

# Child Friendly City: The Case of Istanbul

Özgür Sarı

*Prof. Dr. and the Department Chair, Sinop University/Sociology Department, Turkey  
sosyologozgur@gmail.com*

**ABSTRACT:** Today, the number of cities participating in the child-friendly city movement is increasing both around the world and in Turkey. The main reason for this trend is the concern of creating a city image. In today's neo-liberal policies and global economy, cities have become competing actors alongside national economies. In order for a city to be privileged in this competitive environment, it must be different and attractive from other cities. For this reason, it has become popular to participate in the child-friendly city process today. The new criteria, which were blended based on the Netherlands Delft-based KISS, the South African Republic Johannesburg-based Chawla criteria, and the Francis and Lorenzo criteria, were as follows: The common and most basic criterion in all criteria is security. It is important that the city in which it is located is safe above all else. It is extremely important that children and parents feel safe in the relevant space. Therefore, the first criterion is the distance from the dangers and the safety criterion. The second important criterion is the existence of clean environment and green areas, which are as vital as security. The third common criterion is the existence of play, socialization and activity areas. The fourth criterion is accessibility and freedom of movement, and the fifth criterion is the existence of suitable, safe and accessible transportation routes, pedestrian paths and bicycle paths. Within the framework of the common criteria determined, 171 people were interviewed in game parks across Istanbul. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 171 parents who were randomly selected. During the interviews, seven demographic questions, seven open-ended questions, and five Likert-style test questions were presented. The results were thematically analyzed to understand whether Istanbul is a child-friendly city or not. It has been discussed what deficiencies exist for Istanbul and what needs to be done to meet the criteria.

**KEYWORDS:** Child Friendly Cities Initiative, Delft Criteria, Chawla Criteria

## The Criteria for Child Friendly City

In order to understand whether a city is child-friendly and to evaluate the suitability of urban spaces for the use and development of children, as well as the overall livability of the city for children, it is necessary to analyze the use and development of urban spaces, especially streets, parks, and shopping centers. It is necessary to analyze whether they are suitable or not. There are also studies that analyze the general state of the city.

Bornat and Shaw (2019) conducted a study in which they categorized children into groups based on their age: pre-school (ages 0-5), school-age children (ages 5-12), and older children. The study presented a set of criteria to determine whether a city is child-friendly or not. These criteria include going to school, visiting areas, passageways, cycling, playgrounds and a sense of security.

The first criterion is whether children can reach school safely and comfortably in less time. Today, a significant part of children's daily lives is spent at school. Transportation to school has become an important issue in cities, since it has become one of the most important infrastructure problems of cities today. Parents are most worried when children go to school and return home at the end of school, because, children who dive into the city spaces and interact with the citizens during their transportation to school, away from their parents, are exposed to "danger". What might happen to them on the way to school or on the way home is always a concern. The roads where children reach school should be illuminated with traffic lights and lighting lamps, away from criminals, such as addicts or beggars, and equipped with walking and bicycle paths for children. In addition, these roads must be suitable for the use of children. Again, according to the crossing road criteria specified in this study, the roads must

be in a condition that can be passed or used by children. Presence of traffic signs and signs indicating that children will pass in front of the school, the presence of pedestrian priority passage lanes, the preparation of mechanisms that can be used by children with buttons suitable for their height are perhaps small but very important and vital elements. The existence of safe bicycle paths, which is a subject of transportation, is also a determined criterion. The existence of safe and accessible bicycle paths for children is an important criterion in child-friendly cities. Today, the roads of cities are allocated to motor vehicles. It is probably because the automotive industry, one of the mass production industries that developed rapidly after the 1950s, forced us to design our cities not as our living spaces, but in accordance with the invasion of motor vehicles. Although bicycle paths have started to be built, today's cities are still not at a sufficient level in terms of bicycle paths.

The criterion of visiting areas is whether there are suitable visiting areas for children outside of school, especially for games, activities, courses or shopping. It is also important to have suitable places or institutions in the city for activities that will contribute to a child's socio-cultural and psychological development, from zoos to science parks, from museums to activity courses. Today, it is seen that families have difficulty in finding an activity to take their children and spend time in our cities, which are invaded by shopping centers.

Playgrounds and green spaces are places that have no monetary return in today's capitalism. For this reason, in our cities under the invasion of the construction and housing industry, the spaces to be allocated for green areas and playgrounds are seen as "monetary loss". As a result, we sacrifice our green areas and playgrounds to the rent economy and the housing industry. Our cities lack adequate, accessible and safe green spaces and playgrounds for children. Therefore, families who prefer complex life, living in closed residences and residences built as sites, prefer these expensive residences because of the green areas and playgrounds for their children. However, this situation is far from being accessible to all the public and playgrounds for all children (Alver 2010).

