DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACES:
THE CASE OF OSMANGAZİ, BURSA

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Urban spaces are defined as areas beyond the built environment and urban fabric. An urban space serves as a gathering area and a principal tool for integration within a city. The qualified design of urban spaces can only be achieved by properly addressing and resolving social, functional, political, and aesthetic issues. To achieve such outcomes, urban spaces must respond to the diverse needs of their users. These spaces act as platforms where both residents and different user groups share their cultural experiences. Human interactions, expressions of cultural identity, personal development, and the experience of urban citizenship all take place in these environments.

This study aims to examine the role of open public spaces in shaping society by analyzing behavioral patterns and their potential relationships with the continuous and integrative characteristics of the urban environment. The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the communicative and societal dimensions of urban space, exploring concepts such as meaning, culture, public space, architectural environment, and social and psychological structures, as well as their interaction with public open spaces.

Keywords: Public space, Open public space, City center, Urban, Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Public spaces are integral components of modern urban life, situated at the core of social interactions, collective activities, and community relations. These spaces not only enhance the vibrancy of urban life by bringing individuals together and enabling cultural exchange, but also play a critical role in shaping the identity of a city. Public spaces transcend their physical function as shared areas by also serving as arenas where individuals come together to share common values, reinforcing the social fabric of urban life. In particular, gathering spaces—those designed for assembly—play a vital role in strengthening social bonds and fostering collective consciousness. Thus, the design of gathering spaces within public areas is crucial, not only for enhancing the functionality of urban environments but also for addressing the social needs of city dwellers.

Gathering spaces are public areas where individuals come together to socialize and engage in various activities and events. These spaces allow users to participate in events aligned with their interests, rest, and build social relationships. Effective design of gathering spaces directly impacts the quality of urban life by increasing participation in urban spaces and contributing to urban social integration. Well-designed gathering spaces encourage users to take ownership of the area, spend more time there, and form social connections, thereby improving overall urban life quality.

Osmangazi, one of the central districts of Bursa—one of Turkey's most historically and culturally significant cities—stands out as a focal point of both historical heritage and contemporary urban life. Both locals and tourists frequently use public spaces in Osmangazi and contribute significantly to the city's social, cultural, and economic life. This study aims to investigate the design of communal spaces in the public areas of Osmangazi and evaluate how well these designs meet user needs and contribute to the urban fabric.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC SPACES IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The concept of public space can be traced back to Ancient Greek agoras, which were central areas of the city where people gathered, socialized, traded, and engaged in public discourse. In the Roman Empire, forums expanded upon this concept, taking on additional functions such as governance, judiciary, and other civic activities.

During the Middle Ages, public spaces emerged around religious centers. Church squares were used for markets and festivals, though they largely remained centers for spiritual and commercial activity rather than spaces for broader social interaction. The Renaissance brought significant changes to art, architecture, and public life, leading to the redesign of public spaces as venues where society could engage with the arts.

The Industrial Revolution accelerated urbanization and transformed the functions of public spaces. With rapidly expanding cities came a growing need for green spaces, and parks and gardens began to be developed to improve public health.

Public spaces, such as parks, squares, walkways, and other areas, are essential components of the social and cultural fabric of urban life. According to Richard Sennett, public spaces hold critical importance as locations where individuals come together to strengthen social bonds and express public identity (Bahçeci, 2018). The term "public space" primarily refers to an arena in social life where something akin to public opinion can be formed.

Access to such spaces is guaranteed to all citizens (Habermas, 2004). As integral elements of modern cities, spaces such as parks, squares, streets, and walkways enable people to come together and fulfill both social and cultural needs, while also fostering a sense of belonging to a broader social structure.

Public spaces also play a vital role in facilitating democratic participation. These areas provide platforms where individuals can express their opinions, respond to social events, and engage with the governance of the city. As social and cultural dynamics shape the development of public spaces, they also contribute to improving the quality of urban life (Sağlam, 2019).

In summary, public spaces are more than just physical environments; they embody social solidarity, cultural diversity, and economic development. By offering inclusive, safe, and accessible environments that cater to the needs of individuals and communities, public spaces add value to urban life and remain essential components of sustainable urban living.

3. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES IN PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN

The design of public spaces is a process aimed at creating functional and aesthetic integrity that meets the physical, social, and cultural needs of individuals. This design approach seeks to develop sustainable and accessible environments that enhance quality of life by considering the diverse needs of different user groups.

At its core, public space design must combine functionality—facilitating daily life—and aesthetic value that preserves the identity of the space. This process also embraces an approach that encourages social interaction, promotes a sense of safety, and is compatible with the surrounding environment. Key principles such as human scale, environmental sustainability, and local identity are indispensable elements of the design process (Karayılmazlar & Çelikyay, 2018).

