THE OPEN SPACE CONTRIBUTING TO NEIGHBORHOOD SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH PUBLIC EVENTS: A CASE FROM AKARA, TURKEY

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Sustainable urban development?  

Sustainable urban development covers the issues of social justice, sustainable economies, and environmental sustainability¹.

To achieve economic welfare, social justice, environmental protection and improvement, the approach of sustainable urban development integrates the following policy aims²:

- Strengthening economic prosperity and employment in towns and cities
- Promoting equality, social inclusion and regeneration in urban areas
- Protecting and improving the urban environment: towards local and global sustainability
- Contributing to good urban governance and local empowerment

¹ Charter of European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability-The Aalborg Charter 1994
Sustainable urban development?

Achievement of these integrated aims through the participation of local parties in decision-making.
Sustainable urban development?

- Growth management and land use planning
- Urban design
- Housing
- Transportation
- Environmental protection and restoration
- Energy and material use
- Green architecture and building
- Equity and environmental justice
- Economic development
- Population

✓ “Public space” can refer to any of the above urban sustainability issues.

Open spaces are crucial elements of urban areas that contribute **quality of life** and **sustainable urban development** in many ways:

- Provision of **environmental services**
- Provision of **health services** for the well being of urban residents
- Provision of **social services**
- Provision of **economic benefits**
Public Space & Urban Sustainability

- Economic benefits
- Social services
- Health services
- Environmental services

Quality of life → Sustainable urban development

Architects and planners of the early 20th Century pointed to the creation of open spaces not only at metropolitan scales, but also at neighborhood scales, as characterized in Clarence Perry’s Neighborhood Unit Concept.

A social engineering project: The sense of belonging to a community.

Adjacent to the school, there is a park not only for children but also the residents of the neighborhood to come together and socialize.
In the face of the transformations that cities have experienced, the concept of neighborhood has been transformed, too.

The advent of capitalism accelerated the metropolitanization processes, and maybe ironically, also led to *suburbanization* (Castells 1997).

In the present societies, the *sense of belonging* to a community is not as easily provided as in the past.
The neighborhood unit concept in Turkey

Turkish cities witnessed the emergence of suburban communities, too, with the advent of capitalism.

Although the classical neighborhoods do exist in medium and low-scale cities (and in the older areas of metropolitan cities), suburbanization have been favored especially since the end of 1980s.
Closed or semi-closed apartment communities or garden houses in suburban areas are now regarded as new types of neighborhoods.

The suburban neighborhoods include a package of utilities that are constructed altogether: Commercial areas, open spaces, kindergarten, elementary school (mostly private) are constructed simultaneously with the houses by the construction companies.

The scope of this research is to find out the community building role of open spaces in suburban neighborhoods through festivals.
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The case study: A suburban neighborhood in Ankara, Turkey.
A brief look at the evolution of open space strategies in Ankara

Ankara was declared as the capital city of the Turkish Republic, which was found in 1923.

The capital city was desired to be planned as a modern city, thus, an international competition was held to attain the city plan of Ankara.

A German architect/planner, Herman Jansen, won the competition and produced the plan of the city.
Jansen proposed a green belt around the city and large green areas within the urban area.
Open areas were supposed to be the instruments for the creation of socialization environments in the city.

With this aim, a couple of urban parks, recreation and sports areas were planned and established.

The civic square created in the city center Kızılay was the main promenade of the modern citizens of the new capital.
Besides the macro level decisions, Jansen also paid attention to *neighborhood planning and design*, regarding neighborhood units as elements making up the city rather than avenues or plazas.
People who witnessed the early Republican years in Ankara (1920s-1950s) describe the relationship within neighborhoods with the words **unity, loyalty, affection** and **warmth**.

Meanwhile, the parks created at the city scale also acted as places for **social bonding**.
It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the impacts of capitalism were observed in the city.

The state intervention in the creation of open system was diminished, while the consumption pattern of the citizens changed.

