

MODERN URBAN PARKS, LEISURE TIME AND GENDER

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ABSTRACT

In modern daily life rest, recreation and utilisation of spare time have been determined by dominant cultural codes in terms of time, place and quality. It is the general tendency of modern capitalism for leisure time to be transformed into an economical value. Consumption-oriented shopping malls where everything is put on sale altogether are becoming set as default spaces of free time, rest and recreation. On the other hand, natural spaces such as in-city parks and gardens are public spheres which generate social rather than economical value. The primacy which capitalist economy provides to that which is social makes it difficult for these spaces to be made fit to the principle of profitability. Thus these spaces become tools of a commercial or political struggle. The residents of these spaces are made secondary or marginalised within the primacy of economical value. In this study, city parks will be analyzed within the framework of economical and social value theories. What kind of a meeting and communication space are parks? Who are the residents of parks and how are they defined by modern rationality? What is the value of the communication established by the residents in this space of meeting and communication? These key questions constitute the guiding points in this study.

Keywords: Public Spheres, Urban Parks, Leisure Time and Gender, Communication Spaces.

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MODERN KENT PARKLARI, BOŐ ZAMAN VE TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET

ÖZET

Modern gündelik hayat içerisinde dinlenme, eğlenme ve boş vakitlerin değerlendirilmesi egemen kültürel kodlar tarafından zaman, mekan ve nitelik olarak belirlenmiştir. Boş zamanın ekonomik bir değere dönüřtürülmesi modern kapitalizmin genel eğilimidir. Her şeyin bir arada sunulduđu tüketim endeksli alışveriş merkezleri dinlenme ve eğlenmenin temel mekanlarıdır. Buna karşılık kent içlerindeki park, bahçe vb. doğal alanlar ekonomik olmaktan ziyade sosyal değer üreten kamusal mekanlardır. Ekonominin sosyal olana önceliđi bu alanların karlılık ilkesine uygun hale getirilmesini zorlamaktadır. Bu nedenle bu alanlar ya ticari ya da siyasi bir mücadele aracı haline gelmektedir. Bu mekanların sakinleri de ekonomik değerın önceliđinde ikincilleştirilmekte ya da marjinalleştirilmektedir. Bu çalışmada ekonomik ve sosyal değer kavramları çerçevesinde kent parkları analiz edilecektir. Parklar nasıl bir karşılama ve iletişim mekanıdır? Park sakinleri kimlerdir ve modern rasyonalite tarafından nasıl tanımlanmaktadır? Bu karşılama ve iletişim mekanlarının toplumsal cinsiyetle ilişkisi nedir? soruları bu çalışmada yol gösterici olan anahtar soruları olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kamusal Mekanlar, Kent Parkları, Boş Zaman ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet, İletişim Mekanları.

Introduction:

In modern daily life rest, recreation and utilisation of spare time have been determined by dominant cultural codes in terms of time, place and quality. It is the general tendency of modern capitalism for leisure time to be transformed into an economical value. On the other hand, natural spaces such as in-city parks and gardens are public spheres which generate social rather than economical value. The primacy which capitalist economy provides to that which is social makes it difficult for these spaces to be made fit to the principle of profitability. Thus these spaces become tools of a commercial or political struggle. Consumption-oriented shopping malls where everything is put on sale altogether are becoming set as default spaces of free time, rest and recreation. The reshaping of cities in accordance to a capitalist mode of living produces primary and secondary categorizations regarding the utilization of space. When space is planned in terms of

profitability and time in terms of work and consumption, the utilization of space and time are made to be suitable to these pre-determined priorities; and both any other utilization of space/time and their societal actors become secondary, unimportant and undesirable by the capitalist/patriarchal system. This study discusses the claim that there is a relation between the organization of city spaces and dominant forms of communications, and the societal categories that are the correspondents of these. Since working, producing and accordingly spending are prevailing, the actors who are the subjects of these (especially young men) are rendered worthy. In contrast, not working/producing, free time and not spending money (these mostly by women/the elderly/children) are rendered worthless. The relation between the status of space/time and the capitalist/patriarchal mode of living makes the status and societal value of women, the elderly and children secondary. Therefore the societal spaces dedicated to these societal categories are also made secondary. In this study, city parks will be analyzed within the framework of economical and social value theories. In this respect, there is a strong connection between the gentrification of cities and gender. In this study, parks in modern cities will be considered in terms of the meaning they gain through those societal subjects made secondary (women, children, the elderly) . What kind of a meeting and communication space are parks? Who are the residents of parks and how are they defined by modern rationality? What is the value of the communication established by the residents in this space of meeting and communication? These key questions constitute the guiding points in this study.

