

# Inner Courtyards as Public Open Spaces

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## 1 ABSTRACT

Over the years more and more researches proved, major part of the world's population moving back to the cities and in the future even more people will live there. All this is due to that in the metropolitan regions high level economic activity is taking place and their services getting better quality. Besides of that the cities are not only information and service nodes but also varied cultural and educational centers which providing a lot of opportunities for occupational change or to learn new professions which could be attractive to the high qualified people too. Therefore the cities of the future will have to face significant demographic and sociological problems because besides moving into the city various ethnic and religious groups according to the characteristic of the western countries the urban population shows an aging trend. And in addition the increasing number of the disabled people whose mobility even in a crowded city must be ensured. Therefore the public spaces will play an even more significant role in the cities life because this is the "space" in every city where regardless of gender, age, religion, qualification, etc. all social classes can be found. This is especially true for the public squares and parks where people can not only meet with each other from the different social groups but they can dialogue with each other as well; actively or passively relaxing, having fun, etc. All of this can significantly contribute so that these groups could get know each other. However the public spaces of the cities including the squares and parks looking at their size are bounded. All for this could provide solution for example the opening of the inner courtyards to the pedestrians. Because the inner courtyards similar to the public spaces providing opportunities not only for relaxation and conversation but for buying and entertainment also because the ground floor part of the inner courtyards offering the possibility for the creation of shops, offices, coffee shops and restaurants. Therefore in my presentation I would like to show what is needed to an inner courtyard could become a successful public space.

Keywords: parks, squares, cities, public space, inner courtyard

## 2 INTRODUCTION

In the urban planning since from the beginning the research of the public open spaces played an important role. And in the 21st Century the topic has become even more important. The main reason for this can be found in the globalization processes. Because in the 20th Century more and more people has moved into the cities and as a consequence the in the 21st Century the growing cities will face significant demographic and sociological problems.

The growing number of the population will have significant effect to the public spaces because the people if they can trying to spend as much time as it possible outdoors. The public spaces are the "places of meeting" where people regardless of gender, religion, age, nationality could have dialog with each other, but there can people actively or passively relax or having fun. And all of this is especially important from the aspect of the disabled and old people. Because the western societies of our time aging are typical therefore from the aspect equal opportunities not negligible that the elderly and disabled people could easily approach the public spaces. (Thompson, 2002)

One of the main reasons the mass moving to the cities is that in the metropolitan regions high level economic activity taking place, and their services are becoming more and more quality. Beside of that the cities are not just information and service nodes, but also varied cultural and educational centers which offering their inhabitants many opportunities for professional change. Or to learning new professions which could be attractive for high qualified people. But most into the poor neighbourhoods moving immigrants belongs to the low qualified. And the growing number of the different ethnic minorities in more European large cities (e.g. France) newer residential quarter has already led to a series of serious conflicts. (Enyedi, 2011) But the public spaces of the cities offering good opportunities that the individual ethnic groups could get know each other, becoming friends, and having dialogue with each other.

But the public spaces of the cities have to be facing with another great challenge. Because due to the population growth especially in the case of the historical city centres will increase the needs to the expansion

of the pedestrian areas. Therefore in the city centres could ensure the expansion of the pedestrian areas the alternate routes. One of those alternate routes are the inner courtyards which can function as public spaces. Because the inner courtyards similar to the larger squares not just relaxation or conversation are possible on the benches but shopping and having fun also. The ground floors of the inner courtyards are offering the possibilities for the creation of shops, offices, coffee shops, and restaurants. But it's a question what people really needs on a public spaces or an inner courtyard, to enjoy themselves? And similar to a public space how could become successful and well used among the people an inner courtyard? In the next chapters I will focus to those questions.

