

The Effect of Theme Parks on Urbanisation Process: The Case of Konya

Tema Parkların Kentleşme Sürecine Etkisi: Konya Örneği

ABSTRACT

Cities are changing with the economy and technological advances. With this change, new living standards of people are emerging. The fact that people have more free time in the new standard of living significantly increases their desire for entertainment, adventure, and recreation. Architects and urban planners have designed theme parks as an alternative. Theme parks are transforming according to the consumer society in the focus of certain themes. With this transformation, 'theme parks' are in search of entertainment and fantasy that brings together different cultural elements. In this study, firstly, the concept of theme parks and examples of thematic parks from the world are examined. Thematic parks in Konya were taken as the research area. It discusses the consumption of place-specific cultural values through theme parks and the process of today's cities becoming a 'commodity'.

Keywords: Thematic Parks, Amusement Parks, Commodity, Konya.

ÖZET

Kentler, ekonomi ve teknolojik gelişmelerle birlikte değişiyor. Bu değişimle birlikte insanların yeni yaşam standartları ortaya çıkıyor. Yeni yaşam standardında insanların daha fazla zamana sahip olması eğlence, macera ve dinlenme isteklerini önemli ölçüde artırıyor. Mimarlar ve şehir planlamacıları bir alternatif olarak tema parkları tasarladılar. Tema parklar belirli temalar odağında tüketim toplumuna göre dönüşmektedir. Bu dönüşümle birlikte 'tema parklar' farklı kültürel öğeleri bir araya getiren eğlence ve fantezi arayışına girmiştir. Bu çalışmada öncelikle tema park kavramı ve dünyadan tematik park örnekleri incelenmiştir. Araştırma alanı olarak Konya'daki tematik parklar ele alınmıştır. Yere özgü kültürel değerlerin tematik parklar aracılığıyla tüketilmesi ve günümüz kentlerinin bir 'meta' haline gelme süreci tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tematik Parklar, Eğlence Parkları, Metaleştirme, Konya.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the city, which is the laboratory of many disciplines, is undergoing changes depending on factors such as economy and technology. As the famous urban sociologist Robert Park once stated: the city is the most consistent and, on the whole, the most successful of the efforts made by man to make the world he lives in more suitable for his desires. Therefore, the change in the living standards of people in cities and the increase in attitude towards recreation is the biggest factor in the formation of theme parks. Theme parks are designed as an alternative to the boredom of daily life (Ari, 2014). The first theme park was Disneyland, which was built by The Walt Disney Company in Los Angeles in the United States in 1955. It aims to contribute to increasing the country's tourism revenues by combining technology and entertainment. "Theme parks play the role of a museum based on scientific, cultural and historical subjects. However, they revive their subjects around a specific theme. This revitalisation process is achieved through audio and visual presentations and the use of interactive methods. Another important feature of theme parks is that they combine entertainment systems with stories within the framework of a fiction and present them to their visitors as a concept" (Gürhan, 2018). In this sense, architects and urban planners make alternative plans by listening to user reactions. According to the plans, theme parks become new gathering places / new public spaces.

Space is not only an area that is shaped as a result of production relations and where capital is organised, but also a reality in which social relations are shaped in all aspects and in which the social, shaped by society, is embodied (Harvey, 2012). Accordingly, space is commodified in order to keep the leisure and entertainment sector alive, which enters urban areas as a thematic element. Similar to Baudrillard's definition for shopping centres, "dream and consumption worlds combining fantasy and dreams" are established (Topaloğlu, 2007). The aim is to attract people by creating a unique space as a fantasy world and thus gain popularity (Altınkeser, 2007).

In this study, as a result of the necessary literature research on theme parks, theme parks are classified according to a certain concept. Theme parks are classified as education-themed, climate-themed, geography-themed, recreation-entertainment-themed, story-fable-mythology-themed, era-themed, art-themed, hobby-themed, sensory-themed,