A Critical Approach in City Studies

Social spaces began to be objects of analysis in the 1960s and 1970s. Brenner et. al categorize thus the basic subjects of the critical approach to city studies (Brenner et.al, 2009. 15): a. To analyze the parallel development of capitalism and urbanization systematically and in its specific historical conditions. b. To analyze how, in the process of capitalist urbanization, the changing equilibriums between social forces, power relations, socio-spatial inequalities and politico-theoretical arrangements capitalist urbanization is shaped and how it in turn shapes the abovementioned states as an actor. c. To disclose the naturalized and inherent marginalisations, ostracisms and inequalities in current urban practices. d. To disclose the crisis tendencies

and both the potential and real contradictions in modern cities. e. To point out the more progressive, liberating and sustainable lifestyles in urban life and to politicise these.

Henri Lefebvre (2003), Manuel Castells (1989/1994) and David Harvey (1989) have carried out the pioneering and founding studies in this area. Despite the theoretical and methodological differences between them, they all agree that in capitalism, cities are a strategic space of the consumption processes. Cities are a starting point for the production, circulation and consumption of goods and the internal socio-spatial organization, administration systems and socio-political conflict tendencies of the cities should be understood in relation to these roles (Brenner et al. 2009: 13). These writers all agree that cities are not just a space where goods materialize but that they become goods in themselves. The buildings, the construction of the surroundings, the utilization of the free spaces, the settlement of the inhabitants etc. are organized and reorganized so that the profit-driven capital can consolidate.

The profit-driven perspective of the strategy concerning the resettlement of the cities is an intense topic of negotiation and conflict between the dominant/marginal and primary/secondary social forces. Therefore, city spaces under capitalism are never completed. City spaces are formed and reformed according to the conversion-value (profit-driven) and use-value (daily life) related profits of different social forces. City inhabitants become a part of this negotiation in every stage of their regular daily life practices.

Modernity and Spare Time: Can People Be Let Free?

A specific social formation is a social organization where particular human needs are satisfied by a concurrent division of labor. Needs and the abilities and wants of people are historically produced. Needs, wants and abilities are not dependent upon people but upon the organization of human labor (Keat, Urry: 1994:169). People should always be analyzed within specific historical structures in different modes of production. Work, productivity and spare time are also interpreted and evaluated in a specific form of social relation (Keat, Urry: 1994: 161).

Spare time or free time is the invention of modernity. It has been enabled by the institutionalization of work after the industrial revolution so that capitalism could reproduce itself. What is prior in modernist rationality

is labor/work. Indeed, Weber explains the relation he establishes between the advancement of capitalism and Protestant ethics as the rationality of modernism. According to Weber since the 16th century, the predominantly Protestant capitalists not only encouraged the production of material wealth but they also acted upon an ethics which ruled a suitable understanding of life. The meaning transferred to labor/work is not only earning money and accumulating it but an almost sacralized professional ethics. For a devout Protestant profession is the sign of being chosen. The more a believer works in order to see the grace of God, the more he applies the same grace to his working conditions. His profession will both bring the individual closer to God and make him part of a social organization, taking him away from isolation. There is a parallel between the expansion of earthly activities by way of profession and the limitation of earthly pleasures, joys, spare time and luxuries. It is crucial for the spirit of capitalism that the individual's energy should be spent on working as well as that his spare time should be limited: "Remember that time is money" (Çiğdem, 1997: 135). The role that Weber assigns to labor/work in describing modern rationality is very important for Western societies. In comparisons of the East and the West and in Orientalist texts which describe the East, we often see depictions of people sitting in the streets, chatting, spending time. It is not in a modern person's practices to sit "doing nothing" within work hours.

Modern rationality doesn't only see labour/work as accumulation and reproduction of capital. Labour/work is also necessary for the reproduction of the citizen individual, who in turn is necessary for the reproduction of capitalism as a system. Weber associates this process of disciplining with Protestant ethics, whereas Foucault explains it as the disciplining practices of power. According to Foucault, during the time of the first welfare states which evolved under the influence of the Enlightenment and the parallel liberal thinking, the stress on the people (subjects) became less as the notion of an individual came in the foreground. Governmentality is the control of the subjects through organized categories and practices. After feodality with the population flowing towards cities governments are only able to control their populations through dividing them into subcategories, that is to say, individuals. The population, that is to say the social body is kept organized by institutions such as the police, prisons, hospitals, kindergartens and daycares and nursing homes. At the same time the reproduction, supervisi-

on, inspection, data-collecting and –applying practices of life are enabled. Foucault defines this as biopower. The purpose of the modern welfare state is the project of setting up a new surveillance society (Foucault, 1992: 255-289). To this social engineering project are added the dominant ideologies of the time, liberal thinking and capitalist values. To the normal behaviors of the citizen individual –who is the basic unit of the social body—is added the “productivity/efficiency” idea and the almost-sacralized work aspect. The individual’s industriousness is redefined by his contribution to common social values and his labour efficiency (Tekelioğlu 2003: 223-224). The government starts to observe the individual and the social life, builds its power with the individuals and on the individuals’ body; individuals keep the other individuals under surveillance; every individual becomes both his own and others’ police. The uniform disappears only to reappear in spirit (Tekelioğlu, 2003: 226).

