

Urban Design Process Model with “The Urban User” Participation

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1 ABSTRACT

Rapid globalization, rapid technological innovation and rapid urban change and development due to rapid population increase in our country lead to negative merits on the quality of urban living. This concept of “rapidity” should not be expected to supplement neither the formation of sustainable city nor the “improvement” by neglecting the urban users’ (residents) local merits and social demands, even though it causes to urban-scale “change”.

In our country; the social, spatial and cultural merits which had been under the threat of urban design and transformation process, are being perished by remunerative regulations in the name of improvement, despite the urban users’ expectations. The revisionary building development plans, especially dependent on political ideas of the governing parties along with other problematic changes abate viable urban structure and, in consequence, local vital values and sustainable urban formation parameters. However, the concept of sustainable and livable cities covers various fields such as; ecological architecture, betterment of human life, local cultural heritage and identity preservation, implementation of innovations and urban environmental quality enhancement.

As an important component of the city, urban user’s contribution in all of those fields is imperative. The bulk of this responsibility/role of urban integration devolves on the users as well as the government, local (municipal) governments and the private sectors. For this purpose, urban design process model with “the urban user” participation is constituted by the help of the notion of mutual cooperation and exchange of ideas among the government, local (municipal) governments, private sectors, non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Within the context of this model, the urban user could be defined as the individual directly residing in the city who tends to take up the concerns related to the transition of past traditions and merits towards the future. In our country, the urban users suffer defeat against the urban change within their cities due to their inabilities to participate in the process. Therefore, the urban users’ participation within sustainable design process in order to give support to local improvement (not to change) is aimed. Anyhow, the urban users are not meant to be passive spectators but individuals who would stand up for their local merits with confidence and consciousness. They would assume themselves as the principal individuals of the region and would contribute to eliminate the social and spatial polarization in that context. Different ideas and methods are developed on the subject of sustainable and livable cities. To this end, since the urban users’ participation is considered essential, “Design Process with Participation” model should be constituted with the inclusions of the urban user.

In this context, firstly, several concepts such as sustainability, sustainable urban improvement, smart growth and urban sprawl receive priority consideration. In the second phase, the legal framework in Turkey which formulates urban planning is inquired and critiques/comments on sustainability are put forth for consideration. Finally, in the third phase, some criteria regarding the inclusion of the urban user to sustainable urban design process are formed in order to foster an approach that would render cultural activities permanent, would prevent the city-dwellers from being demoted merely to passive spectators and would maintain further participation on behalf of the city and the urban users. These studies are supported by questionnaire applications with the urban users and the local (municipal) government officers and their results are explicated via table presentations.

The main aims of this paper are to obtain proper evaluations that would be instrumental in urban continuity, to discuss the positive contribution of Design Process Model with “the urban user” Participation as one of design methods towards solving problems that the urban users encounter in the aspects of perception,

comment and experience, to include the city-dwellers in urban integrity and to contribute to long-term cultural, economical and social development of the city. Furthermore, the urban users are aimed to “work up from their passive status to an active status” along with their experiences and knowledge on the issues of that region.

2 INTRODUCTION

Mankind’s dominance over its environment in various aspects with the help of 20th century technology throughout the post-Industrial Revolution era had obscured the fact that mankind itself had also been a part of it. Cities with rapid development and change have also brought their problems. The most prominent of them were related to either non-application or misapplication of sustainability and liveability concepts. Sustainability and liveability are crucial for societies to preserve their traditional life-styles and regional values which reflect their cultural merits to pass on to future generations.

Industrial societies, in order to adapt their life-styles to this rapid change, began to grant certain social and economical concessions to themselves and to their cities. Those concessions mainly consisted of building development plans approved by the local (municipal) government officers in pursuit of profit in land sale at the expense of the urban users. Today, it is apparently clear that providing cities and city-dwellers with sustainability and quality life cannot be achieved merely by building development planning system in developing countries such as Turkey.

