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Urban Public Space in The Context of a New Era, Case of Annaba City-Algeria

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Abstract

Urban public space is an essential element of the urban environment that contributes to the quality of urban life called to create a certain dynamic, places of life, places of meeting, of use, of conviviality, and of social cohesion, providing multiple environmental and health benefits. This urban space can become even more critical in times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, where citizens face increased health and economic stress. As part of our study, we conducted questionnaire surveys during the period in which restrictive measures were imposed in response to the pandemic in Annaba city- Algeria, which has many public urban spaces (gardens, green spaces, squares...), these surveys were intended for users on their attendance and their perception of these spaces since the onset of this pandemic COVID-19, and the challenges they see for the future. Therefore, the findings of our study demonstrated the footprint of COVID-19 on urban spaces and their frequentation, as well as preventive measures in order to gain insight into urban planning and conception.

Keywords: Urban public space, Environment, The city of Annaba, Impact, COVID-19.

1. Introduction

Public space is an essential element of the urban environment which contributes to the quality of urban life called upon to create a certain dynamic, places of life, places of meeting, of use, providing multiple environmental and health benefits, as well as beneficial effects on physical and mental health.

This space can become even more critical in times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, where citizens are facing increased health and economic stress, which leads us to ask the following questions:

Is it possible that this crisis fundamentally changes our relationship with public space and the environment! What are these changes? And what prospects for urban planning and design in a post COVID-19 world?

2. Study Site

Our study was conducted in the city of Annaba which is a coastal town in eastern Algeria, the 3rd largest city after the capital Algiers and Oran. 4th largest city in Algeria in terms of number of inhabitants, after the capital Algiers, Oran and Constantine. Annaba is a city known for its diversity of public space which varies between gardens, square, parks... etc.

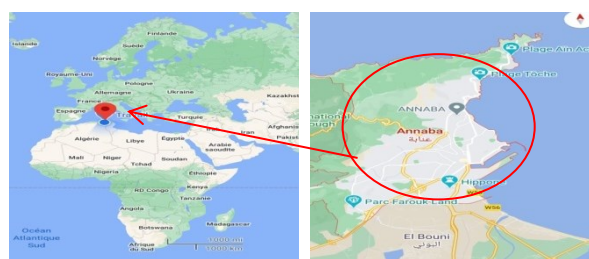


Figure 1. The location of the city of Annaba: Google maps.



Figure 2. (a) Carob garden, Annaba, Algeria, (b) Place of August 19, 1958 Annaba, Algeria, (c) Champs de Mars Garden

3. Materials and Methods

As part of our study, we conducted questionnaire surveys during the period during which restrictive measures were imposed in response to the pandemic in the city of Annaba in Algeria, which has many public spaces; among other places, plots, as well as gardens, these surveys were intended for users of public spaces (plaza, plaza, garden, etc.) on their attendance and their perception of these spaces since the onset of this pandemic of COVID-19, and the challenges they see for the future.

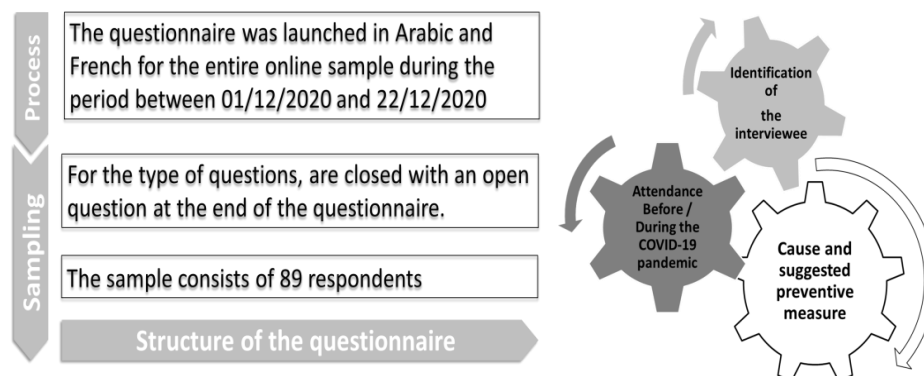


Figure 3. Methodological diagram

4. Results and discussion

To all questions, the answers allowed to draw the following results:

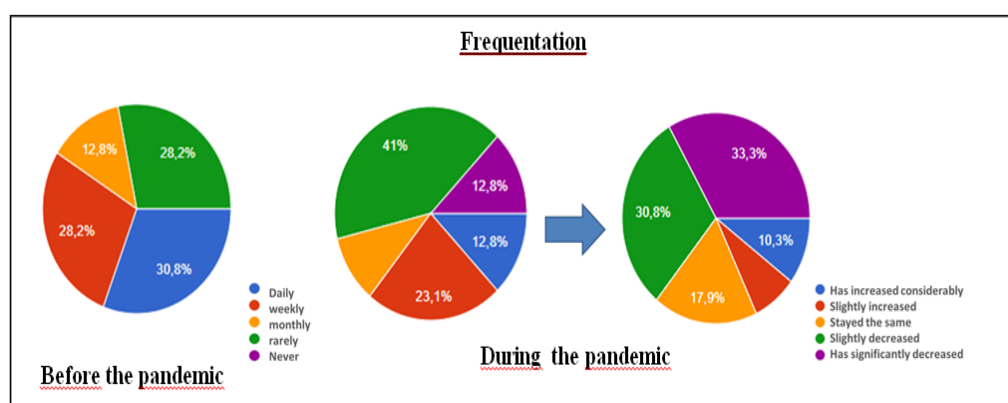


Figure 4. Frequentation before and during the pandemic

-30.8 % of respondents used public space daily before the pandemic COVID-19.

-While 41 % of users frequented public space rarely during the pandemic, which means that the frequentation of public spaces in Annaba has considerably decreased.

Users find that their attendance has decreased because...

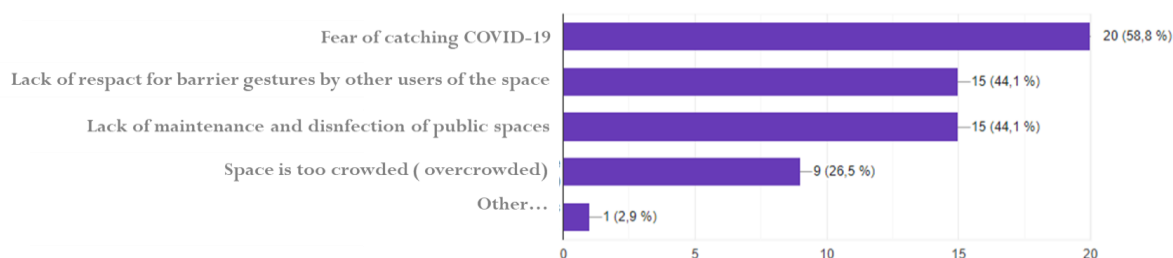


Figure 5. Shows the causes of decrease in frequentation of public spaces.

-58.8 % of the people who answered our questionnaire visited rarely the public space for fear of catching COVID-19.

-44 % find that there is a lack of respect for barrier gestures and also a lack of maintenance.

-While 26.5 % find that the space is too crowded which prevents them from visiting it.

Users find that their traffic has stayed the same / increased because...

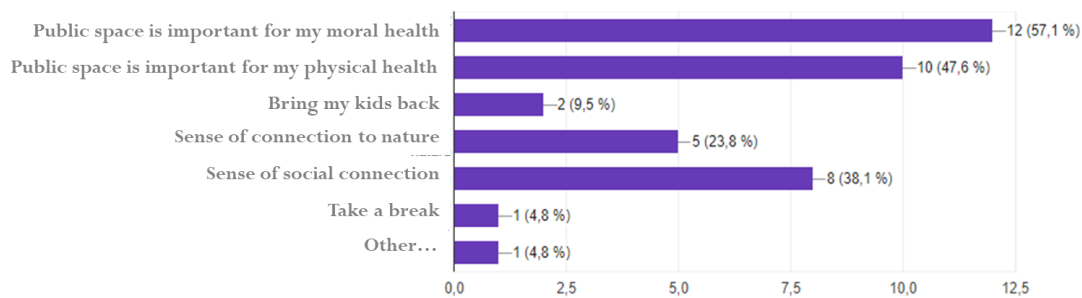


Figure 6. Shows the causes of the increase in frequentation of public spaces.