With capitalist advancements, activities necessary for the reproduction of the individual such as entertainment, rest and recreation become not free time- but spare time-activities. Spare time is the time left over from working. This “spareness” is not a void but a plannable period. It does not mean freedom at all. The organization of spare time is not decided by the individual but by the advancement level of capitalism.

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, with the central position consumption takes in the reproduction of the system, citizen/individual is also defined as a consumer. The material gains of the work process need to be transferred to the capital. The individual’s identity is now defined through work and even more so through consumption. Consumption is the basic activity that defines class structure, social layer, individual identity and social roles. The individual’s spare time gains meaning only when it’s directed to consuming. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, it’s under capitalism’s dictum to say where and how spare time is to be utilised.

A Study of Parks as Social Meeting Places

Purpose and the Method: The purpose of this study is to exhibit the communicatory/social functions of public locations as spaces for spare time. An ethnographic method is used in the study. The ethnographic research method, which tries to understand methods people employ for understanding

and using the daily life, is a branch of science which observes, documents and comments upon the behaviours and relations of specific human groups (Özata 2007). In this research method anthropologists spend some time with the target audience and live like them (Özata, 2007). Ethnographic research is a method of study focusing on the meaning of culture and daily life. Participant observation is a technique widely employed in ethnographic research. The ethnographic method, which is often employed in cultural anthropology, sociology and urban studies, has been widely included in communication studies from the 1960s onwards; many studies have been done to understand how media and tools of communication are experienced. The researcher collects data sometimes by hiding himself and sometimes by directly participating.

In this study, Freedom Park (Özgurluk Parkı) on the Anadolu side of Istanbul has been chosen as sample. The research rests on my observations, impressions and the findings of interviews I've conducted with the inhabitants of the park where I spent a lot of time for 4 years because of my child. In this study I've conducted interviews with the elderly, women and especially the babysitters who spend time in the park. These interviews are not based on prepared questions but rather the results of chats that started with chance encounters. In the study what has determined that parks are taken as social communication spaces is the interactions that developed between the people who met in the park. A dialogue that starts with a simple greeting can acquire a depth in which the participants can discuss their deepest subjects. Between the people who frequent the park, this chance meeting can develop into a steady relation.

Gentrification and Gender

Public space is the area that contains the public life. It is a space for social activity where anyone can participate freely. Before modernization and urbanization fields, forests and such natural places were counted among public spaces whereas today their number has dwindled and they have turned into small demarcated spaces in cities. Today, city dwellers have to get out of the cities in order to access natural environments. In the city, indoor spaces comprised of shopping mall complexes, with their every facility for entertainment and needs, are defined as ideal places for the inhabitants of the city. Within cities, parks which have been allowed space according to

the degree of the land rent, have replaced natural spaces. In today's metropolises the number of parks has dwindled drastically.

According to Zukin the major cities of the western world have parks and squares, built, usually during the nineteenth century, as places of public access where people could meet, walk, talk and participate in a common culture (1996 cited Barker, 2000: 304). Often these collective spaces were created in celebration of civic achievements and monuments to public figures. Today, it is argued, these spaces are on the decline and the new arenas of public meeting, public culture and public sphere are situated in private commercial spaces- private park, the shopping mall and the simulated theme world. This is the product of a combination of factors, including;

- the inability or unwillingness of city government to fund and maintain public spaces;
- increased levels of everyday fear surrounding perceptions of rising crime in general and public assault and robbery in particular (often linked to ethnic and racial tensions),
- the rise of the leisure industries and an increased involvement of private security and leisure companies in the management of public space.

Zukin gives a number of examples of western countries of their way to create safe public space. To him, public culture is shaped by private sector elites (Zukin, 1996 cited in Barker, 2000: 304). This poses three problems:

- Only certain profitable sites will be developed, that is, those with potential to enhance property prices or retail business.
- Control of access to these public spaces is in the hands of security regimes who explicitly exclude "undesirable" social groups, that is the urban poor, in which people of colour are overrepresented.
- There is an attempt to control the total environment through population flow and control of a symbolic culture conducive to commerce, exemplified by shopping malls and theme parks.

