Improving youth well-being and social integration: the role of leisure in organized public spaces in Kazakhstan
Mejorar el bienestar y la integración social de los jóvenes: el papel del ocio en los espacios públicos organizados en Kazajstán

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of youth participation in organized public spaces on the well-being and social integration of young people in Kazakhstan, with a focus on leisure activities. Through empirical research and analysis, the research aims to elucidate how active engagement in these spaces influences the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of youth. The study involved 420 students from one of Kazakhstan's universities and divided them into the influence and control groups. The research tools were the Youth Well-Being Scale (YWBS) and the Youth Social Integration Scale (YSIS). The influence group demonstrated a significant increase in well-being and social integration. This result confirms the significant positive effect of interventions based on leisure activities in public spaces. The study offers practical recommendations for improving the well-being and social integration of young people. These findings also contribute to the scientific understanding of the gender specifics in this context. The article emphasizes the importance of organizing public space for positive youth development through leisure due to the identified positive effects.
Keywords: leisure; public spaces; social integration; well-being; youth

Resumen. El objetivo de este estudio es investigar el impacto de la participación juvenil en espacios públicos organizados sobre el bienestar y la integración social de los jóvenes en Kazajstán, centrándose en las actividades de ocio. A través de investigaciones y análisis empíricos, la investigación tiene como objetivo dilucidar cómo la participación activa en estos espacios influye en el bienestar físico, emocional y psicológico de los jóvenes. En el estudio participaron 420 estudiantes de una de las universidades de Kazajstán y los dividieron en grupos de influencia y control. Las herramientas de investigación fueron la Escala de Bienestar Juvenil (YWBS) y la Escala de Integración Social Juvenil (YSIS). El grupo de influencia demostró un aumento significativo en el bienestar y la integración social. Este resultado confirma el importante efecto positivo de las intervenciones basadas en actividades de ocio en los espacios públicos. El estudio ofrece recomendaciones prácticas para mejorar el bienestar y la integración social de los jóvenes. Estos hallazgos también contribuyen a la comprensión científica de las particularidades de género en este contexto. El artículo enfatiza la importancia de organizar el espacio público para el desarrollo positivo de los jóvenes a través del ocio debido a los efectos positivos identificados.
Palabras clave: ocio; Espacios públicos; integración social; bienestar; juventud

Introduction

Organized public spaces, from community centers to parks, sports, and cultural facilities, occupy a central place in the structure of society (Latham & Layton, 2019; Madanipour, 2021). These spaces provide opportunities for structured leisure, allowing for skill development, self-expression, and interaction with peers and mentors (Benita et al., 2019; Lenz, 2022; Mandeli, 2019). In addition, in the context of Kazakhstan, organized public spaces are crucial. The rich cultural heritage of the country, deeply rooted in traditions and customs, creates a unique background, which underlies the public leisure of young people (Dengelbaeva et al., 2020; Roberts, 2019). In the current twenty-first century, the well-being and social integration of youth are becoming increasingly important topics of concern to society around the world (Bano et al., 2019; Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). Young people in Kazakhstan, like their peers around the world, face various challenges. These challenges include access to education, employment opportunities, and the desire for a fulfilling life (Kutym et al., 2020). The solution to these problems largely depends on the youth's well-being and social integration. Although these two concepts are multifaceted, it is obvious that organized public spaces can contribute to both factors (Arslan, 2021). It is interesting and relevant to research the connection between the participation of Kazakh youth in organized public spaces and their well-being and social integration (Ettekal & Agans, 2020; Shnarbekova, 2020).

The concept of well-being encompasses the physical, psychological, and social aspects intertwined in the lives of young people (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Similarly, social integration reflects the involvement and connection of people with their communities, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support (Rubin et al., 2019). There is evidence of how structured leisure contributes to physical health and psychological well-being (Brown, 2013; Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Nordbø et al., 2020). Understanding the experience of young people in organized public spaces also requires studying gender dynamics. Gender plays an essential role in shaping how people behave in public places. This factor influences the opportunities available to them and the expectations placed on them (Beebeejaun, 2017; Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021). This article aims to investigate the supposed effects of youth participation in organized public spaces on the well-being and social integration of Kazakh youth. In this context, the study focuses on leisure. Through empirical research and analysis, the paper seeks to provide insight into how active participation in these spaces affects the lives of young people. In addition, the study pays particular attention to gender differences. In the context of existing research, this article addresses gaps in understanding the impact of

organized public spaces on youth in Kazakhstan, an area that has been previously underexplored. The study draws on theoretical foundations of positive youth development and social integration, expanding them through empirical analysis of gender aspects. The article holds scholarly value by contributing to the understanding of how leisure activities influence Kazakhstani youth, providing insights into the significance of organized public spaces in enhancing youth's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, it contributes by highlighting the role of gender differences in perceptions and participation in leisure activities, thereby informing the development of more inclusive programs. It also provides practical ideas to policymakers and educational institutions to create a supportive environment. This environment can foster the well-being and social integration of young people, ultimately developing a healthier and more integrated young population in Kazakhstan. This study can also become the basis for the development of targeted measures aimed at improving young people's overall quality of life.