-However less 57 % of these surveyed frequent public spaces such as gardens... and find that these places are even more essential to good health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

38 % of respondents say that these spaces have become more important for their social relationships as well as their feeling of good with nature.

The preventive measures put in place by the state:

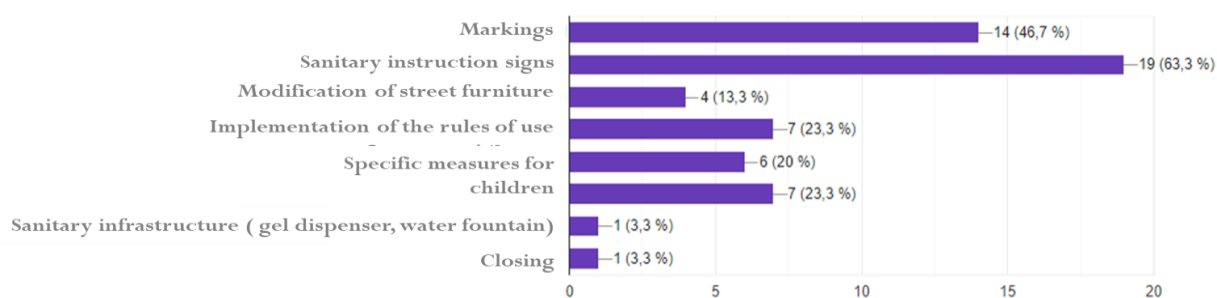


Figure 7. The preventive measures put in place.

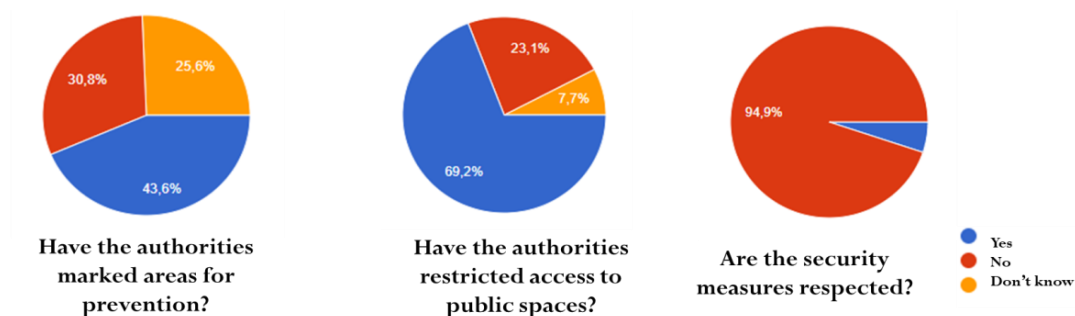


Figure 8. Preventive measures put in place by authorities.

-94 % declare that the authorities have implemented preventive measures but which are not respected by users and find that citizen mobilization is essential to support safe use of public space.

- At the end of the questionnaire we asked the interviewees to give us their opinions and suggestions concerning preventive measures, the response field was composed of the following terms:



Figure 9. Word cloud showing answer field.

The results of our study revealed that public spaces during this pandemic have become very little frequented and neglected, for fear of catching the virus, nevertheless citizens find that these spaces are important for their physical and moral health as well as their social relations, and several suggestions have been made to limit the spread of the virus and be able to visit them safely.

5. Conclusion

Public space contributes to an increased quality of life, in a period when several aspects of life are disrupted. Several user-friendly measures can be implemented, these measures will limit the spread of the virus when frequenting these places; among these measures have found:

- Clean public facilities (water fountain, swings, benches, tables, etc.).
- Communicate hygiene; physical distancing and usage instructions (Install explanatory panels in several places).
- Provide access to sanitary facilities (toilet blocks, hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers or mobile hand washing stations, water fountain).
- Modify the arrangements, the furniture and the rules of use (different arrangements so that the pieces of furniture are far from each other).
- Delimit small perimeters for family bubbles (distancing).
- Improve accessibility to public spaces.
- Specific measures for children (specific info graphics, arrangements promoting free play or games drawn on the ground).

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Conflict of interests

The Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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