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Abstract

This study investigates shopping malls as multifunctional urban actors shaping economic, social, and spatial dynamics in rapidly developing urban contexts, moving beyond approaches that conceptualize them primarily as isolated economic entities. Using Ritaj Mall in Ali Mendjeli as a case study, the research adopts a mixed-methods design operationalized through three key dimensions: economic permeability, social inclusivity, and spatial connectivity, combining structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and systematic field observations, informed by a pilot study. The findings, supported by a central framework of testable propositions, demonstrate that the mall operates as a major commercial and leisure hub, contributing to local economic vitality, transforming consumption practices, and influencing surrounding spatial configurations. At the same time, its expansion generates urban pressures, including traffic congestion, progressive residential–commercial transformation, and emerging tensions related to housing affordability. Interpreted through Lefebvre’s spatial triad, the study advances a theoretical understanding of shopping malls as both products and producers of urban space, linking everyday practices of consumption and mobility to broader processes of spatial production. These insights underscore the importance of integrated urban planning strategies that acknowledge the multifunctional role of shopping malls while balancing economic development with social inclusion, spatial equity, and long-term urban livability.

Keywords: shopping malls; Ritaj Mall; multifunctional spaces; urban dynamics; spatial organization; social interaction; economic development



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1. Introduction

The spatial organization of cities is a complex and multifaceted subject, shaped by a range of factors, including market dynamics, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure investments, and taxation policies [1]. Urban spatial structures play a pivotal role in organizing city layouts, influencing land use, and addressing challenges posed by rapid transformations across various sectors [2]. Effective spatial organization is fundamental to urban planning, ensuring that cities are well-structured and responsive to evolving needs. Monitoring changes in urban forms and spatial elements over time is crucial to understanding both the intended outcomes and the unforeseen consequences of urban planning

decisions [1]. In Algeria, urban dynamics are shaped by spatial, social, and economic transformations that influence the organization and development of cities. These dynamics include shifts in land use, demographic changes, infrastructure expansion, and evolving economic activities, all of which contribute to the restructuring of urban spaces [3–5]. These legal instruments provide a normative backdrop for urban land management and commercial zoning in Algeria; however, this study focuses on empirically assessing the multifunctional roles of malls rather than testing legal compliance directly. Within this context, the development of shopping malls reflects broader urban transformations, as they increasingly function as key nodes within changing urban fabrics. Although shopping malls have been widely studied at the international level, existing research has tended to examine their economic, social, psychological, or environmental aspects in isolation, such as utilitarian and hedonic [6], emotional [7], social [8], psychological [9], and environmental aspects [10]. Studies that integrate these aspects within an intersected analytical framework remain limited.

To enhance conceptual clarity, this study distinguishes among several interrelated terms. “Mixed-use development” is defined as a formal planning and architectural strategy that integrates diverse land uses, such as residential, commercial, and office functions, within a single structure [11]. “Multifunctionality” refers to the broader socio-spatial condition in which economic, social, cultural, and symbolic functions intersect to co-produce urban space. Multifunctional spaces are the physical sites where these capacities are realized, while multifunctional urban actors are the agents whose daily routines and social practices generate overlapping uses. This approach prevents the conflation of top-down planning strategies with bottom-up lived experiences, thereby positioning shopping malls as both mixed-use developments and dynamic, multifunctional urban actors embedded within broader socio-economic systems. In response, this study adopts the concept of multifunctionality to bring together economic, social, and spatial roles of shopping malls within a single conceptual lens. Applying this integrative perspective to the Algerian urban context, where empirical research on shopping malls remains scarce, allows the study to both consolidate fragmented international insights and examine how multifunctionality is expressed under specific local socio-spatial conditions.

This paper examines shopping malls as multifunctional spaces that shape urban life through interconnected economic, spatial, and social dynamics. Multifunctionality is operationally defined through three measurable dimensions: (1) social inclusivity, reflecting the shopping center’s role as a “third place” for interaction and community engagement; (2) economic permeability, capturing employment opportunities and market-related activities; and (3) spatial connectivity, indicating the shopping center’s integration with urban flows and surrounding residential patterns. Rather than treating these positions as mutually exclusive, this study conceptualizes it as a composite construct manifested through visitors’ patterns of use, activities, and spatial perceptions. In response to urban development policies aimed at reducing pressure on the mother city (Constantine, Algeria), Ali Mendjeli was established to accommodate a rapidly growing population. Over time, the city’s commercial sector gained increased prominence, extending beyond its national dimension and enhancing its economic permeability and mobility [12]. To illustrate this evolution, Ritaj Mall in Ali Mendjeli was selected as the focal case study, illustrating the multifunctionality of shopping malls across the social, economic, and spatial dimensions.

The study addresses the following central framework question: To what extent does Ritaj Mall function as a multifunctional urban hub that integrates social, economic, and spatial dynamics in Ali Mendjeli?

To operationalize this question, the study proposes three testable propositions:

- P1: Beyond its retail function, Ritaj Mall serves as a social space that supports community interaction and inclusivity.
- P2: Ritaj Mall functions as an economic node within Ali Mendjeli's commercial structure, reflecting patterns of economic activity and market permeability.
- P3: The spatial presence of Ritaj Mall is associated with patterns of urban integration, particularly in relation to transportation networks and residential proximity.

