

**Representation of Nature-Based Leisure Experiences in New Media: A Qualitative Study on
Online Reviews**

**Representação de Experiências de Lazer Baseadas na Natureza em Novas Mídias: Um Estudo
Qualitativo sobre Avaliações Online**

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ABSTRACT: In a rapidly urbanizing world where alienation from the natural environment is increasing, it becomes crucial to understand how individuals perceive and represent their connection with nature through digital platforms. This research aims to explore nature-based leisure experiences in new media representations within the context of nature attachment, specifically focusing on the case of Isparta Gölcük Nature Park. Within the scope of the research, 1,649 posts related to the park on Google Maps between 2015 and 2025 were examined. Of these posts, 859 were reviews and ratings, while 790 were ratings only. A qualitative research approach was adopted in the study, and patterns found in online reviews shared on the Google Maps application were examined thematic content analysis method. The main consequences highlight three primary themes: connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind, opportunities for social interaction, and concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment. The findings reveal that direct interaction with nature is vital for psychological restoration and social integration. Additionally, it is observed that the park experience is conveyed to wider audiences through new media, as online reviews and experiences are shared in

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the digital environment and transformed into a collective memory. According to the research results, Gölcük Nature Park's opportunities for nature-based leisure activities play an important role in promoting a connection with nature. Furthermore, concerns expressed by visitors through new media highlight the need for effective environmental management strategies.

KEYWORDS: New Media, Online Reviews, Nature-Based Leisure, Human-Nature Interaction, Connectedness to Nature, Gölcük Nature Park

RESUMO: Em um mundo em rápida urbanização, onde o afastamento do ambiente natural está a aumentar, torna-se crucial entender como os indivíduos percebem e representam a sua conexão com a natureza por meio de plataformas digitais. Esta pesquisa visa explorar as experiências de lazer baseadas na natureza nas representações de novas mídias dentro do contexto da ligação com a natureza, focando especificamente no caso do Parque Natural Gölcük de Isparta. No âmbito da pesquisa, foram examinadas 1.649 publicações relacionadas ao parque no Google Maps entre 2015 e 2025. Dessas postagens, 859 eram avaliações e classificações, enquanto 790 eram apenas classificações. Adotou-se uma abordagem de pesquisa qualitativa, e os padrões encontrados nas avaliações online compartilhadas no aplicativo Google Maps foram examinados pelo método de análise de conteúdo temático. As principais conclusões destacam três temas primários: conexão com a natureza e busca por paz de espírito (restauração psicológica), oportunidades de interação social e preocupações com a proteção do ambiente natural. Os resultados revelam que a interação direta com a natureza é vital para a restauração psicológica e a integração social. Além disso, observa-se que a experiência do parque é transmitida a públicos mais amplos por meio de novas mídias, à medida que as avaliações e experiências online são compartilhadas no ambiente digital e transformadas em uma memória coletiva. De acordo com os resultados da pesquisa, as oportunidades do Parque Natural Gölcük para atividades de lazer baseadas na natureza desempenham um papel importante na promoção de uma conexão com a natureza. Além disso, as preocupações expressas pelos visitantes por meio das novas mídias destacam a necessidade de estratégias eficazes de gestão ambiental.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Novas Mídias, Avaliações Online, Lazer Baseado na Natureza, Interação Humano-Natureza, Ligação com a Natureza, Parque Natural Gölcük

1. Introduction

In today's world, where urbanization is increasing day by day, the sustainability of connection with nature is becoming increasingly important. With the growth of cities and advances in

technology, individuals feel disconnected from the natural environment, leading to various physical, psychological, and social problems (Bratman et al., 2015; de Almeida, 2020). This increasingly widespread situation has led to a growing interest in nature-based leisure activities (Lundmark and Müller, 2010; Winter et al., 2019). Understanding how individuals interact with nature is important not only academically, but also in terms of public health, environmental protection, and sustainable leisure experiences.

As a result of accelerating global urbanization trends, the relationship between people and nature is emerging as an increasingly important concern worldwide. As urbanization causes people to become increasingly distant from natural environments, the growing interest in nature-based leisure activities enables researchers to explore the effects of the concept of “nature-connectedness” on human well-being and environmental conservation (Mayer et al., 2009; Schultz, 2002). These leisure activities not only increase individuals’ interaction with nature but also support the development of ecological identity (Freire, 2013). Green spaces, in particular, are considered important places that allow individuals to connect with nature and develop environmental awareness (Klassen, 2010; Shafieiasl Nazarlou, 2022). The biophilic environments offered by green spaces strengthen individuals’ connection to nature by increasing their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interactions with nature (Wolf and Housley, 2014; Zylstra et al., 2014).

In today’s digital world, new media environments play a significant role in understanding how individuals’ interactions with everyday spaces are constructed at both individual and societal levels by enabling users to share their experiences online (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2024; Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2023; Lister et al., 2009; Lohmeier et al., 2025). At this point, user-generated (review-focused) content on online platforms such as Google Maps has become a valuable source of information for understanding visitor experiences and perceptions (Aydın, 2024; Lu and Stepchenkova, 2015; Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé, 2015; Mathayomchan and Taecharungroj, 2020). These evaluations provide direct and original accounts of individuals’ interactions with natural environments, offering extremely rich qualitative data for analysis (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Mkono and Tribe, 2017; Mohamed and Kronenberg, 2025; Narangajavana et al., 2017). Previous studies on human-nature interaction (Brymer et al., 2021; Hanna et al., 2019; Iqbal and Mansell, 2021; Ostermiller and Anderson, 2024; Vroegop, 2015) show that thematic analysis enables a deep understanding of the connection individuals establish with nature.