Cities are also areas where crime and immigration are clustered. In cities where social control is reduced, spatial areas where crime is clustered pose a danger, especially for children. The main concern of parents today is the safety of their children. In the spatial use of the city, safety has become an important criterion for children who will spend many daily activities such as playing games, going to school, participating in events, riding a bicycle outside their home (Sarı 2013).

Today, the number of cities participating in the child-friendly city movement is increasing both in the world and in Turkey. The main reason is the concern of creating a city image. In today's neo-liberal policies and global economy, cities have become competing actors alongside national economies. In order for a city to be privileged in this competitive environment, it must be different and attractive from other cities. For this reason, it has become popular to participate in the child-friendly city process today. In this process, the project covering the period of 2006-2010 signed between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and UNICEF was the beginning (Topsümer et al. 2009, 13).

UNICEF has determined thematic areas in the context of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative. Participation, education, safety, health, environment, inclusion, creativity, play/leisure and migration under the themes of child-friendly cities. This approach, which has a very broad and holistic perspective, also includes fundamental rights from health and education to the environment (UNICEF 2004).

In the light of these themes, studies to determine more specific criteria continued. According to what specific criteria can we count a city as a child-friendly city? One of the studies seeking answers to this is the Chawla criteria, which emerged from the city of Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa (Chawla 2002). According to Chawla, there are six important criteria: existence of green space, existence of behavioural environments, existence of activity areas, possibility to move freely, safe and away from danger, existence of assembly

area (Chawla 2002). Another study in this area is the work of Francis and Lorenzo. The criteria named in the literature as Francis and Lorenzo criteria are accessibility, mixed use and socialization, small-applicable-flexible, natural and environmentally sensitive, identity, participatory (Francis and Lorenzo 2006). Another study from Delft, the Netherlands, developed the Delft criteria. The criteria in the form of safety, walkability, cycling, enabling cross-overs, places to enjoy and playability were named Kids Street Scan (KISS) and mainly focused on making roads healthy and accessible for children (The Delft Manifesto 2017). Their particular emphasis on the cycling criterion is due to the widespread use of bicycles in the Netherlands. In this study, a new list of criteria was created by bringing together the criteria mentioned above and reducing the common ones to one. As a result of the common criteria, the questions asked to families in cities all over Turkey were given points on whether the cities are child-friendly or not. An average score of each city has emerged and the official figure of the whole of Turkey has been determined. In scoring between 1 and 5, 1 and 2 points are shown in red and are cities that are far from being child-friendly. Those with 3 points are the middle-level cities, which are shown in yellow and can be child-friendly with some adjustments. Cities with 4 and 5 points are child-friendly cities and are the most suitable cities for children to live in and are shown in green.

The new criteria, which were blended based on the Netherlands Delft-based KISS, the South African Republic Johannesburg-based Chawla criteria, and the Francis and Lorenzo criteria, were as follows: The common and most basic criterion in all criteria is security. It is important that the city in which it is located is safe above all else. It is extremely important that children and parents feel safe in the relevant space. Therefore, the first criterion is the distance from the dangers and the safety criterion. The second important criterion is the existence of clean environment and green areas, which are as vital as security. The third common criterion is the existence of play, socialization and activity areas. The fourth criterion is accessibility and freedom of movement, and the fifth criterion is the existence of suitable, safe and accessible transportation routes, pedestrian paths, and bicycles.

## **Methodology**

Interviews were conducted with 171 people randomly selected from mothers and fathers who spend time with their children in playgrounds located in different parts of Istanbul. In the questionnaire used in the interviews, seven demographic questions, seven open-ended interview questions and five survey questions prepared according to the Likert technique were asked.

In demographic questions, the person's mother or father, age, occupation, education level, neighborhood, the gender and age of the child were asked. In order to find out whether the city they live in is suitable for their children, seven questions were asked. These questions are aimed at learning their thoughts on whether the city they live in is suitable for their children in terms of transportation, safety and leisure activities. In addition, a seven-question survey prepared with the Likert method was directed to measure how the city they live in is in terms of security, cleanliness, accessibility, freedom of movement, play and activity.

While preparing the questions, previous studies and criteria used in this field were used. Chawla and Delft criteria, which have been previously applied and tested for reliability, were blended. Among the people in the sample, 31 people are men and 140 people are women. The age of the parents is the youngest, 23 years old, and the oldest, 51 years old. Parents differed between primary school graduates and university graduates according to their educational status. While all male parents are working, the majority of female parents are housewives. Parents were also asked about their child's age and gender. The youngest child is one year old and the oldest is 14. Ninety-eight of the parents came to the park with their boys, while 73 of them came with their girls.