Accessibility and user-friendly design are fundamental principles ensuring that public spaces are usable by all individuals equally. This approach aims to eliminate physical and perceptual barriers, allowing users to access and effectively utilize the spaces comfortably. Special consideration must be given to the needs of different user groups, including individuals with disabilities, the elderly, children, and those experiencing temporary physical limitations, making this one of the most critical phases of the design process.

The integration of technology into public space design supports accessibility and user-friendly principles. Innovative navigation systems, digital information boards, and interactive maps help users find their way around more easily. In particular, mobile applications offering guidance services for the elderly and tourists allow public spaces to be used more effectively by a broader user base (Yıldız & Ersoy, 2019).

Security and comfort are crucial components in public space design to ensure that individuals can use these areas with ease and peace of mind. The principle of safety guarantees that users do not feel threatened when utilizing public spaces, while the principle of comfort focuses on providing physical and psychological ease.

A secure public space design can be achieved through the practical arrangement of elements such as lighting, open sight lines, and traffic control. Well-lit spaces, particularly during nighttime use, enhance users' perception of safety. Furthermore, open and unobstructed sightlines enable individuals to perceive better and monitor their surroundings, contributing to a greater sense of security (Tuncer, 2020).

The comfort principle focuses on physical ease and providing solutions tailored to user needs. Ergonomically designed seating areas, shading elements, and climate-sensitive planning ensure that users can enjoy and occupy public spaces for more extended periods.

The principle of "Social Integration and Community Participation" encompasses design strategies that enable diverse social groups to interact within shared spaces (Aydın & Ter, 2008). This principle is rooted in the understanding that urban spaces are not solely physical environments, but also social constructs. Social integration implies the removal of barriers between communities and ensuring that everyone can benefit from public spaces equally (Çelik & Baykal, 2014).

The principle of Aesthetic and Visual Quality is another critical component that enhances both user experience and the functionality of the space. Aesthetic values contribute to a space's visual appeal and identity, allowing users to form emotional connections with it. Design elements that support aesthetic and visual quality in public spaces include landscape features, lighting, architectural details, and public art installations (Özdemir & Çiftçi, 2015).

Urban identity is a significant dimension that reflects a city's unique character. It encompasses the historical, cultural, natural, and architectural values of a city (Kaya & Erdem, 2017). These elements help both residents and visitors develop a sense of belonging, strengthening the distinctiveness of a place. The presence of urban identity features in public spaces adds a powerful layer that differentiates one city from another.

Among these features are the preservation of historical textures, the use of local materials, and the adoption of region-specific design approaches (Demir & Çalışkan, 2019). For example, the historical bazaars and mosques in Bursa's Osmangazi district are among the most prominent elements that reflect the area's historical and cultural identity. Furthermore, the inclusion of urban identity elements fosters a sense of ownership among residents and contributes positively to social integration. The integration of such features into the design process requires collaboration between local governments and designers. Equally important is the participation and input of the

local community. As seen in the case of Bursa's Osmangazi district, preserving and enhancing these elements not only keeps the historical heritage alive but also supports a modern urban lifestyle.

4. PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN APPLICATIONS IN OSMANGAZİ DISTRICT, BURSA

User-centered design of public spaces plays a vital role in modern urban planning. However, some public spaces in the Osmangazi district fall short of meeting the expectations of the local population. For instance, the insufficiency of children's playgrounds limits the social interaction opportunities for youth and children. Similarly, the lack of outdoor sports facilities reveals a need in this area. Safety concerns in public spaces are frequently raised in Osmangazi. Some parks and squares are underutilized due to inadequate lighting and the absence of security cameras. This situation negatively affects the use of public spaces, especially during evening hours. To address this issue, improvements in security measures and monitoring mechanisms are necessary. A detailed analysis of existing public spaces in Osmangazi is important to enhance their functionality and better meet user needs. The preservation and development of historical, social, and recreational green areas will directly contribute to the quality of life for city residents. In particular, consideration of public transportation access, sustainability principles, and user-centered design elements is critical for the future of Osmangazi.
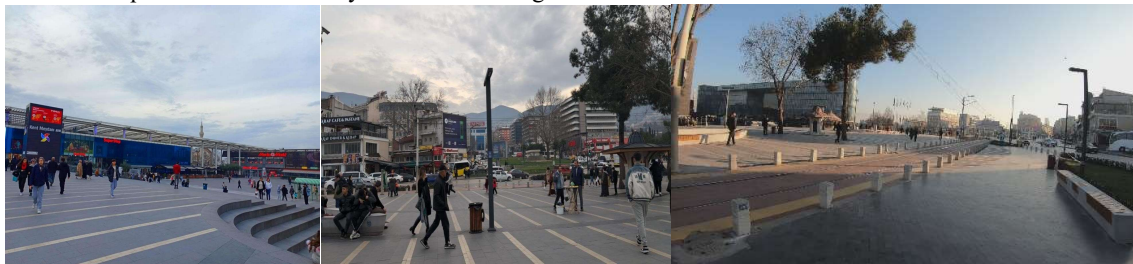
4.1. Squares