Urban parks started to be commercialized with the opening of amusement facilities and night clubs.
In 1955, an international competition for Ankara’s new plan was announced. Turkish architects Nihat Yücel and Raşit Uybadin’s plan proposal won the competition.

The open space strategy of the plan was in continuity with the green-belt ideology.

This ideology and protection of valleys was the reason for Jury’s preference.

However, since the valleys were simply identified as non-habitable areas in the plan and not as public or open spaces, they could not be protected from the illegal settlements of immigrants (Gunay 1988).
Coming to the 1970s, the city leaned on the topographical thresholds in north, east and south; therefore another plan was needed.

The Metropolitan Planning Bureau decided to develop the city towards the west.

This decision led to the emergence of a Western Corridor of Ankara, where the suburban settlements developed rapidly.
The classical neighborhood concept started to change with the sprawl of the city.
The Idea of Green Belt

ÇAYYOLU SUBURBAN AREA
Following the 1990 Plan, the City and Regional Planning Department of the Middle East Technical University of Ankara made a study named “Ankara from 1985 to 2015”. The green belt ideology was maintained in this plan, which was the effective use of valleys as green corridors lying through the city center.

With the amendments in the legislation, the boundaries of the city enlarged in the early 2000s.

Therefore, a new plan was approved in 2007 named The Capital City Ankara 2023. The plan adopted the radial city macroform idea of the previous plan together with the green corridors.
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People who move to the suburban neighborhoods seek **privacy** and **anonymity**.

On the other hand, **interactions are denser** in the neighborhoods of lower-income and less-educated groups.

The west of Ankara, Çayyolu Area, along the so-called Western Corridor, has become a convenient alternative for Ankara’s middle and upper classes.
ME-SA Koru Houses

- 250 villa houses,
- 1321 apartments,
- a kindergarten,
- two elementary schools,
- a public park,
- a local bazaar
Public space is a vital component of the neighborhood for the establishment of the sense of place and belonging.

As it contributes to the neighborhood image, community pride and identity of people, a public space has a symbolic value.

Suburban mass houses are composed of numerous apartments, thus it is not easy to get involved with each other.

So as to overcome the lack of sense of belonging in these neighborhoods, some activities like festivals, garage sales and so on are organized in public spaces of suburban neighborhoods.
The social function of festivals

Festivals go beyond mere entertainment and revenue generation; because they provide a specific time and place in which a local community can show their commitment to the collective being.

Festival attendance can promote social cohesiveness, since a festival is a social occasion in which all members of a community have the opportunity to come together.

Even spending money on festivals can create mutual trust within a local community. When revenues are targeted for some public interest, people develop strong relations with others and feel sense of obligation.
The public park in the Me-Sa Koru hosts a regular spring festival every year which is organized jointly by Kiwanis-Koru and KOSAS.

Local producers sell handicrafts, food and drink in the festival, and the revenue is donated to children-related projects.

Many events that could attract children and families are performed in this festival.
Conclusion

The Me-Sa Koru Spring Festival proves to be a satisfactory community building activity through the users’ perspectives. The reasons are:

- **An established public space management**: A sophisticated management structure is important for the maintenance of an open space.
- **A well-maintained neighborhood park**: All the interviewees state that the public park in the Me-Sa Koru provides a pleasant environment for families and children.
- **A public interest purpose in the festival**: The revenues of the sold items in the Me-Sa Koru spring festival serve to a specific public interest every year.
Conclusion

Recognizing the variety of benefits of open spaces for urban sustainability, city planners have the following tasks to take due care:

- Equal distribution and positioning of open spaces within the entire urban area and in neighborhoods
- Consideration of the size of green areas to improve its health impact
- Integration of open spaces into a network for a sustainable urban form; avoiding uncontrollable urban sprawl; and maintaining biodiversity
- Accessibility of open spaces through public transportation modes
- Accessibility of open spaces for all social groups
- An elaborate urban design that maximizes and encourages the use of parks