

Exploring User Preferences and Place Attachment in Urban (Public) Spaces: A Case Study of Kadıköy Historical City Centre, Istanbul, Türkiye

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the preferences of different user groups for urban (public) spaces and their selective behaviours within them. The study centres on the Kadıköy Historical City Centre (KHCC) in Istanbul, Türkiye. A public online survey was conducted with 473 participants representing residents, workers, and visitors. Survey data were analysed using mixed methods techniques, including descriptive statistics, discourse analysis, and mapping. It was found that there were notable differences in terms of urban space preferences among locals and visitors, and that the place attachment different user groups developed with the space were diversified and differentiated. The study underscores the need for inclusive urban spaces that cater to the needs and demands of all user groups, given the transformation of KHCC.

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1. Introduction: Urban Users and Place Attachment

Different user groups perceive urban (public) spaces and interact with them in unique ways. This experience is shaped by intricate connections between cultural, economic, environmental, geographical, political, social, and technological factors. These encounters shape the attachment individuals develop to these spaces, which is rooted in both direct and indirect physical and social engagements in their daily routines.

Different from place identity and sense of place, place attachment specifically refers to “the cognitive-emotional bond to a meaningful setting [...] observed across cultures, place types, and eras” (Scannell and Gifford, 2017, p. 256). It is “an emotion experienced toward a given place, knowledge and beliefs about the place, and behaviour and activities in the place” (Altman and Low, 1992, in Wohl and Blit Cohen, 2024, p. 2). Therefore, it has three main dimensions: personal, psychological, and spatial (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). The personal dimension refers to the individual and collective meanings that people ascribe to a place, whereas the psychological dimension includes feelings, thoughts, and behaviours that are a result of the attachment process. The spatial dimension, on the other hand, stresses the physical and social qualities of a place, like its uniqueness, interpersonal connections, and the built and natural environments.

According to Lewicka (2011), the majority of place attachment research takes neighbourhoods as the place type, whereas the other types are either neglected or have little body of research. Therefore, there is a high need for research in different place types and in different socio-geographical locations to better understand how place attachment is developed and can be sustained so as to instrumentalise it for the betterment of societies and future cities. Especially in the case of deteriorating city centres, place attachment can be used as a mediator for the revitalisation of vivid city life.

In this context, this study aims to explore the preferences of different user groups for urban (public) spaces, as well as their selective behaviours within these spaces, by analysing and comparing the place attachment these groups develop with them. The study centres on the

Kadıköy Historical City Centre (KHCC) in Istanbul, Türkiye, as it accommodates multiple user groups from different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and has been one of the most important sub-centres of the Istanbul Metropolitan Region since the 19th century. A public online survey was conducted with different user groups (residents, employees, and visitors). A total of 473 participants took part in this study. Survey results were analysed by means of mixed methods techniques, including descriptive statistics, discourse analysis, and mapping.

2. Case Study Area: Kadıköy Historical City Centre (KHCC), Istanbul, Türkiye

Kadıköy Historical City Centre (KHCC) is located on the Anatolian Side of Istanbul Metropolitan Region (see Figure 1). It is one of the oldest settlements dating to 675 B.C. (T.C. Kadıköy Kaymakamlığı, n.d.). Until 1882, it was known for its summerhouses and excursion spots, as well as its agricultural lands, vineyards and Turkish gardens (Ayvazoğlu, 2011; Ekdal, 1997; Kütükçü, 2014) (see Figure 2). Starting with the very first systematized urbanization movements at this time, these places began leaving their spaces to a densely concentrated commercial activity – a city centre – on the coastline and to residential areas in the inner sides of the area (Ulubaş Hamurcu and Terzi, 2021). Beginning with the 20th century, KHCC hosted a vast variety of ethnic and religious groups including Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Jews, Levantines, Roman Catholics and Protestants, and Turks (Kütükçü, 2014). The most dramatic change in KHCC dates to the mid-1900s (Ulubaş Hamurcu and Terzi, 2021). Along with the modernism movement, the existing housing stock was merely replaced by apartment blocks. Following the incidents in 1955 and 1964, the social conjuncture of the area changed drastically (Kavukçuoğlu, 2010).