Rapid expansion of city borders in Turkey undermines inspection mechanisms physically. The essential purpose is to increase awareness of the urban user. For this purpose, consciousness of the urban user on environmental protection and participation in planning decisions. The idea of a unity by means of voluntary non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trusts and associations has flourished against the local governments which connive at illicit construction, illegal profit-seeking groups and political pressures.

It is doubtful whether being elected necessarily democratizes local government organs. Therefore, it is essential for local governments to be receptive to multi-dimensional participation. These efforts would render local governmental institutions efficient and would also provide much larger masses of urban users with democratic participation. The success of local governments depends mainly on intensity and efficiency of their information exchange with the urban society. The basis for existence of local governments is to resolve the problems of urban society and this function can be maintained to the extent of knowledge and healthy data obtained regarding the needs of the society. This kind of information exchange would only be made possible by a democratic networking. Urban society must efficiently take part in the planning of service supplies, the determination of service priorities, the decision-making stage and the inspection. This efficient participation would only be realized by new networking methods (Göymen, 1997). Networking begets participation, participation begets justice and justice begets the future. In this context, it is essential to highlight four principles offered by Eklin, McLaren and Hillman in order to maintain sustainable urban development: i. Situation in the future, ii. Environment, iii. Justice, iv. Participation principle.

2.1 Definition

Human-beings cannot be alienated from their cities they live in since they tend to fully integrated with their natural surroundings. Each member of the society shares the common rights to utilize public properties and to live in a peaceful environment. This common right necessitates solidarity. Solidarity devolves certain responsibilities and duties to the members of the society. The top responsibility of city-dwellers would be to claim “the right to participate” in its administration and inspection. Thus, the city-dwellers would become active users rather than its passive spectators.

However, “the right to live in a peaceful and healthy environment”, as guaranteed by the Constitution, is not reflected to urban development law. Furthermore, the citizens are not equipped with sufficient facilities to apply environmental rights (Köroğlu, 2005).

In this context, the existence of a genuine democratic structure in a rule-of-law state requires feasible communication with the urban users with sense of responsibility whose participation in decision-making is expected.

3 DESIGN PROCESS MODEL WITH “URBAN USER” PARTICIPATION

Urban planning must be considered as a long-term and detailed process. The planning system should be adapted to rapid technological improvements and dynamic structures of the societies which require both elasticity and variety.

In fact, every nation harbors priorities and merits peculiar to it. Therefore, the building development planning process with static form which tends to determine every small detail towards the future should be altered.

In sustainable planning, urban-dwellers are thought to take part in the administration of their city to a certain extent according to their ideas and responsibilities without alienating the city, its institutions and the planning processes. For this purpose, a creative, innovative, participatory design model with “urban user” participation is formed in order to realize sustainable development plan. Urban users are expected to acquire consciousness throughout the training sessions prior to their inclusion in decision-making process in order to maintain their activeness.

3.1 Aimed Characteristics of the Model with “Urban User” Participation

The following are the aims of this paper;

- I. Transformation of the urban user notion, either before or after planning, from the simple spectator to the active role player via participation in the process,
- II. Transparent administration of the local governments,
- III. Formation of a participatory, elastic, sustainable and applicable base, within legal framework, in favor of the future administration to be elected,
- IV. Reduction of contradiction and conflicts between politician-people by newly organized local units, networks and processes in order to restore a unity for common purposes and improvement of new projects by urban users and local governments,
- V. Connection of individual and social interest,
- VI. Activation of all contributory disciplines for the solution of urban problems,
- VII. Having the least possible hierarchical order of planning units and providing networking in participation-incentive fashion,
- VIII. Co-operation of voluntary institutions, private sectors, associations and governmental institutions for training of all individuals in accordance with sustainability and liveability principles,
- IX. Production of common consciousness by attracting the urban users’ attention to the city in terms of mutual information sharing,
- X. Increase in the awareness of rural-to-urban migrants with the help of these processes,
- XI. The most important of all, consolidation of cultural balance among individuals and national unity conditions.