### **3 THE SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SPACE**

Within the framework of the Project for Public Spaces worldwide more than 1000 public space were studied which results it turned out that the success of the public spaces basically depends on four things:

- Community spirit
- Use and activity
- Approach and relationships
- Comfort and overall picture

The community spirit which in fact means on the public spaces happening social life is the key element of every successful public space. Besides of the Project for Public Spaces many other researches has proved that for the people is one of the most important activity on a public space besides the meeting with friends or family members to meet strangers. Due to this can be formed bonding not only to the given public space, but to the local community and city also. Besides of the community is also equally important that for what kind of activity offers possibilities the given public space. Because that is what attracts the new people and invites back the old ones, and that makes individual and special the given public space. And the activity could be from the playground across the outdoor games until the cycling anything. On that public space where is nothing to do, will be left and empty because nobody will use it. (Madden, 2008)

Of course none public space worth anything itself if it can't be approach easily and it's not visible. Namely the successful squares are not just well walked around and usable but the there leading roads are also safe and interesting to the pedestrians. Because people are using in higher rate that routes and public spaces which are bounded for example with stores having buildings. This is due to that they felling themselves more secure if a public space has more watchful look. The another specialty of the well approachable public open space is that its surrounding area has a parking place and also accessible by public transport. Last, but not least in vain attractive are for people a public space due to the there taking place social life, activity, or good accessibility, if there is nowhere to sit down. Public spaces have to provide the opportunity that anytime, anywhere could people sitting down of them. Therefore during the design of every public space must be priority the location of street furniture because due to this could them become comfortable. (Madden, 2008)

## **4 RESULTS OF AN ONLINE SURVEY FORM PUBLIC SPACES AND INNER COURTYARDS**

### **4.1 The background of the online survey respondents**

To determine that what is important to people nowadays on a public space I made an online survey. During the survey I collected the answers of 84 people. Looking at the gender of the surveyed a little bit more than the half was woman, and approximately a quarter men. And looking at the education more than half of the respondents had college degree which compared the number of the high school/ technical school, and vocational degree was far behind, elementary and specialized school degree wasn't included in the sample. With regard to the profession more than three-quarter of the respondents confessed himself as employed which was pretty high rate. The number of the students, university students, and entrepreneurs was far behind who haven't even accounted for a quarter of the respondents. The employees in senior positions and the pensioners have participated in the survey in a small rate.

According to the age groups distribution between the 21 and 30 years old more than half were of the surveyed, between the 31 and 40 were slightly less than the quarter, between the 41 and 50, the 51 and 60, and between 61 and 70 were even fewer. Unfortunately from three age groups failed to take samples: Under the age of 14 years, between the 14 – 20 years old, and over the age of 71 years. This is due to in the case of

over the age of 71 years probably that this age group interested in, or uses the internet least. Which is especially true to the social networking sites where first appeared the online survey. And probably under the age of 14 years didn't attract interest of the research. In their case certainly would have been one of the most effective method to make the questionnaire query in the school, but therefore source, and longer research time would be needed. However it would have been interesting to see especially in the case of the primary schoolchildren and teenagers what they would like to see on a public space or a park. Because they are who still using all functions of the public spaces (eg. playing soccer, talking with each other on a bench, playing sports, etc.).

#### 4.2 About the creation and function of the public spaces and squares

In the first question the respondents had to give answer about that which are those street furniture, functions, or services which they would like to see on a public space. Not surprisingly most of them had marked the benches (87%) as the best known and most popular street furniture. But because maximum three answer could give each responder therefore only 2% behind from the benches on the second place (85,7%) were the plants (Trees, Bushes, Flowers, etc.) (Fig. 1.). All this is therefore surprising because according to the plants are far behind any further function, street furniture, and service. From this only the fountain was an exception which was marked almost by the half (45,2%) of the questioned. However interestingly drinking fountain significantly fewer people want to see in a public space as fountain. Therefore the water primarily as microclimate and wellbeing enhancement "aesthetic experience" should be represented on the public spaces and not as liquid source possibility.

Among the answer options has been marked in similar rate (18%) the bicycle storage and the tourist map. In the case of the first one all this is interesting because the bicycle is one of the most popular and cheapest alternate vehicles what more and more people are using to go to work or school. Beside of that also the cyclist tourists likes to take a rest on the larger city squares which would also justify the placement of bicycle storages. Related to this the tourist map which from touristic aspect has great significance didn't get significant support. Although for the local population could be also useful among others the city's historical attractions marking map on its public spaces.

In our accelerated world the internet and the information flow has become a key element, therefore the question raises right how much feels people necessary to surf on the internet on a public space. Because with the appearance of the "smart phones" on the different restaurants, and besides of the coffee shops today on more public institutions, railway stations, and now in some trains the free wireless so called "wifi" is also provided. But only just 13% has marked the need for using wifi on a public space.