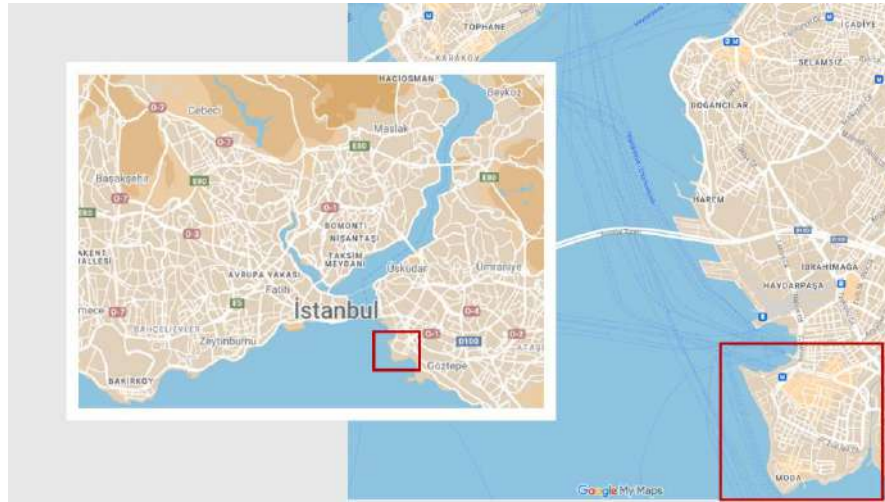


Figure.1 Location of KHCC (prepared by the authors)

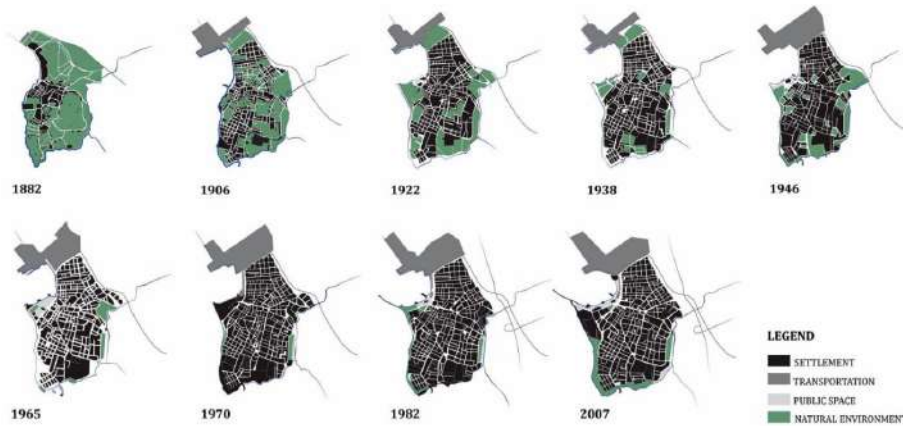


Figure.2 Urban pattern change in KHCC between 1882 and 2007 (Ulubaş Hamurcu and Terzi, 2021, p. 14)

Large-scale urban transportation projects at the beginning of the 2000s resulted in KHCC becoming an important transfer centre for daily mobility and an attraction point for local and foreign visitors (ÇEKÜL, 2014). Along with the renewal projects, it also started housing young white-collar workers, (exchange) students, and professionals from different sectors.

Today, KHCC hosts a variety of users from different economic, educational and social backgrounds (Ulubaş Hamurcu and Terzi, 2021). The diversity and vibrancy brought about by these developments have changed KHCC's appeal, affecting a sense of belonging and attachment among its residents and frequent visitors. This place attachment is further influenced by user preferences that dictate the amenities and social spaces they frequently use within KHCC, shaping their daily interactions and experiences.

3. Data and Methodology

A public online survey was conducted with different user groups (residents, employees, and visitors) before the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, between April 29, 2019, and December 18, 2019. A total number of 498 participants was reached. Nevertheless, 25 answers were excluded due to misuses and misunderstandings faced in the answers which resulted in a total of 473 participants.