Gentrification has meant the introduction of new social actors, a predictable boost in property values and the introduction of new elements in the cultural landscape (Mills, 2007: 335). In the example of İstanbul, very few parks keep their properties as spaces fit for social activities. Freedom Park, which on the Anadolu Coast of İstanbul, constitutes an example to these limited park areas. The park is situated on a 120.000 m² area just next to the

railroad tracks in Kadıköy Selami Çesme. The history of the park provides an important example to the spatial transformation of İstanbul. Göztepe, up until the 1970s was a settlement made up of mansions of varying sizes, and the expansive gardens of these mansions. The immigration wave from the 1960s onwards, the fact that İstanbul became the central economic and commercial production center of İstanbul and the rising population turned the city lands into a fundamental economic goods. The impact of the immigration around the city centres is that it structures the settlements according to class. First there emerges a qualitative difference between the center of the city and its periphery. The periphery, that is, the settlements first defined as tenements (*gecekondu*) and then as slums (*varoş*) is inhabited by the peasant-urbanites who work in the central areas of İstanbul, but who can never be a candidate for being İstanbulites; who, even if they could, would not be accepted as real İstanbulites. The center, on the other hand, increasingly differentiates in terms of class. Different cultural and class-based groups also increasingly retreat to their own spaces. Districts become characterized by withdrawn people who share a common economic and –even more so– cultural capital. The Göztepe district where Freedom Park is situated that we chose to illustrate this process is affected by the logic of speed and efficiency that capitalist development creates in the city. Those life practices which enabled and gave meaning to the mansion are not present anymore. Life shifts from the peacefulness of the mansions to the efficiency of the apartments. The apartment creates an important economy in the distribution of the city land. It is a shift from a land economy where a few people share the land among themselves to a lifestyle where a lot of people live together. The apartment represents a shift in the understanding of life, where people go from living side by side/horizontally to hierarchically/vertically. The in-house life, provided just enough square-meters for the inhabitants to live in, establishes a connection with the outside only through limited balconies. The limited land areas around the apartment buildings are not gardens anymore, but car lots. Since the apartments are so close and facing each other, heavy curtains are used to ensure the privacy of the inside. In these vertical lives, except for the obligatory greetings made during obligatory encounters, humane communication disappears. A minority group which constitutes the exception to this, if they still exist, are merely the “of-no-use”s of the urban economy, which forced them to live in apartments in the

first place. These are the women who still meet in increasing intervals, the retired people at home, the elderly and the children who try to play at the car lots of the apartments. The gentrification of the cities reappoints the status of the gender. In the face of the capitalist/patriarchal system city spaces that are becoming secondary are also feminized in this process.

The change from mansions to apartments, even though it allowed for the building of apartments with the caveat that the remaining few mansions were protected; mansions and their gardens were replaced by high apartments which rose as time passed. Freedom Park, which is in Göztepe, is actually the garden of one such mansion. The park, which is enclosed by apartments of varying heights on all sides, is a space which answers the social needs of the city dwellers, which look as if they are becoming less important as time passes.

The Contents of Freedom Park (Özgürlük Parkı)

In the Freedom Park, there are courts of football and basketball, a tennis court, a hiking trail, two playgrounds for children, sports equipment for adults, a road for bicycles, fountains, an amphitheater, special grounds for pets, a picnic area and a cafeteria. The park, which is suitable to all age groups with the wide variety of functions it offers, is open from the first light of the morning till midnight.

The park, which hosts different activities from time to time, also has a website in which anything about it can be found. Alongside with this website which contains the activities, announcements and general information, there is also a e-mailing list where the park's enthusiasts can get in touch with each other. In summer nights, the amphitheater hosts different activities such as plays, open-air movies and concerts.

In the park there are three sets of playgrounds, a hiking trail, basketball, football and tennis courts, an ice-skating ring, fountains, two cafeterias, an amphitheater, public restroom, a bicycle path, a picnic area, a volunteers' organization.