From the another answer possibilities the creation of a public lavatory has marked only one person, three the placement of refuse bins, and held important the placement of advertising columns.

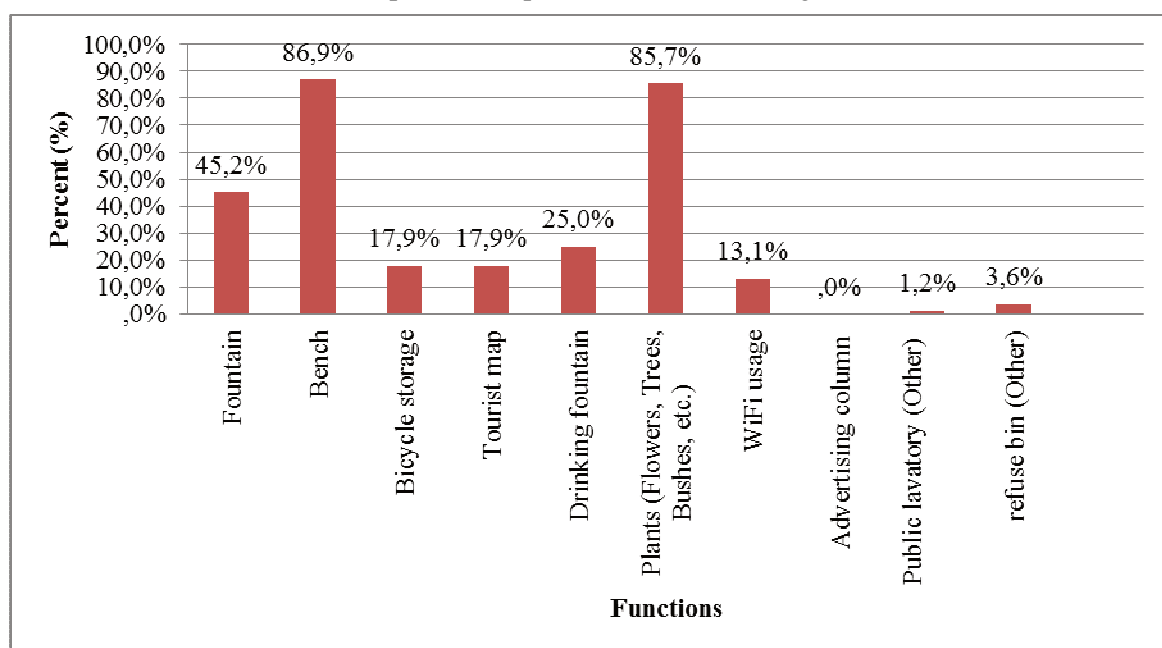


Fig 1.: The rate of the marked public space street furniture/functions/services

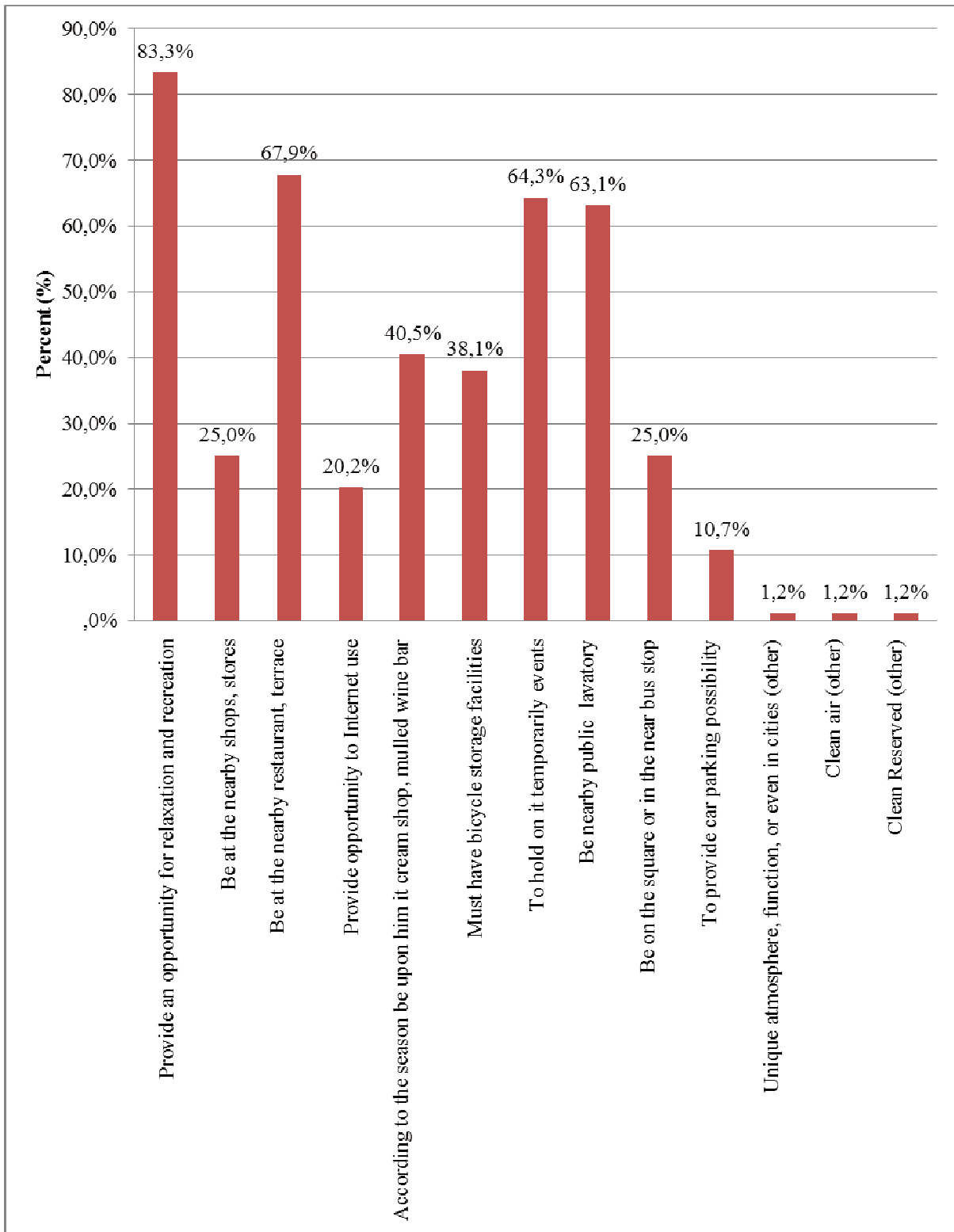


Fig 2.: The use and functional needs of the squares

In the following questions the respondents has to give the answer of which are those aspects which has to prevail on a square or a park. Would they prefer there for example shops, restaurants, terrace, or even a bust stop. Maximum five answers could mark the surveyed form the listed aspects.

In the case of the squares on the first place it was featured that they must provide an opportunity for relaxation and recreation (83,3%), on the second place that near them should be a restaurant with terrace (67,9%), and on the third that it should be holding on them temporarily events (64,3%) which from not far left behind that in the near should be a public lavatory (63,1 %) (Fig. 2.). In the case of this last one was an interesting contrast with the previous question, because as it was showed in Fig. 1. only one person has

marked that it would be necessary the placement of public lavatory on the public spaces. According to this the respondents doesn't want that on the squares themselves but near them should be public lavatories. However they also want that besides of relaxing and recreation should be hold on them events, festivals but interestingly only 40,5% would have to liked it that according to the season for example in summer ice cream shop and in winter mulled wine bar works on it.

It was also interesting to see that at this question 38,1% of the surveyed have thought that it's necessary the placement of bicycle storages, and only 25% that nearby of the squares should be shops or stores. But in the same rate they want it also that a square could be approachable even by bus. Internet use like the former, wanted only the fifth (20,2%) of the respondents and parking places even less (10,7%). In the other category three people has given three more such as: Clean Reserved, Clean air and Unique atmosphere, function, or even in cities.

In the case of parks compared to the squares in higher rate was marked that they must provide an opportunity for relaxation and recreation (91,7%) (Fig. 3.).

Most of the parks has playground therefore it wasn't surprise that 77,4% of the respondents still wants that they would be part of them in the future. From this not far falls behind also the varied flora (with 4,8%) but it must be noted that the playground had overtook the basic function of the parks.

