

## Playful Urbanism in Diyarbakır: Dynamics of Power and Play in Public Space Design

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### Abstract

Public spaces embody the intricate interplay of power dynamics influenced by governmental, societal, and economic factors, shaping spaces to reflect idealized lifestyles guided by urban management, societal norms, and capitalist economies. However, the emergence of playful actions disrupts these norms, offering fresh perspectives on power structures and public spaces. Activities characterized by playfulness, illuminated by play theory, advocate for innovative approaches to public space design, exploring play's transformative role in nurturing social connections and enriching urban life while reshaping social interactions and landscapes.

Focused on Şeyh Said Square and nearby parks adjacent to the Diyarbakır walls in Turkey, this study employs field research, observations, and surveys. Renowned for its vibrant culture and diverse societal representations, this locale fosters unique connections among users, authorities, and urban designers. Playful actions serve as a catalyst for challenging established power dynamics and fostering greater participation in the design and use of public spaces. Acknowledging play as fundamental in urban design, the research explores alternative narratives, emphasizing social engagement and public space utilization. Through a comprehensive and participatory methodology, it highlights play's significance in promoting participation and shaping urban design.

**Keywords:** play theory, power dynamics, social interaction, participation, urban design.

## **Introduction**

Public spaces in urban environments are vital for social interaction and community engagement. These areas have evolved into dynamic arenas where power dynamics, conversations, and collective activities converge, deeply influencing the fabric of society (Lefebvre, 1991; Sennett, 2018). As essential components of an open society, public spaces serve as venues for socialization, counterbalancing divisive societal forces. Although they may not directly resolve social and economic challenges, these spaces are fundamental to the effective functioning of democratic societies (Madanipour, 2010).

Play theory offers a unique lens through which to view public spaces, revealing the underlying power dynamics and social interactions that shape them. Embracing play enables individuals to overcome power barriers, establish new social connections, and redefine the essence of public spaces (Stevens, 2007). Beyond mere entertainment, play serves as a mechanism for reclaiming, designing, and transforming existing spaces and urban landscapes (Shaftoe, 2008).

This study aims to apply play theory to specific public spaces, including Şeyh Said Square and the parks surrounding the Diyarbakır Walls in the Sur district of Diyarbakır province. This region, recognized for its rich historical and cultural significance, has long been a site of power struggles and political activity due to its strategic location and historical importance.

The Sur district encompasses remnants from nearly 30 civilizations, including churches, mosques, and bazaars, creating a rich cultural mosaic with a profound historical narrative (Diyarbakır Cultural Inventory, 2011). With its architectural marvels and narrow alleyways, Diyarbakır's historic Sur district reflects the complex interactions among diverse civilizations over time (Aslan, 2013). During bustling commerce and vibrant markets, these areas continue to serve as centres for communal life and social interaction, preserving their traditional charm and cultural heritage (İnce, 2011).

Despite its rich history and diversity, Sur faces challenges from homogenizing urbanization and rent-driven economies. Migration, urban transformation, and urban destruction have gradually eroded the unique character and identity of Sur's public spaces. However, these challenges also present opportunities for revitalization and renewal through playful urban interventions.

Playful activities, emerging in response to entrenched power structures, offer a dynamic and inclusive approach to urban life. Play serves as a form of participation, allowing residents to engage with and shape their surroundings. This study aims to explore play activities within public spaces and investigate residents' expectations for these communal areas. By understanding user preferences, the research seeks to enhance community engagement and empowerment in urban design through play. Additionally, the study examines the complex power dynamics inherent in urban design, aiming to dismantle traditional hierarchies and promote a more collaborative approach to urban development.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Play, Power Relations, and Public Space**

Understanding the intricate relationship between power dynamics and the use of public spaces is crucial for navigating the complexities of urban life. These spaces are influenced by a range of factors, including political, military, economic, and social forces, all of which are

interconnected within broader national and international contexts (Mitchell, 2003). Because of power dynamics, public spaces have evolved to become increasingly impersonal and transient, often serving functional or symbolic roles. These ongoing transformations underscore the dynamic nature of public spaces, which are continually shaped by diverse societal, national, and international factors impacting their liveability, sustainability, and user-oriented design in urban environments (Madanipour, 2010).

This section explores the nuanced power dynamics within public spaces, examining how historical contexts, regulatory frameworks, and theoretical perspectives influence the urban social fabric. It also considers the role of play theory, highlighting its impact on public spaces and its potential to influence power relations by promoting inclusive social interactions and challenging traditional hierarchies. By applying this perspective, the study aims to foster a more equitable and engaged urban community.

### **2.1. Understanding Power Relations in Public Space Use**

Public spaces within urban areas are crucial in defining a city's character and identity. These spaces—including parks, plazas, sidewalks, and other communal areas—are managed by authorities to ensure they fulfil their intended functions effectively. Initially, rules governing public spaces were established for practical reasons such as maintaining order, safety, and cleanliness (Carmona, 2010). Over time, these rules have evolved into complex systems of regulations resembling localized legal frameworks. Each public space has its own set of rules tailored to its specific context, reflecting the unique dynamics and priorities of the surrounding community. These regulations shape social behaviour and interactions within public spaces, creating a sense of order and predictability. However, what began as temporary or exceptional rules often become normalized and entrenched in everyday life. Public spaces thus transcend their physical attributes to become symbolic arenas where societal norms and values are expressed and enforced. Understanding the evolution and implications of these regulations is crucial for policymakers, urban planners, and residents as they strive to create inclusive and vibrant public spaces that meet diverse community needs (Stavrides, 2019). Examining these power dynamics is essential for exploring how interventions can reshape public spaces.