The Osmangazi district of Bursa stands out with its significant public spaces reflecting the city's historical and cultural heritage. Public spaces include squares, which are central to social life and among the most prominent elements of urban identity. Historically, squares have been places where societies gathered and various activities such as trade, art, and politics took place. Squares located in city centers not only preserve historical heritage but also serve as meeting and socializing points for residents (Ulutaş, 2019).

In modern cities, squares hold importance both aesthetically and functionally. They are designed to strengthen a city's aesthetic integrity and identity while providing spaces where social, cultural, and economic activities coexist. Especially in the contemporary world, where public spaces are shrinking and individual lifestyles predominate, squares offer residents a place for gathering, resting, and socializing. Furthermore, squares play a crucial role in organizing urban landscapes and, together with surrounding buildings, shape a city's visual perception (Jacobs, 1961).

4.1.1. Osmangazi City Square

The city square located in Osmangazi, Bursa's central district, occupies a strategic position at the intersection of commerce, transportation, and social life. Situated on main urban transport arteries, the square has direct connections to the Bursa Intercity Bus Terminal and metro lines. This positioning transforms the square from merely a public space into a key transportation hub. Moreover, surrounding shopping centers, restaurants, and cultural event venues make it one of the busiest areas in the city in terms of pedestrian traffic.

The square's design reflects a modern urbanization approach. Wide pedestrian pathways, spacious open areas, and seating groups aim to enhance social interaction and provide a comfortable experience. This architectural concept allows the square to host both daily activities and large-scale events.

Photo 1. *Osmangazi City Square (2025).*

Osmangazi City Square has a substantial social and cultural impact. As a gathering place for people from different parts of the city, it plays a role in shaping the dynamics of social life. The square is especially popular among youth, families, and tourists, offering opportunities for socialization while boosting economic activity. The surrounding restaurants, cafés, and commercial enterprises form an attraction center for both locals and visitors. Research indicates that city squares strengthen social bonds and positively contribute to residents' quality of life. The square also stands out due to the use of sustainable materials in its design and the allocation of space for landscaping. Regular cleaning and maintenance efforts by local authorities demonstrate that Osmangazi City Square is managed with a sustainable urban development approach. These practices exemplify a city model shaped by environmental awareness.

4.1.2. Hanlar District and Koza Square

The Hanlar District and Koza Square present a unique blend of Bursa's historical and cultural richness with modern urban life. Historically, the Hanlar District was the commercial and socio-economic heart of Bursa during the Ottoman period and continues to maintain this role to a large extent today. Koza Square, integrated with the Hanlar District, represents Bursa's contemporary face through modern urban arrangements. These areas not only carry traces of the past but have also become vital parts of social, economic, and cultural life today.

Photo 2. *Bursa Hanlar District (left) (URL-1), Bursa Koza Square (right) (2025).*

4.1.3. Osmangazi Atatürk Square

This square combines the city's social, cultural, and historical life with a modern perspective, standing out for its blend of past traces and today's dynamic urban life. In addition to being a meeting point for residents, the square functions as a multifunctional area for various events and social organizations (Yılmaz, 2021).

Osmangazi Atatürk Square was designed with a modern urban design approach, featuring wide pedestrian paths, seating areas, and commercial spaces integrated into daily public life. Designed in harmony with the city's historical and cultural fabric, the square also holds symbolic significance in commemorating Atatürk. The Atatürk monument, located within the square, reminds visitors of the legacy of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, reinforcing the area's historical and cultural identity.

Photo 3. *Bursa Osmangazi Atatürk Square (2025).*

4.1.4. Tophane Square

Tophane Square hosts many important structures from the Ottoman era. Among the significant landmarks are the tombs of Osman Gazi and his son Orhan Gazi, founders of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the Tophane Clock Tower built in the early 20th century. Additionally, the square is one of the most preferred spots for visitors wishing to enjoy panoramic views of Bursa. The historic city walls and bastions surrounding the square are crucial remnants that shed light on Bursa's pre-Ottoman period (Aksoy, 2021).