Among these, 71% are visitors, 22% live and 7% work in the area. A detailed analysis revealed that 55% of participants come to KHCC for leisure activities, 10% for transportation, 5% for shopping, and 3% for other purposes. It was also discovered that 3% of the participants both live and work here.

Participants were asked to: (1) list the first three things that come to their mind when Kadıköy is mentioned; (2) choose among the list of regions of KHCC which they think they mostly use; (3) list where they specifically spend most of their time in KHCC; (4) and choose among the listed publicly owned places which they think they know. By asking these, it was aimed to understand how the participants related themselves to the existing physical environment (in this case, KHCC) and what type of meaning they attribute to it.

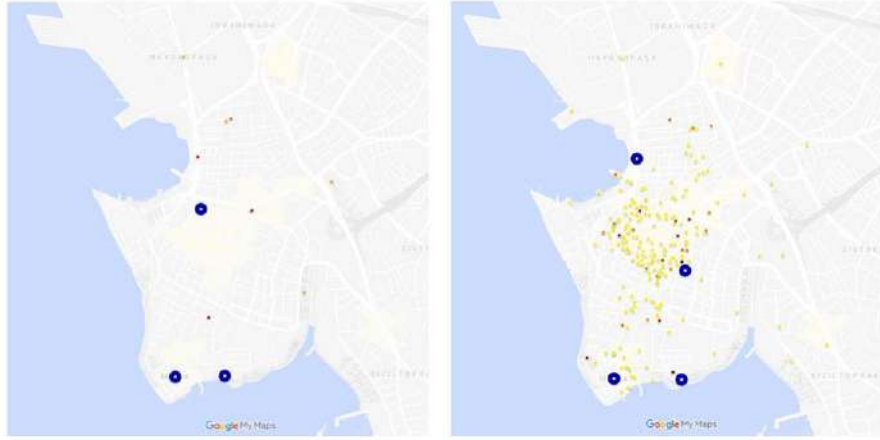


Figure.4 Top districts accommodated by visitors (left); Frequently visited places (right) (prepared by the authors)

Participants are also allowed to give detailed answers to the places where they go frequently. Again, Moda, Moda Sahil, Bahariye, Rıhtım and Çarşı (Bazaar) come to the forefront. In addition to these districts, they also go to Starbucks, Moda Aile Çay Bahçesi (*tea garden*), Akmar (*a building where second-hand bookstores are located*), Asuman (*chocolatier*) and cafes (see Figure 4 – right).

On behalf of publicly owned spaces, Nazım Hikmet Kültür Merkezi, Süreyya Operası and Barış Manço Evi are well known, whereas the rest of the spaces have equal significance. These publicly owned spaces also exist on the same axis beginning with the Çarşı to Moda Sahil.

4.1.1. Visits for leisure time activities

55% of the participants (=260 people) come to KHCC for leisure time activities. Among these 68% are women and 32% are men. The profile of the visitors with leisure purposes is similar to the general profile of the visitors which is 18-24-year-old university students and full-time workers with at least bachelor's degrees. 85% are single, 14% are married and 1% have another marital status. 65% are tenants of which 66% live with full rent, 31% share their accommodation and 3% sub-rent it. 69% know their neighbours. Most of them use the ferry to come to KHCC along with wide ranging ways of transport including minibus, rail transit, car, metrobus, bus, bicycle and walking. A small group uses taxis to come to KHCC.

The answers given to the question about the three things that come to one's mind when Kadıköy is mentioned are cumulated around the physical attributes of the site. These can be listed as Rıhtım, ferry, Moda, Boğa, Moda Sahil, beer and Fenerbahçe. In terms of emotional connotations, 'crowded' and 'fun' comes to the forefront, whereas 'Fenerbahçe' as a football club also has emotional connotations (see Figure 5).

Participants are also allowed to give detailed answers to the places where they go frequently. Again, Moda and Moda Sahil come to the forefront. In addition to these districts, they also go to Starbucks, Rihtim, Akmar, and cafes (see Figure 8 – right).