Literature Review

Cultural and leisure activities refer to a wide range of events, covering various aspects of culture, entertainment, and personal interests. People engage in these activities in their free time to enrich their lives, relax, have fun, and attend cultural, artistic, or entertainment events (Kamenets et al., 2017). Organized public spaces serve as venues for socialization, leisure, and entertainment (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2015; Grinkrug, 2020). These spaces are carefully planned, developed, and maintained in order to provide the public with a range of amenities and opportunities (Burdakova & Byankin, 2019). Young people use organized public spaces differently depending on the offered advantages. For instance, public parks and recreation areas are green areas for recreation, sports, picnics, and outdoor activities (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019). Community centers offer a variety of programs and activities, such as workshops, classes, lessons, educational seminars, and so forth (Lowey, 2023). Public libraries provide not only access to books and educational resources but also places for learning, group discussions, and social events (Mersand et al., 2019). Sports stadiums, arenas, and facilities provide places to watch and participate in sporting events (Newman et al., 2022). There are various benefits that young people can get from visiting organized public places. Thus, physical activity improves physical health. Available environments for relaxation and stress relief can stabilize mental health. Finally, socialization opportunities allow young people to meet with peers, make new friends, and strengthen existing relationships (Acosta et al., 2021). Moreover, participation in various cultural and leisure activities can develop such skills as teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, and communication (Matraeva et al., 2020). Organized public spaces can provide a favorable environment for personal growth, self-expression, and self-confidence building. In turn, libraries and educational centers can offer resources and study spaces that improve academic success, as well as help balance leisure and work (Orel, 2019). Thus, organized public spaces can offer young people opportunities for physical, social, and intellectual development. These spaces serve as important components of communities, contributing to well-being and overall life quality. However, despite obvious advantages, some young people may ignore such places or activities. The most common reasons for this may include significant remoteness of proper infrastructure or its absence; negligent management; lack of advertising and promotion; difficulties in social integration; fear of rejection by the group; security problems (Grinkrug, 2020; Juvonen et al., 2019; Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021; Nurbatsin & Gazzola, 2022).

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that covers the overall quality of life and the sense of satisfaction, happiness, and contentment experienced by a person. It reflects the physical, emotional, social, and psychological state (Sterling et al., 2020). The theoretical basis of well-being rests on various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and philosophy. There are several theories of well-being. Hedonic well-being stems from the idea that people strive for happiness and try to minimize suffering (Ryff et al., 2021). Eudemonic well-being assumes that well-being is achieved through personal growth, purpose, meaning, and realization of one's values (Su et al., 2020). Subjective well-being (SWB) includes cognitive assessments of life satisfaction and emotional assessments of happiness (Das et al., 2020). In this context, one can recall positive psychology, which focuses on the study of human strengths, virtues, and factors that contribute to well-being (Lomas et al., 2021). For young people, well-being is essential. It lays the foundation for their future and affects their educational level, career success, and overall life satisfaction (González-García et al., 2022). A high level of well-being implies improved physical and mental health since positive emotions and stress reduction can positively affect the human body. Moreover, well-being is a key factor determining the overall quality of a person's life. This factor can influence social relationships, productivity, achievements, and social benefits (Sutton, 2020; Udayar et al., 2020). Research reported that life satisfaction significantly correlates with positive emotions, relationships, and achievements, as well as with lower levels of depression ([BLINDED] et al., 2023; Kern et al., 2015). Modern research is increasingly recognizing the complexities of youth well-being, particularly how socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors influence their overall life satisfaction and mental health (Lapp, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). According to some scientists, the concept of well-being has gone beyond psychological health to include social and environmental factors. This implies that young people find meaning and satisfaction through interaction with their environment (Betley et al., 2023; Siegel & Drulis, 2023). Other studies show that the well-being of young people significantly depends on their participation in social and recreational activities. These activities not only provide relaxation and pleasure, but also

contribute to a sense of belonging and purpose (Geng et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023). Social and recreational interactions typically contribute to resilience and adaptability, which are crucial in the process of young people's life formation (Puhakka & Hakoköngäs, 2024). Environmental factors also play a crucial role in shaping people's well-being. Green spaces in urban areas improve physical health and mental well-being by providing space for reflection, socialization, and interaction with nature (Clarke et al., 2023). In addition, recent theoretical studies have addressed the impact of economic conditions on the well-being of young people. According to some data, economic instability can lead to increased anxiety and stress among young people (Bashir & Qureshi, 2023). Understanding the well-being of youth is a global health priority. A high level of well-being ensures that young people can effectively live and function in society (Jamatia, 2023).