The public lavatory similar to the squares was the fourth most often marked (56%) need. But interestingly only the 9,5% of the surveyed wanted dog toilet. All this from that aspect also surprising that most people who lives in the city and who has a dog usually takes his pet walking to the park nearby to his residence. But to the dog faeces removal despite to the legal obligation fails to comply every owner. Although in the parks many families among them especially with young children are who most often spend their free time. Therefore primarily to the young children means serious hygiene risk the not removed or not properly removed dog faeces. However the dog toilet could help not only with the preservation of the parks cleanliness but it could assure also the regular placement of the faeces.

However, the city parks not only for those who want relaxation and to the dog walkers offers space but also for sports enthusiasts. Because most of them got a smaller soccer field, basketball court, or maybe sports field. Nonetheless only 41,7% of the surveyed have thought that they hast to give offer for playing sport although the obesity resulting from the sedentary lifestyle in our country is also an increasingly serious problem. And the parks ensuring free movement possibilities for all age groups. But several parks can be found where next to the sport field smaller snack bar, coffee shop or ice cream shop are also operating. Therefore it's not a coincidence that near then one third of the respondents wants that the snack bars, coffee shops, etc. continue to be part of them or be developed. With this connected it should be extra noted that these catering features were more importantly rated than the placement of bicycle storages (28,6%) or the selective waste collection containers (23,8%). The bicycle storages were only with 1% left behind from the catering facilities but compared to the squares there 10% more people (38.1%) has marked it. Although the parks are approachable by bicycle as well as the squares also moreover there are parks where bicycle learning track has been developed for the children.

Environmental protection is one of the key elements of sustainability which part is the waste management. In order to preserve the squares and parks cleanliness is especially important question the possibility and the way of the waste location. The placement of waste collection containers are today a statutory requirement in the case of the public spaces. But for the selective waste collection containers got other specifications. Right now more parks and squares can be found in Hungary where are available the selective waste collection containers island. Therefore to the park visitors the selective waste collection is insured, and along with it the environmental protection and the sustainability. Nonetheless from the survey it turned out that only 23,8% of the respondents think so that the parks should have selective waste collection island.

As it previously already has been mentioned only 9,5% of the surveyed has marked the dog toilet. Therefore it wasn't surprise that only 10,7% wants dog running place to the parks. Although as it already has been also mentioned in order to preserve the hygiene of the parks it would be appropriate enclose an area on them only for the dogs.

Most people similar to the squares doesn't want near to the parks bus stop, because only 13,1% has marked it, 12% less as in the case of the squares. As the car parking possibility also has been marked 3% less, so it hasn't reached even the 10% in the case of the parks.

Among the other category three people has given separately the drinking fountain, the regular maintenance of the parks, and the cleanliness.

From the questions related to the squares and parks clearly turned out, that for the people primarily in both cases the relaxation, the comfort and the vegetation is the most important. However a significant difference has been appeared because until at the squares most people have marked the restaurants, and terraces until at the parks the playgrounds. The third most often marked aspect in the case of the squares were the temporarily events on them, and in the case of the parks the varied flora. After that in similar rate has been marked in both of them the public lavatory.