On behalf of publicly owned spaces, Nazım Hikmet Kültür Merkezi, Süreyya Operası and Barış Manço Evi are well known. Surprisingly, though Tarih Edebiyat Sanat Kütüphanesi (TESAK) is located on the coastline right behind the Beşiktaş-Adalar jetty and IDO terminal, and next to the first-final stop of Moda tram and Kadıköy-Bostancı minibüs terminal, and at the back of bus stops, it is the least known by the visitors with transfer purposes.

4.1.3. Visits for shopping

5% of the participants (=20 people) come to KHCC for shopping purposes. Among these 70% are women and 30% are men. The profile of the visitors with shopping purposes is similar to the general profile of the visitors which is 18-24-year-old university students and full-time workers with at least bachelor's degrees. 76% are single and 24% are married. 30% are tenants of which 50% live with full rent and 50% share their accommodation. 85% know their neighbours. Most of them use bus, minibüs, rail transit, ferries, and car to come to KHCC. A small group also uses taxis and metrobus to come to KHCC.

The answers given to the question about the three things that come to one's mind when Kadıköy is mentioned are cumulated around the physical attributes of the site. These can be listed as Moda, Boğa, shopping, ferry, sea, Bazaar, Haydarpaşa, REXX, beer, fish and cafes. Among the frequently used words listed, 'crowded', 'culture', 'arts', and 'ease' come to the forefront with emotional connotations (see Figure 9).



Figure.9 Three things about KHCC – Visits for shopping (prepared by the authors using Word Clouds)

Visitors with shopping purposes state that they spend most of their time in Moda and Çarşı whereas Haydarpaşa is the least preferred region by them (see Figure 10 – left).

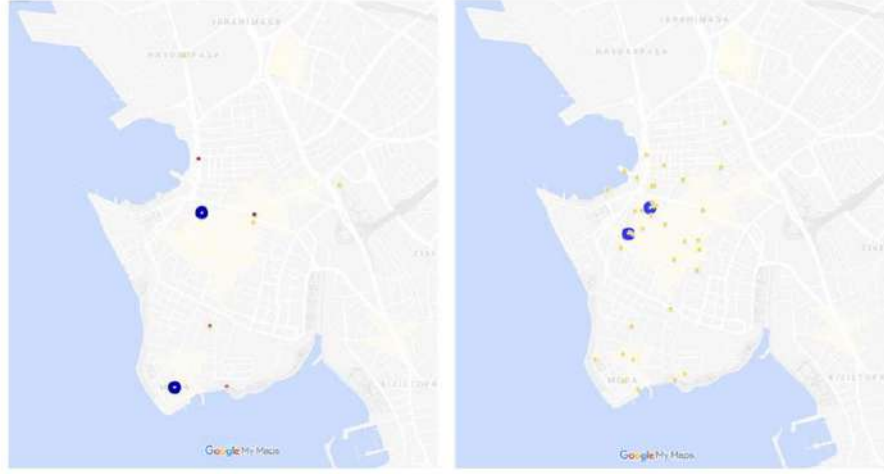


Figure.10 Top districts accommodated by visitors with shopping purposes (left); Frequently visited places (right) (prepared by the authors)

Participants are also allowed to give detailed answers to the places where they go frequently. Boğa, Bazaar, Moda and Moda Sahil come to the forefront. In addition to these districts, they also go to Starbucks, Mephisto (*bookstore*), Baylan (*patisserie*), REXX (*bar*) and second-hand bookstores (see Figure 10 – right).

On behalf of publicly owned spaces, Yeldeğirmeni Don Kışot Evi, Karikatür Evi, Yeldeğirmeni Sanat and Tarih Edebiyat ve Sanat Kütüphanesi (TESAK) are the least known whereas the rest of the spaces have equal significance.

4.2. Locals

Locals consists of residents, workers, and people who both live and work in KHCC.