Social integration implies providing equal opportunities for all people to participate fully in society. This means creating an environment where everyone can access resources, services, and opportunities, as well as feel valued, respected, and integrated into the community (Taimur & Mursaleen, 2020). The theoretical basis of social integration is the theory of social capital. This theory assumes that social networks and relationships are valuable resources that can increase well-being and expand opportunities (Swanson et al., 2020). It also directly concerns human rights and social justice, emphasizing that everyone has the right to fully participate in the life of society (Bhat et al., 2022). The theory also rests on Amartya Sen's approach based on empowering and freeing people so they can live the life they value (Garcés Velástegui, 2020). For young people, social integration has a decisive influence on their formation and transition from childhood to adulthood. In this process, it is crucial to have established social contacts, be part of society, and experience its support and acceptance (Rubin et al., 2019). The transition from childhood to adulthood can be challenging for many young people. In this case, social inclusion initiatives can provide the necessary support network, reducing stress and promoting mental well-being. Thus, socially integrated students are more likely to actively participate in their studies, collaborate with peers, and benefit from a more enriching educational experience (Bano et al., 2019). The improvement of social integration is an essential investment in the future of an inclusive and cohesive society (Lakhal et al., 2020). Thus, given all of the above, organized public spaces of leisure can improve the well-being of students and their social integration. Organized public spaces contribute to leisure and stress reduction. Finally, these measures can provide opportunities to engage in physical activity, increase academic success, develop a sense of commonalities, and so forth. All these aspects serve as a fundamental basis for the current research.

Problem Statement
The current research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of public spaces for positive youth development through leisure, focusing on the example of Kazakhstan. It is important to study the expected positive effects of active participation in organized public spaces (in other words, cultural and leisure activities) on the general well-being and social integration of young people. Through empirical analysis, this study reveals whether participation in organized public spaces can affect the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of Kazakhstani youth. The study also attempts to identify how public spaces contribute to social integration, namely, a sense of belonging, social relations, and participation in the community. Another research task was to find possible gender differences in terms of well-being and the results of social integration in this context. Thus, the article pursues three objectives:

(1) The first task is to determine whether participation in organized public spaces affected the well-being (physical, emotional, and psychological) of respondents. It is necessary to compare the results of pre-tests and post-tests, find gender differences in indicators, and determine the reliability of intra-group differences.

(2) The second task is to establish whether participation in organized public spaces influences social integration, including a sense of belonging, social relations, and participation in the community. In this case, it is also necessary to compare the results of pre-tests and post-tests, identify gender differences in indicators, and determine the reliability of intra-group differences.

(3) The final task is to establish the reliability of the differences in the results between the control and influence groups by comparing the post-tests of well-being and social integration.

Methods and Materials

It was impossible to find acceptable tools that were developed or previously validated in Kazakhstan. Therefore, it was necessary to develop tools specifically for this study, namely the Youth Well-Being Scale (YWBS) and the Youth Social Integration Scale (YSIS). The Youth Well-being Scale (Appendix 1) contained three subscales related to physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, with ten statements each. The Youth Social Integration Scale (Appendix 2) also contained three subscales: Sense of Belonging, Social Relations, and Community Participation, with ten statements each. Thus, each scale had 30 items for evaluation on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 – " completely disagree" to 5 – "completely agree"). When developing the Youth Well-Being Scale (YWBS) and the Youth Social Integration Scale (YSIS), the goal was to cover the multifaceted aspects of well-being and social integration in the context of Kazakhstani youth. This goal required a careful selection of scale items that would be culturally significant and could accurately reflect local socio-economic conditions and lifestyles. Based on a wide range of existing literature and preliminary qualitative research, the questions cover the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of well-being, as well as a

sense of belonging, social relations, and community participation in social integration. The Youth Well-Being Scale and the Youth Social Integration Scale were tested on validity, reliability, and accuracy. Through a preliminary literature review, the authors found the existing scales of well-being and social integration, as well as the relevant theoretical foundations. These materials served as the basis for a comprehensive pool of items for each scale. A group of experts, including psychologists and researchers in this field, formed a set of items for each scale. They assessed the reliability of the content, namely, the relevance and representativeness of the elements. During additional revisions, the experts made some adjustments. Both scales were tested on a small sample of young people (n=30) to assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and conformity of statements. The subsequent revision was based on an iterative process. This revision allowed the authors to select the final pool of items for each scale. A reliability analysis was also conducted. Cronbach's Alpha measured internal consistency: the indicators ranged from 0.87 to 0.91. The reliability of the design was assessed by the correlation of the scales with other established indicators. To assess the stability of the scales over time, a subgroup of participants filled in the scales twice. The reliability of the second test was calculated to ensure the consistency of responses over time. Finally, the researchers developed recommendations for administrating, evaluating, and interpreting the scales to ensure their effective use in research and assessment.