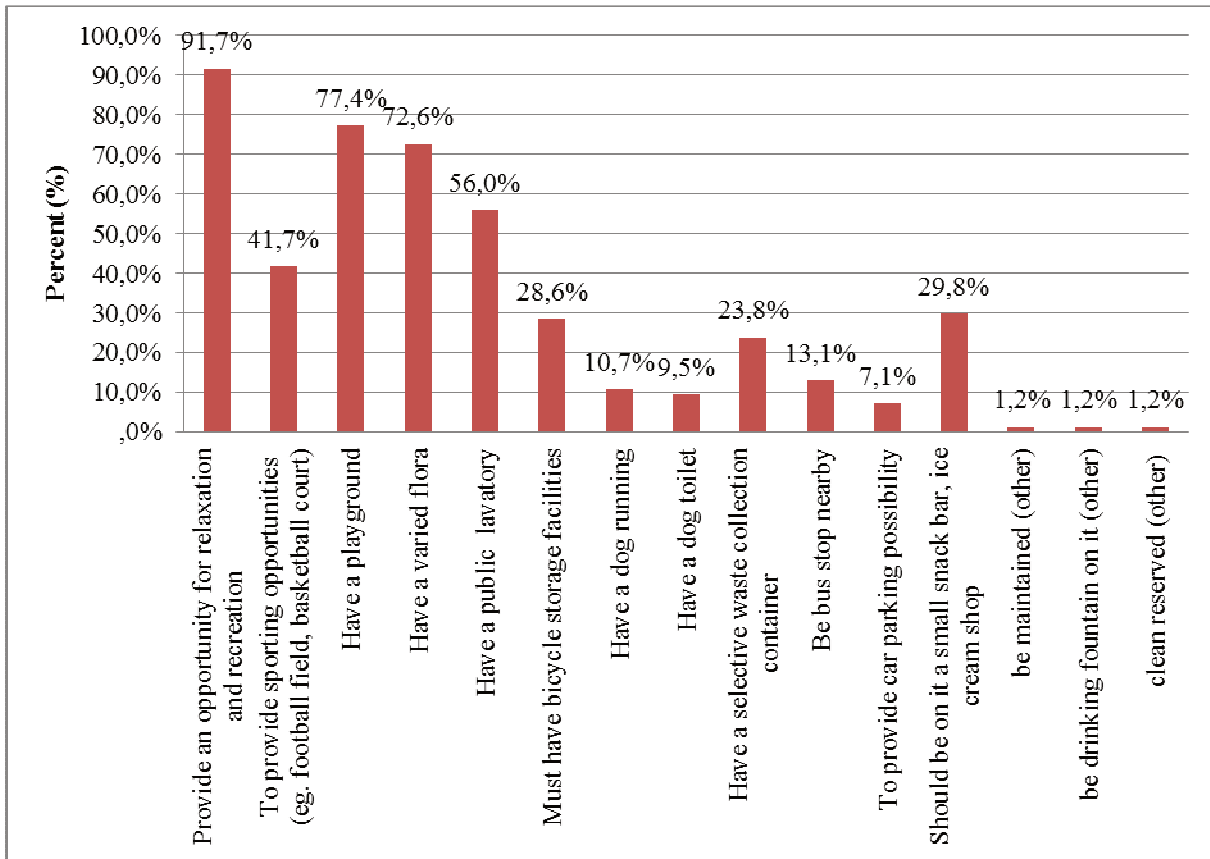


Fig. 3.: The use and functional needs of the parks

#### 4.2 The public use and opening of the Inner Courtyards

As already has been mentioned in the Introduction, in the future the public space would playing more significant role in the cities life which primarily would due to the high number moving. But the cities public spaces size are mostly bounded and there is no real potential for their extension or new squares perhaps parks creation. This is especially true to the historical city centers where the buildings often got historical protection. Therefore on these areas could be a solution for the public spaces extension the opening of the inner courtyard having buildings to the pedestrians. This way the inner courtyards could function further as public spaces which could give place to smaller shops, stores, coffees shops, ice cream shops, or even restaurants. But in the larger courtyards park or playground could be also developed. And unlike to the squares and parks another benefit could be of the inner courtyards, that they can be closed for the night because they are private areas. Therefore the calm of the there living people would be ensured because the pedestrian use of the courtyard would be possible only during the day which significant part most people are working.

Therefore in the next question the surveyed had to answer where it's possible would it be worth the inner courtyards of the old downtown buildings open to the pedestrians. And depending on the courtyards sizes the creation of stores, shops, or restaurants in them. After that they have to be justified why it would be worth or not worth to open such courtyards for the pedestrians.

More than half of the respondents (56%) has marked that he wants the opening of the inner courtyards for the public use and where it's possible the creation of stores, shops, and restaurants. Only 19% were disagreed with this type of development however the rate who has marked the "I do not know" answer was pretty high (25%) (Fig. 4.).