In the early 20th century, urban designers and architects did not directly challenge the existing system but sought to impose order on the chaos of modern life and urbanization (Gilloch, 2001). Their focus was on standardizing everyday life and practicality, with less emphasis on entertainment in city planning. Le Corbusier, a prominent figure of this approach, argued that many existing cities could not meet the demands of modern life due to rapid urban development and industrialization. He viewed urbanization as a natural progression and emphasized the need for ideal planning to foster progress. Le Corbusier envisioned cities characterized by organized transportation, clean environments, and strong ethical values, placing importance on working conditions and the layout of business areas. In contrast, Jane Jacobs criticized Le Corbusier's projects, arguing that they prioritized cars over people and promoted functional separation of urban areas, limiting social interaction. Jacobs advocated for diverse, interactive urban spaces such as vibrant streets and sidewalks, which she believed were essential for fostering human connections and enhancing city liveability (Jacobs, 2009). Examining these historical perspectives reveals the evolving relationship between urban design, societal norms, and power dynamics.

Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary society provides a profound exploration of power dynamics, extending beyond mere coercion to emphasize the systematic organization and

control of individuals. In a disciplinary society, power operates through various mechanisms of discipline—such as surveillance, normalization, and examination—that are embedded within social institutions and practices. These mechanisms regulate behaviour and shape spatial organization. For Foucault, discipline is not just a coercive force but an art of distribution that actively influences individuals' actions within a societal framework (Foucault, 1995). The spatial aspect of this disciplinary order is crucial, as power intervenes to regulate the physical distribution of individuals, turning discipline into a tangible influence on spatial organization (Foucault, 1995). In public spaces, disciplinary power is evident in design and surveillance measures that control behaviour, impacting social interactions and shaping usage patterns (Zukin, 1995). Analysing power dynamics in public spaces provides insight into how disciplinary mechanisms manifest and influence social interactions within urban environments.

In public spaces, power dynamics work to establish order, standardization, and an ideal societal vision. Drawing on Foucault's concept of biopower, which encompasses control over life itself (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 2003), public spaces become arenas where structures, relations, and practices shape political subjects. These spaces are not merely passive backdrops but are imbued with power mechanisms that regulate and organize human behaviour. Biopower reveals how political subjects are constituted and deployed through regulation and surveillance of various life aspects, including time and bodies (Cisney & Morar, 2016). This lens highlights how the management of public spaces involves asserting authority over populations, shaping behaviours, interactions, and collective dynamics (Agamben, 1998). The regulation and surveillance in public spaces extend beyond individual bodies to broader population dynamics, reflecting a biopolitical approach to community life (Negri, 2016). Thus, the design and management of public spaces are intertwined with power dynamics aimed at creating standardized, organized environments conducive to an ideal societal vision (Boano & Talocci, 2014). Exploring these dynamics opens opportunities to apply play theory, paving the way for innovative approaches to challenge and reshape entrenched power structures.

## **2.2. Utilizing Play Theory to Reshape Power Dynamics in Public Space**

Play theory can be applied to public spaces to empower communities and transform power dynamics. It involves the actions of individuals, their use of space, and their engagement, either individually or collectively. Play theory holds the potential to rejuvenate existing power structures and foster new social connections. In everyday life, people often unconsciously replicate societal norms and behaviours through playful interactions, creating their own set of rules, rhythms, and social orders within the context of play (Lefebvre, 1991). To fully comprehend play theory in public space design, it is necessary to explore the concept of play itself and its impact on power relations within public spaces.

Play is frequently perceived as a creative and productive activity that fosters innovative potential. However, it is not confined to just children; rather, it is a voluntary engagement that individuals undertake throughout their lives in various spaces and times. The foundational work on play comes from the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who introduced his work "Homo Ludens" in 1938. Huizinga explores the historical significance of play, asserting that it played a crucial role in the emergence of culture. He conceptualizes human beings as "Homo Ludens" or playing humans, suggesting that actions performed in social life serve to produce the essential needs and requirements of life. Huizinga characterizes early human societies' life-sustaining activities, such as building shelters, hunting, and gathering, as acts of play. As human beings started creating their reality, they initially shaped everything in rhythm, arrangement,

and repetition. In essence, reality emerges as a product of playful social interactions (Huizinga, 1995).

Agamben provides a profound insight into the concept of play, defining it as the act of liberating things, actions, or events from the confines of the sacred realm, thereby enabling individuals to interact with them without the constraints imposed by sacred conventions. The contemporary manifestations of the sacred are diverse and complex, encompassing phenomena such as militarized security institutions, military urbanism, and the capitalist process of dispossession. Agamben's concept of profanation involves returning sacred objects or spaces to the free use of humanity, thereby subverting the control imposed by governmental mechanisms and neoliberal ideologies. Play, through its transformative power, empowers citizens to reshape urban environments, while profanation disrupts dominant narratives by reclaiming sacred spaces for common use (Boano & Talocci, 2014). By encompassing all human activities that transcend the limitations imposed by the sacred, play serves as a potent tool for challenging established norms and practices dictated by sacred tradition. Particularly evident in children's play is the transformative nature of ordinary objects, as items like cars, toy guns, or even electric stoves assume new roles and meanings through imaginative exploration. Through play, children freely navigate social conventions and expectations, unleashing their creativity and expressing their unique perspectives (Agamben, 2007).