Participants

The sample for the current study consisted of 420 university students from Kazakhstan, who were selected due to their accessibility and diversity of backgrounds. This sample reflected a wide range of young people living in urban areas. All the participants were students in their second, third, and fourth years of study at a Kazakh university. All of them voluntarily decided to participate in the study when they received information about the goals and objectives of the project. Thus, all students were randomly divided into two groups: control and influence. Table 1 provides more detailed information.

Table 1.
Data on respondents of this study.

Group	Total	Women	%	Men	%	Mean age (M)	SD
A (control)	210	123	58.57	87	41.43	20.87	1.58
B (influence)	210	117	55.71	93	44.29	20.54	1.79

The study guaranteed the confidentiality of the information and personal data provided by the participants. The control group included 123 women and 87 men (58.57% and 41.43%), and the influence group included 117 women and 93 men (55.71% and 44.29%). All participants studied at this university from the first year and did not change their educational institution. No foreign students were included in the sample.

Research Design

The current study lasted from September 2022 to May 2023 and implied an impact during one academic year. Thus, the students completed two questionnaires online in September (a pre-test) and then in May (a post-test). The results were automatically saved in online forms. The control group only completed the questionnaires without any additional interventions. However, these students could take part in any activities and visit public spaces. The influence group participated in a developed program and had to follow the scheduled activities. The program included visits to public spaces of various types and relevant activities (Table 2).

Table 2.
The program of cultural and leisure activities.

Public space	Activity
Local park	Group picnic, outdoor yoga classes, cleaning day, morning jog
Public garden	A master class on gardening indoor plants, a visit to a local food bank, the production of environmentally friendly crafts, seminars with invited lecturers
Sports arena	Group fitness class, friendly sports tournament, spectator experience (as fans), team sports games
Cultural center	An art exhibition, a master class in cultural dances, a local musical performance, a theater play
Youth center	A game tournament, creative art workshops, speeches of guest speakers, a seminar on youth initiatives
Public library	A book club meeting, storytelling workshop, a hobby seminar, a creative evening for writers
Science museum	Interactive scientific exhibitions, scientific discussions and seminars, a show in the planetarium with a guide, a visit to the local lore museum
Coworking	Networking events, skill exchange seminars, joint group projects, "happy hours", communication
Center of Public Services	Volunteering and charity, social initiatives, visits to lonely elderly people, educational seminars

All 210 participants were divided into twenty mini-groups of 10-11 people to attend the activities. Each mini-group had a curator – a teacher to accompany the students. In addition, each stage of the program involved various specialists: from sports instructors to scientists. The program had four planned activities for each month (one per week). During the holidays, the participants had several activities per week. The university managed all organizational issues, students participated in planned activities outside of school hours. In total, the participants made 36 visits to 9 types of public spaces during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Data Analysis

The completed scales were analyzed in the SPSS software package. The calculations of nonparametric criteria determined the significance of differences.

Ethical Issues

The study received the approval of the ethics committee and the full support of the university. The students from the control group had the full right to use any public spaces at will, no one restricted their rights and freedoms. The study

also provided for the inviolability of the respondents' private information.

Results

The first task of the study was to determine whether participation in organized public spaces affected the well-being of respondents. To this end, the authors compared the results of pre-tests and post-tests. It was also necessary to identify any gender differences in indicators and determine the reliability of intra-group differences. Table 3 presents statistical data on well-being dynamics. The Wilcoxon test served as a tool for determining the reliability of intra-group differences (significance level 0.005).

Table 3.
The data of the well-being subscales according to the YWBS pre-test and post-tests among the control and influence groups with gender focus.