Firstly, it is important to address the GNP in this context, as it is an area that has been studied only to a limited extent in terms of visitor experiences and connection to nature (Akten and Gül, 2014; Yücedağ and Yelsiz, 2022), despite its significant potential from an ecological and recreational perspective. Furthermore, evaluating user-generated content on Google Maps offers a unique approach

to understanding visitor experiences (Alzboun et al., 2023; Măgdălin and Cehan,2022). This approach has the potential to reveal different dimensions of nature-based well-being through the analysis of real-time experience sharing.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

Studies examining the relationship between nature-based leisure activities and individuals' well-being have gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly as urbanization processes have led people to become increasingly disconnected from natural environments (Keniger et al., 2013; Shanahan et al., 2015). In this context, the concept of "nature-boundness" has emerged as an important conceptual framework for understanding how individuals develop and maintain their sense of connection with the natural world (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2009). The concept of connectedness to nature, introduced to the literature by Schultz (2002), refers to the degree to which individuals perceive nature as a component of their own self. The origins of this concept are based on studies of biophilia (Wilson, 1984) and ecological identity (Thomashow, 1996), which argue that humans have an innate connection to nature and that our relationship with the natural world plays an important role in shaping our sense of self.

Focusing on the development of this concept, Mayer and Frantz (2004) developed the nature attachment scale with the aim of determining individuals' levels of emotional attachment to the natural world. In this context, it has been found that individuals with higher levels of nature attachment have higher life satisfaction, ecological behaviors, and perspective-taking abilities. Building on this work, Nisbet et al. (2009) developed the relationship with nature scale, which encompasses the cognitive, emotional, and experiential aspects of human-nature relationships, and demonstrated that attachment to nature has a positive relationship with environmental concern, well-being, and environmental behavior.

Nature-based leisure activities play an important role in developing a connection to nature, especially for city dwellers who have limited access to natural environments in their daily lives (Akçakese et al., 2024; Mayer et al., 2009). These activities, which enable individuals to interact directly with nature, can lay the groundwork for rich experiences that strengthen the bond with the natural world (Rosa et al., 2018; Zylstra et al., 2014). Various studies have examined the relationship between nature-based leisure activities and connectedness to nature. Mayer et al. (2009) state that even low levels of exposure to nature increase attachment to nature and positive affect, and have shown that, in general, being in nature has a stronger effect on increasing attachment to nature than simply viewing nature scenes.

Urban green spaces, in particular, are considered important places for individuals to develop a connection to nature, and it is stated that the existence of these areas supports the development of environmental awareness (Erasmus et al., 2023; Keniger et al., 2013). It is emphasized that green spaces strengthen individuals' relationships with nature and positively influence sustainable environmental behaviors by contributing to their physical, psychological, and social well-being (Akçakese et al., 2024; Shanahan et al., 2015). Similarly, Lencastre et al. (2024) have shown that individuals' experiences of urban green spaces are highly functional spaces in terms of their well-being and establishing meaningful connections with nature. Lumber et al. (2017) defined five different elements of connection to nature: contact, emotion, meaning, compassion, and beauty, thus emphasizing the importance of strengthening emotional bonds by interacting with nature through multiple senses to encourage this connection. In terms of leisure activities, Wolsko and Lindberg (2013) examined the relationship between recreational nature experiences, connection to nature, and psychological well-being, reporting that individuals who participated more in nature-based leisure activities had higher levels of connection to nature and psychological well-being.

Nature parks are generally defined as areas that promote the conservation and sustainable use of natural areas, while the literature also includes critical assessments of the construction and management of these areas (Cheng et al., 2022; Tanase, 2019). In this context, it is important to evaluate parks not as areas for the protection of ecosystems, but rather as products of specific political, economic, and socio-ecological processes (Paradiso, 2024). Indeed, processes such as determining the boundaries of nature parks, establishing management policies, and regulating visitor experiences create an artificial perception of nature that disregards its self-developing dynamics (Cronon, 1996; Simsek, 2023). The rationalization processes applied during the management of these areas result in natural areas being transformed into tourist consumption environments designed around specific aesthetic and recreational experiences (Jamal and Everett, 2004; Li et al., 2024; Matveevskaya et al., 2019; Ojeda, 2012). In other words, as Malesevic (2023) points out, in nature parks where nature is presented as "untouched", elements such as visitor management, infrastructure arrangements, and landscape design lead to the creation of a specific framework for the presentation of nature.

As digital technologies become increasingly prevalent in everyday life, researchers have begun to explore the role these technologies play in individuals' nature-based leisure experiences. New media tools shape users' information searches and preferences in leisure evaluation processes, highlighting the impact of online reviews, particularly on decision-making processes (Kavoura and Stavrianea, 2015; Sharmeen, 2015; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Gretzel and Yoo (2008), who investigated the use of online travel reviews in travel planning processes, revealed that such user-generated content plays an important role in shaping travel decisions and expectations. Lu and Stephenkova (2015) conducted

a systematic review of studies in the field of tourism on user-generated content and found that online reviews and social media posts generally provide important information about visitor experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction.

Although Google Maps has not been widely used in research on nature-based leisure activities, some studies indicate that online reviews have the potential to be a valuable source of data. For example, Mkono and Tribe (2017), who analyzed TripAdvisor reviews in line with examining tourist experiences, including cultural and nature-based tourist destinations, identified five different user roles that define users' online behavior: troll, activist, social critic, information seeker, and socialite. Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé (2015), who conducted a comprehensive analysis of user-generated content in tourism research using the case of Barcelona, demonstrated the functionality of online reviews as a data source in terms of accessing large volumes of real-time, easily accessible data that reveals authentic visitor experiences.