## Findings

Five survey questions prepared with the Likert technique were asked to the interviewees:

- 1) The city I live in is safe and far from dangers for my child.
- 2) There is enough clean environment and green space for my child in the city where I live.
- 3) There are enough playgrounds, activities and socialization areas for my child in the city where I live.
- 4) My child can move freely in the city where I live.
- 5) In the city where I live, there are enough suitable, safe and accessible transportation opportunities for my child, pedestrian paths and bicycle paths.

They were asked to rate these statements between one and five. Families were asked to score these statements, with one being the most negative and five being the most positive.

As a result, all families gave one or two points for these statements, suggesting that Istanbul, is not considered a livable city for children. Families cited a lack of clean environment, green areas, bicycle and pedestrian paths, playgrounds and socialization areas for children. Also, in terms of transportation and security, Istanbul is not a suitable city for children.

In addition, families were asked seven open-ended questions:

- 1) Do you worry about your child going to school and returning home? If you're worried why? What are the negativities or dangers during going to school and returning home?
- 2) Do you think that your child can walk or cycle comfortably on the roads in your neighborhood? What disadvantages or dangers do the roads contain for your child?
- 3) What kind of activities do you take your child to outside of school and home? Are there enough places for leisure activities in your area (zoo, water park, science park, museum, etc.)? Or which places would you like to have?
- 4) Do you feel that the city you live in is safe enough for your child? If yes, in what way is it safe? If your answer is no, what kind of dangers exist for your child in the city?
- 5) Do you find your city clean enough for your child? If not, what problems are there? In what ways do you not find it clean?
- 6) Are green areas sufficient in your city?
- 7) What do you want to add about the subject?

Only 18 of the families stated that the green areas and socialization activities in their neighborhood are partially sufficient, the neighborhood they live in is partially safe and clean for their children, and the transportation facilities are partially sufficient. They stated that the neighborhoods they live in are more elite than the general of Istanbul and have a socio-economic status above the average. For this reason, they gave a partially positive opinion about their own neighborhoods. However, his thoughts about Istanbul in general were completely negative.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, is a metropolis that has experienced an unhealthy urbanization and growth process as a result of its population exceeding 16 million and the rapid immigration it has received. It is understood that the city, which is struggling with many infrastructure, social, economic and environmental problems, is a difficult city to live in for families with children.

Istanbul is far from meeting criteria such as Chawla criteria or Delft criteria, which are internationally determined criteria for a child-friendly city, is a city that is not suitable for the healthy development of children.

Parents who participated in the study also stated this situation, noting that Istanbul is not a suitable city for raising children. Parents have a hard time raising their children, sending them to school, and making them do leisure time activities outside of school. Moreover, they do not find the city's environment clean enough for their children's healthy development.

The Child Friendly City Criteria convincingly argues that cities should integrate trees and natural spaces at many scales, from the landscaping of homes, schools, and childcare centers to connected city pathways, greenways, parks, and "rough ground" systems for children's creative play. For local governments avoiding the cost of making arrangements for children only, it is recommended that all-generational arrangements be made. In this way, intergenerational interaction is also ensured. Intergenerational interaction is also important for the social and psychological development of children. In order to achieve these, both central and local governments and non-governmental organizations must act jointly and in coordination. It is also important to check and monitor that the criteria are met. Unfortunately, creating livable cities, especially green spaces, is sacrificed to global and liberal policies today. Because urban lands whet the appetite of companies for rent (Van Vliet & Karsten, 2015).

## References

- Alver, Köksal. 2010. *Siteril Hayatlar*. Ankara: Hece Yayınları.
- Bornat, Dinah & Shaw Ben. 2019. *Neighborhood Design-Working with Children Towards a Child Friendly City*. London: 7D Architects & University of Westminster.
- Chawla, Louise. 2002. "Growing Up in an Urbanising World, UNESCO-Management of of Social Transformations Program." London: Earthscan.
- Francis, Mark & Lorenzo Ray. 2006. "Children and City Design: Proactive Process and the Renewal of Childhood." In *Children and Their Environments: Learning, Using and Designing Spaces*, 217-237. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sari, Özgür. 2013. "Suç ve Kent." In *Suçun Sosyolojisi-Cezanın Felsefesi*, edited by Özgür Sari & Güncel Önkal. Ankara: Nobel Yayınevi.
- Topstümer, Füsün. 2009. "Şehir ve Çocuk: Çocuk Dostu Şehir Girişiminin Şehir İmajına Katkısı." *İstanbul Ü. İletişim F. Dergisi* 35: 5-20.
- Thoreau, Henry David. 2016. "Walking." In *The Making of the American Essay*, edited by John D'Agata, 167-95. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.
- UNICEF, 2004. "The State of the World's Children 2004." UNICEF House, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA.
- Van Vliet, Willem & Karsten, Lia. 2015. "Child-Friendly Cities in a Globalizing World: Different Approaches and a Typology of Children's Roles". *Children, Youth & Environments* 25(2), 1-15.