4.2.1. Residents

22% of the participants (=105 people) live in KHCC. Among these 54% are women and 46% are men. The general profile of the residents is 25-45-year-old full-time workers with at least bachelor's degrees. 62% are single, 35% are married and 3% have another marital status. 63% are tenants of which 79% live with full rent and 21% share their accommodation. 77% know their neighbours.

The answers given to the question about the three things that come to one's mind when Kadıköy is mentioned are cumulated around the emotional connotations of the site. These can be listed as 'home', 'ease', 'crowded', and 'fun'. These are followed by 'freedom', 'civilization', 'safety', 'friends', 'arts', 'life', 'history', and 'social environment'. Among the frequently used words listed, only a few refer to the physical environment. These are Bazaar, Boğa, Moda, and Moda Sahil. Sea, ferry, Yeldeğirmeni and Haydarpaşa are also among frequently referred physical attributes of KHCC (see Figure 11).

Figure.14 Top districts accommodated by workers (left); Frequently visited places (right) (prepared by the authors)

Participants are also allowed to give detailed answers to the places where they go frequently. Again, Moda Sahil come to the forefront. In addition to Moda Sahil, workers also go to Bahariye, Moda Aile Çay Bahçesi, IDEA Kadıköy, and Rıhtım (see Figure 14 – right).

On behalf of publicly owned spaces, Barış Manço Kültür Merkezi, Süreyya Operası and Barış Manço Evi are well known. The rest are also known by the workers of KHCC.

4.2.3. Both

3% of the participants (=13 people) both live and work in KHCC. Among these 23% are women and 77% are men. The general profile of the workers is 25-45-year-old full-time, freelance and multiple job workers with at least bachelor's degrees. 46% are single, 39% are married and 15% have another marital status. 85% are tenants of which 29% live with full rent and 18% share their accommodation. 77% know their neighbours.

The answers given to the question about the three things that come to one's mind when Kadıköy is mentioned are cumulated around the emotional connotations of the site. These can be listed as 'noise', 'ease', 'home', and 'crowded'. Among the frequently used words listed, only Moda Sahil comes to the forefront on behalf of physical attributes of the site. Different than that of other user profiles, this group also refer to a list of words which consists of the following: 'neighbourhood', 'neighbourhood culture', 'streets', 'my youth', 'my life', and 'motherland' (see Figure 15).



Figure.15 Three things about KHCC – Both (prepared by the authors using Word Clouds)

Participants who both live and work in KHCC state that they spend most of their time in Moda and Bahariye. Rasimpaşa, Altiyol/Boğa and Rıhtım are the least preferred regions (see Figure 16 – left).

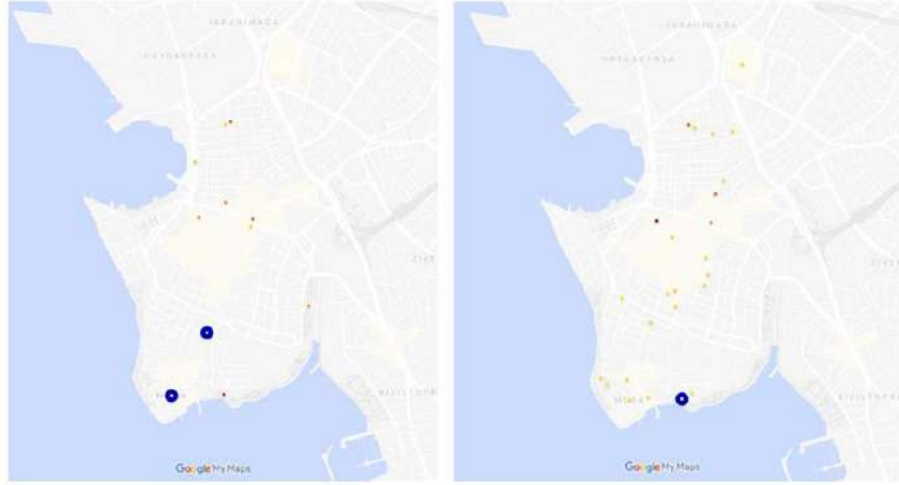


Figure.16 Top districts accommodated by both residents and workers (left); Frequently visited places (right) (prepared by the authors)

Participants are also allowed to give detailed answers to the places where they go frequently. Again, Moda Sahil and Bahariye come to the forefront. In addition to these places, they also go to Yeldeğirmeni and Çarşı (see Figure 16 – right).