Located in the Mediterranean Region, GNP is a protected area known for its rich biodiversity and recreational potential. It is situated 12 kilometers from the center of Isparta province (Akten and Gül, 2014; Gül et al., 2005; Oğurlu et al., 2005). Characterized by volcanic cones and a rich landscape, GNP is a unique destination, especially for nature lovers (Canpolat, 2015; Tolunay et al., 2004). The ecological importance of the park stems from its unique geomorphological features, as well as its diverse flora and fauna (Özaltın and Özmen, 2005; Özçelik, 2023). On the other hand, despite its natural wealth and recreational opportunities, it is noted that GNP does not have a comprehensive recreation management plan (Akten and Gül, 2014). This situation presents both challenges and opportunities for researchers and policymakers in developing sustainable strategies that will strike a balance between conservation efforts and visitor experiences.

2. Objectives

Within the framework of the case of Isparta Gölcük Nature Park, the main objective of this study is to explore nature-based leisure experiences in new media representations in the context of attachment to nature. Based on this, this study aims to explore individuals' nature-based leisure experiences in terms of their connection to nature, using the case of Gölcük Nature Park (GNP). Therefore, this study focuses on thematically revealing the representations of visitors' nature-based leisure experiences in new media within the framework of attachment to nature by examining Google Maps reviews of Gölcük Nature Park.

The study aims to contribute to the literature on nature-based leisure and connection to nature from multiple perspectives. Within this framework of functionality, this study, which utilizes thematic analysis to identify recurring themes in Google Maps reviews by GNP visitors, aims to contribute to

understanding how nature-based leisure experiences are reflected in new media content created by users and how these online narratives can be linked to nature-based experiences. In conclusion, this study aims to fill the gap in this area by examining nature-based leisure experiences in GNP within the framework of previous studies on nature attachment, thereby contributing to our understanding of human-nature relationships and offering new insights into establishing sustainable and meaningful interactions with natural environments.

3. Methodology

This study, which examines the representations of nature-based leisure experiences in new media through Google Maps reviews, employs a qualitative research design. In this context, the research design is based on the interpretive paradigm, which aims to understand social phenomena through the meanings people assign to them (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This approach is highly functional in terms of thoroughly examining the reflections of GNP visitors' subjective experiences and perceptions in new media.

User-generated reviews for the GNP location on the Google Maps application constitute the primary data source for this study. Google Maps was selected as the data source due to its widespread use and the rich content it provides about visitor experiences (Öztürk Hacı, 2025; Shin et al., 2022). In addition to the reviews, the ratings given by users were also examined as supporting elements in the study. The data collection process involved extracting all GNP reviews from the Google Maps application and recording relevant data such as review dates, ratings, and reviewer information. Within the framework of obtaining a comprehensive dataset, 859 of the 1,649 posts made between August 2015, when the first review was written, and July 2025, when the data was collected, were reviews and ratings, while 790 were ratings only. Thematic analysis was conducted on only 859 reviews, but the ratings given by users were also examined within the scope of the research. This research design aligns with previous studies in tourism and leisure research that have used online reviews as a data source (Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé, 2015; Mkono and Tribe, 2017).

The online data collected was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, specifically utilizing thematic analysis, the general framework of which was outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Studies conducted by Iqbal and Mansell (2021) and Ostermiller and Anderson (2024) demonstrate that this method is extremely useful for exploring the complex and multifaceted nature of leisure experiences and connection to nature, as it allows for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) in the data. While flexibility is one of the significant advantages of thematic analysis, it is important to present the analysis process systematically and transparently. In this study, which adopts an inductive approach, the decision-making processes are clearly reported, and the process of how themes

were created, what data they were based on, and how their contextual meanings were shaped is detailed.

In this regard, within the framework of Braun and Clarke's (2006) "six-stage" cyclical thematic analysis, the reviews were coded into meaningful units after being read line by line, primarily to gain an in-depth understanding of the content and to familiarize ourselves with the data. These codes, organized through the MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2024 program, were categorized by examining the relationships between them and were then transformed into themes in line with the study's main objective. In this context, statements regarding nature-based leisure experiences and connection to nature have been brought together under the themes of "connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind," "opportunities for social interaction," and "concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment." These themes were then reviewed and interpreted by comparing them with coded quotes and the entire dataset, ensuring that the themes and categories were linked to the research question and literature, thus reaching their final form. To ensure the reliability of the research, the coding process was conducted cyclically using the constant comparative method, and initial codes were developed within the framework of collaborative negotiations and transformed into more comprehensive thematic categories. In addition, operational definitions of categories and themes have been created, and cross-checks have been performed to highlight different layers of meaning.

4. Results And Discussion

In the findings section of the study, patterns of people's nature-based leisure experiences in new media were attempted to be identified through reviews and ratings made on the Google Maps section. According to Google Maps data, a total of 1,649 reviews were made for Gölcük Nature Park between 2015 and 2025. Of these, 859 are commented and rated, while 790 consist only of ratings. This distinction shows that users express their parking experiences in different forms within the new media environment. Uncommented ratings quickly and concisely reflect the park's overall level of appreciation. On average, scores in this type of evaluation have ranged from 4.4 to 4.5. So, users who only give ratings generally associate the park with positive experiences. However, these types of ratings provide limited information because they do not reveal the positive or negative details of the experience.

Commented ratings allow for a more detailed description of park experiences. In text reviews, the average score fluctuated between 4.0 and 4.3 over the years, and particularly in 2023, it dropped to 4.0. This decline stems from criticisms regarding environmental cleanliness, overcrowding, management deficiencies, or the degradation of natural structures being reflected in the reviews. Despite this, positive reviews frequently highlighted the park's peaceful nature, its suitability for

family activities, and the beauty of its scenery. This situation aligns with the themes of “connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind” and “opportunities for social interaction” in the article. Uncommented ratings keep the park’s overall popularity high, while commented ratings provide a more complex, multi-dimensional, and critical portrait of visitor experiences. When both data types are evaluated together, it is understood that Gölcük Nature Park is represented in the digital environment with both quantitative satisfaction metrics and narrative experiences, thus transforming individual experiences into a collective digital memory.