4 SUSTAINABILITY CONCEPT

Brundtland Report highlighted the idea of sustainable development and defined it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Today, living in a clean and healthy environment is considered as a constitutional right. Acquisition of knowledge requires both efficiency within changing processes and participation in decision-making processes. This, in turn, contributes to democracy. Sustainability advancements render networking of both NGOs and Occupation Chambers in this framework inevitable. In that sense, sustainability can be translated as;

- A means of integration between society and occupations,
- A tool for sustainability of cultural merits and tradition,
- An instrument for efficiency of the user in design, and

- An implement for the development of interaction among different scientific disciplines (İncedayı, 2004).

As networking levels of the urban users increase, their direct involvement in administration of environment arises. Especially with “urban user information units” organized by local governments, participation of individuals in decision-making process can be restored. Thus, protection of natural, cultural, social and environmental merits is aimed.

The purposes of these units organized at neighbourhood level are as follows;

- I. To facilitate knowledge exchange among urban individuals,
- II. To encourage individuals’ contribution to decisions,
- III. To increase their level of responsibility and to maintain the protection of natural and cultural merits,
- IV. To reduce Politician-people conflicts by restoring unity on common purposes.

5 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FORMING URBAN PLANNING IN TURKEY AND CRITICISM IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY

Planning can be defined as the production of policies and programs towards future-oriented rational decisions (Hall, 1974). Cooke (1983), on the other hand, designates planning as “a fragment of civilizing process” and “a legal means used by the governments aiming not only for environmental regulations, but also for preservation and transformation of the social relation types”.

Ambrose asserts that planning should not be independent of physical, social and economical characteristics of the society (Ambrose, 1986). Otherwise, urban-dwellers would be alienated from their city and society.

The merits provided by urban planning to the city and urban users in the name of social, economical, cultural, psychological, and ecological aesthetics are indisputable. These merits are integrated with environmental sources, energy, ecology and urban users.

In Turkey, under comprehensive planning process, plan enactments take place upon having the approval of the municipal council. City-dwellers reserve right of avoidance (objection) for the related matters in these plans. As can be seen, city-dwellers cannot participate in projection and decision-making phases but they would object to them. At this phase, urban users cannot reserve the right to render opinion/advice and inspection. However, projected plans; in either future-oriented planning or action plan processes through design model with “urban user” participation, aim to the following;

- I. Transparency,
- II. Production of optimal solutions by public dispute.

Considering laws and regulations that account for urban planning system in Turkey, comprehensive planning approach appears as the main basis of the system. But, since the building development plans are demoted to speculative physical construction rights, the produced plans became the responsible for such urban locations being named as “concrete jungles” and “shanty settlements” (Özer, 2005).

In this context, the urban users are being deprived of their liveable environment and also being hindered from contributing to transparency process.

5.1 Zoning Regulations in Turkey

Urban Development Planning in our country leads to loss of urban identity due to the following reasons;

- I. Its incompatibility with societal dynamics,
- II. Exclusion of experience and knowledge accumulation from general framework,
- III. Handling the applications through fractional approaches,
- IV. Absence of a progressive and holistic conception of planning,
- V. Profit-seeking applications that loom large,
- VI. Deprivation of the urban users in psychological, economical and social aspects.

As amended by Law No. 3194, devolution of authority from central to local administrations took place in our country.

Thus, local governments became fully authorized on approval and application processes of physical planning decisions.

That law mentioned nothing of public participation in decision-making and planning processes and defined it merely as the approval of publicly-elected representatives at municipal councils and the right of avoidance (objection) within the specified objection period. Under the Law No.3194, it led to mistrust also in a planning process advocating for the public interest in addition to loss of natural resources, destruction of cultural and historical heritage and formation of an unhealthy urban settlement configuration (Eke, 2005).

5.2 New (Northern) Adana Example in Urban Planning

After 1980s, Tepebag Region, referred as the Old Adana, became relatively incompetent with respect to social and economical attributes. In that context, beside preservation of Tepebag Region's historical settlement configuration, crowded and hectic urban environment this region necessitated the expansion of city toward more appropriate urban settlement areas (Photos 1,2)(Adana 1833-1960).