Play activities in public spaces emerge as a means to challenge the stability and rationality of modern life. Shaped by the intricate social and cultural norms of the city, these activities do not always occur spontaneously but possess creative potential, offering new perspectives on the world. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu conceptualizes play activities as a form of habitus, constituting a set of beliefs, values, and practices evolving through daily experiences. Play becomes a tool for personal and social transformation, enabling individuals to surpass their customary ways of thinking and behaving (Bourdieu 2000).

According to Sennett (1974), the playful theatricality of roles and masks in urban encounters goes beyond traditional responsibilities, reshaping the rules of social participation. Play in public spaces prompts individuals to discover new needs and develop fresh forms of social life and space, offering a lived critique of instrumental rationality and challenging conventional definitions of function. Playful behaviour, marked by sudden, unplanned, and unpredictable social encounters, takes on a spontaneous and creative dimension. Each urban period introduces new roles and potentials, inducing corresponding changes in laws, etiquette, and the overall transformation of the city (Stevens, 2007).

Public spaces, whether among friends or strangers, serve as environments where individuals engage in various modes, acting as both spectators and performers. Participation in these areas fosters a shared understanding that others, like oneself, possess a rich repertoire of social behaviours, reinforcing the joyful and pleasurable aspects of social interaction (Lennard & Lennard, 1984). This learning extends beyond public space, influencing structured relationships and other environments. The organization of people's activities in and around public spaces contributes to its theatrical quality by providing a wide range of potential actors and framing their interactions (Stevens, 2007). In these dynamic environments, individuals, whether friends or strangers, collectively realize that they share a broad spectrum of social behaviours through play, leading to the creation of new spaces (Lennard & Lennard, 1984). These evolving interactions weave into Sur's Story, illustrating how historical events and urban realities shape and are shaped by the dynamic nature of public spaces.

### **3. Contextual Background: Sur's Story: A Tapestry of Historical Events and Urban Realities**

Understanding the historical narrative and demographic shifts of Sur is essential for contextualizing the complex interplay of power dynamics and urban development in the region. Before delving into the study area, it is crucial to explore the events that have shaped Sur's rich historical legacy and ongoing socio-political changes, as public spaces derive significance from these structural, demographic, and political contexts.

Sur, originally a diverse settlement embracing various ethnic and religious groups, has undergone profound transformations over time. Historical events such as the mass deportation of non-Muslim populations in 1915 and the suppression of Kurdish uprisings in 1925 have significantly influenced the city's collective identity (Gambetti, 2009). However, the most impactful event reshaping Sur's demography was the conflict between Turkish state forces and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in the 1990s. This conflict led to the forced migration of numerous residents from rural areas to Sur, further altering the city's demographic landscape and contributing to its evolving identity (Ayata & Yüksek, 2005; Çelik, 2005).

The intense clashes between state forces and Kurdish fighters from 2015 to 2016 represent another critical chapter in Sur's history. The Kurdish issue and demands for rights, longstanding since Turkey's establishment, gained prominence in 2013 with peace negotiations, only to end abruptly in 2015. Subsequently, conflicts erupted as Kurdish militants declared self-governance and autonomy, resulting in widespread violence and destruction, particularly in Sur. The aftermath of these conflicts witnessed urban transformation projects, leading to the demolition of buildings within the Sur region and significant changes to the cityscape (Kibar, 2017).

The urban transformation has sparked debates about preserving Sur's historical and cultural heritage, particularly as new developments often clash with the city's historical fabric. Criticisms have been raised regarding the construction of concrete structures and widened roads, which deviate from the old ambiance and contribute to the displacement of residents, turning parts of Sur into ghost towns (Eşin, 2018).

These intricate social and urban transformations underscore the complex interplay of political, economic, and ideological factors shaping Sur's urban landscape. As Sur continues to evolve, research into its past and present becomes indispensable for understanding urban spaces and broader societal dynamics. When examining these events within the city walls, it becomes imperative to reconsider the roles of decision-makers and power dynamics within the city and how these dynamics will be influenced by the unfolding events.

### **4. Study Areas: Şeyh Said Square and parks around Diyarbakır Walls**

This study focuses on Şeyh Said Square and the surrounding parks near the Diyarbakır Walls, areas of profound historical and cultural significance. These locations offer valuable insights into the dynamics of power and playful interactions within public spaces.

Diyarbakır's city centre, with origins dating back to approximately the 6th millennium BC, flourished under the protection of the Diyarbakır Walls. The walls, constructed during the Roman era, include both inner and outer fortifications, symbolizing Diyarbakır's enduring heritage. Designated as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2015, the walls extend over 5.5 kilometres. They feature bastions that rise 10 to 12 meters high and possess a thickness of

3 to 4 meters, significantly contributing to Diyarbakır's distinctive urban landscape (Diyarbakır Cultural Inventory, 2011). The parks that surround these walls further enhance the study area, offering additional context regarding the region's historical and social fabric.

