

EVALUATING SOCIAL INTERACTION PERFORMANCE AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN URBAN GREEN SPACE: THE CASE OF TRABZON GANITA COAST

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Abstract. As population increases in urban centers, urban open spaces are gradually diminishing and the quality of existing spaces is deteriorating. Therefore, when designing open spaces in cities facing issues such as population growth, unplanned urbanization, industrialization, and transportation problems, social dimensions should be considered as much as ecological and economic dimensions. This study focuses on the Ganita Coastal Project, one of the identity spaces of the city of Trabzon. The aim is to determine the social performance of urban open space organizations formed after the implementation of the project and to reveal their effects on the sense of community. The research method consists of surveys that include the evaluation of the social interaction performance provided by the place and the assessment of the sense of community. The research results show that the social interaction performance of the place has a positive and significant relationship with the sense of community. This study defines the sub-dimensions of social features by focusing solely on the social characteristics of the place. The social factors affecting the sense of community are identified as the functional, social, and perceptual sub-dimensions, respectively. The success of the social features such as popularity of place, social accessibility, and variety of activities has allowed for the intense use of this space. This research focuses on the social interaction performance but cannot claim to have examined all the features of the place that constitute social interaction. Considering the importance of urban open spaces as a social stage and their significance in forming relationships between people and places as well as among people themselves, the findings of this study are quite important. The results, especially regarding which social features of a place should be taken into account when designing new urban spaces, can be guiding for both designers and managers. **Keywords:** social interaction performance, place experience, performance evaluation, sense of community

Introduction

Today, cities that grow uncontrollably without considering the environment and society are being replaced by sustainable cities. Especially in recent years, the rapidly increasing world population has led to uncontrolled urbanization. Rapid urban growth and population increase in developing countries have resulted in the reduction of open green spaces in city centers. A large portion of the human population resides in urban centers. Consequently, increasing construction due to building density, transportation systems, and other requirements of globalization leads to physical and social changes within and around the city. Therefore, urban open spaces should be evaluated in terms of ecological, economic, and social sustainability dimensions. The city of Trabzon has also been facing issues such as population growth, unplanned urbanization, industrialization, and transportation in recent years. As a result, open green spaces in the city center are gradually diminishing, and the quality of the existing green spaces is also deteriorating. In this context, several landscape projects have been designed and implemented in the coastal city of Trabzon in recent years. One of these projects is the Coastal Project aimed at reorganizing the existing Ganita Coast. This research aims to evaluate the social interaction performance of Ganita Coast, one of the city's important socialization centers. For this purpose, the concepts of place and space, people-place interaction, the social features offered by the place, and the concept of social performance will be focused on.

Urban open spaces should be considered not only for their physical characteristics but also for their social features [1]. In this context, the concept of place has emerged in the architectural literature, with a focus on the differences in meanings between space and place. According to place definitions: Creswell defines place as "locations that people engage with, touch, and connect to; meaningful positions" [2]. Pretty et al. state that place is formed through the interaction of people with each other and their environment [3]. From

these definitions, it is clear that contemporary studies in urban design emphasize the need to question spaces not just by their physical attributes but also by their social features that contribute to livability [4,5].

The term green space originates from the urban nature conservation movement and the concept of green space planning in Europe [6]. Urban open green spaces are locations accessible and usable by the public on various scales, from the smallest neighborhood playground to expansive landscapes, with different purposes, functions, and forms. Urban open green spaces contribute ecologically by preventing air pollution and preserving biodiversity. Additionally, from social and economic perspectives, they promote social interaction and integration, thereby enhancing mental and physical health. Considering their environmental, social, economic functions, and contributions to individual and public health, urban open green spaces are indispensable elements of urban planning, urban life, and society. Since this study will focus on the social functions and opportunities of urban open green spaces, it is necessary to evaluate people-place relationships.

Environmental psychology, which questions the foundations of people-place interaction, how it forms, how the features offered by the environment are perceived, and how people evaluate these features, has realized that these questions are also related to the social characteristics of the physical environment. Human behaviors occur in a specific physical and social environment that meets their needs and requirements (Figure 1).