Photos 1-2. Adana Tepebag Region (1940-1950).

Furthermore, the city also experienced the hardships of being founded near riverside. During 1950s, those hardships stemmed from frequent floods due to unrehabilitated Seyhan River Basin (Photo 3).



Photo 3. Flood in Tepebag Region Adana (1948).

In 1980s, the city of Adana with a population of approximately 1.500.000 people needed a new expansion. In order to achieve this objective, "New Adana Development Plan" was projected and inauguration of New (Northern) Adana settlement with 1.200.000 population capacity which extends from the southern shores of Seyhan Lake to the northern parts of Old Adana settlement was aimed.

This plan is still in dispute today due to its negligence of urban users, its profit-seeking nature, its demotion of transportation to speed-linked vehicles, its lack of adequate green areas and social attraction spots and its indulgence towards multi-floored constructions.

A questionnaire survey is performed in New (Northern) Adana Region pertaining to urban users’ hardships and demands.

This questionnaire study is comprised of totally 5 sections which aim to obtain data of general information on urban users; on their living environments; on their locations; on their current problems; and on their contributions with the help of open-ended questions, respectively.

In this context, solution-based discussions on “urban users” and their problems are held with local government administrators and they are explicated via tables at survey questionnaire evaluation results and conclusions section.

6 CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION OF URBAN USERS TO URBAN DESIGN PROCESS

For societies, a sustainable and liveable environment stands for the preservation of traditional life-styles and cultural merits to be passed on to future generations.

Each society is likely to improve its own merits and virtues within a healthy environment. In this context, societies must be also compatible with technological improvements and innovation.

Therefore, the main objective is to reinstate the political willpower in order to utilize abundant on-line information exchange and to convey transparent information to the public.

In this context, a two-phased application is thought as the criteria for inclusion of urban users to sustainable urban design process.

I. Basic Training-Oriented Applications (Definition of Problems)

II. Decision-making Process Oriented Applications (Determination of Objectives)

6.1 Basic Training-Oriented Applications (Definition of Problems):

Training in this phase is of a process that covers from elementary to expert level. Amartya Sen, the Nobel prize-winning economist, calls attention to this concept by saying “that illiteracy and innumeracy are a greater threat to humanity than terrorism”. Urban users are expected to go through a training program prior to their inclusion in design process.

For this purpose, Local Governments National Training Centers that would should be founded for development and application of training framework and strategies.

In regional and local scale, applied training must be provided by using creative approaches.

This training program would also fulfill appropriate conditions for cultural interaction and co-operation among various sub-cultural groups.

It would heal relative isolation feeling of various social groups (especially, rural-urban migrants) within urban settlement and would create a much better and healthier environment for administration-citizen relationship (Göymen, 1997).

This process is categorized and explicated under four headlines:

6.1.1 Elementary Training:

This is the basic training, on “city and liveability” suitable for elementary and intermediate levels. The aim here is to provide the children of early age with knowledge about city, environment and ecosystem.

6.1.2 Low-Educated Citizens and Migrants:

This the training program provided by local administrations and/or voluntary institutions appropriate for either low-educated citizens or rural-to-urban migrants.

6.1.3 Highly Educated Citizens:

It is prepared for citizens with undergraduate and/or graduate level of education. The objective is to provide training and studies on preservation of urban merits and values.

6.1.4 Executive Training:

This is a mandatory training for the elected local administrators.

Administrator candidates from occupational groups with no prior knowledge accumulation either on administration or on urban planning would be assigned to their post by election. A certain period of time is spent on service and planning experiences and this reflects negatively on urban development and improvement.

6.2 Decision-Making Process Oriented Applications (Determination of Objectives):

In this phase, the urban user with a certain level of education attends to studies regarding decision-making process. For this purpose, firstly, certain steps should be taken in order to prepare the training within a controlled and elasticity-incentive mechanism. Detailed plans must be prepared as being open-to-discussion and participation. Above all, exercising the right of communication is crucial for compromising and open-to-participation planning. On regional scale, local administrations should constitute media broadcasting organs such as radio, TV, magazine, and internet either for transparency or for planning follow-up. Inclusion of the urban users in processes with the help of these media broadcasting organs is aimed. Therefore, Urban User Information Units must be founded. They are the most important units for urban user to maintain connection with local administrations. With these units; the individuals' contribution to decisions are aimed, as well as preservation of natural and cultural merits and reduction of politician-people conflicts by restoring unity.