Şeyh Said Square, formerly known as Dağkapı Square, was renamed in 2014 in honour of Şeyh Said, a notable Kurdish figure who was executed by the Turkish government in 1925. In 2019, the Turkish government appointed trustees to the Kurdish-majority area and declared a state of emergency (Kibar,2017). Despite the ongoing uncertainty regarding the square's official name, the local community continues to refer to it as Şeyh Said Square, underscoring its enduring significance and the lasting legacy of Şeyh Said.

The square has undergone significant transformations over time. The most notable changes began in the 1930s, when the demolition of the Sur walls was carried out to improve airflow and reduce heat. This demolition led to the reconfiguration of the square and the surrounding roads (Gambetti, 2009). These modifications were part of a broader effort during the early Republican era to establish a uniform and modern society, as reflected in the development of contemporary urban spaces (Bozdoğan, 2002). At that time, the area surrounding Dağkapı Square was developed with a focus on military infrastructure, shaping its initial landscape (Gambetti, 2009). Today, Şeyh Said Square functions as a bustling transit hub, as shown in the function map (Figure 1). It is surrounded by large, dynamic traffic roads, medical facilities, hotels, restaurants, retail shops, and remnants of its military history.



Figure 1. Map of research areas: Şeyh Said Square and Parks around Diyarbakır Walls

## 5. Methodology

This research employs two primary methodologies: observational study and structured questionnaire survey. Together, these approaches aim to provide a comprehensive

understanding of public space utilization, socio-cultural influences, and individual perceptions within Diyarbakır.

Observational research was conducted to investigate the use of public spaces in Şeyh Said Square and the neighbouring parks beside the historic Diyarbakır Walls. Observations were carried out primarily in the afternoon, between 16:00 and 17:00, during March and April to capture peak activity periods under favourable weather conditions. Following principles from urban ethnography (Whyte, 1980), the observations focused on documenting interactions between individuals and their physical environment, particularly playful activities, and social behaviours. This included monitoring movement patterns, social interactions, and prevalent activities within the selected public spaces. Data were recorded through detailed notetaking and photography to capture insights into space utilization and the nature of activities.

A structured questionnaire survey was utilized to gather quantitative data from 227 residents of Diyarbakır. The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture participants' descriptions and perceptions of public spaces, as well as their engagement with playful elements. According to Taherdoost (2022), questionnaires are essential for collecting standardized and comparable data, ensuring a rigorous approach to data collection. The questionnaire followed a structured format, with sequential questions designed to guide participants through the survey systematically. This approach aligns with the methodological principles outlined by Burgess (2001), from defining the research objectives to analysing the collected data. By adhering to these methodological standards, the study aims to offer a thorough analysis of the perceptions and activities of individuals within Diyarbakır's public spaces.

## 6. Case Study: Şeyh Said Square and Parks around Diyarbakır Walls

Şeyh Said Square predominantly hosts similar types of activities, reflecting its role as a communal space. In the afternoon, people often gather to socialize, sitting on small stools while enjoying cups of tea (Figure 2). It is a popular spot for chatting with friends, watching people go by, and soaking in the atmosphere. The square features two open-air tea houses on opposite corners, which are mostly frequented by older men. Nearby, children aged 7 to 15 play football, turning parts of the square into a playful area (Figure 3). They are quite agile and can organize games in any available space better than adults.



Figure 2. Tea drinkers on small stools



Figure 3. Children playing football.

The square is primarily used by pedestrians, with people moving at varying rhythms and speeds. As observed in Figure 4, the fountain pools are typically empty, and some benches are occupied

by individuals waiting for friends. In the centre of the square, a clock tower stands above a closed market. Most of the market stalls are vacant, except for one music studio. The lower market area is transient, particularly for young people visiting the studio. Beyond the clock tower, the square is mostly empty, with some scattered seating. Figure 5 illustrates the evening ambiance as clothing stalls begin to appear around the square, sometimes even within it, displayed on hanger racks. While informal sellers can occasionally change, this gives a basic identity of the square during the afternoon and evening times.



Figure 4. People sitting on benches and walking Figure 5. laid out on hanger racks.

In the parks around the city walls, you'll find mobile liver kebab carts positioned near the entrance gates (Figure 6). Although some people complain about the smoke and smell from these carts, many still choose to sit on stools and enjoy the liver kebabs. Picnicking used to be more common, but it has decreased due to past conflicts and changes in the area. Outside of tourist activities like taking photos of the walls, the connection between people and the city walls tends to be more passive.

Anzele Park, as shown in Figure 7, offers a playful approach within a historical context. Located near the Diyarbakır Walls, but separated by a busy road with heavy traffic, the park features a vibrant and playful environment. The pool area next to the old historical fountain serves as a space for children to learn swimming. Currently frequented by residents who have remained despite urban transformation, the park functions as a vibrant public space where activities such as swimming, watching children, chatting, and enjoying tea take place.



Figure 6. Mobile liver kebab carts



Figure 7. Children are swimming.

Şeyh Said Square primarily functions as a waiting and transition space, with occasional events like festivals managed exclusively by governmental organizations. Similarly, parks in non-tourist areas often serve as brief waiting spots but lack significant user engagement despite their inherent potential. Anzele Park stands out with its numerous playful dynamics, whereas other parks around Diyarbakır generally exhibit less vibrancy.