The comparative graph derived from Google Maps data (Figure 1) provides important insights into how experiences at Gölcük Nature Park are represented in the new media environment. The rapid increase in the number of reviews since 2017 indicates that park experiences are not only lived in physical space but also become visible on online platforms. This situation indicates that users are moving from passive consumers to content creators, which is consistent with the participatory culture approach defined by Jenkins (2006a). Thus, park experiences are transformed into digital memory and shared with wider communities. Looking at the average scores, high values are observed between 2018 and 2020. During this period, visitors expressed that the theme of connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind were strongly embraced. However, one aspect of this increase is the pandemic process experienced in 2020. Due to the pandemic, indoor spaces were considered risky, making nature-based leisure areas more appealing; parks were seen as a “safe escape” during this period. This situation aligns with the high number of reviews and relatively positive ratings in 2020.

In contrast, the decline in scores after 2021 is noteworthy. The increase in visitor numbers following the lifting of pandemic restrictions has brought with it problems such as overcrowding in the park, environmental pollution, and degradation of natural structures. This situation has negatively impacted average scores, especially when considering the criticisms expressed in text reviews. Indeed, the prominent theme in the article, “concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment,” can be directly linked to these issues, which have become more visible in the post-pandemic period. The fact that the average scores of text reviews show a more fluctuating trend compared to all ratings indicates that users not only provide numerical evaluations but also narratively convey their experiences. Reviews like “good for a barbecue but too much trash” or “ideal if you’re looking for a quiet place” reveal different aspects of the park experience, serving both a guiding and critical function. This finding directly supports the theme of “experience sharing on new media” discussed in the article.

In conclusion, the graph supported by quantitative data validates the three main themes highlighted in the article (connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind, opportunities for social interaction, and concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment) with digital indicators. The pandemic process has further highlighted these trends, increasing the importance of nature-based

leisure experiences on one hand, while demonstrating that intensive use has amplified environmental concerns on the other. Thus, online reviews clearly demonstrate the role of new media in both the transmission of individual experiences and the process of building collective memory.

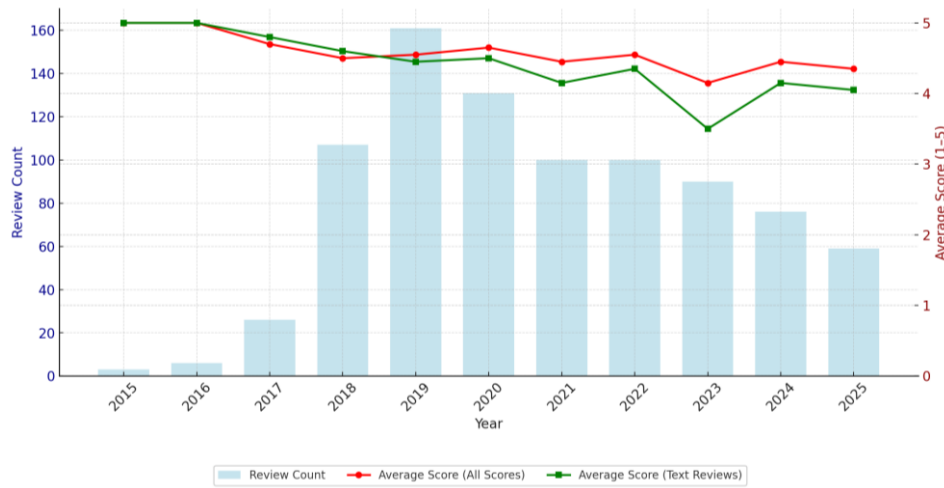


Figure 1. Comparison of Reviews and Ratings by Year
 Source: Google Maps Data, prepared by the authors

Using the case of GNP, and within the framework of explaining the representation of visitors’ nature-based leisure experiences in new media within the context of nature connectedness, this study employed inductive analysis of online review data from the Google Maps application, allowing themes and categories to emerge directly from the data “without attempting to fit them into a predetermined coding framework” (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In other words, the themes were developed through the continuous review of patterns emerging from the data itself, supported by contextual interpretations, rather than through predetermined categories. The themes and categories generated from the inductive analysis of the online data regarding visitors’ nature-based leisure experiences are presented below (Figure 2):