This structure consolidates research questions, operationalizes multifunctionality, and situates the study in the Algerian context, addressing both local empirical gaps and broader theoretical debates. Finally, this article is organized into four main sections. It first presents a comprehensive literature review and description of the case study and the research methods. The findings are then presented in four sections, focusing on three key aspects of urban dynamics: social, economic and spatial aspects of urban dynamics. The Discussion section compares and contextualizes our findings with those of previous studies, highlighting how multifunctional malls acts as active agents in shaping contemporary urban space.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Urban Planning Foundations

Urban planning is a multidisciplinary field concerned with designing, developing, and managing urban spaces, integrating physical, social, economic, and environmental dimensions [13]. It seeks to guide urban evolution by addressing land use, infrastructure, and zoning while considering broader socio-economic dynamics [14]. Historically, urban planning evolved from ancient civilizations to a formal discipline in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, shaped by industrialization and population growth [15], while modern approaches emphasize sustainability, balancing environmental, economic, and social concerns [16]. Key planning concepts, such as urban sprawl [17], smart growth [18], and transit-oriented development [19,20], have influenced contemporary strategies, alongside theoretical models like rational [21], communicative [22], and advocacy planning [23].

2.2. Historical Evolution of Shopping Malls

The conceptualization of shopping has evolved alongside broader economic, spatial, and cultural shifts reflecting its transformation from simple retail facilities to more complex multifunctional hubs. Gruen et al. initially framed malls as planned retail environments integrating commerce with social functions, laying the groundwork for their multifunctional potential [24]. By the 1980s, shopping malls had become central to American suburban life, increasingly operating as retail-driven environments that diverged from Victor Gruen's original socially oriented vision. In denser urban contexts, Tan observed a new model in Hong Kong, where malls were embedded within transit and architectural infrastructure to maximize accessibility, contrasting with the suburban autonomy of earlier malls [25]. Similarly, Akmerkez Mall in Istanbul exemplifies a regional adaptation, integrating mixed use planning that responds to urban mobility patterns [26]. While Levy et al. reaffirmed their centralized commercial role [27], Kushwaha et al. emphasized unified management structures in response to shifting market demands, blending functionality with strategic governance [28]. This trajectory culminates in Loughran's notion of malls as "lifestyle destinations", reflecting a turn toward immersive, experience-driven spaces [29]. Recent scholarship further reframes the evolution of shopping malls within the context of accelerated digitalization and the expansion of e-commerce. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a structural catalyst, intensifying online consumption patterns and reshaping retail real estate and high streets through the rapid acceleration of e-commerce and digital transformation [30,31]. Rather than signaling the decline of physical retail, post-pandemic dynamics

have produced hybrid retail ecosystems in which experiential design, digital integration, and omnichannel strategies coexist. Contemporary malls increasingly function as platforms that integrate online and offline consumption through click-and-collect systems, showrooming, immersive technologies, and community-oriented programming [32,33]. This shift positions malls not as obsolete retail infrastructures but as adaptive urban nodes responding to the restructuring of digital capitalism and evolving consumer expectations. Khan et al. further highlights that customer preferences for variety and aesthetics are becoming more significant, signaling a move toward emotionally charged and well-planned retail spaces [34]. In comparison, Yes Mall in Algeria similarly incorporates both leisure and retail components, thereby demonstrating a convergence in consumer-oriented mall design practices across diverse regions. These perspectives trace the mall's evolution from planned retail hubs to multifunctional urban spaces shaped by changing consumer needs and urban dynamics. However, much of the existing literature tends to compartmentalize these factors, addressing the malls' social, economic and spatial roles in isolation, which limits the understanding of shopping malls as holistic urban entities.

2.3. Social and Cultural Debates

From a social perspective, malls serve as modern town squares that foster community interactions and fulfill the social needs of suburban residents, offering spaces for leisure, enjoyment, and social engagement beyond purely commercial purposes [35]. Studies show that shopping is often pursued as a pleasurable space for enjoyment and social interaction, with malls functioning as informal gathering places that foster social bonding and urban vitality. Malls thus function as communal spaces where people connect and participate in recreational activities outside of retail, promoting social interactions that enrich the urban experience [26,36,37]. Yet, this communal role is undermined by their privatized nature, which imposes rules on behavior and often restricts access for marginalized groups, thereby limiting the potential for inclusive community engagement [38]. Comparatively, Horton Plaza in San Diego exemplifies adaptive redevelopment that fosters public engagement, while City Center Houston enforces stricter behavioral controls, highlighting regional variation in social inclusivity [39]. This tension between the mall's social inclusivity and its private governance is a recurring theme that deserves more critical interrogation. From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu's theory of distinction provides a critical lens for understanding how consumption practices within malls reproduce social hierarchies [40]. Retail environments function as arenas where taste, lifestyle, and purchasing power operate as markers of symbolic capital, reinforcing class differentiation even within ostensibly inclusive spaces.