Women, children, the elderly or *the social groups that do not produce "value"*

When we ask ourselves the question "Who are the parks for?" or "Who spends time in parks?" we also answer the question, "Who are the subjects

who belong to the hierarchy established between work and spare time?”. The people in parks are those with time to spend. Spending time is not a spare time activity. Spending time is an activity outside of working, people without work spend time. Spare time, or spending time does not produce an economic value, quite the contrary, these are the hours where work force is wasted. Therefore it is not seen as an activity by the modern capitalist rationality. The people in the parks are outside of the work force. Who are they? Firstly, the parks are for children. Then, women. Women are rarely at parks for themselves; more often, they go with and for their children. The elderly and the retired are among the frequenters of the parks. Then there are the unemployed, who belong to none of these categories. They primarily go to parks to spend time, also because they don't have anywhere else to go or anything else to do. When we look at these groups we are able to categorize them in the same group. The frequenters, or the population of the park are groups that are outside of the work life, not producing any noteworthy economic value. In this respect, they are groups that are marginalized by the patriarchal and capitalist societies. Since it requires spare time, and carries a purpose of rest and recreation, going to a park can be seen as a personal space activity. Even though parks are public spaces that are open to anyone, park activities and park frequenters are defined within a personal space. Coming to the park is a personal activity done in public space.

When we look at these groups we can say that they are defined in the personal space. Habermas, in differentiating between personal-public space, says that women and children are the actors of the house/privacy (Habermas, 1989). We can include the elderly and the unemployed to them. Parks are public-social spaces where individuals/groups that are defined in the personal space go to spend time. The types and relations of public life are not objects of analysis since they are seen as belonging to the personal space. The public space is the area of work, economic activities and men.

The Social / Communicational Functions of Freedom Park Children: When we say parks, the first thing to come to mind is surely children. The transformation of urban spaces has affected children before the other groups of society. Childhood and play are two concepts that go hand in hand. Games are, for children, not fictive but reality itself. Playing is an activity where the child socializes, prepares for interpersonal relationships

determines his identity, role or status. It is as crucial as vital requirements. It is a collective activity rather than a personal one. It requires sides and groups. Therefore at least two people need to be in a shared area. In this respect, play is spatially-bound. With the transformation that spaces went through in modernity, games were moved from real spaces shared in real time to symbolically shared communicational locations. Communicational locations are primarily programs designed for children in mass media communication. These programs are limited to staring at the screen, and they fill the time children are supposed to spend playing in. The advancements in technology sometimes make these programs interactive; but the children's relation with the television is largely limited to being passive consumers. With video, digital technologies, computers and the internet there appears a structural change in the games themselves and in the position of the players; and games consist of children sitting at computers, not seeing each other face to face, only aware of each other in the cyberspace, in contact both with each other and the game. Here, the child who is playing a game is interactive in a communicational way, but physically passive. The child is dependent upon the monitor and the keyboard in a cyber-communicational space. Even though he/she is active in running the game, digital games are softwares and in the final analysis, the rules of the game are determined by the software developers.

Parks are left as the sole alternatives to the computer-dependent activities of the children in cities as natural spaces. With modernity and urbanization, an expansive rural countryside is turned into a pastoral nostalgia. The meadows are replaced by neighbourhoods. Up until the end of the 1970s, picnic areas, empty patches of land and especially the streets were the main playgrounds of children. They were spaces in which the children of every neighbourhood spent time together in a safe way, developed a group consciousness against the children of other streets, and created their own subcultures. Neighbourhoods and streets turned into apartments and avenues from the 1980s onwards, and these avenues hosted high traffic. What was left to children were the gardens of the apartments –if they were not turned into car lots yet--, car lots and the insides of the apartments. With modernization the daily lives of children have become so besieged by day care centers, school, training programs that they either don't have any time to spend outside the house or such a time is seen unnecessary. If playing

a game is so important, then computers run to the rescue. Within these developments, parks are the rare daily spaces where children take a breath, see each other, play face to face, ride their bicycles, rollerskate and run.

Among the frequenters of the Freedom Park, children are an important group. It can be said that different age groups visit the park at different hours. In the morning hours preschool children come to the park with their mothers, grandmothers and more often, their babysitters.

During noon, little children go back to their houses to nap; other children who don't nap after lunch, truant middle school and high school students and "flirting" kids visit the park.

In the afternoon, until the time the family gets back home, again it is the babysitters and little children in the park. After the family gets home from work, depending on the season, the children come to the park with their mothers and fathers.

After school hours, middle school and high school students go to the park. Whereas the little children play in the playgrounds, the older ones play collective games such as tennis, basketball and football.

The Elderly: Like children, the elderly are also a social group that is outside of the work force in the post-capitalist system; a group that does not produce economic value. The elderly denotes both an age group and a status, like being retired. The elderly can be further categorized and broken down into different groups, but in general they are a group made dependent to the indoors. Even though Turkey is said to have a young population, due to the advanced methods in population planning, it is expected of Turkey to have an elderly population like Europe in the years to come.