The connection between the city walls and their users remains largely passive. Even though these walls provide shaded areas crucial for the hot climate, people use the parks infrequently. Activities such as eating liver kebabs or drinking tea around the Sur area contribute to the unique character of these spaces. However, due to urban transformation projects and migration, parks experience minimal user participation. Promoting more playful activities could potentially alter this dynamic, enhancing user empowerment and fostering greater involvement in the design process. To further understand these dynamics and the underlying reasons for limited engagement, the subsequent analysis of the questionnaire data provides valuable insights into user perceptions and preferences regarding public spaces in Diyarbakır.

### **7. Analysing Public Space Perceptions and Urban Design Participation: Insights from Şeyh Said Square and Diyarbakır Walls**

To understand users' perceptions of play activities and public space, as well as their participation, the results of the questionnaire were analysed. Responses were gathered from a diverse pool of 217 participants, providing perspectives and preferences regarding public spaces, particularly Şeyh Said Square and parks in the Sur surroundings. Among the respondents, 54% identified as male, 45% as female, and 0.50% as other. Regarding age demographics, the participants were distributed as follows: 2.80% were under 18, 20.20% were aged 18-24, 30% were aged 25-34, 27.20% were aged 35-44, 15% were aged 45-54, and 5.20% were 55 and above. In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (70.00%), followed by those with a master's degree (18%), individuals with a high school diploma or lower (9.00%), and a small proportion with a doctoral degree (2.80%). These responses were not only from the residents of the Sur District but also included participants from other neighbourhoods, reflecting the area's appeal beyond its immediate vicinity. The aim was to gain insights into participants' perceptions of public spaces, understand how these spaces are utilized, and explore views on play activities within these environments.

The representation of public spaces plays a crucial role in defining their function and impact on the community, as it shapes how individuals perceive and interact with these environments

(Lefebvre, 1991). Participants offered varied definitions of public space, with a majority emphasizing its pivotal role as accessible areas for diverse segments of society to converge and interact. As illustrated in Figure 8, public spaces are regarded as common areas for social interaction and fostering a sense of community, with an emphasis on the importance of civil participation. Conversely, a smaller segment of participants considers public spaces as dynamic environments meant to break away from daily routines and encourage spontaneous, unpredictable interactions. This limited acceptance suggests that people may be less open to encountering new and diverse experiences within these spaces, reflecting a reluctance to embrace risk and novelty. This hesitation aligns with Stevens' observations on the difficulties of integrating playful and unpredictable elements into public spaces (Stevens, 2007).

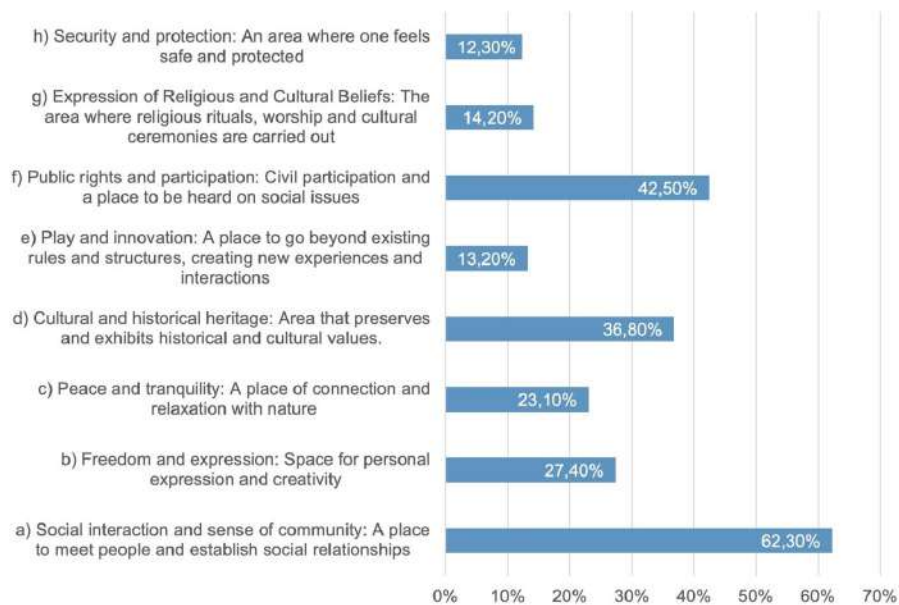


Figure 8." Which of the following do public spaces represent to you?" (np:227)

The survey results reveal a broad spectrum of activities that people associate with play in public spaces, highlighting varying preferences and perceptions. Figure 9 illustrates that socializing and meeting with friends is the most favoured activity, reflecting the importance of public spaces as venues for social interaction and community engagement (Shaftoe, 2008; Whyte, 1980). This underscores the role of play these spaces in facilitating informal social gatherings and connections. Children's games, while significant, are viewed as a more traditional aspect of play, illustrating a common perception that play is primarily for younger individuals (Huizinga, 1955). This perspective is supported by the popularity of sports and games, which are seen as organized and regulated forms of play in modern contexts. Additionally, creative, or artistic activities and social and political activities also receive notable support, indicating that respondents view play in public spaces as encompassing opportunities for creative expression and civic engagement. This reflects a broader and more inclusive understanding of play, highlighting the evolving nature of these activities beyond traditional recreational pursuits (Huizinga, 1955).