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natural life-themed, special meaning gardens (Deniz, 2002). Park themes are classified as adventure, futurism, international, nature, fantasy, history and culture and films (Wong & Cheung, 1999). Based on these classifications, the thematic parks in Konya are discussed. The aim of the study is to examine the consumption of place-specific cultural values through thematic parks in Konya and the process of today's cities becoming a "commodity" in this process. Elements belonging to unfamiliar cultures were identified by observing the sample area. In the light of the information provided from the examined examples, it draws attention to the importance of the loss of cultural values.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution, theme means the main subject, basic motif, main subject, while thematic means formed around a theme (Turut & Özgür, 2018). Theme parks are parks where the activities, shows and structures organised in areas designed for entertainment, adventure, culture, and education are planned around a central or a group of themes (King, 2002). Theme parks are cultural artefacts that provide an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which leisure and entertainment have become a fundamental element of economic, social, and regional development in contemporary societies (Clavé, 2007). Theme parks are socio-cultural entertainment spaces that intertwine and intertwine spatial-temporal worlds through symbolic landscapes (Eyüboğlu, 2018). A theme park is a closed world that contains the possibilities of a unitary theme that spreads around the entire park or only a part of the park (Braun, 2000). These places, which contain many different functions, contain functions such as commercial, cultural, sports, entertainment that can meet many possible needs of the users in order to keep the users inside and make them spend more time and money (Ercan, 2016).

Theme Park activities are closely related to the concepts of "disney, disneyisation, disneyland and no-place". Disneyland expresses the principles of theme parks prevalent in cultural and non-cultural contexts (Bryman, 1995). Disneyland urbanism is precisely the urbanism of universal equivalence. In this new city the idea of different places is scattered in a universal sea of incommensurability, as any place can be any place, as everywhere becomes the destination (Sorkin, 1999).

Today, in the period described by Marc Augé as the super-modern era, areas such as amusement parks, hotel chains, airports, railway stations, refugee camps and shantytowns facing the threat of demolition are called "no-places". With the concept of "no-place", Augé states that these areas lack a "relational, historical and identity sense" (Augé, 2008). According to Harvey, the fact that countries design themselves according to Disney criteria shows that the more they resemble Disney, the more they lose their uniqueness (Harvey, 2012). The soulless standardisation that comes with commodification predicts that the advantages of monopoly will be lost, and cultural products will be no different from ordinary goods.

Theme parks are defined in the literature as parks designed for entertainment and leisure activities. Theme parks, which have an immense potential in terms of tourism, lead to a uniform understanding on the international platform due to the combination of cultural values of unfamiliar cultures under a single standard. This situation may cause the differences between cultures to be ignored and cultural diversity to decrease.

In the next section, some thematic parks around the world are selected as examples to show how thematization emerges in practice. These examples are important in terms of supporting the criticism of the uniform understanding that is formed by bringing unfamiliar cultures together. In addition, these examples also show how thematic parks have an important potential in terms of tourism.

EXAMPLES OF THEMATIC PARKS FROM THE WORLD AND TURKEY

Theme parks are places that depict the traditions, customs, beliefs, lifestyles, cultures, and histories of different civilisations and offer various activity opportunities by adopting a multinational art style understanding (Koçyiğit & Gorbon, 2012). Theme parks design the values specific to other places in detail under themes in order to create a sense of reality for visitors. In these parks, there are usually entertainment-based activity venues such as games, theatres, dance shows that appeal to all age groups. These attractions are professionally designed and displayed in accordance with the theme. Thematic units are difficult to distinguish from reality. Theme parks have the potential to attract a wide range of visitors as entertainment and attraction centres.

According to the 2018 TEA (Themed Entertainment Association) analysis of the number of visitors, the top 25 theme parks generally saw an increase in the number of visitors compared to 2017. America, Japan, and China stand out as the most visited countries in terms of theme parks (Table 1). Theme parks are considered to create a separate centre of attraction in order to pave the way for cultural entertainment tourism in the city and to improve the infrastructure facilities of the region.