Culturally, malls reflect the interplay between global consumerism and local traditions, adapting international retail practices to diverse social contexts. Jackson and Thrift describe them as spaces where global and local trends converge, resulting in hybrid cultural expressions that blend Western consumerism with regional customs [41]. In post-socialist contexts, such as Hungary, malls like the Csaba Center in Békéscsaba blend global retail practices with local symbols, redefining consumer behaviors and class identities [42]. Building on global perspectives, scholarship on shopping malls in North Africa and the Arab World remains comparatively limited. Emerging studies in cities such as Cairo and Algiers highlight that malls function not only as commercial centers but also as pivotal sites for social gathering and community interaction [43]. Incorporating this regional perspective emphasizes the social role of malls, complementing their economic and spatial functions, and strengthens the contextual grounding of the present study. Rather than treating these positions as mutually exclusive, malls can be conceptualized as dialectical spaces where inclusion and exclusion coexist, necessitating a theoretical lens like Lefebvre's spatial triad to

capture the interplay of social, economic, and spatial dynamics. However, these processes also reinforce social stratification, privileging certain groups while marginalizing others. Scholars such as Shields [44] and Goss [35] emphasize the role of malls as “microcosms of urban life”, where communal activities foster social cohesion and facilitate identity formation. Shopping malls are complex cultural spaces where global and local forces intersect, shaping economic and social dynamics while reinforcing consumer identities and fostering social interactions. Thus, rather than viewing malls as passive cultural sites, we must critically examine how they actively participate in socio-cultural reconfiguration.

2.4. Spatial and Urban Impacts of Shopping Malls

From a spatial perspective, malls significantly influence urban morphology, shaping mobility patterns and embedding themselves in planning agendas. Erkip notes their role in urban expansion, as their distribution affects city layout and transportation networks [26]. Their strategic placement shapes consumer flows and integrates them into wider planning frameworks. Despite this, research remains limited to the external spatial impacts of malls, particularly their connections with surrounding urban environments, as most studies primarily focus on internal shopping behaviors. The development of shopping centers also requires a careful analysis of their potential impact on urban environments. Improperly located malls can generate traffic congestion, environmental degradation, urban sprawl, and disruption to local commerce [26]. As major economic drivers, shopping malls create jobs, generate tax revenue, and reflect the vitality of a community. Urban planning policies, including land use regulations and taxation, influence retail sales, making shopping centers a critical focus in city planning. Cases such as Paradise Valley Mall and Metrocenter Mall in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, initially caused traffic congestion and poor pedestrian integration, yet later became mixed-use community hubs through strategic redevelopment [26]. Similar challenges were observed in the case of Regal Chowk and Mall Road in Lahore (Pakistan), where historic character was lost as traditional squares were converted into traffic islands, leading to a decline in their communal functions. Jabeen and Munir note that increased commercialization has led to congestion and spatial confusion, while development pressures have deteriorated public spaces, making them less inviting for community use [45]. Additionally, visual pollution from large billboards and modern structures has overshadowed historic buildings, contributing to social disconnection and diminished community identity. These examples highlight the need for integrated urban planning and adaptive reuse strategies that ensure malls enhance, rather than undermine, urban functionality. It is important to acknowledge that the relationship between shopping malls and urban environments is bidirectional; while malls shape cities through economic, social, and spatial influences, cities also determine the evolution and function of malls. As Goss observes, socio-economic conditions influence the types of retailers’ malls attract, with wealthier areas supporting luxury brands and lower-income regions favoring discount retailers [35]. Furthermore, urban policies promoting mixed-use developments encourage malls to integrate residential, office, and entertainment spaces, enhancing their multifunctionality [46]. Yet, as the above examples demonstrate, many studies still treat social, economic, and spatial aspects of malls as separate rather than as mutual reinforcing dynamics.

2.5. Multifunctionality and Mixed-Use Planning

The significance of multifunctionality in urban planning aligns with the notion of mixed-use development advocated by Jacobs, which integrates residential, recreational, and commercial functions to enhance economic growth and social cohesion [47]. Narváez et al. found that mixed-use configurations promote economic diversity and accessibility, thereby fostering vibrant urban environments [48]. Concurrently, Wang et al. emphasized

the notion that multifunctional spaces enhance human interaction and urban vitality [49]. Shopping malls embody Jacobs' vision, integrating retail, social, and leisure spaces to support integrated and sustainable communities. In accordance with the conceptual framework established by Jacobs, the principles of Communicative Planning Theory advocate for the implementation of inclusive decision-making processes, with the objective of ensuring that urban spaces are designed to cater to the diverse needs of the community. New Urbanism emerged as a response to urban sprawl, advocating for compact, walkable neighborhoods that integrate residential, retail, and public spaces, enhancing social interaction while reducing car dependency [50]. In their respective models, both Jacobs and Fainstein underscore the significance of diversity as a key concept. However, Jacobs places greater emphasis on the built environment, while Fainstein's focus lies in the socio-economic dimensions [11,51].

While these frameworks offer valuable insights into multifunctionality and diversity, they remain analytically limited when applied to contemporary shopping malls. Jacobs and New Urbanism emphasize vitality and physical form but tend to understate the power dynamics embedded in privatized and managed commercial environments. Fainstein provides a strong normative lens centered on justice and equity, yet offers fewer analytical tools for unpacking the lived and experiential dimensions of commercial space. Similarly, Communicative Planning Theory foregrounds participation and consensus-building but often abstracts from the economic logics and capital strategies that structure retail-led urban developments.

2.6. Theoretical Positioning and Analytical Framework

More broadly, urban commercial spaces have been theorized through distinct analytical lenses: physical (urban design), social (livability), economic (urban growth), and perceptual (placemaking). These perspectives are further enriched by Giddens' structuration theory, which posits a recursive relationship between human agency and institutional structures [52]; Massey's relational geography, conceptualizing commercial nodes as intersections of local and global flows [53]; and Santos' ontology of space as inseparable systems of objects and actions [54]. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they tend to privilege particular dimensions of urban space, whether institutional reproduction, relational flows, or lived materiality, without fully integrating the governance logics and capital strategies embedded in managed retail environments.