7 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE WITH URBAN USERS AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS AND TABLES

Survey Questionnaire results are summarized interpreted and reported in terms of several methods such as tally tables, percentages and averages.

7.1 Survey Questionnaire Evaluations

Due to scarce resources, survey questionnaire cannot be performed on all of the urban users. Therefore, face-to-face interviews are held with only randomly-selected 150 individuals residing in New Adana Region. The tables (1-2) indicating the distribution age and education levels of Questionnaire participants are shown below:

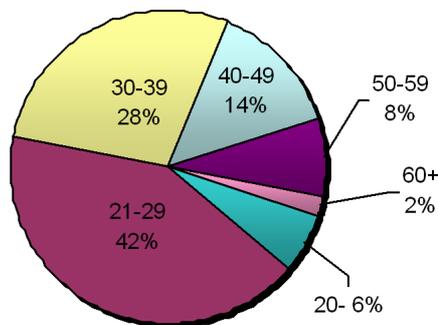


Table 1. Pie-chart Illustration of Age Distribution

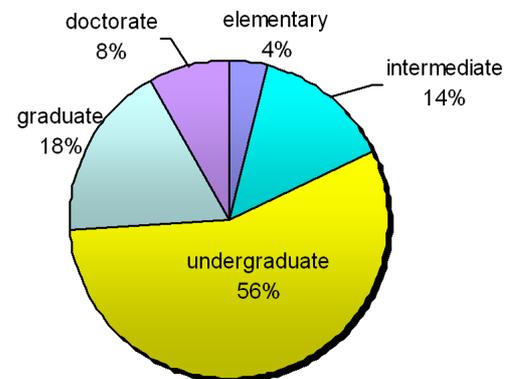


Table 2. Pie-chart Illustration of Education Levels

74% of the participant urban users live in multi-floored apartments (Table 3) and 28% of those participants utter discontent.(Table 4).

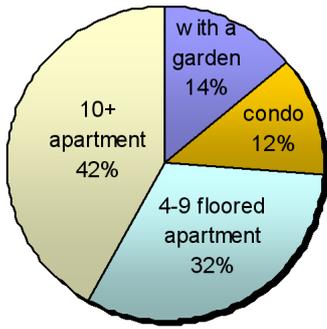


Table 3. Pie-chart Illustration of Residence Type

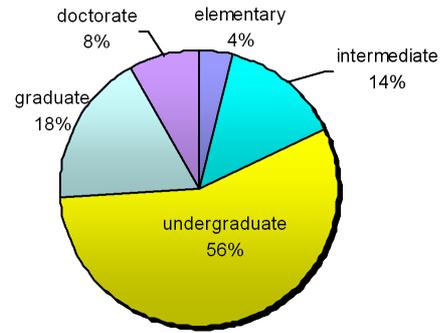


Table 4. Pie-chart Illustration of Content in Multi-floored Apartments

Some critical results in survey questionnaire evaluation process are given below. Other evaluations are explicated at Survey questionnarie Evaluation. 70% of the urban users of the same region replied the question on “attainability of leisure facilities within city limits” as “yes, but distant” (Table 5). Especially the age group of 20-39 appeared to be highly suffering in terms of quality leisure time.