Table 1: TEA, Number and Rate of Visitors of Theme Parks by Year 2018

Parks	2017	2018	Increase
Magic Kingdom Theme Park at Walt Disney World Resort (USA)	20,450,000	20,859,000	2.0%
Disneyland Park, Anaheim (USA)	18,300,000	18,666,000	2.0%
Tokyo Disneyland at Tokyo Disney Resort (Tokyo, Japon)	16,600,000	17,907,000	7.9%
Tokyo Disneysea at Tokyo Disney Resort, (Tokyo, Japon)	13,500,000	14,651,000	8.5%
Universal Studios Japan (Osaka, Japan)	14,935,000	14,300,000	-4.3%
Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park at Walt Disney World Resort (USA)	12,500,000	13,750,000	10.0%
Epcot Theme Park at Walt Disney World Resort (USA)	12,200,000	12,444,000	2.0%
Shanghai Disneyland (Shanghai, China)	11,000,000	11,800,000	7.3%
Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World Resort (USA)	10,722,000	11,258,000	5.0%
Chimelong Ocean Kingdom (Hengqin, China)	9,788,000	10,830,000	10.6%
Universal Studios Florida Theme Park (USA)	10,198,000	10,708,000	5.0%
Disney California Adventure Park (USA)	9,574,000	9,861,000	3.0%
Disneyland Park at Disneyland Paris (France)	9,660,000	9,843,000	1.9%
Universal's Islands of Adventure Theme Park (USA)	9,549,000	9,788,000	2.5%
Universal Studios Hollywood (USA)	9,056,000	9,147,000	1.0%
Hong Kong Disneyland (China)	6,200,000	6,700,000	8.1%
Lotte World, Seoul (South Korea)	6,714,000	5,960,000	-11.2%
Nagashima Spa Land, Kuwana (Japan)	5,930,000	5,920,000	-0.2%
Everland, Gyeonggi-Do (South Korea)	6,310,000	5,850,000	-7.3%
Ocean Park, Hong Kong Sar (China)	5,800,000	5,800,000	0.0%
Europa Park, Rust (Germany)	5,700,000	5,720,000	0.4%
De Efteling, Kaatsheuvel (Netherlands)	5,180,000	5,400,000	4.2%
Walt Disney Studios Park (France)	5,200,000	5,298,000	1.9%
Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen (Denmark)	4,640,000	4,850,000	4.5%
Chimelong Paradise, Guangzhou (China)	4,181,000	4,680,000	11.9%









Source: retrieved from URL 1.

According to 2018 TEA (Themed Entertainment Association) data, the most visited countries worldwide include the USA, Japan, China, France, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Among these countries, the USA, Japan, and China are among the most visited countries. Therefore, it is possible to obtain more detailed information about the conceptual and theoretical background of thematic parks by examining thematic park examples from the most visited countries (Table 2).

In comparison to the USA, Japan, and China, Turkey lacks large-scale thematic parks. Instead, municipalities have established medium and small-scale theme parks. Vialand (now Istanbul), built on approximately 600 decares of land, is Turkey's first theme park (Figure 1). The park includes a shopping mall, entertainment, and accommodation venues. The Adventure World section of Vialand theme park, specifically designed for young people and those who feel young, features more than 50 units such as Tower of Justice (Tower Ride), Crazy River (Rafting Ride), Viking (Splash Coaster), Jetski, King Kong, 360, Imagination Screen (King, 2002). Visitors who come to parks in various parts of Turkey to have fun or spend leisure time can observe cultural elements in Disneyland-like structures and cultural elements from different countries simultaneously (Url6, 2019).

Table 2: Examples of Thematic Parks from the World

Theme Park	Sections of Theme Park
Magic Kingdom Theme Park (USA)	The Magic Kingdom theme park was opened in 1971 as an amusement park under 4 themes (Disney's Hollywood Studios, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Magic Kingdom Park, Epcot) at the Walt Disney World Resort in the USA. The park consists of a variety of entertainment activities, food, and accommodation. Located in an area isolated from the city centre, the park was designed in accordance with its natural environment, making it a centre of fantasy, adventure, and attraction. In 2018, 20,859,000 people (See Table 1) visited it. The visitor profile of the park consists of families, groups of friends or people who want to have fun individually.
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Disney's Hollywood Studios (Url3, 2019)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Disney Animal Kingdom (Url3, 2019)</p> </div> </div>

	 <p>Magic Kingdom Park (Url3, 2019)</p>	 <p>Epcot (Url3, 2019)</p>
<p>Tokyo Disneyland (Japan)</p>	<p>Tokyo Disneyland, located at the Tokyo Disney Resort, was the first Disney theme park to open in Japan in 1983. The park features a variety of entertainment-oriented attractions designed for children. In 2018, it attracted seventeen million 907 thousand visitors, making it the most visited theme park in the Asia-Pacific region and the third most visited theme park worldwide.</p>	
<p>Shanghai Disneyland (China)</p>	<p>Shanghai Disneyland theme park is the first Disney resort in China (Figure 3). It serves a user base that appeals to all ages. This thematic park fulfils many spatial functions such as entertainment, adventure, accommodation, shopping, and dining. In 2018, it is the eighth most visited theme park in the world with 11 million 800 thousand visitors.</p>	
	 <p>World Bazaar (Url4, 2019)</p>  <p>Adventureland (Url4, 2019)</p>  <p>Westernland (Url4, 2019)</p>  <p>Fantasyland (Url4, 2019)</p>	 <p>Top view (Url5, 2019)</p>  <p>Perspective view (Url5, 2019)</p>

Source: derived from different sources by the author.



Figure 1: Vialand Theme Park Map

Source: retrieved from URL 6.