However, capturing the multifunctionality of shopping malls requires a framework that explicitly synthesizes spatial materiality, everyday practices, and commercial power relations. While the aforementioned theories offer foundational insights, they present limitations for this specific analysis: Giddens provides a robust account of institutional reproduction but remains insufficiently spatially explicit; Massey excels in defining relational space yet offers a weaker focus on everyday micro-practices; Santos conceptualizes lived space but remains less operationalized for the governance specificities of commercial environments. Collectively, these perspectives illuminate important aspects of commercial space, yet they do not fully theorize the dialectical co-production of economic imperatives, spatial design, and social practice within multifunctional malls. While existing studies offer valuable insights into mall functionality and socio-spatial impact, they often lack a clear and integrated theoretical framework. For this reason, the present study adopted Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space as its primary analytical framework. Unlike Giddens' emphasis on institutional structuration, Massey's relational flows, or Santos' material ontology, Lefebvre explicitly conceptualizes space as a social product generated through the interaction of capital, planning strategies, and everyday life. Lefebvre challenges the notion of space as neutral, arguing instead that it is socially produced through the dialectical interplay of spatial practices (daily routines and materials flows), representations of

space (conceived space shaped by planners, developers, and capital), and representational spaces (lived and symbolically appropriated space). This triadic formulation provides an integrated analytical structure capable of examining how economic imperatives, spatial configurations, governance mechanisms, and social practices are mutually constitutive [55].

Shopping malls reflect this process: their spatial design serves economic goals, with accessibility, visibility, and circulation patterns tailored to maximize profit. Spatial arrangements structure consumer pathways and influence behavioral patterns, while users simultaneously appropriate and reinterpret these environments through everyday practices such as leisure-oriented visits, window shopping, or gendered forms of social participation. Multifunctionality, therefore, emerges not simply as an urban design attribute but as a dialectical outcome that serves both as a mechanism of consumerist capture and as a site of social negotiation and appropriation. Applied to the case of Ritaj Mall, Lefebvre's triad enables a systematic demonstration of how conceived space (developer ambitions and economic strategy), perceived space (material layout and circulation), and lived space (user meanings and practices) interact. This theoretical positioning moves beyond treating malls as isolated retail entities or as straightforward mixed-use developments; instead, it conceptualizes them as contested multifunctional urban nodes produced through the interplay of capital, governance, spatial design, and everyday life. Building on this, applying Lefebvre's theory to malls reveals a structural interdependence: economic imperatives drive spatial design, spatial arrangements influence social behaviors, and social dynamics, in turn, reshape economic and spatial practices. Such interdependencies position malls as contested multifunctional urban nodes rather than isolated retail economics, spatial organization, or social use. Some scholars now advocate a more integrated view, for example, Lontoc et al. described malls as re-territorialized urban nodes that reshape accessibility, land use, and urban hierarchies [34]. Gomes et al. and Gilboa et al. both highlighted the psychological and sensory experiences that influence mall engagement, factors that extend beyond traditional retail models [56,57]. This shift requires strategic urban planning to sustainably integrate malls into the broader cityscape [58]. Moreover, digital technologies and evolving consumer expectations are transforming the mall experience. Smart parking systems, health-oriented retail [59], and omnichannel shopping are blurring the boundaries between digital and physical experiences [60,61]. Together, these dynamics underscore malls' role as laboratories of urban change, posing regulatory challenges for urban planners and reshaping socio-spatial relations.

In sum, shopping malls are not merely sites of commerce but dynamic arenas where social, economic and spatial logics converge. Their impact on cities is both reflective and constitutive: they mirror societal trends while actively shaping them. Across regional, national, and global examples including Ritaj Mall, Bab Ezzouar, Paradise Valley, and Akmerkez, this framework illuminates how multifunctional malls act as active agents in producing urban space, reflecting both local specificity and shared global patterns. Understanding this complexity requires moving beyond fragmented analyses to embrace integrated, theory-driven perspectives like that offered by Lefebvre. Only then can we grasp the full extent of malls' multifunctional role in urban development and respond critically to both their potentials and pitfalls, where these fragmented approaches, though valuable, underscore the necessity of an integrated theoretical lens that captures the interconnectedness of these forces rather than treating them in isolation [55].

3. Description of the Study Area and Methodology

3.1. Case Study

Ali Mendjeli, a municipality in the Province of Constantine, was established in north-eastern Algeria as a strategic response to the city's rapid population growth and the

resulting urban challenges, particularly in housing. Constantine's expansion led to fragile housing structures and an intensifying housing crisis, prompting the need for a comprehensive urban planning solution. Ali Mendjeli was thus developed to absorb demographic pressure on Constantine and the housing needs [62]. As Saidi et al. noted, its creation also reshaped rural-to-urban migration, reinforcing the role of newly recognized "de jure" towns in driving urban population growth in the northeast region [63].

Ali Mendjeli was formalized under the Constantine Master Urban Plan (PUD), approved by Decree No. 16 in 1988, reinforced by the Master Plan for Development and Town Planning (PDAU) in 1998, and over time, Ali Mendjeli transitioned from a social housing area to a city with a prominent university presence [64]. In addition, the rise of large-scale commercial activities has positioned Ali Mendjeli as a vital urban center, extending its influence across the region and reviving nightlife once lost in the mother city, largely due to major commercial hubs. Strategically situated between the municipalities of El-Kharroub and Ain Smara, Ali Mendjeli today extends over 1500 hectares (Table 1), divided as follows:

- 1002 hectares, constituting approximately two-thirds of the total area, fall within the municipality of El-Kharroub.
- 498 hectares, or about one-third of the area, are located in the municipality of Ain Smara.