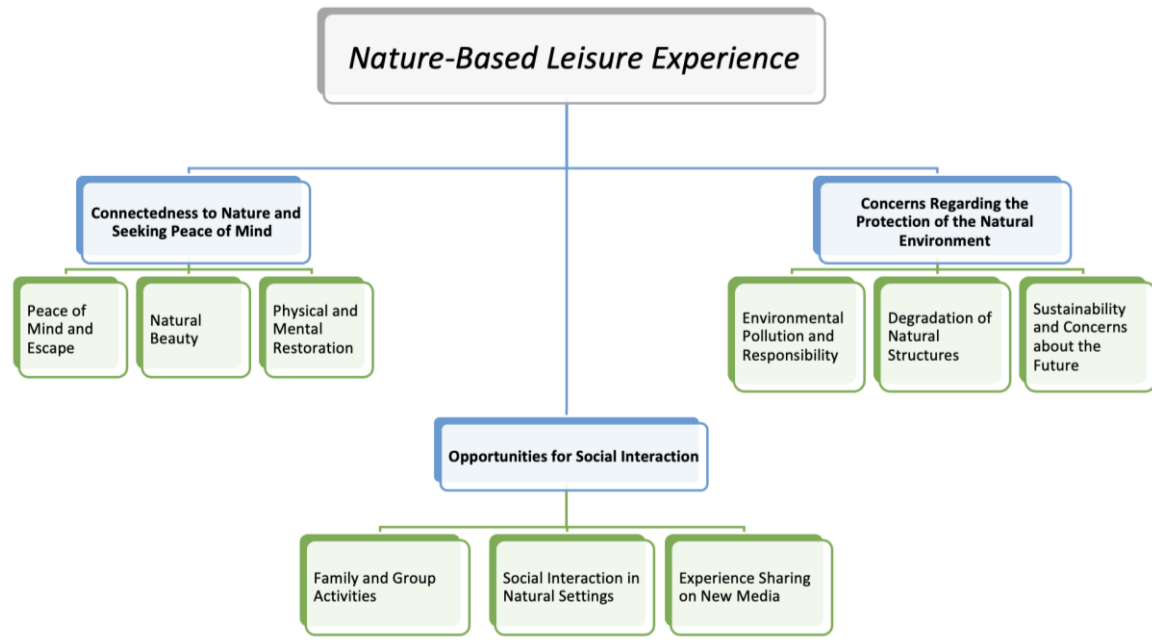


Figure 2. Themes and Categories Related to Nature-Based Leisure Experience
Source: Prepared by the authors

4.1. Findings on Connectedness to Nature and Seeking Peace of Mind

Looking at the “peace of mind and escape” category, it is evident that GNP strengthens visitors’ connection to nature by offering nature-based leisure experiences. Visitors describe the park as “a pleasant place where they can spend quiet, peaceful time, barbecuing with their families and friends in front of a beautiful landscape” and “a wonderful place where they can observe animals like squirrels and turtles in their natural habitat” highlighting the park’s opportunities for interaction with nature. It is stated that these interaction opportunities strengthen individuals’ connection with nature and increase their well-being levels (Capaldi et al., 2014). The park enriches the leisure experiences of individuals seeking an escape from the city's stress: “Perfect for picnics and relaxing, the scenery is wonderful.” Interaction with natural environments serves as a significant resource for individuals in terms of stress management (Berto, 2014).

The search for a quiet and peaceful environment is another feature highlighted by visitors. In this context, the review “If you are looking for a quiet, peaceful, and serene place, Gölcük Lake Nature Park is just for you” indicates that the park meets this expectation. It is stated that natural environments help individuals focus their attention and reduce mental fatigue (Berman et al., 2008; Kaplan, 2001). The review, “The mountains and forests surrounding the lake offer peace with their unique beauty,” highlights the tranquil effect of the natural environment and the positive outcomes of interacting with nature. Similarly, those visiting the park with a desire to escape their daily routines say, “There’s a wonderful lake view. It’s good for getting some fresh air.” These reviews indicate that GNP offers

visitors opportunities to integrate with nature, escape the stress of city life, experience nature-based leisure activities, and find peace in a quiet and serene environment.

Within the context of the “natural beauty” category, it is observed that GNP reinforces the sense of connection to nature, which is highly admired by visitors. Within the framework of praising the scenery and nature, expressions such as “a complete natural wonder” and “a perfect natural wonder” are used about the park. It has been observed that these experiences in natural environments positively impact individuals' connection with nature and their overall attitudes toward the environment (Mayer and Frantz, 2004). The fact that Gölcük is a crater lake, is 30-35 meters deep, has walking paths around it, and offers an oxygen-rich environment among pine trees enriches visitors' experience of interacting with nature. It is known that activities carried out in natural environments have positive effects on individuals' mental and physical health (Pretty et al., 2005). Visitors seeking a unique nature experience have left reviews such as “It has a wonderful lake view” and “A lake that relaxes people with its perfect scenery, nature, and tranquility,” which are noteworthy. Visitors highlight the park's natural richness with phrases like “This place inside the forest is full of sounds and sights that nature offers,” and “Its crystal-clear air and bird chirping make it a wonderful place,” emphasizing the stunning details of nature. On the other hand, the review “Seeing wild horses in Gölcük is quite common and enjoyable” highlights the importance of the region's diversity in terms of nature-based leisure opportunities. These assessments show that GNP's natural beauty enhances visitors' leisure experiences and connection to nature.

From the perspective of the “physical and mental restoration” category, it is evident that GNP facilitates visitors' physical and mental restoration through the opportunities it offers in terms of nature-based leisure. In terms of relaxation and renewal in a natural environment, the park is described as “an area where you can escape and rest quietly around the lake and also recharge your energy.” Previous studies in this field have highlighted the positive effects of nature experiences, particularly on mental health and emotional well-being (Bratman et al., 2015; Larson et al., 2016). In the context of sports and recreational opportunities, it is mentioned that visitors can walk all the way around the lake on a path. It is known that similar physical activities have positive effects on physical and mental well-being (Thompson Coon et al., 2011). Regarding physical health and fitness, the park is highlighted for its benefits in getting fresh air and being a great place to breathe clean air. It is also understood that during morning walks, wild horses are seen and wild ducks diving in and out of the lake enrich visitors' nature-based leisure experiences. For individuals seeking mental relaxation, the statement “if you are looking for a quiet, calm, and peaceful place, Gölcük Lake Nature Park is just for you” is noteworthy. Regarding renewal in a natural environment, the park is described as a perfect natural wonder, and the peaceful atmosphere it offers is emphasized. This situation aligns with Ulrich's

(2023) theory of stress reduction, which posits that natural environments promote physiological relaxation and emotional calming. These reviews indicate that GNP is an important leisure space that meets visitors' physical and mental restoration needs, strengthening their connection to nature.