On behalf of publicly owned spaces, IDEA Kadıköy, Süreyya Operası and Barış Manço Evi are well known. The rest are also known by the participants who both live and work in KHCC.

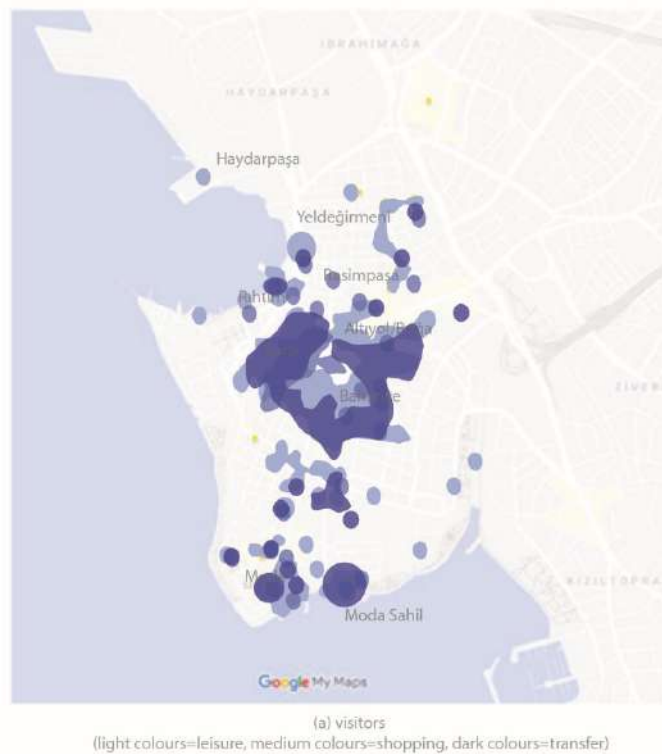
4.3. Discussion

Based on the discourse analysis, two major groups of participants are revealed. These are visitors and locals. Both groups stand on the opposite sides of the spectrum as they have different types of place attachment with KHCC. It is obvious that the emotional and social ties of locals with the place were very strong, and the meaning they attribute to the urban space was determined considering these premises, whereas visitors mostly referred to the physical elements of the urban space when describing the KHCC (see Figure 17). On behalf of locals, it is also observed that participants who are both residents and workers in KHCC have a different place attachment when compared to other sub-groups of locals as they also emphasize on a group of words which are 'neighbourhood', 'neighbourhood culture', 'streets', 'my youth', 'my life', and 'motherland'. Not only this but also their mentioning only a few physical aspects of KHCC strengthens this premise. This is not surprising as the more the time spent the stronger the place attachment is (Lomas et al., 2024).

	VISITORS	leisure	shopping	transfer	LOCALS	residents	workers	both
physical	Moda Boğa Rihtim Moda Sahil ferry Fenerbahçe beer	Moda Boğa Rihtim Moda Sahil ferry Fenerbahçe beer	Moda Boğa ferry beer Haydarpaşa shopping sea Bazaar fish cafes Rexx	Moda Boğa ferry beer Rihtim Haydarpaşa shopping bars İskele		Moda Moda Sahil Boğa ferry sea Bazaar Yeldeğirmeni Haydarpaşa	Moda Boğa ferry beer Moda Sahil Fenerbahçe theatres Yeldeğirmeni Rihtim work	Moda Sahil
	emotional	crowded fun Fenerbahçe	crowded fun Fenerbahçe	crowded culture arts ease	crowded fun		crowded ease home freedom fun life safety civilization friends arts history social environment	crowded ease home civilization noise fun night life freedom Fenerbahçe work

Figure.17 Comparison of the physical and emotional connotations by visitors and locals (prepared by the authors)