		pre-test physical well-being	post-test physical well-being	pre-test emotional well-being	post-test emotional well-being	pre-test psychological well-being	post-test psychological well-being
The control group (women)	Mean	23.45	23.25	32.90	32.04	31.50	31.20
	The standard error of the mean	.473	.441	.369	.266	.276	.304
	Standard deviation	2.114	1.970	1.651	1.188	1.235	1.361
	Median	23.00	23.00	31.00	32.00	28.00	29.00
	Variance	4.471	3.882	2.726	1.411	1.526	1.853
	Kurtosis	-1.246	-1.171	-1.612	-1.576	-1.640	-1.002
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	.077	-.112	.176	-.050	.186	-.262
	t-value	.874		.739		.745	
The control group (men)	Mean	30.20	29.75	28.40	29.30	27.65	27.75
	The standard error of the mean	.706	.684	.336	.272	.221	.270
	Standard deviation	3.156	3.059	1.501	2.218	3.988	4.209
	Median	30.00	30.50	30.00	30.50	29.00	29.00
	Variance	9.958	9.355	2.253	1.484	.976	1.461
	Kurtosis	-.824	-.998	-.956	-1.647	-.770	-1.350
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	-.070	-.142	.681	.132	-.283	-.460
	t-value	658		.547		.847	
The influence group (women)	Mean	22.90	29.35	31.20	35.15	31.80	35.60
	The standard error of the mean	.497	.460	.304	.244	.277	.184
	Standard deviation	2.222	2.059	1.361	1.089	1.240	.821
	Median	23.00	29.00	27.00	32.00	27.00	30.00
	Variance	4.937	4.239	1.853	1.187	1.537	.674
	Kurtosis	-1.397	-.987	-1.002	-1.002	-1.401	-.830
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	-.020	-.284	-.262	.488	-.501	.914
	t-value	.000		.000		.000	
The influence group (men)	Mean	29.70	34.05	26.75	31.70	27.05	31.55
	The standard error of the mean	.831	.359	.354	.252	.170	.256
	Standard deviation	3.715	1.605	1.585	1.129	.759	1.146
	Median	29.50	36.00	27.00	32.00	27.00	32.00
	Variance	13.800	2.576	2.513	1.274	.576	1.313
	Kurtosis	-1.540	-1.550	-1.525	.253	-1.154	-1.379
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	.023	-.175	.193	-.801	-.086	-.136
	t-value	.000		.000		.000	

In the control group, the difference between pre-tests and post-tests among women is as follows: physical well-being is 0.20, emotional – 0.86, and psychological – 0.30. Among men, the difference indicators are 0.45, 0.90, and 0.10, respectively. All the values are statistically insignificant. In the influence group, the difference between pre-tests and post-tests among women on the physical well-being subscale is 6.45, emotional well-being is 3.95, and psychological well-being is 3.80. In the male influence group, the difference was 4.35, 4.95, and 4.50, for each subscale, respectively. The indicators in the influence group differ significantly on all three subscales, confirming the positive impact of the developed activities in public spaces on well-being. As for gender differences between the indicators of men and women, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test was used (Table 4). As the presented data shows, the indicators of men and women in the influence and control groups differ statistically significantly from each other. This result indicates that physical well-being was higher for men, while emotional and psychological well-being was higher for women.

Table 4.
The statistical significance of differences in YWBS subscales for men and women of control and influence groups.

	pre-test physical well-being	post-test physical well-being	pre-test emotional well-being	post-test emotional well-being	pre-test psychological well-being	post-test psychological well-being
The control group						
The Mann-Whitney U	16.000	15.000	12.000	137.000	80.500	86.000
The Wilcoxon W	226.000	225.000	222.000	347.000	290.500	296.000

Z	-4.994	-5.026	-5.149	-1.757	-3.361	-3.229
Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
			The influence group			
The Mann-Whitney U	24.500	.000	16.000	82.000	46.500	17.500
The Wilcoxon W	234.500	210.000	226.000	292.000	256.500	227.500
Z	-4.786	-5.439	-5.067	-3.286	-4.278	-5.034
Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000

The second task was to determine whether participation in organized public spaces affected social integration by comparing the results of pre-tests and post-tests. It was also necessary to find gender differences in indicators and determine the reliability of intra-group differences. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5.
The data of the social integration subscales according to the YSIS pre-test and post-tests among the control and influence groups with a gender focus.

		Sense of Belonging pre-test	Sense of Belonging post-test	Social Relations pre-test	Social Relations post-test	Community Participation pre-test	Community Participation post-test
The control group (women)	Mean	26.50	27.20	26.35	27.30	23.95	24.40
	The standard error of the mean	.366	.408	.342	.291	.387	.336
	Standard deviation	1.638	1.824	1.531	1.302	1.731	1.501
	Median	26.00	27.50	26.00	27.50	24.00	25.00
	Variance	2.684	3.326	2.345	1.695	2.997	2.253
	Kurtosis	-.449	-1.366	-.953	-.967	-1.831	-1.025
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	.838	.192	.804	-.305	.017	-.565
	t-value		.854		.741		.987
The control group (men)	Mean	29.60	29.50	30.10	30.90	28.90	29.20
	The standard error of the mean	.275	.394	.315	.280	.320	.287
	Standard deviation	1.231	1.762	1.410	1.252	1.433	1.281
	Median	26.50	27.00	27.00	27.00	25.00	23.00
	Variance	1.516	3.105	1.989	1.568	2.053	1.642
	Kurtosis	-.358	-1.080	-1.329	-.515	-.826	-.571
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	.496	.481	-.070	.207	-.656	.754
	t-value		.784		.881		.735
The influence group (women)	Mean	27.10	30.05	27.15	30.15	24.40	28.35
	The standard error of the mean	.369	.235	.233	.198	.380	.223
	Standard deviation	1.651	1.050	1.040	.887	1.698	.999
	Median	28.50	30.00	31.00	34.00	27.50	30.50
	Variance	2.726	1.103	1.082	.787	2.884	.997
	Kurtosis	-.819	-1.001	-1.069	-1.786	-1.426	-.933
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	-.488	.498	.133	-.104	.011	-.024
	t-value		.000		.000		.000
The influence group (men)	Mean	29.75	33.50	30.75	35.25	27.90	32.15
	The standard error of the mean	.446	.276	.190	.204	.380	.393
	Standard deviation	1.997	1.235	.851	.910	1.698	1.755
	Median	28.50	33.00	30.50	36.00	27.50	35.00
	Variance	3.987	1.526	.724	.829	2.884	3.082
	Kurtosis	-1.691	-1.640	-1.416	-.371	-1.009	-.634
	The standard error of the kurtosis	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992	.992
	Asymmetry	-.278	-.186	.534	.378	-.011	-.772
	t-value		.000		.000		.000