Tophane Square functions as an open-air museum reflecting Bursa's cultural identity. With its historical background, unique scenery, and symbolic structures, it serves as an attraction for both locals and tourists. As the first capital of the Ottoman Empire, Bursa's Tophane Square holds a special place in the city's collective memory due to its historical and strategic location. Besides its architectural heritage, the square also hosts social events, sustaining Bursa's cultural legacy.

Photo 4. *Bursa Tophane Square (2025).*

4.2. Parks and Green Spaces

Parks and green spaces are vital public areas that meet the physical, social, and environmental needs of urban life, supporting the interaction between nature and people. Parks provide relief from daily stress while playing a crucial role in enhancing physical and mental well-being. These spaces not only fulfill individual needs but also foster social interactions and strengthen community solidarity.

The value of parks and green areas in cities is evident through their environmental, social, and economic contributions. Environmentally, these spaces improve urban air quality, reduce carbon emissions, and mitigate the urban heat island effect. Natural vegetation helps preserve biodiversity and contributes to regulating groundwater levels. Additionally, by facilitating rainwater absorption, parks reduce flood risks and help prevent natural disasters such as erosion (Yıldız & Ersoy, 2019). Therefore, parks and green spaces act as natural buffers serving not only humans but entire ecosystems.

From a social perspective, parks and green spaces are centers of social interaction. They provide safe recreational environments for children, the elderly, and individuals of all ages, strengthening community bonds and a sense of belonging. Additionally, these areas support physical health by offering opportunities for activities such as sports, walking, and picnicking. Research indicates that individuals living near green spaces experience lower stress levels and higher quality of life, highlighting the positive effects of these areas on personal well-being (Gehl, 2011).

4.2.1. Erdem Saker Botanical Park

Erdem Saker Botanical Park is a large urban park established with the mission to protect Bursa's natural heritage and promote environmental sustainability. Situated in the heart of the city, it offers a unique retreat for both nature lovers and residents. Named after Erdem Saker, a former mayor known for his environmental initiatives, the park contributes to the region's natural landscape with its green spaces and botanical diversity, while advancing urban design standards with its modern landscaping.

Spanning a total area of 400 decares, the park houses a rich collection of local and exotic plant species. This diversity provides not only aesthetic value but also serves as a significant resource for scientific research and botanical education. The plant species in the park contribute to preserving the local ecosystem, while exotic varieties offer visitors an opportunity to experience natural beauty from different parts of the world. Moreover, the park's regular educational programs and plant introduction events support raising environmental awareness, especially among youth.

Erdem Saker Botanical Park is more than a recreational area; it functions as a center promoting environmental sustainability. Its design and management are based on eco-friendly practices and innovative technologies. Energy-saving lighting systems reduce overall energy consumption, while recycling areas and organic waste management increase environmental consciousness. Additionally, routine maintenance ensures the preservation and enhancement of plant diversity. These applications position Erdem Saker Botanical Park as a prime example of Bursa's environmentally responsible urban policies.
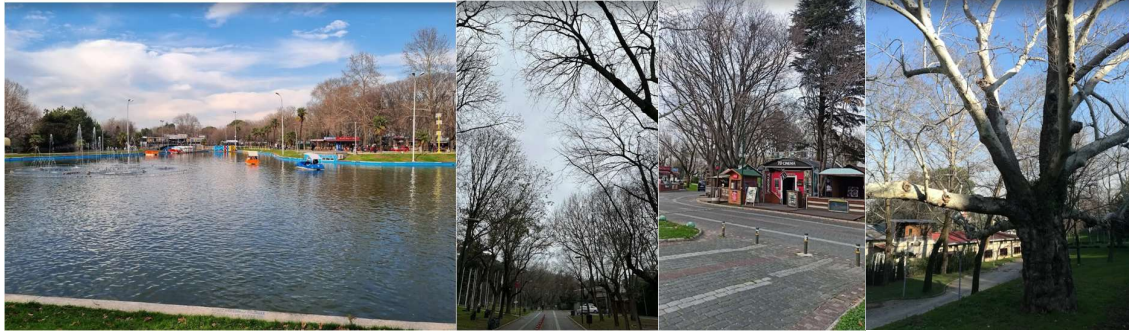

Photo 5. *Bursa Erdem Saker Botanical Park (2025).*

4.2.2. Reşat Oyal Culture Park

Bursa Reşat Oyal Culture Park is one of the city's most important recreational areas, bringing together Bursa's cultural, social, and natural heritage (Kaya, 2021). Covering an area of 400 decares, the park caters to visitors of all ages. It features walking and jogging paths, cycling trails, playgrounds, and picnic areas. The park also includes a large pond and landscaped surroundings, providing visitors with a natural and peaceful atmosphere. Seating areas and bridges around the pond enhance the park's visual appeal and offer visitors a unique view. The pond serves as a habitat for fish and bird species, contributing to the park's natural ecosystem.