It was also found that there were notable differences in terms of urban space preferences among locals and visitors (see Figure 18). When a detailed analysis was made by visitor purposes to KHCC, it was determined that there were subdivisions in terms of their spatial preferences, revealing that the different sub-regions of KHCC were intensively used and preferred by different user groups. In other words, different user groups are clustered in different regions of this urban space, interact with different parts of it, and have different spatial experiences. In detail, visitors with shopping purposes reveal a dispersed pattern across the area without any significant clustering, whereas visitors with transfer purposes prefer similar regions with visitors who come to KHCC with leisure purposes showing clustered patterns around Çarşı, Bahariye, Altiyol/Boğa, Moda and Moda Sahil (see Figure 18a). On behalf of locals, workers show a similar behaviour with visitors with shopping purposes as they display a dispersed pattern across the area, whereas residents permeate like an oil stain between Çarşı, Altiyol/Boğa and Bahariye (see Figure 18b). Participants who are both living and working in KHCC are, on the other hand, mobile on a North-South axis between Yeldeğirmeni and Moda Sahil creating sub-clusters. Nevertheless, there are certain regions where all user groups come together. These are Moda and Moda Sahil where the coastline with green areas exists and act as the main common public space for all types of users.



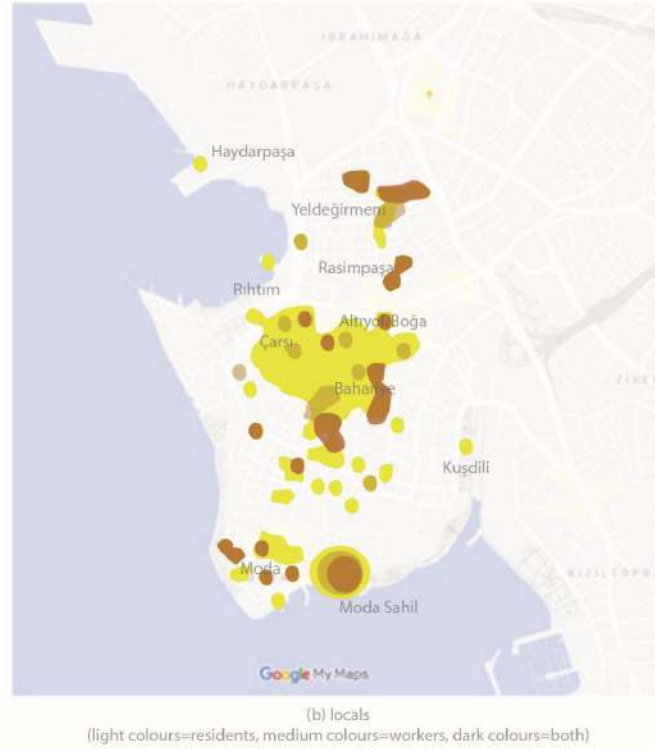


Figure.18 Comparison of the spatial preferences by visitors (a) and locals (b) (prepared by the authors)

5. Conclusion

Considering the transformation that KHCC is currently undergoing, it stands out that there is a high need to design and plan urban (public) spaces that are inclusive of all user groups and respond to their needs and demands. As there is a major differentiation between two different user groups (visitors and locals), the sustainability of the city centre and mixed-use areas depends on how these needs and demands can be faced and how much the place attachment would be developed and made stronger. These findings are also expected to contribute to the international urban planning discourse, emphasizing the importance of socio-cultural diversities in shaping the future of urban spaces and placemaking.

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Ethical Approvals, As this research includes human research participants, ethics approvals from the Istanbul Technical University Social and Human Sciences Human Studies Ethics Committee are taken (Date: November 2, 2018, Number: 99). In place of informed written consent, the web-based survey included two mandatory checkboxes to start the survey and to participate in the research: (1) participants confirm that they are over 18 years old; and (2) they accept voluntary participation in the survey on the condition that they can leave it at any time before submitting their answers if they do not want to continue it. In addition to these, detailed information about how and where this data will be used was included above these checkboxes.