Women from the control group showed insignificant dynamics in indicators. Consequently, the difference between the pre-test and the post-test was 0.70 in Sense of Belonging, 0.95 in Social Relations, and 0.45 in Community Participation. For men, these values were 0.10, 0.80, and 0.30, respectively. All t-values are above the 0.05 threshold. In the influence group, women showed an increase in indicators: the difference between the pre-test and the post-test was 2.95 (Sense of Belonging), 3.00 (Social Relations), and 3.95 (Community Participation). For men, the growth on these three scales was 3.75, 4.50, and 4.25, respectively. All t-values were 0.000, indicating the positive impact of the organized influence on the social integration of respondents. To determine gender differences in the indicators of men and women, the study used the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test for each of the two independent samples (Table 6).

Table 6.
The statistical significance of differences in YSIS subscales for men and women of control and influence groups.

	Sense of Belonging pre-test	Sense of Belonging post-test	Social Relations pre-test	Social Relations post-test	Community Participation pre-test	Community Participation post-test
			The control group			
The Mann-Whitney U	28.000	39.500	.000	.000	37.500	.000
The Wilcoxon W	308.000	249.500	210.000	210.000	247.500	210.000
Z	-2.821	-4.408	-5.467	-5.468	-4.467	-5.456

Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
The influence group						
The Mann-Whitney U	35.000	3.500	.000	.000	33.000	.000
The Wilcoxon W	345.000	213.500	210.000	210.000	243.000	210.000
Z	-1.790	-5.381	-5.478	-5.476	-4.572	-5.455
Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

The table above shows that all values significantly differ depending on gender. That is, the variables of social integration, such as a sense of belonging, social relations, and community participation, are higher among women. The third task of the study was to measure the reliability of the differences in the results between the control and influence groups. In this case, it was necessary to compare the results of the post-tests on well-being and social integration. For the comparison, the study also employed the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test (Table 7).

Table 7.
The statistical significance of the differences between the YWBS and YSIS post-tests among the control and influence groups

YWBS			
	Physical well-being	Emotional well-being	Psychological well-being
The Mann-Whitney U	232.500	155.000	189.000
The Wilcoxon W	1052.500	874.000	965.000
Z	-5.473	-4.516	-5.014
Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	.000	.002	.000
YSIS			
	Sense of Belonging	Social Relations	Community Participation
The Mann-Whitney U	187.000	154.000	149.000
The Wilcoxon W	562.500	369.000	452.000
Z	-4.541	-4.321	-4.697
Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	.000	.000	.000

All three YWBS and YSIS subscales demonstrate that the influence group had a higher level of well-being and social integration on the post-test. This result confirms a significant positive effect of leisure activities in public spaces on young people.

Discussion

The significant improvement in the well-being of the influence group suggests that the developed activities and interventions positively affected the participants. This fact highlights the potential of organized public spaces. These results can be due to several factors. Thus, for example, the influence group benefited from the activities in public places, confirming previous reports about the positive impact of organized activities on people (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2015). The interaction of the participants with other people in a common environment could improve their emotional and psychological well-being. In turn, physical activity could increase energy levels and reduce stress, positively affecting the studied indicators. A scientific paper (Schultchen et al., 2019) indicates that physical activity leads to improved mood and less stress/negative impact. Moreover, public places can offer activities that promote a sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, and purposefulness, which are important components of psychological well-be-

ing (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019). Feeling part of a community, an individual can experience increased emotional and psychological well-being. This feeling implies a sense of support and identity. Thus, previous studies have reported that loneliness and a lack of support negatively affect mental health (Brown et al., 2020). The influence group enjoyed the activities in public places. This fact could also impact the results since pleasant and satisfying activities improve well-being, and participants experience positive emotions and satisfaction (Armbrecht & Andersson, 2020).