THEMATIC PARKS IN KONYA

Kyoto Japon Park

In 2010, Konya Metropolitan Municipality opened a theme park designed to develop the feelings of brotherhood between Turkish and Japanese people. Designed in accordance with Japanese architecture and culture, the park is located on an area of 30.000 m². The park has elements such as wooden and stone bridges, artificial pond, park entrances, stone lanterns, camellias, observation terraces, tea house, small islands, restaurant and Japanese trees and plants (Figure 2). The park consists of three entrances and three ponds joined by a narrow strait. The islands in the pond are reached by zigzag bridges. In keeping with the traditions of Japanese art, every part of the park is elaborately designed with rocks, water, and elegant plants.



Top view of Kyoto Japon Park



Restaurant Department



Park Entrance

Figure 2: Kyoto Japon Park
Source: author archive, 2019.

80 Binde Devri Alem Park

Konya Meram Municipality opened the 80 Binde Devri Alem Park on 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day in 2014 and it was designed on an area of approximately 80 thousand m² (Figure 3). The park consists of three sections: 120 miniatures named 'Cihan-ı Türk', 'T-Reks' containing 50 dinosaur models and 'Cotton Candy' dedicated to fairy tale heroes. In the park, there are sound and moving models of extinct dinosaurs, models of fairy tale heroes such as Smurfs and Cinderella, monuments of important names such as Hz. Mevlana and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and miniatures of architectural works such as the Taj Mahal and Mostar Bridge. Each section of the park, which appeals to all ages with its different themes, is detailed in detail. Everything from film characters to architectural miniatures has been considered.



Figure 3: Top view of 80 Binde Devri Alem Park

Source: retrieved from URL 5.

Kalehan Ecdat Garden

Kalehan Ecdat Garden is a project completed by Konya Metropolitan Municipality in 2017 and has traces of Seljuk and Ottoman architecture (Figure 4). The park has an area of 110 thousand square metres and is designed considering the traces of historical architecture. There are walking paths, ramparts, castle bastions, bridges and gates around the pond and there is a white architecture and lighthouse called Bosphorus Mansion in the pond. The area planning, where architecture and landscape are intertwined, has been made in accordance with the traditional architecture of Konya, and elements such as camellias, social facilities and seating units are included. In addition, there are two main entrances in the park, the Ottoman Entrance, and the Seljuk Entrance. Kalehan Ecdat Park welcomes its visitors with its street with wooden buildings where woodworking is successfully exhibited and includes boutique shops where local souvenirs are sold.



Figure 4: Top view of Kalehan Ecdat Garden

Source: author archive, 2019.

Turkish Stars Park

Opened in Konya-Selçuklu in 2016, Turkish Stars Park is Turkey's largest aviation-themed park with a total size of 321,000 m² and an aviation theme (Figure 5). The park aims to inform its visitors about aviation. The park, which opened with a show by the Turkish Stars, has a restored Airbus A300 aircraft and serves as a restaurant. Within the park, there are Vecihi Hürkuş and Nuri Demirağ monuments, exhibition areas, sports fields, amphitheatre, children's playgrounds, climbing walls, adventure trails, fountains, camellias and firepit picnic areas. However, the lack of security measures at the entrance of the park and the lack of adequate lighting reduces the sense of security of the visitors. In addition, the park has limited accessibility due to its location outside the city centre.



Figure 5: Top view of Turkish Stars Park

Source: retrieved from URL 7.

Tropical Butterfly Garden

Tropical Butterfly Garden is a natural habitat that provides information about the life processes and behaviours of butterflies (Figure 6). Spread over an area of 385,000 square metres, the garden is enriched with green areas, planting, and recreation areas. The garden is home to 15 species of butterflies and 20 thousand plant species belonging to 98 species. There is also an insect museum and interactive presentations provide information about the life cycle of butterflies and the lives of insects. The Tropical Butterfly Garden is Turkey's first LEED Silver and BD+C certified green building with 48% energy efficiency, 55% water efficiency and renewable energy sources that meet 30% of energy consumption. The garden also hosts different activities such as amphitheatre, pond and pool, children's playgrounds, greenhouse, botanical garden, and butterfly museum.



Figure 6: A view from The Tropical Butterfly Garden

Source: Author archive, 2019.

Science Centre

Konya Science Centre is the first science centre in the central Anatolia region of Turkey supported by TUBITAK. The centre incorporates renewable energy sources using environmentally friendly technologies. Science and Art Centre Konya offers different facilities such as exhibitions, open-air exhibitions, observation and observation tower, planet house, conference halls, laboratories, and library, introducing visitors from all age groups to the enjoyable and fun aspects of science. Such science centres of Konya Science Centre play a key role in increasing public interest in science, encouraging future scientists, and raising awareness about science.