In the formation of the physical environment shaped according to human needs and requirements, it is essential to first examine the fundamental structure of human beings and their behavior. People engage in behaviors to meet their needs. Behavioral science studies the interaction between human behaviors and environmental variables, aiming to measure differences in behaviors influenced by the environment or to

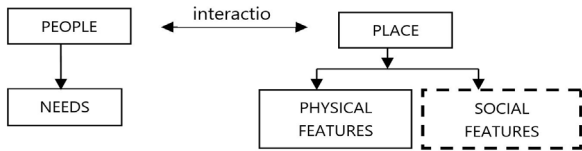


Fig. 1. Physical and social characteristics in people-place interaction [created by author]

modify the characteristics of the environment based on new needs that arise from these behaviors. In other words, there is a mutual interaction between humans and the environment. The interaction system between urban open spaces and their users occurs within the scope of the users' needs and the features offered by the environment. In summary, urban open spaces where users perform their behaviors according to various needs and requirements should be places where people go for individual or group activities, engage in actions to meet their needs, and have amenities that facilitate these actions [7].

Social features of the open place

The physical and social characteristics offered by urban open spaces designed with users' needs in mind are significant factors influencing users' relationships with the environment. Classifications used by environmental designers regarding what urban open spaces should offer to people have expanded to include not just the space but life itself. These studies have focused on the differences in meaning between space and place [7; 8; 9; 10]. An example of these studies is PPS (Project for Public Spaces), which has examined open spaces worldwide and identified criteria for success. In this context, the characteristics of successful open spaces are grouped under four main functions: "comfort and identity," "access and connection," "use and activity," and "sociability" [9]. Among these, the functions of use and activity, as well as sociability, refer to the social characteristics of the place. Whyte stated that urban open spaces should be places that offer a variety of activities and host social events [12].

Carmona evaluated urban spaces in terms of place and the social activities occurring within them. They assessed the social dimension through accessibility, safety and security, proximity, diversity of functions, and street furniture [13]. Similarly, Gehl expressed the success of a place by the number of social and optional activities it hosts. He emphasized that there is a strong relationship between the variety of activities and the success of a place [10].

Salama focused on the functional, social, and perceptual characteristics offered by a place [11]. Özkan and Yılmaz concentrated on the physical and social characteristics that successful open spaces should offer [7]. In summary, the number of studies focusing on the social characteristics offered by places has been increasing in recent years (Table 1). In this research, which focuses on the relationship between urban landscape and social performance in the people-place relationship, the social characteristics of the place will also be evaluated.

Although studies examining the social features of the opportunities offered by open spaces are limited, the indicators vary. When studies investigating the social dimension in the literature were examined, it was seen that the indicators in Table 1 came to the fore. In line with all this literature, the social characteristics of Trabzon Ganita Coast open spaces will be evaluated and their social performance value will be revealed. The effects of Ganita Coast social performance value on the sense of community in users will be investigated.

Place experience and sense of community

Table 1. Social interaction performance factors of urban open places [table created by authors]

Dimension	Factors	Researches
Social features	Social activities	[7], [9], [10], [11], [12], [14]
	Definability	[13], [15]
	Social interaction	[7], [9], [10], [11], [12], [16], [17]
	Inclusiveness	[10], [11], [15], [18]
	Vitality / Attractiveness	[7], [9], [10], [15]
	Activeness	[10], [12], [15], [19], [20], [21]
	Recreational facilities	[9], [12], [15]
	Variety in activities	[7], [9], [10], [11], [12], [14], [22]
	Diversity of AgeGroups	[11]
	Ethnic Diversity	
	Functionality	
	Reachability	
	Social accessibility	
	Harmony	
Popularity of place	[7], [23]	

Studies focusing on people-place interaction focus on the features offered by the place and the emotional bonds between people. In this respect, it is an important dimension whether a sense of community is formed in these open spaces that appeal to the whole society. Sense of community has been defined as the social bonds that develop among people in a particular place [19]. Many studies accept McMillan and Chavis's classification, which explains the sense of community in four dimensions [24]. These are membership, influence, integration or fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections dimensions. Public spaces such as parks, coastlines, and squares in city centers improve the sense of community by facilitating chance encounters between people [25]. Urban designers and sociologists have long discussed the features of urban open space that encourage social interaction [12, 14, 26, 27, 28, 29]. However, few studies in the literature have It focuses on the relationship between social characteristics and sense of community. In this research, which aims to investigate the relationship between the social performance value and the sense of community resulting from the social use of public space, Ganita Coast, one of the important public spots for the city of Trabzon, was chosen as the study area.