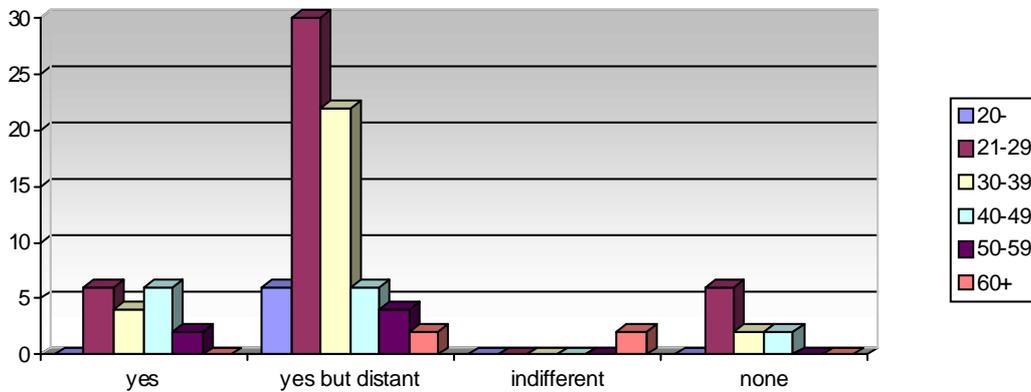


Table 5. “Graphical Illustration of “Attainability of Leisure Facilities” for Age Groups

Despite the fact that Northern Adana Region is located south of Seyhan Lake, urban users still cannot actively utilize this area up to its potential (Table 6).

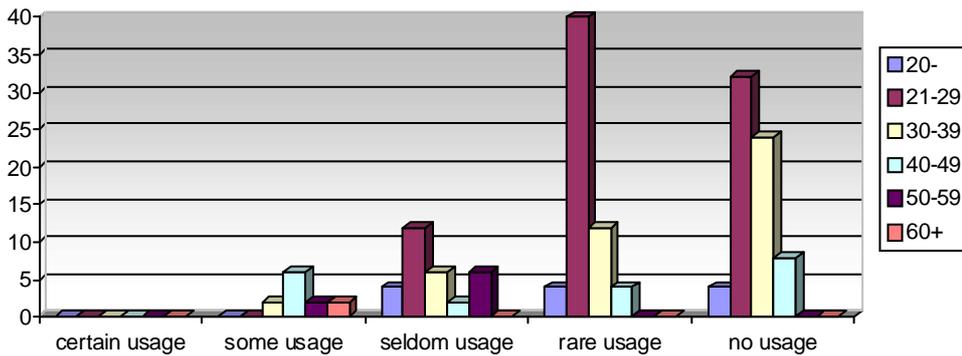


Table 6. Graphical Illustration of Seyhan Lake Active Usage for Age Groups

Urban users cannot contribute to planning decisions on their living spaces (Table 7).

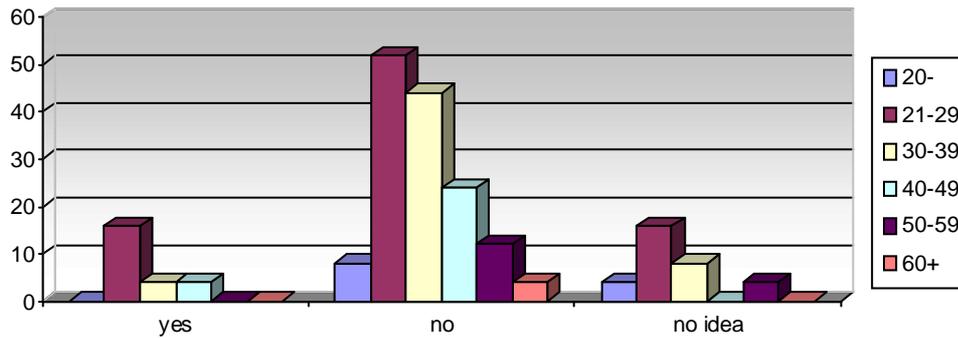


Table 7. Graphical Illustration of Urban Users' Contribution to Their Region

Urban users of New(Northern) Adana Region complained about noise and heavy traffic being the major determining factors for their discontent (Table 8).