Table 1. Technical elements the new city of Ali Mendjeli. Source: [65].

Attachment Type	Area (Hectares)
Housing	450
Roads	420
Equipment	350
Green spaces	160
Multi-activity area	120
Total	1500

Ali Mendjeli is divided into neighborhoods and neighborhood units (NUs) as follows (Table 2, Figure 1):

- Neighborhoods: The new city consists of five neighborhoods, subdivided into 20 neighborhood units. Positioned between the NU, the smallest spatial unit, and the city as a whole, this intermediate level was designed to establish a hierarchical system of spatial organization.
- Neighborhood units: The area includes 20 neighborhood units that are planned and spatially organized. The aim of this division for its residents is to provide comfort and good conduct of the various activities accompanying the residential function.

Table 2. Neighborhood areas within the new city of Ali Mendjeli. Source: [65].

Neighborhoods	Neighborhood Units	Area (Hectares)
Neighborhood No. 01	01, 02, 03, 04	227.18
Neighborhood No. 02	05, 06, 07, 08 + Expansion 05	219.74
Neighborhood No. 03	09, 10, 11, 12	227.22
Neighborhood No. 04	13, 14, 15, 16	183.31
Neighborhood No. 05	17, 18, 19, 20 + Expansion 20	301.28
Multi-activity zone	/	341.27
Total	/	1500

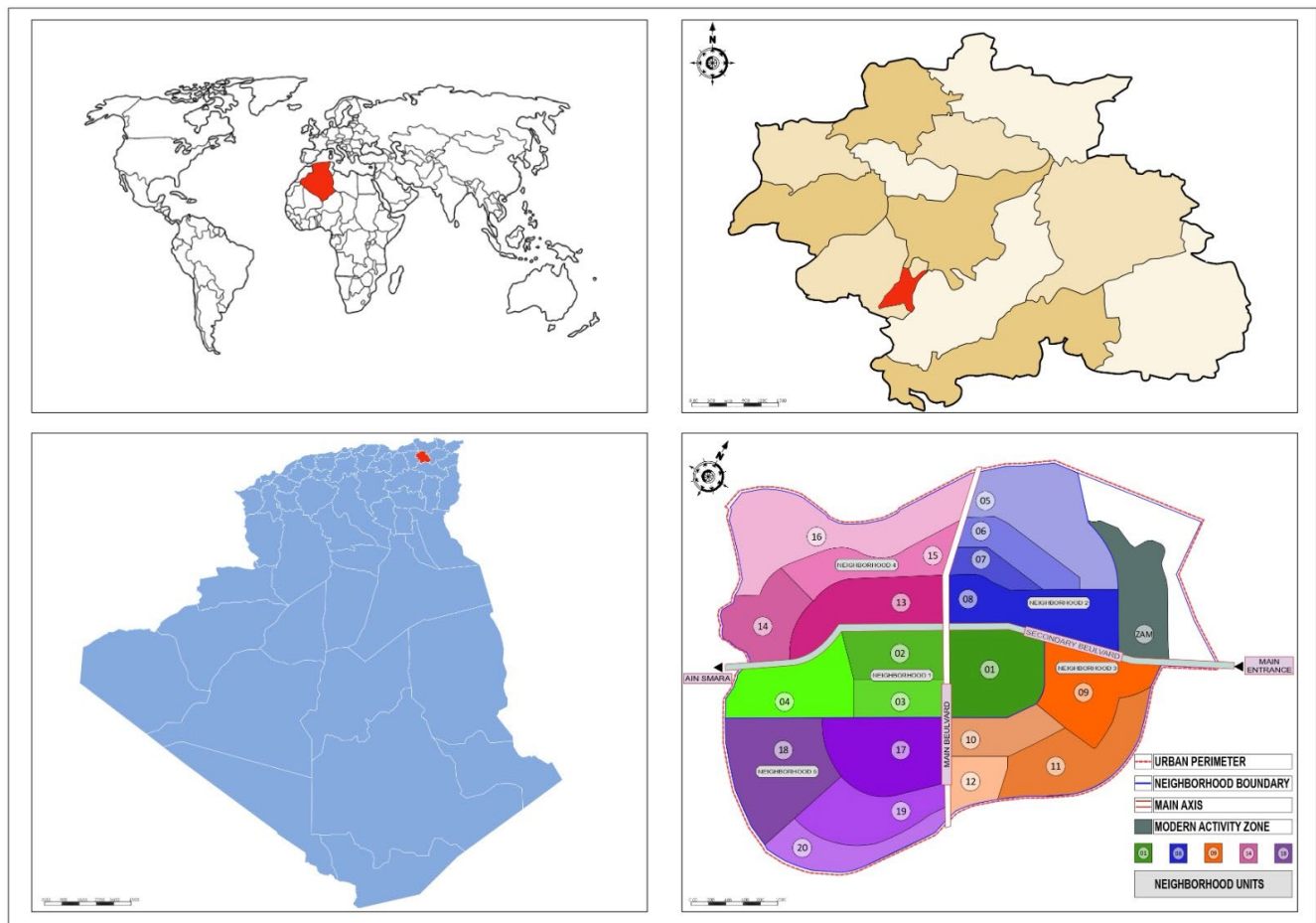


Figure 1. Map of the Spatial Division of Ali Mendjeli, Constantine, Algeria. Source: Edited by the authors.