Materials and Methods

The research was conducted in Ganita Coast, located in the central district of Ortahisar in Trabzon province. According to the 2023 population data, the population of Trabzon is 824,352. With a total area of 4,662 km², Trabzon province has a population density of 177 people per square kilometer. The population of the central district Ortahisar is 332,504 [30]. Ganita Coast, which holds significant importance in the urban culture of Trabzon, derives its name from the Greek word "kanita," meaning "beautiful place" (Figure 2). The selection of this area as the study area was influenced by its substantial contribution to coastal usage in the city and its reorganization for public use.

In this study, a face-to-face survey was conducted with users of Ganita Coast. The survey was conducted between August and November 2023. The survey, which selected users through simple random sampling, was administered to 145 local individuals aged 15 and above. The number of surveys considered valid and entered into the SPSS 24.0 database is 140.

In the research, data collection consists of two main sections. In the first section, a 5-point Likert scale was

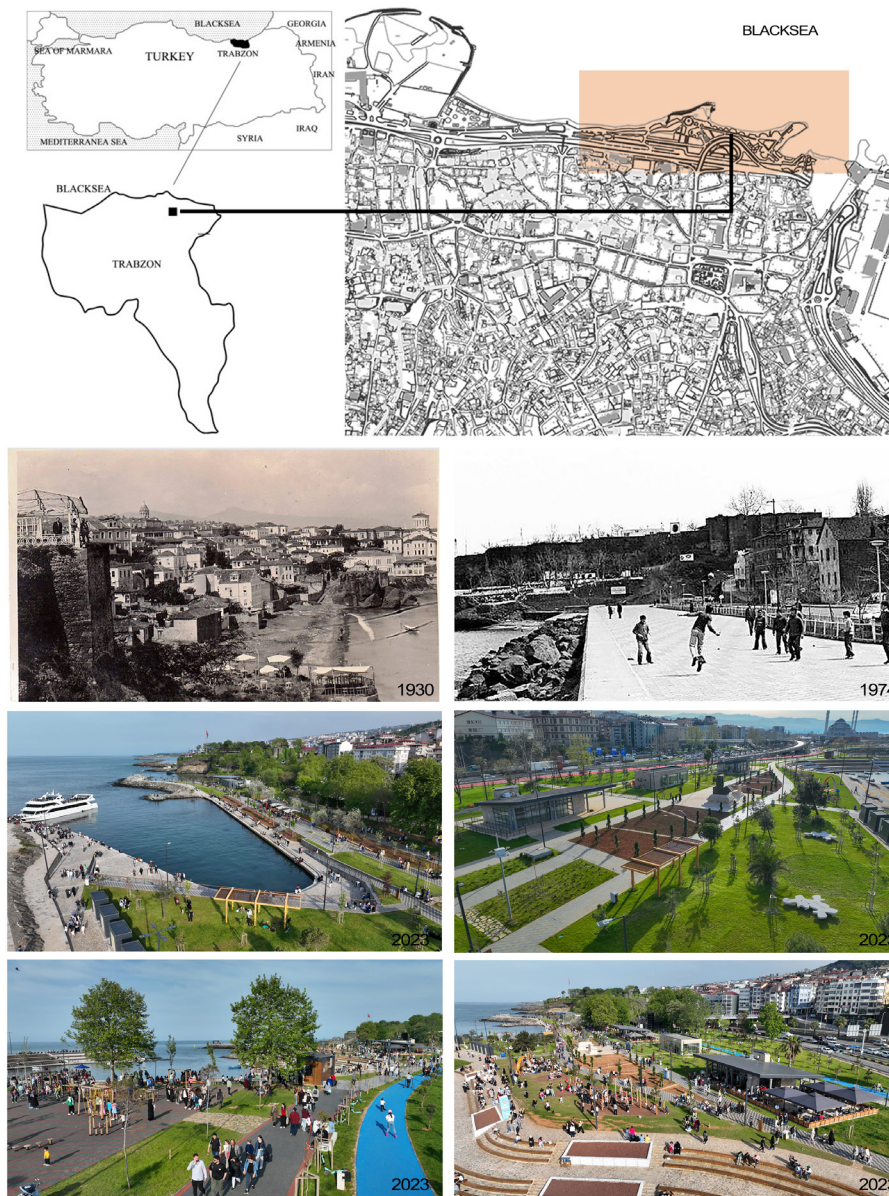


Fig. 2. Location of trabzon ganita coast and changes in coastal use [created by author]

administered to collect data on users' social interaction performance, while in the second section, data related to the sense of community were collected. The scale aimed at determining social interaction performance consists of 15 items, and it was developed based on the works of [9; 11; 13; 15]. The scale aimed at determining the sense of community consists of 11 statements and was developed based on the works of [24; 31; 32; 33]. Subsequently, regression analyses were conducted to determine the relationship and effects between Ganita Coast users' social interaction performance and sense of community.