In Turkey, old age is conventionally described as an inactive period. Public policies are inefficient in creating solutions to the sheltering and care of the elderly as well as to their health care and social needs. The elderly either spend time with their families, children and grandchildren or they look after their grandchildren at their own homes. Because of the nuclear families, when the grandchildren grow up, or when there are no grandchildren to look after, the elderly live at their homes either as husband-and-wife or single. In the apartments where the connections between neighbors are not very strong, the daily life swings between loneliness and the search of social activities to alleviate the loneliness. We know that the basic antidote to loneliness is a television. Television is the social communication space

that continues every day and which replaces friendship and company in a routine lonely life. The alternative space to this is the parks.

What parks are to the elderly primarily is that they are a space without traffic or crowds where they can walk and do basic exercises in safety. Early in the morning and after sunset in the evening are the hours when the elderly spend time in the park. Apart from walking, there are also a lot of men and women who sit around at the park.

Aunt Hürriyet (76):.. I slowly walk to here. I both sit down and look around. The time passes. If people sit near me we talk about this and that, about illnesses, the children. So the time passes...

Uncle Mehmet (81): If I don't get ill, I come here every two or three days. I have a cane, I come and sit. Under the sun my legs are warmed, and also it's open air. There are no cars either. My eyes are hard of sight so I don't read newspapers anymore. When I was young I did. But now it's enough to have a chat with the people around.

On the other hand parks are the rare public spaces where the elderly can socialize. The elderly who go to the park rarely or more often see people like themselves, find the opportunity to have a chat, and therefore lose the feeling of loneliness, and hold on to life the stronger because there are other people like them. Among the elderly who come to the park and see each other often, friendships develop; they arrange hours to meet at the park, their chat topics widen.

Ms. Pervin: I'm 62. I retired last year. I live alone, I got a divorce; I have a son but he lives in another city. I'm alone at home. I have friends from my work life, I meet with them. But it's not always that way. After retirement I started to wake up early in the morning and walk. Then I got a dog, now I come to the park for him; there is an area in the park where dogs meet, we've made a lot of friends, both the dog and I. As we talk of animals the conversation also comes to politics and other subjects. There is even a lady that we meet at a specific hour every day. We talk a lot. Retirement is hard; one is left alone all of a sudden. It's hard to bear, and the park makes it easier.

The Volunteers' house at the Freedom Park is an attempt of the elderly, the retired and the adults with time on their hands to turn the spatial com-

munity they share into a forum for sharing and discussion. It functions in a similar way to the community centers we see in Western societies. Activities such as painting lessons both help the elderly acquire an ability and sustain their existing interest; and they also offer opportunities for new friendships.

The Volunteers House also brings together the elderly in conferences and discussions. These are often about health issues, which would interest them. In this way they learn who can counsel them, and what can be done in health matters. In some of the conferences and discussions, public figures who speak on controversial political and economic subject are invited. Thus the elderly learn new things about public matters, express their opinions before an audience, meet people with similar views or argue with those who hold different opinions. It would not be excessive to call the Volunteer House the “elderly public space”.

Women: Since gender is an organizing principle of social life thoroughly saturated with power relations, it follows that the social construction of space will be gendered. Gender relations vary over space: spaces are symbolically gendered and some spaces are marked by the physical exclusion of particular sexes (Barker, 2000: 293). The division between the private and public articulated with home and workplace is the manifestation of the modern capitalist/patriarchal gendering of space. Some places and activities are primarily male practices in male spaces. Certain activities, streets, pubs and parks are not open for women to enter in. Although modern city parks are public spaces they are also private spaces for women in terms of closeness and familiarity produced through practices of caring children. Women are the primary frequenters of the park. It is possible to group them among themselves. In weekdays, women who come to the park within work hours are women with young children. They come to the park so their children can play and get fresh air. Also, coming to the park means that the women get to do activities outside of the house. Park means getting away from the routine of the house. By means of it, they can get away from the housework; at least it can be postponed. The change in scenery also helps in a psychological way. The stress created by the routine of the housework and childcare is alleviated by the natural and social space of the park.

Ms. Gülümser (35): My son is 3, I come to the park almost every afternoon. I used to work, then I quit. For the child, anyway it was very difficult for me. After quitting work it was very hard for me

to sit at home, I don't have any help around the house either. It is a very hard job. I don't have time for anything else, I can't even answer the phone. In the last months I have been very depressed, I am on medication. The park is an escape for me. We go out with my son, he finds some friends and plays with them. I chat with the babysitters or the parents. I'm still with the kid but at least there are people to have a chat with. It helps me a lot...

The park is for women a social space where social connections are established. Women, who are at the park because of their children, meet by means of them, chat and develop friendships. The women who come to the park regularly are a group among themselves. Within these groups the main topics of discussion are childcare, health and education. Treatments of illnesses, doctor suggestions, suggestions about educational institutions, relating experiences etc... As these friendships progress sometimes the families also meet and do activities together.