Earlier scientific papers have noted that women all over the world have a higher level of well-being than men (Graham & Chattopadhyay, 2013). In this study, men reported higher physical well-being, while women reported higher emotional and psychological well-being. However, over the past decade, gender has not often been the subject of well-being studies. Consequently, the current observation is a complex phenomenon possibly influenced by a combination of biological, social, and individual factors. For example, this issue may concern questions about the biological differences between men and women (Jiang et al., 2021), social and gender roles (Hentschel et al., 2019), and the possibility of expressing emotions by men (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019). Women may be more likely to seek social support and use emotional expression as a coping mechanism (Fluharty & Fancourt, 2021), whereas men are more likely to engage in physical activity (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019). This fact can serve as an explanation for the obtained results.

Previous authors have reported that the lack of integration among students at the university reduces academic results and harms mental health (Rubin et al., 2019). The current study's results suggest that organized events in public places allowed the students to participate in social interactions and build connections with others, improving the mentioned indicator. Women are more likely to participate in group or social activities. Possibly, in this study, women were more actively engaged in activities and received more benefits from social integration. This fact explains their higher scores on the subscales. Thus, a study of Curșeu et al. (2018) showed that the proportion of women in groups, as well as the group's need for cognition and basic self-esteem, improves the quality of the discussion. The latter, in turn, predicts positive academic performance. Additionally, women often support broader and more diverse social support networks. These networks are reported (Belle & Benenson, 2014) to be highly "gendered", and women seek and receive more support from network members than men. At the same time, women tend to participate in dyadic relationships, whereas men prefer interaction in groups. Previous scientific papers have also addressed gender differences in the parameters studied in the current paper

(Akintunde et al., 2023; García-Fernández et al., 2021; Planey et al., 2019; Xin et al., 2019). The results of these authors confirm the presented data. Therefore, gender is a crucial factor in the design of measures to promote social inclusion and well-being in public spaces.

Some researchers (Benita et al., 2019) have studied the relationship between public spaces, the immediate environment, and short-term subjective well-being. The results provided weak empirical evidence that visiting parks and community centers increases the likelihood of short-term subjective well-being. At the same time, proximity to natural factors, such as green areas or reservoirs, was not statistically significant (Benita et al., 2019). This conclusion only confirms that interventions should address a wide range of such spaces, without focusing on only one. Another paper by Jennings and Bamkole (2019), on the contrary, associated urban green spaces with positive health behaviors and outcomes, including increased physical and social activity. Another study by Abbott-Chapman and Robertson (2015) showed that outdoor recreation has practical benefits for improving the resilience, engagement, long-term health, and well-being of young people. These findings also correlate with the current results.

Recent critical assessments in sports research have revealed the potential limitations of the traditional concept of positive youth development (PYD), which has also penetrated leisure studies. Thus, in one of the studies (Camiré et al., 2023) the authors advocate for a revision of the positivist concepts that have long dominated PYD discussions. The authors suggest that these concepts can no longer adequately reflect the complexities of youth development in modern contexts. This criticism is consistent with the arguments of operationalization, social justice, and posthumanism, which question the sufficiency of PYD in addressing the nuances of youth experience in various environments. The argument of social justice provides an important perspective. It highlights that PYD can sometimes overlook the socio-economic inequalities and cultural differences that affect youth development (Camiré et al., 2023). The operationalization argument criticizes PYD for rigid and linear models. These models may inaccurately reflect the dynamic and multifaceted ways young people interact with and benefit from public spaces. Leisure studies indicate the need to create structures that recognize the spontaneous, diverse, and nonlinear interaction of young people with the leisure environment. Recognizing this criticism of the traditional concept of positive youth development (PYD), the current study aims to broaden the discourse in leisure studies. The paper examines how new approaches can provide new insights into the role that public spaces play in the development of young people. At the same time, the results of this study highlight the significance of well-designed public spaces for improving the well-being and social integration of young people. Policymakers can use this information to identify priorities for the development of public spaces that promote active and meaningful youth participation. For teachers, integrating structured leisure into students' lives

can be a strategy for improving their mental health and social skills. In addition, urban planners can design spaces that are more inclusive and youth-friendly, creating an environment in which young people can develop both socially and emotionally. These strategies are necessary to establish strong, supportive, and healthy communities for the young population.

Conclusions

As for women's well-being, in the influence group, the difference between the pre-test and the post-test was as follows: physical well-being – 6.45, emotional well-being – 3.95, psychological well-being – 3.80. For men, these indicators were 4.35, 4.95, and 4.50, respectively. In the case of social integration, women showed the following dynamics of indicators: Sense of Belonging increased by 2.95, Social Relations – by 3.00, and Community Participation – by 3.95. For men, the growth was 3.75, 4.50, and 4.25, respectively. The indicators of well-being and social integration in the influence group significantly differed. In the control group, none of the values were significant. The study also found that physical well-being was higher in men, while emotional and psychological well-being was higher in women, as were variables of social integration, such as a sense of belonging, social relationships, and community participation. All three YWBS and YSIS subscales showed that the influence group demonstrated a significant increase in well-being and social integration. This result confirms a significant positive effect of interventions based on leisure activities in public spaces for young people.