Results

Findings on evaluation of social interaction performance

The first part of the study aims to determine the Trabzon Ortahisar Ganita Coast in terms of social interaction performance. The values related to users' social interaction performance are shown in Table 2. When examining the values of social interaction performance, it was determined that the items with the highest values are "popularity of place", "variety in activities", and "social accessibility", respectively. The items with the lowest values are determined to be "ethnic diversity", "definability", and "vitality/attractiveness".

The average overall social interaction performance of Ganita Coast users is determined to be 3.54. Within the scope of the research, factor analysis was applied to 15 statements prepared to evaluate the social interaction performances of Ganita Coast and after many analyzes, scales were created with various reliability tests that showed suitability for factor analysis.

Factor analysis was conducted using varimax rotated principal component analysis to determine and evaluate the sub-dimensions of social interaction performance at Ganita Coast. Factor loads lower than 0.40 were removed, and the analysis was repeated 4 times. After the factor analysis of the 15-item social interaction performance scale, the statements "Diversity of Age Groups" and "Ethnic Diversity" could not be included in the scale, resulting in a total of 13 items grouped under 3 factors. These factors explain 73.596% of the total variance (Table 3).

Findings on the Evaluation of sense of community

The analysis revealed that the average value of the scale (11 statements) prepared to determine the level of sense of community among Ganita Coast users is 3.32. As a result of the analysis, the first factor was named "influence" and has

Table 2. Descriptive measurements of social interaction performance [table created by authors]

Dimension			Dimension		
Social interaction Performance, n:140	\bar{x}	σ	Social interaction Performance, n:140	\bar{x}	σ
Social activities	3.21	0.985	Diversity of Age-Groups	3.26	1.008
Definability	3.11	1.073	Ethnic Diversity	3.03	0.099
Social interaction	3.37	0.884	Functionality	3.62	0.909
Inclusiveness	3.76	0.889	Reachability	3.50	0.910
Vitality / Attractiveness	3.11	1.008	Social accessibility	3.96	1.065
Activeness	3.73	0.912	Harmony	3.41	1.032
Recreational facilities	3.71	0.954	Popularity of place	4.34	0.819
Variety in activities	3.99	0.818	Total average	3.54	0.917

\bar{x} : arithmetic mean; σ : standard deviation

Table 3. Principle component analysis for social interaction performance items with varimax rotation [table created by authors]

Dimension	Factor	Variance (%)	Mean	α
(Social) Functional (6 items)		36.186	3.64	.94
Social accessibility	0.937	-	-	-
Reachability	0.917	-	-	-
Variety in activities	0.912	-	-	-
Functionality	0.792	-	-	-
Definability	0.764	-	-	-
Recreational facilities	0.632	-	-	-
(Social) Perceptual (4 items)		26.993	3.50	.92
Vitality / attractiveness	0.987	-	-	-
Inclusiveness	0.971	-	-	-
Harmony	0.964	-	-	-
Activeness	0.958	-	-	-
(Social) Social (3 items)		10.417	3.64	.89
Popularity of place	0.805	-	-	-
Social activities	0.753	-	-	-
Social interaction	0.459	-	-	-
Total variance		73.596		

a variance value of 33.841 %. The second factor was named "fulfillment of needs" with a variance value of 22.555 %. The third factor was named "membership" with a variance value of 14.448%. The fourth factor was named "emotional connection" with a variance value of 11.648% (Table 4).

Findings on the relationship between social interaction performance and sense of community

To determine the relationships between the factors constituting social interaction performance and sense of community, a correlation analysis was conducted (Table 5). According to the results of the correlation analysis, there is a positive and significant relationship between sense of community and the social-functional factor ($r=0.619^{**}$; $p=.000$), social-perceptual factor ($r=0.297^{**}$; $p=.000$), and social-social factor ($r=0.520^{**}$; $p=.000$).