Elena (38): We live near the park. My son is 4, we spend at least 4 hours everyday at the park regularly. At the beginning my son couldn't speak Turkish, he could only speak Spanish. Even if it was hard for him to talk with the other children, they become friends easily by playing games. Here he has the opportunity to play with a lot of children everyday. We have friends that we've been meeting regularly for 3-4 years. I say "we", because I met with the mothers of the friends my son made. Either we met in the park, or I rang them up by getting their numbers from the babysitters. The relationship we have with them is primarily about the upbringing of the children. For instance when I have an urgent thing to do, there is someone I can leave my son with. Similarly, they can leave their children with me...

Süreyya (40): I've made some friends by taking my son to the park. Sometimes we talk over the phone and meet. The children play, we chat. Sometimes we meet without the children. For weekends we plan together and take the children on trips. We exchange ideas on childcare, we plan their education together. For instance my son is going to go to the same school with a friend we've made in the park. Since we both work, we thought

we could help each other in picking the kids up from school...

Babysitter Women: There are many babysitters in the park, maybe the majority of the dwellers. The babies and children usually belong to the working mothers. Since the families living around the Freedom Park are middle or upper middle class, we could easily say that the majority of the mothers have a job.

You can see the children with their care takers at any hour during the day. Some care takers bring the children to the park after the breakfast, and some of them in the afternoon. The timing depends on the time of the child's usual meal and sleeping, and also to the mother's schedule. However, it is obvious that there is a regularity and frequency for both the children and care takers. The park is a regular place to attend on (in?) the daily activities of children. For children, the park serves as a natural need for fresh air and as a socialization area; and for the care takers, it serves as fulfilling the needs of the children. Moreover, the park sessions take the majority of care takers' time outside the house.

In Turkey, babysitting or child caring is not an institutionalized job. Some unqualified, uneducated or less educated women use their natural knowledge about housework and children to find a job. In some cases, housewives or retired women look for this job in order to have some money for domestic economy. In recent years, some agencies are established for the purpose of finding jobs for babysitters. Nevertheless, parents usually find their babysitters using their connections through families, friends or co-workers.

The job descriptions of babysitters extend to a large scale. In general, in middle and upper-middle class families, the babysitters are responsible for the child's daily needs and routines such as eating, drinking, playing, cleaning, basic instruction and activities out of home. In a middle-class Turkish family, babysitters are also expected to clean the house. Some babysitters take care of housework or even cooking, but some just take care of the child.

For the babysitters, parks also mean that they can get away from the works in the house. The more time they spend with the child, the less time they have to do the housework. Families simply ignore this fact for the sake of the children's well-being. Parks are both a necessary part of child caring, and an excuse for leaving the house, which is in fact a work-place.

Türkan (32): ... The house I work is just across the park. It is as though we are going out to the garden. For this reason, we

spend a lot of time in the park. We come at 10 am, and leave at 1 pm just before the lunch. We walk or play even if the weather is not good. When we don't go to the park, the day in the house becomes very boring. We play a little in the house, but most of the time we watch TV. While the child is watching TV, I do the housework. I use hoover and clean the house. When we are at the park, I postpone these. I do it anyway, but I do it while the child is sleeping, and very quickly...

Going out to the park means that going away from parents. When there is another adult in the house, it is not appreciated because it means a control on the babysitter.

Gül (37): ... Going out to the park is very good. Both the child and I have fresh air. And I have a break from housework. Sometimes the lady stays at home. In that case, it becomes very difficult. The mother takes care of the child and I have to do the housework. Or worse, I have to do both....

The house is a workplace for babysitters. For the regular visitors of the park, both house and park may become a workplace.

Türkan (32): ... The other day, I said to someone "see you at work". You understand right? I say "work" for the park. I think I internalized it...

Gül (37): ... We spend a lot of time at the park. The house is a workplace, and park is the second workplace, or part of the workplace.

Park is defined as a workplace is not only because they come with the child, but also because there are other babysitters around. It turns into a meeting place for co-workers.

Özge (28): ... You meet with a lot of people in the park. Then you bring the children at the same hour with them. We are a group of friends who come here everyday. First we were too many people, but then some problems occurred between some friends. We had to leave the group. Now, we are 7 people at most. We come to the park at the same time in the morning, and leave together.

The park enables the babysitters to do their job collectively. They watch the children all together.

Türkan: ... For instance, Ms. Sezen is older than us. While we are at the park, Ms. Sezen can tell us what to do, like "come here, go

there...” We can run to follow the children, because we are younger. When I leave for shopping, I leave the child to the custody of my friends, finish the shopping and come back.