Figure 7: Top view of Kalehan Ecdat Garden

Source: Retrieved from URL 8.

Olympic Park

Opened in 2010, the Olympic Park has an area that is difficult to access due to its location far from the city centre. The park is 162.000 m² in size and covers 100.000 m² of green areas. Inspired by the Olympic rings, the park has different areas such as the Ottoman Garden, Far East Garden, West Garden, Children's Playgrounds, Go-kart Track, Car Park, and a lighted pool that moves with music. There is also a walking track and an equestrian track, and it appeals to various age groups.



Figure 8: Top view of Kalehan Ecdat Garden

Source: Retrieved from URL 9.

CATEGORIES OF THEME PARKS IN KONYA

Konya is a city with a great historical and cultural richness and various thematic parks have been established to support the development of tourism. These thematic parks are designed based on different themes and categorised according to the classification of (Deniz, 2002) and (Wong & Cheung, 1999) thematic parks (Table 3). This categorisation of thematic parks in Konya provides a vital tool to understand the diversity of the tourism industry

and to analyse the experiences offered to visitors. Moreover, this categorisation provides an opportunity to better respond to tourists' visit preferences by highlighting the unique characteristics of each park. In this context, the thematic parks in Konya play a key role in enhancing the tourist attraction of the city and promoting sustainable tourism development.

Table 3: Classification of Thematic Parks in Konya

	Categorisation of thematic parks in Konya in accordance with the classification of thematic parks developed by Deniz in 2002	Categorisation of thematic parks in Konya in accordance with the classification of thematic parks developed by Wong and Cheung in 1999
Kyoto Japon Park	Climate, Geography	History And Culture, International, Nature
80 Binde Devri Alem Park	Recreation-Entertainment, Story-Tale-Mythology, Hobby	Adventure, International, Fantasy
Kalehan Ecdat Garden	Age, Hobby, Geography	History and Culture, Adventure
Turkish Stars Park	Climate, Geography	Adventure, Nature
Tropical Butterfly Garden	Adventure, Natural Life, Climate, Education	Nature, Films, International, Adventure, Futurism
Science Centre	Education, Age, Art, Sense, Geography	Adventure, Futurism, International, History and Culture
Olympic Park	Recreation-Entertainment, Hobby	Adventure, Nature

Source: derived from author.

DISCUSSION

Thematic parks have become increasingly popular in the tourism industry in recent years. These parks provide visitors with the opportunity to have fun, learn and discover, while at the same time making a significant contribution to the tourism sector. However, there are also controversies about thematic parks. The focus of these criticisms is environmental pollution, traffic congestion due to the increase in the number of visitors, and the commercialisation of cultural values and the corruption of these values.

The thematic parks built in Konya, which are considered within the scope of the study, have been accepted by the public as an indicator of development both in terms of tourism and the display of a new park approach to the city. However, these parks have remained weak in terms of ensuring cultural continuity specific to Konya. Thus, these parks have developed in themes independent from the place. The loss of cultural values, which is the most discussed issue in the focus of thematic parks, over time, this situation has left how parks can be integrated into cities.

CONCLUSION

Theme parks are parks that are planned around a specific theme and include different subjects such as entertainment, adventure, history, and science. These parks are a mixed, introverted closed world that can combine values specific to unfamiliar cultures. The first theme park built by The Walt Disney Company aims to contribute to increasing tourism revenues by combining technology and entertainment. Theme parks are achieving this goal with the increasing number of visitors every day. Worldwide, America, Japan and the People's Republic of China are the most visited countries according to 2018 TEA (Themed Entertainment Association) data.

Theme parks give the impression of belonging to a fantastic past and the park entrances are visually splendid. These attractive entrances make people want to go inside. However, the parks are full of restaurants, cafes and shopping shops that encourage people to consume. Such places cause recreation and water elements to be pushed to the background. All kinds of phenomena such as nature, history and culture are turned into objects of design, thus moving away from the origin of place-specific values. The fact that theme parks have a sharp boundary between outside and inside (closed/introverted spaces) exhibits a quality that separates the society. This situation causes the cultural values that give identity to the city to be consumed on the international platform.

Theme parks should be evaluated in terms of the tourism potential they bring to the region. However, while making this evaluation, the spatial designs of the cultural values specific to the place with theme parks that progress in parallel with today's understanding should be brought to the forefront. In this way, while theme parks contribute to increasing tourism income, it will also be possible to protect and promote local cultural values.

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