The practical significance of this study is empirical data on the positive effect of cultural and leisure activities. These results provide practical information to politicians and youth organizations seeking to promote the well-being of young people and their social integration. The article opens up opportunities for research on the specific types of activities and leisure in public places that would lead to positive youth development. The understanding of the mechanisms underlying these improvements can contribute to more effective programs. The results confirm that organized public spaces play a crucial role in improving the well-being and social integration of young people in Kazakhstan. This conclusion emphasizes the effectiveness of structured leisure. Future research should explore additional leisure activities that can further contribute to youth development. In addition, this research lays the foundation for the development and implementation of strategies to create more inclusive and supportive public spaces for young people.

Limitations

The study included only one educational institution, making it impossible to extrapolate the results. In addition, cultural factors and features may be individual in each country or cultural context. The developed tools may also have hypothetical limits since they were developed specifically

for the current study. The influence program was also individual, and such programs can radically differ in activity and content. The results may not fully reflect the experiences of young people who do not attend university, or rural residents who may have different social dynamics and access to public places. Therefore, in future studies, it is necessary to include a more heterogeneous sample. This approach can increase the applicability of the results to different subgroups of young people in Kazakhstan. In addition, the study did not investigate specific differences between various types of public spaces in terms of their impact on well-being. This gap leaves room for future research in this area.

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Appendix 1
The Youth Well-Being Scale
Subscales

Physical well-being

1.   I regularly engage in physical activity to maintain my health.
2.   In my daily life, I prioritize a balanced diet and nutrition.
3.   I sleep calmly enough to feel energetic during the day.
4.   I take measures to manage and reduce stress in my life.
5.   I am happy with my overall physical health.
6.   I am actively looking for medical examinations and preventive medical care.
7.   I am satisfied with my level of physical fitness.
8.   I participate in relaxation and leisure activities.
9.   I am aware of and follow the rules of hygiene and self-care.
10.   I feel physically capable and prepared.

Emotional well-being

11.   In general, I feel happy and satisfied with my life.
12.   I can healthily and constructively express my emotions.
13.   I can effectively cope with life's problems and failures.
14.   I have a positive outlook on my future.
15.   In everyday life, I feel a sense of gratitude and appreciation.
16.   I feel a strong sense of self-worth and self-esteem.
17.   I have supportive relationships that contribute to my emotional well-being.
18.   I am aware of my emotional needs and can satisfy them.
19.   I experience a healthy balance of positive and negative emotions.
20.   I usually easily cope with my emotions and can cope with stress.

Psychological well-being

21.   I understand the purpose and meaning of my life.
22.   I can set and achieve important goals.
23.   I have a high level of autonomy and control over my choices.
24.   I have a positive sense of self-identification and self-acceptance.
25.   I am open to personal growth and development.
26.   I can adapt to changing circumstances and perceive changes positively.
27.   I have a strong sense of personal competence and skill.
28.   I feel a sense of inner peace and inner harmony.
29.   I can effectively manage my thoughts and emotions.
30.   In general, I have a satisfactory and fulfilling life.

Appendix 2
The Youth Social Integration Scale
Subscales
Sense of Belonging

1. I feel like a valued member of the community.
2. I have a strong sense of attachment to the place where I live.
3. I feel a deep connection with the people in my community.
4. I feel that my opinion and contribution are important to my community.
5. I feel proud to be a part of this community.
6. I feel like I belong here just like anyone else.
7. I feel welcome and accepted by people in my community.
8. I have a strong sense of identity attached to my community.
9. I feel an emotional connection with the culture and traditions of this community.
10. I would consider this community my home.

Social Relations

11. I have close friends with whom I can share personal questions.
12. I have a supportive network of friends and acquaintances.
13. I regularly participate in social activities with my peers.
14. I feel connected to my classmates and colleagues.
15. I have people I can rely on in difficult times.
16. I have a strong sense of belonging to my social circle.
17. I can easily make new friends and acquaintances.
18. I enjoy spending time with other members of my community.
19. I have a diverse group of friends from different walks of life.
20. I feel emotionally close to the people in my social network.

Community Participation

21. I actively participate in social events and leisure activities.
22. I volunteer my time to support public affairs.
23. I am a member of local clubs or organizations.
24. I take part in discussions and decision-making processes in my community.
25. I invest my skills and knowledge for the benefit of my community.
26. I regularly attend public meetings and meetings.
27. I play an active role in improving the well-being of my community.
28. I know and participate in local initiatives and projects.
29. I help organize or conduct social events.
30. I have a strong intention to actively participate in the life of my community.