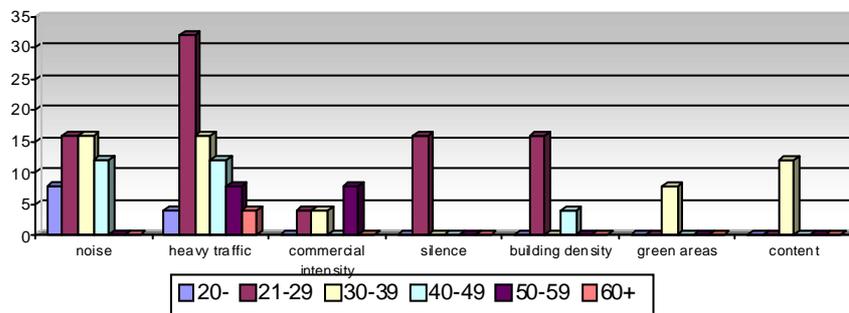


Table 8. Graphical Illustration of Factors causing Urban Users' Discontent in Age Groups

Urban users are asked to reply the question on the factors causing their content (Table 9).

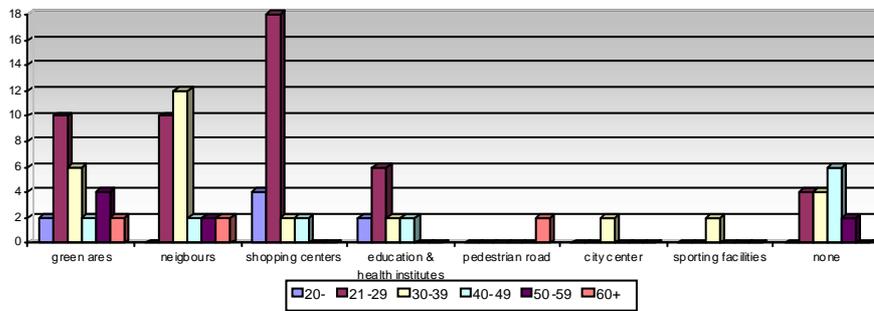


Table 9. Graphical Illustration of Factors causing Urban Users' Content

Urban users are observed to be incompetent at reporting the problems pertaining to their residence regions (Table 10).

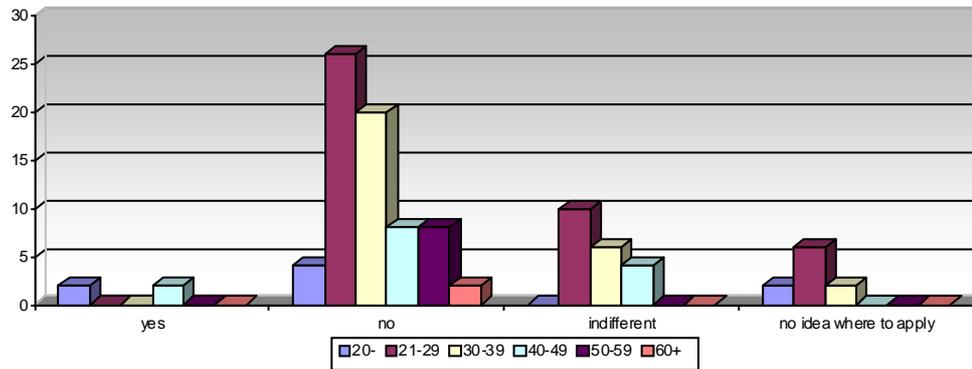


Table 10. Graphical Illustration of Local Administrators' Awareness of Urban Users' Problems

The urban users reported insufficiency of green areas, sporting facilities, pedestrian lanes, public squares, bicycle paths, transportation systems and Seyhan Lake access as the major problems in New (Northern) Adana Region. Infrastructural services and motor vehicle roads, on the other hand, are defined as “sufficient” (Table 11).