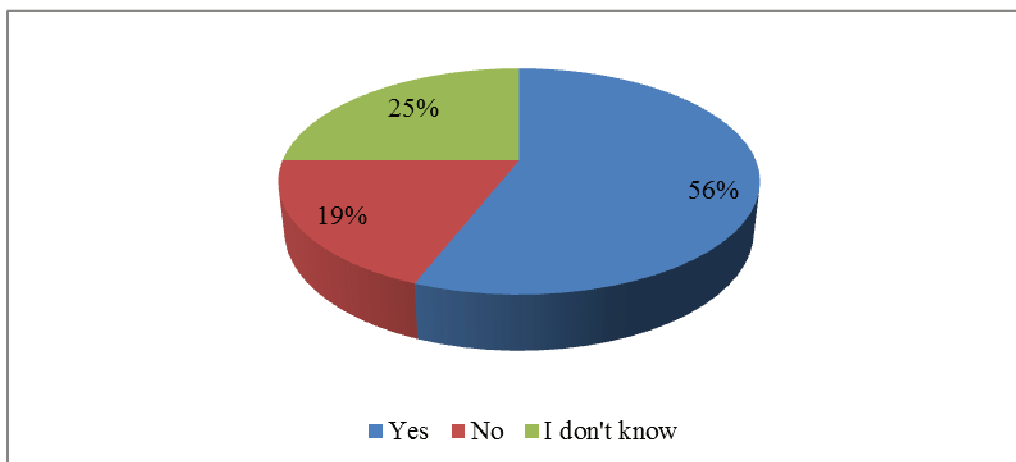


Fig. 4.: The respondents answer regarding on that where it is possible would it be worthy the old inner city buildings yards (for example by the model of the Bécsi garden, or the Gozsgu garden) open for the pedestrians and creating in them even shops, stores, or smaller restaurants

Those who had supported the public opening of the inner courtyards for the pedestrian traffic had primarily highlighted the "mood" and the "magic" of the courtyards. But more people had mentioned the tourist attractiveness and they would like to visit themselves such places. And some people because of the trading and restaurant creation possibility have thought that it would be worth the public open of the courtyards. From the answers received it turned out clearly that for the respondents it's important that the historical city centers should have not only stores, shops or restaurants but smaller "more intimate" inner spaces. It's important for them that the city where they are living should be not just varied and colourful but it should have unique mood.

Those who were disagree with the public opening of the inner courtyards for the pedestrian traffic mostly they have referred to the generated traffic which would confuse the calm of the there living people. And some people had given that answer that the stores there wouldn't have proper traffic or the rent would be so high which due to they have to close later. It must be noted that the survey doesn't had information about that the inner courtyards can be closed for the night. Therefore probably the rate of the answer would have changed if this would be mentioned because as it could be seen, more than half of the respondents had even so supported the public opening of the inner courtyards.

## 5 CONCLUSION

From the results of the survey can be definitely concluded, that for the people who lives in cities are important, that the square or park which is located next to them must have varied flora. This is confirmed by that English study in which was mentioned, that for the people who lives in cities is important to have in some way connection to nature. (Thompson, 2002) Because by the squares and parks were almost equally marked the plants. And in the large cities the public spaces could provide place for the significant number of plants.

Which must be also highlighted in the case of the public spaces is beside of the plants is the water. But more like the microclimate and mood enhancement function of the water because as it was showed the respondents had prefer more the fountain against the drinking fountain.

The squares and the parks first of all must provide opportunities for relaxation and recreation. In both cases were this marked in the highest rate by the respondents. The other aspects have been separated from each other after that but similar support has become in both cases the placement of public lavatory. The second most supported function of the parks were the playground until in the case of the squares the restaurants and terraces. According to that the parks has to give the opportunity for families to relaxation and ensure the entertainment of children. So it can be said that for the people who lives in the cities primarily considering

the parks as appropriate places to relaxation for the whole family. In contrast to this the primary function of the squares besides of relaxation is the “entertainment” and the “catering”. Because besides of the restaurants most people would like to see events on the squares. Therefore we can say that on the essential historical use and function of the parks and squares no change has occurred. And the surveyed had confirmed these essential functions and hasn't given newer needs.

The rest of the research has dealt with the inner courtyards. As it was showed most people want that where it is possible the inner courtyards should be open for the pedestrians and to have such functions (stores, shops, restaurants, etc.) which can be found around any square. All of this was justified by most people that in this way the city center would be much more charming which is so for the tourist could become more attractive.

According to the results of the research the inner courtyards giving good possibilities for the expansion of the public spaces in the growing population cities. Because the inner courtyards could function as smaller squares island like in the city (centers). Furthermore similar to the squares can be appearing on them the catering and the trade. True due to their size not or only limited could give possibilities for certain services (eg. events) or street furniture (eg. fountain). But these courtyards are also able to become giving place for meeting, dialogue, or relaxation for the people who lives in the cities as it was mentioned in the beginning of the study. Therefore in the future it would be worth to made further researches related with the use and the pedestrian traffic of the inner courtyards.

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