Özge: ... When children run around the swings, every one of us stands at some specific spot. By this way, we don't miss the children.

Ms. Sezen: ... Last year I broke my leg. After some time at home, I started to work again. I couldn't walk too much at the park, but thanks to the girls, I received a lot of help. While they were looking after their children, they watched mine too. It is not a problem, because they played together anyway.

In addition to the collective working, the babysitters support each other when someone comes late or someone needs a day off.

Gül: ... Our children get along very well. We met at the park. Their mothers got to know each other through us. They also get along well. They even meet in the evenings or at the weekend. Anyway, I had to go to the hospital a few times, and once I needed to be somewhere. I left the child to Türkan. They played together and then slept. Then, Türkan left him to his mother.

Türkan: ... The same thing happened to me. One day, I couldn't leave for work. His mother left the child to Gül. Gül was responsible for him all day. If Gül wasn't there, I would have to go to work or his mother would have to stay at home. We helped each other and no one had a problem...

The cooperation in caretaking lead to the babysitters to review their working conditions and description of their own jobs. Their friendships allowed for them to talk about their problems and expectations about their job.

Türkan: ... When we first met, everyone told that she only looked after the child. However I knew, because I worked at many houses. When we became friends, they started to talk about other works to do. We came to understand that everyone does cleaning, ironing and even cooking. They do these works just as me, but they didn't talk about it for some reason.

Gül: ...For example, C. takes care of the child only. She cooks only for the child, and she does ironing only for child's clothes. When the child goes to sleep, she reads books or something. She never does housework.

Their knowledge about working conditions of colleagues allowed them to re-evaluate their relations with the employers. The cooperation makes them re-think their working conditions and it leads to negotiations with employers.

Türkan: ... Of course we talk about who works in what conditions. We do the same things. I do enough, but not more...

Özge: I used to do a lot of housework, but then my friends told me what to do and what not to do. Now I generally work for the child's business. I do some housework, but Ms. N. started to bring cleaning women. At the beginning, she wanted me to do the cleaning, but then she started to see that both housework and child caring is very difficult.

The implicit negotiation with the employers about the working conditions extends to the payments they receive.

Ms. Sezen: I am retired. I can support myself without babysitting. I receive more payment than my friends. I deliberately tell them how much I take. This job has a price, it is a responsibility. They should know how much I get, so that they can request the same amount.

Türkan: My wage is not bad, but it is lower than S.C. While speaking with Ms. N. at home, I implied it a few times. Their budget is limited, but it is good for them to know what others pay. At least, they won't think they pay me too much.

Özge: I also talked to Ms. N about this. I didn't want more money, but I mentioned it while speaking. I expect an increase next year. If I don't, I can leave.

The babysitters' relation with each other, which is established at the park, made them to see their own jobs, working conditions and job quality. This process leads to the negotiations with the employers. In this context, the park is not only an open space for babysitters to bring the children for fresh air and playing, but also a means of a public relation leading to the cooperation and transformation of their jobs. If public spaces such as parks did not exist, would the babysitters still be able to get together? Meeting and getting together doesn't only serve for social needs, it also functions as a public space.

Conclusion: Parks are Public Spaces for Social and Communicative Action

I tried to discuss the rationality of public spaces in modern capitalist/patriarchal metropol cities. Our daily, individual and collective practices, the results of city planning and academic studies indicate that the desire for efficiency and profit in capitalism exceeds to every available social space. This desire has spread from the minimal practices in human relations to the largest social institutions as the rationalé of a system. It is everywhere and embraced everything. In modern capitalist systems, the interaction of humanity with her surroundings has resulted in commodification of every natural and human aspect. The relation with nature and environment is a nostalgic one, which is experienced in a limited number of organized public spaces. Public space is a space open for everyone (Habermas, 1989). The case in Göztepe Freedom Park shows that such an open space has a high value for social communication. The park could also be a place for efficient capitalism, and in that case it might be very profitable. Such open spaces, which do not allow for standard forms of working, consuming, recreation and entertainment designed by the capitalist system, can be spaces to reproduce their lives for specific groups of people. Parks are spaces of bodily reproduction for children, elderly, women and some workers. Even if the people in the park, and the social and human needs of social communication established by means of the park is of secondary importance for capitalist system, and even if it cannot be transformed into an economic asset, these people and these needs are vividly real, and they are at the center of life. Moreover, this meeting, speaking and relating leads to unexpected social functions. Many groups who could never meet otherwise, can get together in this space and develop a sense of community thanks to the availability of the space.

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