Visitor reviews evaluated within the framework of the categories above reveal that GNP is an important venue for nature-based leisure activities, meeting the connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which, according to Şahin and Eşici (2020), focuses on meanings related to human actions, it is understood that the meanings individuals attribute to the park shape their interaction with nature. Within the framework of the “peace of mind and escape” category, it is understood that the park offers visitors the opportunity to escape the stress of urban life and integrate with nature. In this context, it is possible to explain the healing effect of natural environments on people through theories of overcoming stress and renewing attention because natural environments are extremely conducive in terms of the characteristics necessary for restorative experiences (Kaplan, 1995). Thanks to its quiet and peaceful atmosphere, individuals are seen to experience mental relaxation and meaningful leisure time, escaping their daily routines. The aesthetic value of natural areas has positive effects on individuals' environmental attitudes and behaviors (Gobster et al., 2007). At this point, reviews categorized as “natural beauty” indicate that the park's unique natural landscapes and biodiversity inspire awe in visitors and strengthen their connection to nature. Therefore, the park's natural features are gaining importance by contributing to individuals' increased interaction with nature, fostering a deep connection with the natural world. Nature-based recreational activities, which encourage a deeper connection with the natural environment, directly contribute to individuals' psychological well-being and positively impact their mental health (Wolsko et al., 2019). In this context, when the “physical and mental renewal” category is examined, it is noteworthy that the recreational opportunities offered by the park support visitors' healthy lifestyles, enriching their leisure experiences and enabling them to rejuvenate. In light of these findings, it is understood that GNP is a leisure space where nature lovers can find peace and enjoy pleasant times interacting with nature.

4.2. Findings on Opportunities for Social Interaction

Looking at the “family and group activities” category, it is evident that GNP is a nature-based leisure space that stands out for its various opportunities for families and groups. It is stated that family leisure activities carried out in natural areas strengthen individuals' connection to nature and strengthen bonds between family members (Izenstark and Ebata, 2017; Rantala and Puhakka, 2020). The reviews specifically mention the park's suitability for family picnics and barbecues, with phrases like “We're coming to barbecue or picnic” and “A nice weekend spot where you can picnic with your family”

highlighting the park's popularity among families for spending time in nature. The fact that shared experiences in nature strengthen family bonds and improve children's environmental awareness increases the importance of time spent together as a family in these natural environments (Aydın, 2025; Chawla, 2015). However, the review "It's a wonderful place for a family barbecue picnic, you can go for a walk, and dip your feet in the lake" highlights the other leisure activities the park offers. Similarly, the park's functionality for families' nature-based leisure experiences is expressed in reviews such as "A beautiful area under the trees with a lake view for picnics, where children can play" and "a beautiful nature park for family outings, walking and other sports activities, barbecues and meals, chatting, fresh air, and relaxation." Regarding ease of transportation, information about the park's accessibility is provided with the statement, "It's very close to the center of Isparta, I don't know of any public transportation, but you can go by your own car, taxi, or even by bicycle if you are physically fit." Based on these reviews, it is understood that GNP provides a suitable environment for family and group activities and offers various opportunities for visitors in terms of leisure time evaluation.

When examining the "social interaction in natural settings" category, it is observed that visitors prefer GNP for shared nature-based leisure activities. Participation in nature-based activities allows individuals to develop emotional connections with natural environments, increasing their attachment to those spaces (Wright and Mathews, 2015). In this context, the park is described as a natural area where families can enjoy quality time together and is considered one of the best places to visit with family. In terms of social interactions merging with nature, the park is described as a worthwhile place to visit with family, but the review "the only problem is zero security" highlights the importance of security. Reviews such as "It is a beautiful nature park for family outings, walking and other sports activities, barbecuing and eating, chatting, fresh air and relaxation" and "a place where you can go and have a pleasant time with your family or friends" emphasize that the park offers a suitable environment for family activities and social interactions. Participation in nature-focused group activities strengthens social bonds, which is extremely important for establishing a community-based environmental management approach (Dhakal, 2011). The review in English, "A great place to barbecue and relax under the trees beside the lake," and the review in Russian, "Много разных беседок, места для жарки. Спуск к озеру. Чистейшее озеро" (There are many different gazebos and places for barbecues. There is also a descent path down to the lake. The lake is very clean.) reveal that the park is also experienced by foreign visitors. Based on these reviews, the potential of GNP, which offers opportunities for social interaction in nature, to be a leisure space that reinforces a sense of connection to nature is highlighted.

When examining the category of "experience sharing on new media" it was found that online reviews make park experiences visible and reproduce them in the digital environment. Visitors not

only shared their time spent in the park but also engaged in a process of digital socialization by sharing their experiences with a wider community. For example, the statement “I uploaded my photos from Gölcük, let everyone see them” highlights the importance of visual content sharing, while the review “my advice to those coming here is to definitely bring hiking shoes” shows how experiences are transformed into guiding recommendations. Similarly, the phrase “we had a wonderful time as a family, and I wanted to share this memory” indicates the transfer of personal experiences to digital memory. These types of reviews reveal that users are not only consumers but also content creators, which aligns with Jenkins’ (2006a) participatory culture approach. Thus, the park experience is transported from physical space to digital space, creating a collective memory process.