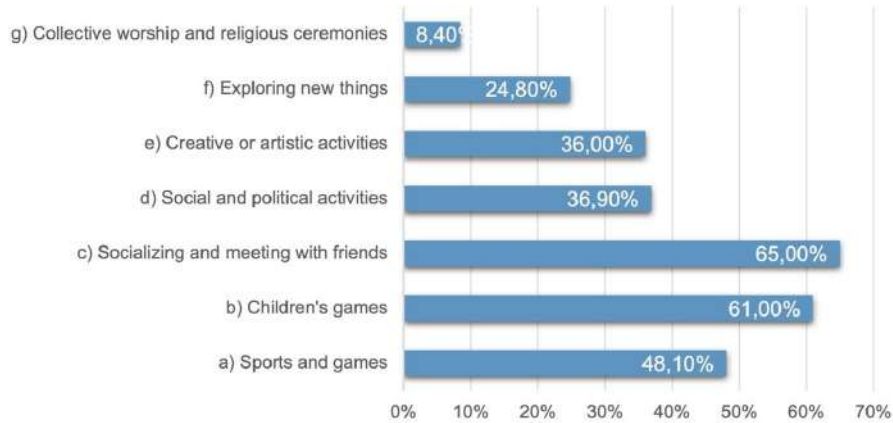


Figure 9." What types of activities do you consider as play in public spaces?" (np:227)

The range of activities that people currently engage in or plan to pursue at Şeyh Said Square underscores its multifaceted role within the community. According to Figure 10, sitting, resting, and chatting are the most common activities, highlighting the square's function as a space for relaxation and informal social interaction. This underscores the need for comfortable and inviting areas that foster leisure and social connections. Additionally, there is significant interest in participating in events that enhance the square's aesthetic appeal, such as art installations and festivals, indicating a desire for a visually and culturally enriched environment. Activities related to social, political, or environmental causes, such as protests and rallies, also play a notable role, underscoring the square's importance as a venue for civic engagement and community activism. Cultural activities, including street performances and outdoor theatres, as well as support for local businesses through markets and fairs, are also valued, reflecting a preference for diverse public programming. In contrast, outdoor sports, yoga sessions, and fitness classes are less emphasized, suggesting these activities are not central to the square's current usage.

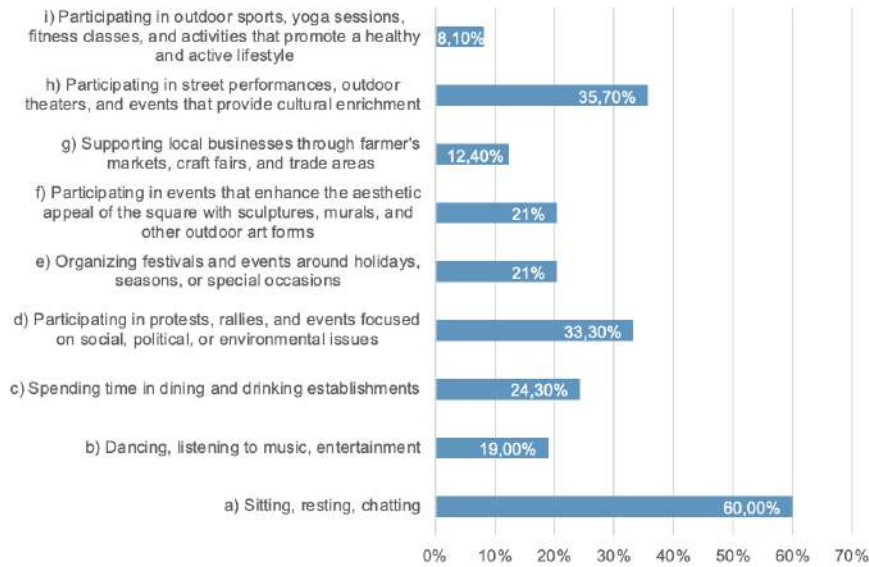


Figure 10. "What activities currently or intend to engage in at Şeyh Said Square?" (np:227)

The survey explores the participation of various stakeholders in the design process and their respective roles. Most respondents believe that users should be directly involved in the design of public spaces, reflecting a strong desire for public engagement and input in shaping their environments (Shaftoe, 2008). This perspective suggests that incorporating user feedback can lead to more responsive and inclusive designs that better meet the community's needs and preferences. Figure 11 highlights the decision-making responsibilities, with architects, urban planners, and environmental experts seen as the most crucial contributors to public space planning. This underscores the value of professional expertise in creating well-designed and functional spaces (Lefaivre & Döll, 2007). Local governments also play a significant role, emphasizing the importance of municipal involvement in managing and maintaining public spaces. Moreover, there is substantial support for involving users, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, indicating a recognition of the importance of diverse perspectives and grassroots input in the decision-making process (Boano & Talocci, 2014).