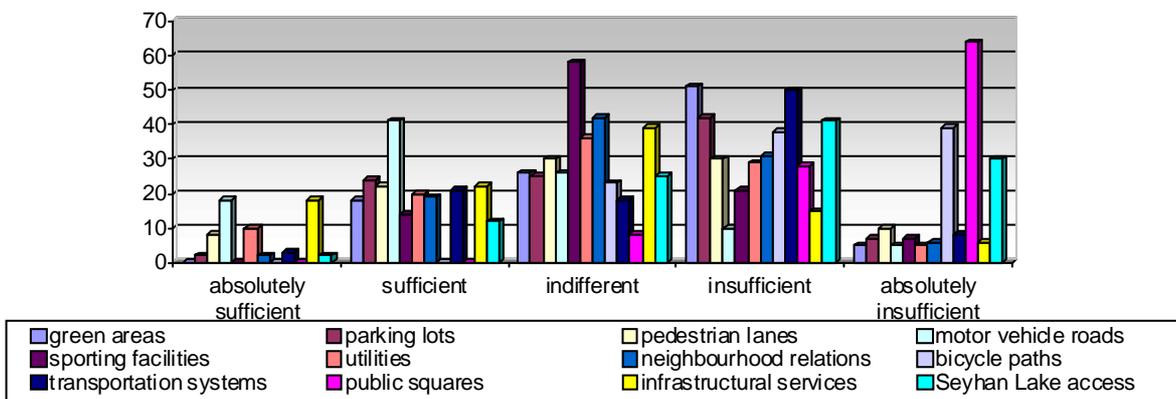


Table 11. Graphical Illustration of Urban Users' Comment on New (Northern) Adana Region as a Whole

7.2 Urban User Survey Questionnaire Evaluation Results

Urban users are very displeased with remotely located leisure time facilities and social areas. This discontent is felt even more deeply especially by the age group of 21-39.

Although they long for contribute to planning decisions on urban areas, urban users cannot achieve this goal due to bureaucratic confusion and certain degree of unattainability of the related units.

Incompetence of the planning process for New (Northern) Adana as a whole causes excessive building density, insufficiency of green and recreative areas and lack of pedestrian access to Seyhan Lake.

Absence of bicycle paths in daily life, either for transportation or for recreational purposes, is also reported by urban users as another problem.

Urban public squares provide physical and psychological relaxation, either by allowing to various social activities or by easing the tension of avenues and streets. Thus, urban users' needs for public squares are being substituted with shopping centers and malls.

7.3 Administrator Survey Questionnaire Evaluation Results

Due to intensive office hours of local administrators, survey questionnaire could not be performed for the entire group. However, face-to-face interviews are held with totally 10 administration officers from Metropolitan and county municipalities. As a result of these interviews some facts are brought forth as follows;

Especially, NGOs have more authority in urban planning processes and academicians are needed to be included in those processes.

All of the administrators agreed upon the idea that urban users' inclusion takes place before planning decisions are finalized.

Local administrators' lack of training related to their own units appeared as another hardship. In this context, the participant administrators confessed that they experienced loss of time and difficulty during applications. They emphasized the importance of training sessions prior to their assignments.

8 CONCLUSION

I. Non-profit-seeking "Urban User Information Units" should be founded in order to activate public potential.

II. "Urban User" Participation Model enables a participatory approach featuring physical environment. In this model, efficient employment of technology, resources and local merits would contribute to the economy.

III. In order to achieve productivity in this model, "Urban User Information Units" should be considered on neighbourhood scale. Thus, with the help of these units, individuals would also assume responsibility in the name of constitute a liveable environment.

IV. The substructure of this model is training. Environmental, economical and social training process would guarantee continuity of the model.

V. The Zoning Law No.3194 appears to be inadequate in terms of public participation incentive. The zoning law should be revised in favor of urban/natural environment and the urban users' participation.

VI. Planning Bureaus of Municipal Building Development Directorates should be restructured. It should be re-organized and its staff should be comprised of certain experts such as urban planners, urban design specialists, architects, landscape architects, art historians, academicians, sociologists and psychologists.

VII. Urban user participation model helps to improve individuals' perception of democracy. As it leads to more and more individual participation, the relationship of society-local administration becomes more productive.

VIII. This model, by restoring cultural balance among individuals, would intensify the cultural unity.

IX. Design Process Model with Urban User Participation is a continual administration control model which enables user content, via formation of quality urban environments without eliminating local characteristics of the city.

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