A regression analysis was conducted to identify the factors affecting the sense of community (Table 6). The results of the regression analysis indicate that all factors associated with the sense of community were included in the model. The values show a gradual increase, with the R2 value calculated as 0.601 in the third and final step. The analysis fits the linear model ($F(3-136) = 68.381$; $p=0.000$) and there is no autocorrelation. Therefore, it is statistically demonstrated that the factors in Table 6 have a positive significant effect on the sense of

Table 4. Sense of community factors for Ganita [table created by authors]

Factors	X	Factor Load	Explained Variance	α
Influence			33.841	0.842
If there is a problem in the place, the users can solve this problem	3.16	0.979	-	-
It is very important for me to use of this place	3.09	0.970	-	-
People greet each other in this place	3.19	0.954	-	-
Fulfillment of Needs			22.555	0.814
I consider this place a good place to live	3.14	0.953	-	-
User relationships are extensive in this place	2.97	0.947	-	-
User relationships are extensive in this	3.12	0.932	-	-
Membership			14.448	0.865
I can recognize most of the people in this place	3.41	0.823	-	-
I share similar characteristics with most users in this neighborhood	3.40	0.784	-	-
I feel at home in this place	3.75	0.632	-	-
Emotional Connection			11.648	0.838
When someone does a good deed for this place that makes me feel	3.68	0.893	-	-
I plan to live in this place for a long time	3.66	0.868	-	-
Total Variance (%)			82.492	-

Table 5. Correlation between social interaction performance and sense of community [table created by authors]

Variables	Sense of community
Social - Functional	0.619**
Social - Perceptual	0.297**
Social - Social	0.520**
$p^* < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$	-

Table 6. Regression analysis between social interaction factors and sense of community [table created by authors]

Variables	B	Std. Err.	β (Beta)	t	p
Constant	1.126	0.199	-	5.653	.000
3 Functional - Social	0.334	0.036	0.526	9.346	.000
Social - Social	0.235	0.029	0.446	8.176	.000
Perceptual -Social	0.110	0.042	0.147	2.640	.008

$R=0.775$; $R20.601$; Adj. $R2=0.593$; Model $F(3-136) = 68.381$; $p < 0.01$

community.

Within the scope of the research, the performance of social interaction and its sub-dimensions were first identified. Then, the levels and sub-dimensions of the sense of community among users of Ganita Coast were determined. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted between these two sets of data, and as a result, the sub-dimensions of social interaction that determine the users' sense of community at Ganita Coast were revealed.

Summarizing the research findings, it is evident that the social features provided by the design, specifically "popularity of place," "variety of activities," and "social activities," received the highest scores. Evaluating these results through the visuals of the Ganita Coast Project, Figure 3 illustrates which features of the place influenced these outcomes. The absence of boundary elements that would negatively affect visual interaction between the sea and the land, and the



Fig. 3. Evaluation of research findings through Ganita visuals [created by author]

design of amenities that allow for sitting and sunbathing, are organizational features that enhance the location's popularity. Ganita Coast offers a high value of variety of activities, enabling activities such as listening to music, dancing, watching the sea, boating, visiting cafes and restaurants, biking, and playing in children's areas. Similarly, the presence of organizational features like the sunset terrace and the over-sea viewing terrace, which bring people together, has had a positive impact on "social accessibility".

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the social interaction performance provided by the social features of the place and its impact on the sense of community. There is a gap in the literature regarding studies that determine the performance value of social features offered by a place. In this context, this research focused solely on the social features provided by the place.

Ganita Coast, a long-standing symbol of the city of Trabzon, has been a significant spot for users. However, it was observed that this area, where the interaction between the city residents and the sea has been most intense for many years, could

no longer meet users' needs and had lost its identity. As a result, the project under investigation was implemented and received considerable interest from users.

Considering that cities are recognized for their quality public spaces, the importance of the success of recreational opportunities offered by these areas is clear. [34] and [35] also emphasized that the amenities provided by these open spaces should focus not only on their physical aspects but also on their social dimensions.

In the study, a scale designed to determine the social interaction performance of the place was subjected to factor analysis, revealing a three-factor structure. These social interaction factors were identified as functional (social), perceptual (social), and social (social) based on the values they received. It was observed that the functional and social factors had the same average, while the perceptual features scored slightly lower. Among the social interaction features of Ganita Coast, the highest values were found for popularity of place, variety of activities, and social accessibility. These findings support the statements by [26] and [36] that designs enabling various activities promote socialization. The intensive use of a place offers significant opportunities for

social interactions. Considering that social interaction includes formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal communication, and all forms of social contact, the importance of a place's intensive use and popularity becomes clear. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate, consistent with previous studies, that the social amenities provided by the physical environment are strongly connected to social interaction [13, 37]. Whyte also stated that urban open spaces should offer a variety of activities and facilitate social events [12]. Similarly, [10] emphasized the importance of the number of social and optional activities in the success of a place. The findings of this study support these statements as well.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings of the study regarding the sense of community reveal a four-factor structure consisting of influence, fulfillment of needs, membership, and emotional connection. This structure aligns with the sense of community factor model proposed by [24] and [38].