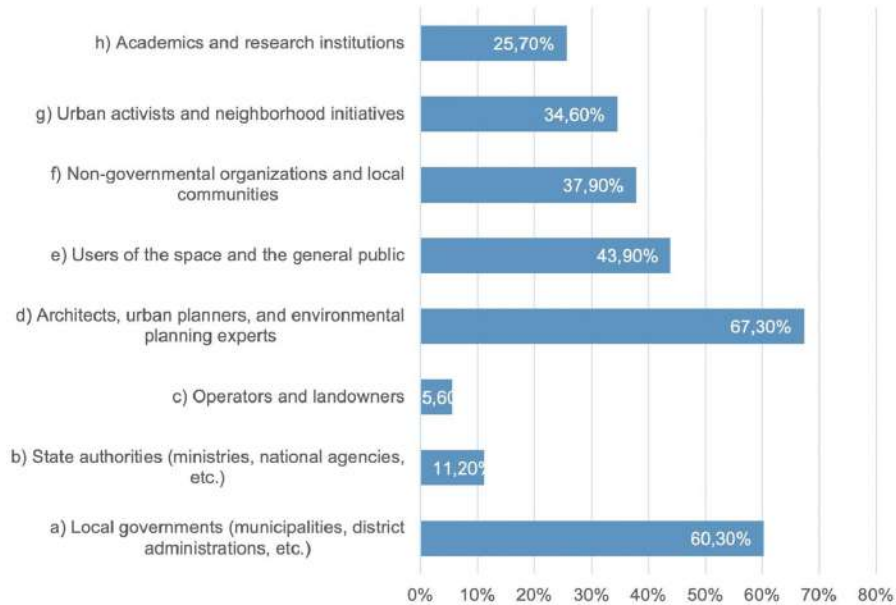


Figure 11. " Preferred Decision-Makers in Public Space Planning and Management?" (np:227)

The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of public spaces and emphasize the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and user engagement in their design. These insights will serve as a foundational basis for future initiatives aimed at enhancing public spaces in Şeyh Said Square, parks in the Sur surroundings, and beyond, ultimately fostering social cohesion, cultural vibrancy, and community well-being. This emphasis on participation and play highlights the importance of giving users the power to shape their environments and make decisions that reflect their needs and preferences. It is imperative to recognize that participation and play are not only integral components of vibrant public spaces but also mechanisms for empowering individuals and communities to actively engage in the process of urban design and decision-making.

#### **8. Discussion: Playful Participation in Urban Design to Play with Power Relations: Towards Inclusive Public Spaces**

Observing the events shaping the history of the Sur district reveals that life within Şeyh Said Square and its surrounding parks is significantly influenced by power dynamics, particularly urban transformations driven by state interventions and economic factors. Social life, characterized by group activities and male-dominated gender dynamics, also plays a major role in these power dynamics. Despite these challenges, a closer examination of how people navigate their everyday lives reveals new ways of utilizing the space. In these instances, playful engagements have the potential to shift power dynamics, granting individuals greater autonomy within the spatial realm. Playful interventions can disrupt dominant narratives, subvert spatial hierarchies, and create opportunities for collective empowerment and expression (Boano & Talocci, 2014). In urban public settings, play often arises in response to the uncertainties and

tensions inherent in everyday life. Play within public spaces promotes interactive engagement and heightened awareness of others participating in the same activity (Stevens, 2007). This participation and its benefits produce new powers and spaces. Play serves as a communication network, actively engaging people within these dynamics (Sennett, 2018).

Understanding the diverse needs, preferences, and behaviours within the community is essential (Madanipour, 1996). Play theory suggests that the introduction of playful elements into public spaces can facilitate new forms of usage by encouraging risk-taking and spontaneous behaviours (Stevens, 2007). In Şeyh Said Square and the surrounding parks, functions such as eating and drinking areas are identified with the area and contribute to the spatial distinctiveness of these locations. The music workshop situated in the unused covered bazaar beneath the public space could potentially spill over into the square, adding to its vibrancy with playful activities. Additionally, the questionnaire responses indicate a broad and diverse perception of play among the participants, highlighting the multifaceted nature of playful interactions within these spaces. Specifically, play facilitates social interaction and integration with nature, bringing new possibilities for rhythms of behaviour and new communication systems (Lefebvre, 2004).

The interplay between the city walls and local activities can make play activities unique to a specific place. In play theory, adopting a historical perspective is crucial for evaluating a location based on its history. The embedded stories and memories within the urban fabric enrich our understanding of the place's identity (Boano & Talocci, 2014). The city walls of Diyarbakır, often seen merely as a backdrop, reveal deeper historical significance upon closer examination. Locals refer to the city walls as the 'body,' a term that holds substantial meaning and plays a distinct role in everyday life. Historically, street fighters would challenge each other in the areas near the walls, which were referred to as the "body," and social gatherings would often take place in these spaces (Diken, 2002). This term embodies a form of spatial ownership and identity, where play functions as a mediator in this ownership process (Boano & Talocci, 2014).

The character of playful activities is significantly influenced by the surrounding urban structures and the overall urbanization of the area. One major factor that restricts the playfulness of this space is the high density of vehicular traffic and the designated use of these areas for vehicles only (Shaftoe, 2008). Roads around Şeyh Said Square and nearby parks are heavily trafficked, and the rise of automobile-dependent transportation has further diminished opportunities for outdoor interaction. Consequently, public spaces have been reduced to main roads and isolated gardens. Modern design principles for public spaces should focus on human-centred planning. This approach should foster environments that promote social interaction, spontaneous play, and community engagement, while also integrating elements of nature to enhance liveliness and strengthen the connection between people and their surroundings (Gehl, 2011; Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2013; Beatley, 2011).