Visitor reviews evaluated within the framework of the categories above indicate that GNP is an important recreational space where social interactions take place. Yurtseven and Oğuz (2021) generally state that urban green spaces strengthen individuals’ social bonds and promote interaction within the community. Within the “family and group activities” category, it is noteworthy that the park contributes to fostering a connection with nature through activities such as picnics, barbecues, and nature walks, particularly by providing a functional environment for families. Family-based nature activities positively impact the quality of family relationships by strengthening family bonds through shared experiences (Izenstark and Ravindran, 2022). Similarly, findings in the “social interaction in natural settings” category indicate that the park enhances visitors’ social relationships through shared leisure activities within the natural environment. It is understood that visitors, spending time in the park with their families and friends, had the opportunity to be in touch with nature and interact socially, thus engaging with nature. From a structural-functionalist perspective, parks as a social institution also have the function of promoting social diversity in addition to biological diversity (Carruthers Den Hoed, 2008). Today, a digital dimension is being added to this diversity, with park experiences being shared on new media through online reviews, contributing to the construction of “digital diversity” (Jenkins, 2006b). In this regard, the category “experience sharing on new media” reveals how park experiences are transformed into digital memory through online platforms. In this context, it is seen that GNP, which offers visitors various shared leisure experiences, is a functional leisure space not only for interacting with nature but also for social and digital interaction.

4.3. Findings on Concerns Regarding the Protection of the Natural Environment

When examining the “environmental pollution and responsibility” category, it is evident that GNP visitors expressed concerns about the pollution of nature and the lack of environmental awareness. Individuals visiting the park to spend their leisure time in a natural environment highlight issues regarding the park’s cleanliness with statements such as “The lake is very beautiful, but there is

no environmental cleanliness” and “Everywhere is covered in seed shells and cigarette butts.” It is stated that such environmental pollution problems can negatively affect individuals’ sense of connection to nature and change their attitudes toward natural areas (Halpenny, 2010; Menzel et al., 2024). In the context of a lack of environmental awareness, visitors are warned, “Don’t forget to throw your trash in the bins:~)”, and they emphasize individual responsibility and service expectations with the statement, “Our people’s public space sensitivity regarding cleanliness is well-known, but I have the right to expect a clean environment in a place where I paid 24 lira.” On the other hand, reviews like “The places are filthy, there isn’t even a trash can” and “Poor maintenance” highlight the park management’s inadequacy in this regard. Visitors, highlighting the importance of environmental protection, are calling on authorities and other visitors to take responsibility with statements such as “Please inspect this place and punish those who harm nature” and “Don’t litter, not even cigarette butts.” Developing effective management strategies is crucial for reducing environmental pollution in natural areas and promoting environmentally friendly behavior among visitors (Ramkissoon et al., 2013). At this point, visitor reviews indicate that the park is facing environmental pollution issues, and that visitors who come to the park in search of interaction with nature should be more sensitive to environmental awareness and cleanliness.

In the reviews under the category “degradation of natural structures,” it is observed that visitors’ concerns about the negative experiences they encountered at the GNP are increasing. The degradation of natural structures can weaken individuals’ connection to nature and negatively impact their sense of belonging (Alam et al., 2018; Carlsson, 2024). In this context, the statements “They planted trees in place of the ones they cut down as supposedly dangerous, but many of them have dried up” and “I couldn’t understand why these large historical trees were cut down” highlight that the cutting down of large and historical trees in the park negatively affected the natural texture. It is stated that visitors are interfering with the animals’ habitats in terms of damage to wildlife and the ecosystem, and a warning is issued: “You are a guest in the wild animals’ space.” The fact that this place is a nature park is emphasized in the phrase, “Is that your private garden? It’s a nature park, as the name suggests. Dozens of creatures normally live there, there’s a lake habitat.” Regarding the lack of landscaping, it is stated that the stones scattered around make the place look like a battlefield and the park is left bald when the trees are cut down. These reviews express concerns about the degradation of the natural structure in the GNP and highlight the need for measures to protect the ecosystem. The conservation and sustainable management of natural areas play an important role in strengthening individuals’ connection to nature and increasing their environmental awareness (Zhang et al., 2016).

Looking at the category of “sustainability and concerns about the future,” it is evident that visitors expressed worries about the future of GNP. In this context, visitors express their sadness and

concern that the lake's future is at risk with reviews such as, "It's heartbreaking to see such a natural wonder slowly disappearing" and "Gölcük Lake is disappearing every day. We need to let our children experience these beauties as soon as possible." Concerns about the sustainability of natural areas influence individuals' commitment to nature and can also increase their environmental responsibilities (Lee and Jan, 2015). Hughes et al. (2018) also emphasize that connectedness to nature is an important factor in developing environmental protection behaviors from childhood. At this point, visitors expressing environmental protection demands regarding the sustainability of interaction with nature emphasize the need for the park's conservation and improvement of environmental arrangements with reviews such as "Such a beautiful natural wonder must be protected in the best way" and "Maintenance and environmental arrangements could be more beautiful." The review "The lake's waters have receded quite a bit" highlights the drop in water level and raises concerns about the depletion of natural resources. It is understood from these reviews that visitors have serious concerns about the sustainability of GNP and its transfer to future generations.

Visitor reviews evaluated within the framework of the above categories indicate serious concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment in GNP. Köroğlu and Karaman (2014) emphasize that the development of nature-based tourism activities is closely related to the conservation of natural resources and highlight the importance of community-based management approaches in this process. In the reviews under the category "environmental pollution and responsibility," visitors' concerns about environmental pollution and irresponsibility regarding cleanliness, which negatively impact nature-based leisure experiences, are prominent. Positive experiences in clean natural environments increase emotional well-being and promote a sense of responsibility toward environmental management (Stodolska et al., 2017; Zafeiroudi, 2020). This situation is also consistent with the findings of Doronina et al. (2018), which showed that individuals with high environmental awareness are more likely to exhibit behaviors that reflect environmental consciousness. At this point, it is observed that the pollution of nature, especially due to a lack of environmental awareness, negatively affects the park's ecological structure. The findings in the "degradation of natural structures" category reveal that the natural structure has been degraded due to tree cutting and interventions in the ecosystem, and that wildlife has been harmed. It is also evident that the lack of landscaping negatively impacts the park's esthetic and ecological value, and fails to meet the expectations of individuals seeking nature-based leisure activities. Ajuhari et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of promoting pro-environmental behaviors as a strategy to prevent environmental degradation and ensure the sustainability of natural resources. When examining the "sustainability and concerns about the future" category, it is understood that visitors who want to interact with nature sustainably are concerned about the future of nature and that demands for conservation from a

