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ÜNAL, ARZU (Faculty Member, Turkey)

IBRAHIM, SALEH KAHLED* (Ibn Haldun University, Turkey)

TOPKAYA, BESRA BETÜL (Ibn Haldun University, Turkey)

Changes in Migrants' Preferences for Socialization and Leisure Spaces: The Experiences of Syrian Migrants in Istanbul

Migrants need spaces where they can spend their leisure time and socialize amid the crowded and noisy urban environment. For tens of thousands of Syrian migrants living in Istanbul, historic grand mosques, parks, and city squares serve as key locations for socialization. These spaces are significant for migrant families during both leisure time and religious occasions. They provide low-cost venues where middle-class and low-income migrant women can gather outside their homes and where their children can interact with local children or other migrant children.

For adults, particularly the first generation of migrants, historic grand mosques play a crucial role in strengthening existing relationships and performing religious duties, especially during Ramadan and feasts. Notable examples of such spaces include the Fatih Mosque and the Sultanahmet Mosque, located in Istanbul's Fatih district. These places are significant points in the city where migrants can simultaneously meet their religious, cultural, and recreational needs. The proximity of these spaces to migrant settlements, both geographically and culturally, makes them preferred destinations for many migrants.

This study focuses on how social spaces in Istanbul, such as the Fatih and Sultanahmet Mosques, have been transformed through the experiences of Syrian migrants. In recent years, rising anti-migrant sentiments, economic challenges, and Turkey's evolving migration policies have forced many Syrian families to change their spatial preferences and seek alternative venues. Increasingly, migrant families are forgoing spending religious occasions, like Ramadan and holidays, as well as their free time on weekends, at the Fatih and Sultanahmet Mosques, and are exploring new opportunities in other parts of the city. This study examines the factors behind the changing social spaces preferred by Syrian migrants in Istanbul for leisure and religious activities, as well as the alternatives they are exploring.