Studies examining the relationships between the physical and social features of a place and the sense of community have predominantly shown that social features are more strongly related to the sense of community [7; 33; 40; 41; 42]. This research focused specifically on the effects of the social features of a place on the sense of community. The results revealed that social features impacting the sense of community were primarily functional, social, and perceptual characteristics. Among the social interaction features, the functional dimension's "variety of activities" and "social accessibility" and the social dimension's "popularity of place" scored highly. The variety of activities in a place encourages users to spend more time there and facilitates social interaction. This finding supports studies in the literature emphasizing the importance of variety in activities as a social indicator [10; 11; 12; 14]. Social accessibility of a place is also crucial. Salama (2017) highlighted social accessibility as an important social indicator in his classification. Recent studies have emphasized the growing importance of the concept of popularity of place in the design of open spaces and its role as a significant social component [7; 23].

These results indicate that the Ganita Coast Project effectively designed the interaction between sea-land and sea-users. It is evident that the conscious decision not to use boundary elements with the sea has been positively received by users. Similarly, the over-sea viewing terraces are heavily utilized, highlighting their importance in the design for social accessibility. The "sunset window," referred to as an Instagram point, has created significant value in terms of the popularity of place. Additionally, the sunbathing units designed in the project have been well-received by users. Regarding another critical social performance indicator, "variety of activities," the presence of multiple service elements (restaurants, cafes, pop-ups, buffets, etc.), a children's play area, a bike path, a walking track, sea viewing areas, seating steps, and a performance area has transformed the space into a continuously active and interactive social area. The presence of good seating elements and the variety of activities have especially kept users in the area for longer periods. [21] noted that well-designed seating in open spaces encourages users to stay longer.

Places serve as a sort of mirror for both individuals and societies, playing a significant role in shaping social and cultural elements. While places shape individuals, they also adapt according to human needs and behaviors. This relationship between place and people is continuous and dynamic. In the interaction between humans and places, the place serves as a determinant and shaper of human life,

thoughts, and actions. In this aspect, places not only have a physical but also a social stage function. According to [43] and [44] a place represents a multi-dimensional sense of meaning, anchoring individuals to a specific location and connecting them to it. Therefore, thorough research into the social features of a place is necessary.

The results presented in line with the objectives of the research only explain the effects of the social features of a place on the sense of community. While this study focused on social interaction performance, it cannot be claimed to have examined all the features of a place that contribute to social interaction. Additionally, the fact that the research was conducted in a single location is a limitation. Therefore, future studies should examine different urban open spaces to verify whether the findings regarding social interaction performance align with those of this study.

Considering the significance of urban open spaces as social stages and their role in shaping relationships between people and places, the findings of this study are indeed crucial. Particularly in the design of new urban spaces, the results regarding which social features of a place should be considered can serve as guiding principles for both designers and policymakers.

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Kopsavilkums

Palielinoties iedzīvotāju skaitam pilsētu centros, pilsētu atvērtās telpas pakāpeniski samazinās un esošo telpu kvalitāte pasliktinās. Tāpēc, projektējot atklātās vietas pilsētās, kuras saskaras ar tādām problēmām kā iedzīvotāju skaita pieaugumu, neplānotu urbanizāciju, industrializāciju un transporta problēmām, sociālās dimensijas ir jāņem vērā tikpat lielā mērā kā ekoloģiskās un ekonomiskās dimensijas. Pētījums koncentrējas uz Ganitas piekrastes projektu, kas ir viena no Trabzonas pilsētas identitātes telpām. Pētījuma mērķis ir noteikt pēc projekta īstenošanas izveidoto pilsētvides atvērto telpu organizāciju sociālo sniegumu un atklāt to ietekmi uz kopības sajūtu. Pētījuma metodi veido aptaujas, kas ietver vietas sniegtās sociālās mijiedarbības veikspējas un kopības sajūtas izvērtējumu. Pētījuma rezultāti liecina, ka vietas sociālās mijiedarbības sniegunam ir pozitīva un nozīmīga saistība ar kopības sajūtu. Pētījums kopumā definē sociālo iezīmju apakšdimensijas, koncentrējoties tikai uz vietas sociālajām īpašībām. Sociālie faktori, kas ietekmē kopienas sajūtu, tiek identificēti attiecīgi kā funkcionālā, sociālā un uztveres apakšdimensijas.