The population growth of Ali Mendjeli unfolded in two main phases shaped by successive relocation waves. In 2008, the city counted 61,075 inhabitants (Table 3). This was followed by a steady increase in population during the first phase, spanning from 1999 to 2010, during which the city reached 68,546 inhabitants. This initial development was driven by the Province of Constantine's housing policy, which focused on reducing precarious living conditions and offering residential projects for the middle and upper classes, thereby encouraging social diversity. The second phase, from 2010 to 2020, marked a period of massive demographic expansion, with the population growing by nearly 400,000 inhabitants to reach a total of 461,885 inhabitants. This growth was driven mainly by new housing programs serving Constantine's intercommunal area, with relocations intensifying between 2012 and 2014, particularly for residents of slums or areas at risk of landslides in Constantine, into NUs where these relocations caused a demographic jump from 68,546 in 2010 to 369,510 by 2014.

Table 3. Population development of Ali Mendjeli between 1998 and 2020. Source: [66].

Years	1998	1999	2001	2003	2008	2010	2012	2014	2018	2020
Population	0	7505	25,115	31,425	61,075	68,546	211,360	369,510	431,726	461,885

Due to the emergence of commercial uses in the new city through the establishment of commercial centers and given the importance of this function in organizing the dynamics of the area, NU02 was selected for analysis, as it represents a primary zone of direct

interaction between large-scale commercial activity and everyday urban life. NU02 hosts the commercial center, Ritaj Mall, the city's most significant retail hub, whose presence generates intensive economic, social, and spatial interactions within its immediate surroundings. NU02 lies at the core of Ali Mendjeli, and falls within Land Occupation Plan No. 01, which includes Neighborhood No. 01, consisting of NUs 01–04, along with four more units (north: NU13, south: NU03, east: NU01, west: NU04). However, the spatial and functional dynamics associated with Ritaj Mall are not confined to strict administrative boundaries and extend beyond NU02, offering a concentrated, analytically manageable setting for observing the most immediate effects. With 11,015 residents across 45.43 hectares, it represents 3.92% of the city's population [67].

Algeria's first shopping center opened in Bab Ezzouar (Algiers) in 2010, while Constantine's largest, Ritaj Mall, was inaugurated on 16 April 2016 in the core of Ali Mendjeli. The first urban core in Constantine emerged in NU06, where early commercial activity was concentrated [68]. Ritaj Mall plays an important role within NU02, and over time, additional shopping centers have been developed, such as "Boubaya" and "Sans Visa", which combine shopping, entertainment, and social interaction. Ritaj Mall is home to 12 international brands, a children's entertainment area, and the 5500 square meters Hypermarket Illef, which operates under separate administration and is owned by the brother of the owner of Ritaj Mall. The mall features 295 stores across five floors (2.5 hectares), attracting an average of 30,000 visitors daily, reaching 11,240,311 visitors in 2023, and providing 3000 direct job opportunities (Interview 1). The analysis highlights Ritaj Mall's strategic location and substantial commercial appeal with non-food stores comprising 72.2% of outlets. Its attraction rate, calculated at 2.59 far surpassed the benchmark of 1, confirming its position as a major retail hub.

3.2. Methodology

In response to the rising business activity in NU02, a pilot survey was conducted to identify potential limitations such as unclear questions, logistical difficulties, or biases, thereby improving the accuracy and validity of the main study. As Lancaster et al. noted, a well-executed pilot study can significantly improve the quality and efficiency of the main study, leading to more reliable and robust findings [69]. Guided by these findings, a detailed questionnaire was developed to collect extensive data from two key groups: customers (demographic information, shopping behaviors, and satisfaction levels) and traders (retail types and perceived advantages). Data collection took place during July and August 2024, using an intercept method to ensure a diverse and representative sample. After excluding incomplete responses, 125 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. To complement the survey conducted with Ritaj Mall visitors, two semi-structured interviews were carried out: the first with a senior managerial representative in Ritaj Mall (Interview 1), and the second with a senior official from the Directorate of the Municipality of Ali Mendjeli, Constantine (Interview 2). A revised survey was implemented based on insights from a pilot study conducted in March 2023. Table 4 highlights the key differences between the preliminary pilot study and the finalized main descriptive survey. These differences illustrate how the pilot study informed significant adjustments to the research methodology. Regarding language preferences, both questionnaires were initially administered in Arabic, with the responses later translated and coded into English in IBM SPSS Statistics version 24 for analysis. The questionnaire was originally developed and administered in Arabic, the primary language of everyday communication in Algeria, and was completed by the target population of general mall users and traders. Three of the four authors are native Arabic speakers and were involved in the design, administration, and interpretation of the instrument. The English translation was conducted only after data collection for

coding, statistical analysis, and reporting purposes. Because the instrument was conceived, administered, and interpreted within a single linguistic and cultural context, formal cross-cultural adaptation procedures such as forward and backward translation or semantic validation were not deemed necessary for this study.

Table 4. Comparison between the pilot study and the main survey. Source: Edited by the authors based on the surveys used for the research.