Reşat Oyal Culture Park is also rich in social and cultural activities. It regularly hosts events such as theater performances, concerts, festivals, and open-air cinema screenings. These activities, especially in summer, add vibrancy to Bursa's cultural life and increase social interactions among residents. The Bursa Open Air Theatre, located within the park, is an important venue for local and national artistic events. Additionally, museums and exhibition areas in the park allow visitors to explore Bursa's history and cultural heritage closely.

Photo 6. Bursa Reşat Oyal Culture Park (2025).

4.3. Cultural and Artistic Spaces

One of the main functions of cultural and artistic spaces is the preservation and transmission of cultural memory. Museums and galleries, for example, exhibit historical artifacts and artworks, enabling societies to connect with their past. Such venues not only foster historical awareness among individuals but also ensure that cultural values are passed down to future generations. Cultural spaces serve as vital centers for the continuation of traditions, encompassing theaters, concert halls, museums, galleries, libraries, and cultural centers. These venues contribute to social enlightenment and invigorate the city's social life through artistic and cultural activities.

4.3.1. Ördekli Cultural Center

The Ördekli Cultural Center stands out as a significant social space that blends historical and cultural heritage with contemporary events. Established through the restoration of a historic Ottoman bath, the center preserves traces of the past while functioning as a modern cultural venue. It exemplifies Bursa's efforts to protect its historical texture and transmit it to future generations, thereby significantly contributing to the city's cultural identity. Reflecting the elegance of Ottoman architecture, the center hosts diverse activities, serving as a key meeting point for locals and tourists alike. Acting as a bridge between Bursa's past and future, the Ördekli Cultural Center strengthens the city's cultural identity (Karaca, 2020).

4.4. Commercial and Social Spaces

Commercial and social spaces play a fundamental role in shaping urban economic dynamism and social interaction. Commercial spaces refer to areas such as shops, shopping centers, and marketplaces where economic activities concentrate, while social spaces include parks, squares, and cultural venues where people gather and socialize. These spaces enhance the quality of urban life and contribute to the formation of sustainable cities. Commercial areas form the lifeblood of the urban economy. Strategic decisions regarding store locations are critical in reaching target markets and securing competitive advantages (Özgören, 2016). Social spaces, on the other hand, are defined as the settings within urban areas where public life unfolds, facilitating social interactions and various activities. Urban squares serve as important public spaces used for social, cultural, political, and commercial purposes, fostering social cohesion and improving the quality of urban life (Erdönmez & Çelik, 2016). The integration of commercial and social spaces is crucial for sustainable urban development. Shopping malls exemplify this integration by evolving beyond mere commercial venues to become centers for social and cultural events, thus becoming indispensable parts of city life (Uzun et al., 2017).

Overall, commercial and social spaces are integral to urban life, influencing both the economic and social fabric. Their planning and management directly affect urban living standards, addressing residents' needs and supporting sustainable development.

5. Conclusion and Evaluation

This study comprehensively examined the definition, historical development, and functions of public spaces, focusing specifically on the Osmangazi district of Bursa. The findings provide valuable insights into the current state of public spaces and their impacts on urban life in the district. Squares, parks, and cultural and social venues analyzed in the study were assessed according to the needs and expectations of various user groups.

To ensure effective use of public spaces, accessibility must first be improved. Traffic congestion and insufficient pedestrian connections in Osmangazi create significant barriers to access. Measures such as increasing pedestrianization projects, relocating public transport stops closer to public spaces, and integrating bicycle paths should be implemented. Moreover, universal design principles must be adopted to enable disadvantaged groups, such as disabled and elderly individuals, to benefit from these areas comfortably.

For public spaces to foster stronger social ties, public participation should be ensured during the planning stages. Design approaches based on user needs and expectations must be embraced. Furthermore, organizing cultural,

artistic, and sports events that enhance social interaction will increase the utilization rates of public spaces, supporting social harmony and enlivening these areas.

Improving public spaces in Osmangazi offers an opportunity to enhance urban life quality and strengthen community bonds. By integrating accessibility, security, aesthetics, and social cohesion, public spaces can become more functional and attractive. Collaboration among local authorities, NGOs, and residents will facilitate the implementation of sustainable and innovative solutions. These recommendations can serve as a model not only for Osmangazi but also for other cities with similar characteristics.

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