Participatory design workshops, interactive installations, and collaborative activities that invite residents to contribute their ideas and wishes are essential for creating playful public spaces (Boano & Talocci, 2014). Actively involving the community in the design and planning of these areas ensures that they reflect the desires and aspirations of their users. This participatory approach leads to urban environments that are more inclusive, user-friendly, and vibrant—a concept that aligns with play theory, which emphasizes the interactive and participatory dimensions of play within societal norms (Bateson, 1987). Findings from the questionnaire reveal a strong desire among people for greater involvement in the public space design process, indicating a wish to have more control over their surroundings. Residents of Sur, in particular,

have expressed a desire to engage in discussions about the city with designers, supported by contributions from local administration. This call for empowerment reflects a broader aspiration for community-driven urban development, where residents actively shape the environments, they inhabit.

The insights presented in Table 1 highlight the importance of integrating playful interventions, active participation, and historical exploration into urban design. Such approaches contribute to the creation of inclusive, vibrant, and nature-oriented public spaces.

Table 1: Insights into Urban Design Approaches through Play Theory

Urban Design Approach	Key Insights	References
<b>Empowerment to Users</b>	Playful interventions can disrupt dominant narratives and challenge the sacredness of, thus dismantling power dynamics embedded within urban spaces.	(Stevens, 2007), (Shaftoe, 2008), (Whyte, 1980)
<b>Creating New Actions</b>	Playful design encourages the creation of new actions and interactions within public spaces, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among individuals in reshaping their environments.	(Stevens, 2007), (Shaftoe, 2008), (Whyte, 1980)
<b>Active Participation</b>	Actively involving the community in playful design processes empowers individuals by giving them a voice in shaping their surroundings, leading to more inclusive and user-centric urban spaces.	(Boano & Talocci, 2014), (Shaftoe, 2008), (Carmona, 2010)
<b>Historical and Cultural Exploration</b>	Exploring the history and culture of public spaces through a playful lens enriches the understanding of place identity and encourages meaningful interactions between users and their urban environment.	(Huizinga, 1995), (Boano & Talocci, 2014), (Jacobs, 1961)
<b>Connectivity and Accessibility</b>	The proliferation of playful spaces is facilitated by the interconnectedness of public spaces	(Shaftoe, 2008), (Whyte, 1980)
<b>Varied and Stimulating Environments</b>	Public spaces gain meaning through the functions and life surrounding them.	Lefaivre & Döll (2007); Whyte,(1980)
<b>Lively and Nature-oriented</b>	Incorporating nature elements and promoting vibrant activities enhances the vitality and connection to the environment in public spaces.	(Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2013), (Beatley, 2011), (Francis, 1987)

## 9. Conclusion

Active participation in the design and planning of public spaces is pivotal in shaping environments that foster inclusive and empowering experiences. By involving the community in these processes, public spaces can be transformed into dynamic arenas where individuals not only participate but also shape their surroundings according to their needs and aspirations. This approach challenges existing power dynamics inherent in urban transformations and state interventions, offering an opportunity to democratize spatial experiences. Through playful interventions, individuals gain agency within the spatial realm, disrupting dominant narratives

and subverting spatial hierarchies (Boano & Talocci, 2014). Promoting interactive engagement and heightened awareness of others, play creates opportunities for collective empowerment and expression, ultimately sharing power equally and fairly among users (Sennett, 1977). Prioritizing human-centric design principles and facilitating active community involvement in creating public spaces are essential steps toward building vibrant, inclusive, and socially connected urban environments where the transformative potential of play can be fully realized (Shaftoe, 2008).

In examining Şeyh Said Square and the neighboring parks in Sur, an ongoing urban change is evident, affecting residents, often without their realization. However, through observing playful activities and engaging with people about their desires, these places can become lively through active involvement. Even when power dynamics are influenced by the conservative values of the state, economy, or society, play always introduces a new way of exerting influence. According to Agamben, play empowers citizens by involving them in the design process and allowing them to reshape their environment based on their aspirations and everyday needs. The act of play is explored as a means of opening up the fence and unlocking new uses and modes of politics within urban design processes (Boano & Talocci, 2014). Play theory offers a framework for understanding the aesthetic and political dimensions of urban design. Designers can challenge established norms and power structures, opening possibilities for alternative forms of social and spatial organization (Sennett, 1970; 1972).

Concluding the exploration of the importance of play by delving into Nietzsche's philosophy, his character Zarathustra famously declares, "*I will believe in only one god, a god who dances!*" (Nietzsche, 1995). In Nietzsche's philosophy, dance symbolizes the affirmation of bodily pleasures and the celebration of life. Rejecting dogmatic truth claims, Nietzsche advocates for a philosophy that embraces the richness of life and celebrates free thought. He emphasizes activities like dance and music that transcend intellectual constraints, offering avenues for self-expression and empowerment. Thus, the prevalence of play activities in space signals a community actively engaged in shaping their existence, embodying Nietzsche's vision of personal autonomy and creativity (Hinman, 1975). In conclusion, integrating play theory into the collaborative design process empowers individuals to actively shape the evolution of public spaces, fostering a spirit of playfulness, encouraging social interaction, and deepening the sense of place (Whyte, 1980; Shaftoe, 2008). Embracing play as a vital force in urban design leads toward establishing lively and adaptable cities that reflect the rich tapestry of experiences inherent in diverse communities.

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