	Pilot Study		Main Descriptive Survey
	Purpose	Spatial Organization	Comprehensive study of mall as a multifunctional space (spatial, economic, social)
Aspect	Sample Size	60 traders (inside and outside the mall) 65 clients	60 traders (inside the mall) 65 clients
	Sampling types	- Probability Sampling (random sampling) to ensure spatial coverage	- Probability Sampling (random sampling): ensures spatial coverage - Cluster Sampling: the population is divided into clusters (clients and traders) and then entire clusters are randomly selected - Stratified Sampling: stratified sampling by age group (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55+) to balance, accurate representation across demographic strata, also target individuals aged 18 and above
	Data Collection Period	During school days	Chose two days: one during school and one during vacation
	Key Findings	Identified spatial patterns	Identified the mall's economic aspect and social role
	Limitations Identified	Narrow focus on spatial aspects	Broader inclusion of economic and social insights based on pilot feedback
	Modifications Implemented	Revision of survey to include economic and social questions	Refined survey design based on the pilot, ensuring comprehensive scope
	Focus of Questions	Spatial organization: mall layout, space usage	Spatial, economic, and social aspects: affordability, community use, and social interactions
Questions	General or habit questions (clients)	- Gender: (Male/Female) - Age Range: All ages - Place of living: (The city of Ali Mendjeli, Constantine city, Within Constantine province, in another province)	- Gender: (Male/Female) - Age Range: Starting from 18 years old - Place of living: Within the Neighborhood Unit 02, Within the Neighborhood 01, within Ali Mendjeli city, Outside the city but within the same province, In another province, Outside Algeria) - Time spent in the mall - Average store visits per trip
	Questions about traders	- Type of trade (in regular stores located outside and near the mall) - Opinion on advantages: from their perspective that boost their retail practice	- Type of trade (inside the mall) (the choice is to compare retail dynamics, customer behavior, and the mall's impact on urban trade).

Table 4. *Cont.*

Pilot Study			Main Descriptive Survey
Questions	Questions related to economic dimensions	- The amount spent per visit - Comparison of price affordability between shops inside Ritaj Mall and those in its vicinity	- Monthly income - The amount spent per visit - Creation of job opportunities - The affordability of prices
	Questions related to the impact on urban development	The effects of the commercial assembly (Ritaj Mall and the stores in the close vicinity)	- Emerging land use patterns - Impact on traffic and transportation - Environmental contributions of the mall - Significant benefits of the mall - Evaluation of the positive and negative criteria, including an assessment of the environmental impact, spatial dynamics and advantages of the commercial complex
	Questions related to social impact.	Preferences regarding shopping location: within Ritaj Mall or at surrounding stores	- Satisfaction with mall services - Perceptions of the mall's purpose - Assessing the socio-cultural impact of the shopping mall

The initial pilot study focused on the spatial organization of shopping malls and their surrounding commercial environment, specifically examining retailer distribution and Ritaj Mall's attractiveness. The objective was to identify factors contributing to the mall's appeal. However, participants frequently referenced its broader economic and social roles, highlighting affordability, accessibility for diverse income groups, and its function as a social hub for community interaction. These insights informed the refinement of the main survey instrument and expanded the analytical scope beyond spatial morphology to include economic and social dimensions.

The main study adopted an exploratory research design and surveyed a total of 125 respondents, including 65 mall visitors and 60 traders operating in and around Ritaj Mall. Although the sample size was modest, it was consistent with the exploratory nature of the research and maintained continuity with the pilot study. The study did not aim for statistical generalization, rather, it sought to identify patterns, relationships, and perceptual tendencies within this urban-commercial context. Participants were recruited on-site through face-to-face survey administration. Eligibility was restricted to visitors aged 18 or older, and mall employees were excluded from the visitor survey, as traders and staff were addressed through a separate questionnaire. Respondents provided informed consent by checking a consent box after reading a printed consent statement that explained the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the academic use of the data; no questionnaires were excluded due to a lack of consent. Incomplete questionnaires were systematically discarded, leaving a final analytical sample consisting only of fully completed surveys that met the predefined inclusion criteria.

A total of 65 questionnaires were distributed to customers and 60 to traders of commercial services within NU02, particularly those visiting or operating in Ritaj Mall, to gather perspectives from both groups, consistent with the pilot study. The questionnaire examined various aspects of shopping habits, and respondents were asked to evaluate the attractiveness of the mall using a five-point Likert scale. To ensure analytical coherence between the theoretical framing and the empirical investigation, the study operationalizes Lefebvre's spatial triad by mapping questionnaire variables into three measurable dimensions. Conceived space was assessed through planned integration and mobility

indicators, such as transportation mode and urban purpose, reflecting the mall's strategic placement within the urban framework. Perceived space was operationalized through functional rhythms of everyday use, including time spent, average number of stores visited, and spending patterns, to quantify the intensity of spatial practice. Lived space captured the subjective appropriation of the mall by cross-referencing visit motivations and satisfaction levels with socio-economic indicators such as gender, income, and residence, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of distinction [40]. This structured mapping explicitly links abstract theoretical constructs to statistical indicators, providing a robust foundation for subsequent analysis. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Associations between variables were examined according to their measurement type and the nature of the research questions. The analysis employed the Chi-Square Test (a statistical tool used to examine relationships between categorical variables, such as yes/no or multiple-choice questions) [70], Kruskal–Wallis Test for comparing three or more groups involving ordinal variables, such as Likert scales or income groups) [71], and Spearman's Rho (a non-parametric statistical measure was used to evaluate the strength and direction of a monotonic relationship between two variables, mainly when the data are ordinal, interval, or ratio in nature) [72]. The choice of each statistical test was determined by the type of variables under examination, and statistical inference was based on *p*-values to assess the presence of associations between variables.