sustainable environmental perspective are increasing. The reviews from visitors, reflecting their concerns about the preservation of ecological balance and the depletion of natural resources, highlight the urgent need for action regarding the park's future. Sustainable park management is a multifaceted process that requires consideration of ecological, social, and economic factors, as well as a participatory approach (Geng, 2021; Oladeji and Fatukasi, 2017). In this context, developing comprehensive strategies to address concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment within the GNP becomes extremely important.

5. Conclusions

This study, which focuses on the increasing detachment from natural areas caused by urbanization processes, aims to contribute to the exploration of the importance of immersive interactions in natural environments for reducing alienation from nature and increasing psychological well-being. Based on the case of Gölcük Nature Park (GNP), an area known for its rich biodiversity and recreational potential, visitor-generated review data from the Google Maps application was analyzed using qualitative content analysis to explain visitors' nature-based leisure experiences within the framework of nature connectedness. Online data interpreted within the themes of "connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind", "opportunities for social interaction," and "concerns regarding the protection of the natural environment" reveals that direct interactions with natural environments like GNP are not only crucial for escaping the stress of urban life, but also for developing environmental awareness, psychological restoration, and social cohesion.

The findings of the study emphasize the importance of protecting natural areas and encouraging access to them, which play a key role in maintaining individuals' connection to nature in the face of the problems brought by modern urban life. The study is presented more concretely within the framework of its themes, highlighting GNP's function as a meaningful natural environment where visitors develop a deep sense of connection to nature. The fact that visitors describe the park as a place that facilitates both physical and mental renewal is explained within the theme of "connectedness to nature and seeking peace of mind." Visitor narratives reflect that personal and collective meanings are imbued in the GNP, and that it functions as a representation of peace, renewal, and social belonging. At this point, the park becomes a space where individuals can re-evaluate their relationship with nature, demonstrating that leisure areas are not only physical spaces but also contribute to the formation of environmental identities (Clayton and Opatow, 2003). The peaceful environment, wildlife viewing opportunities, and the park's overall healing atmosphere align with research demonstrating the positive effects of nature on well-being and stress reduction (Kaplan, 1995; Ulrich, 2023). Thus, the park, which

goes beyond its physical features, serves as a catalyst for psychological restoration, strengthening individuals' connection with the natural environment.

The findings on the theme of “opportunities for social interaction” reveal the role of the GNP in strengthening social bonds through nature-based activities. The park, which facilitates the intergenerational transfer of environmental values, functions as a space for social interaction. Visitor reviews evaluated in this context are supported by studies on the formative effects of family-focused nature experiences on environmental conservation and the development of a sense of ecological responsibility (Chawla, 2015; Hughes et al., 2018). On the other hand, in the findings related to the theme of “concerns about the protection of the natural environment,” it is observed that visitors express their concerns about environmental degradation. These concerns highlight problematic issues that threaten the park's future in terms of maintaining biodiversity and environmental balance, due to irresponsible visitor behavior and management deficiencies. At this point, the necessity of developing comprehensive environmental management strategies to ensure the ecological sustainability of the park is emphasized.

The interactive nature of new media tools makes it possible to transfer nature-based leisure experiences to online environments, allowing users to position themselves not only as consumers but also as content creators. This study, which utilizes user-generated online content as a unique data source for explaining leisure experiences, contributes to the existing literature by revealing the role of nature-based leisure activities in increasing connection to nature. Methodologically, utilizing visitor narratives from digital platforms offers a new perspective on explaining individual experiences of human-nature interactions. In this context, the study highlights the potential of using digital data sources in the field of leisure studies, thereby expanding the methodological possibilities available to researchers in this area.

In conclusion, this study, conducted using the case of GNP, illustrates the importance of developing a connection with nature in today's society and the challenges that come with it. This park, which offers extremely important opportunities for personal restoration and social interaction in a natural context, also faces the devastating effects of environmental violations. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that brings together scientific research, pragmatic management practices, and proactive visitor engagement to ensure the park's ecological and social functions are preserved for future generations. This approach is important for ensuring the sustainability of the human-nature relationship, which is of vital importance in today's world, as it allows natural conservation areas like GNP to continue providing restorative and healing experiences.

6. Recommendations

In future studies in this field, it may be beneficial to investigate how different sociodemographic groups interpret natural areas. Longitudinal studies can help understand how changes in social values, urbanization patterns, and environmental policies affect individuals' relationships with nature over time. Interdisciplinary studies conducted within the intersection of leisure studies, environmental science, and sociology can pave the way for a deeper understanding of the reciprocal relationship between society and the natural environment.

From a practical perspective, this study underscores the necessity for park management and policymakers to adopt strategies addressing the sociocultural dimensions of environmental protection and visitor experiences. These strategies may include comprehensive environmental education programs to make visitors aware of the consequences of their behavior, improvements to waste management infrastructure, and the promotion of conservation activities. Including local communities in participatory management processes can foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for natural areas, in line with community-based conservation principles. At this point, stakeholder engagement, including feedback from visitors, local communities, and environmental organizations, is essential for developing management strategies to ensure the park's long-term sustainability.

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