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure is a statistical tool employed to ascertain the sufficiency of the sample size for factor analysis. The measure evaluates the degree of shared variance among variables and determines their suitability for structure detection. In particular, the KMO measure ranges from 0 to 1, categorizing the adequacy of sampling as follows [73]:

- KMO > 0.90: Marvelous;
- 0.80–0.90: Meritorious;
- 0.70–0.80: Middling;
- 0.60–0.70: Mediocre;
- 0.50–0.60: Miserable;
- KMO < 0.50: Unacceptable.

As shown in Figure 2, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.697 indicates an acceptable yet borderline level of sampling adequacy according to Kaiser's criteria, suggesting that the data exhibited moderate adequacy for factor analysis. While this level of adequacy supports the use of exploratory factor analysis, it also necessitates a cautious interpretation of the resulting factor structure. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a highly statistically significant result ($p < 0.000$), confirming that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that meaningful relationships between variables exist. Taken together, these results indicate that the dataset was suitable for factor extraction; however, the extracted factors were interpreted as indicative patterns rather than as robust latent constructs. The moderate level of inter-item correlation may partly reflect the heterogeneous nature of the variables, which captured multiple functional dimensions of the mall, thereby reinforcing the exploratory orientation of the analysis [73].

Since traders and visitors represent distinct groups, their responses were analyzed separately to account for their different roles in the mall environment. A total of 125 questionnaires were collected, and despite variations in sample sizes, they were deemed sufficient for capturing key trends, with findings interpreted accordingly. The study was further supported by a pilot study (Table 4) and semi-structured interviews with the senior managerial representative and the municipal architect of Ali Mendjeli. To enhance anonymity, the interviews were not recorded, interviewees were referred to only by their institutional role, and each lasted approximately 120 min. An interview guide was developed

to focus on the mall's commercial attractiveness, spatial organization, and social functions. Notes from the interviews were analyzed thematically, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring that no new themes emerged. These interviews provided qualitative insights that complemented the survey findings and helped contextualize the quantitative results. After gathering the necessary data, a descriptive approach was adopted to analyze the phenomena comparatively and achieve the research objectives. Commercial density, a key criterion for assessing commercial centrality, was measured by calculating the number of shops per square meter. Additionally, the commercial attraction factor for Ritaj Mall was determined by dividing the number of non-food stores by the number of food stores. This systematic approach ensured comprehensive and reliable data collection for analytical study. Data interpretation, analysis, and visualization were conducted using Excel (Microsoft Excel LTSC MSO, Version 2408 Build 16.0.17932.20638; Microsoft Corporation: Redmond, WA, USA, 2024), SPSS (IBM Corp. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 24.0; IBM Corp.: Armonk, NY, USA, 2016), and Flourish (Flourish Studio; Kiln: London, UK, 2024).

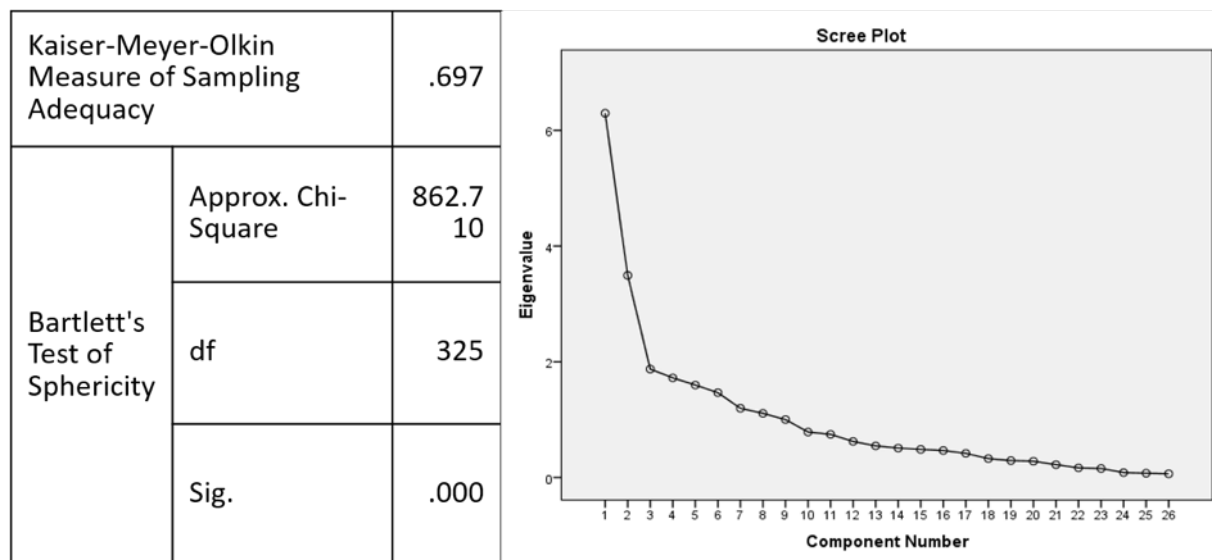


Figure 2. The results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test for the sample and the KMO Index Value Curve. Source: Edited by the authors.

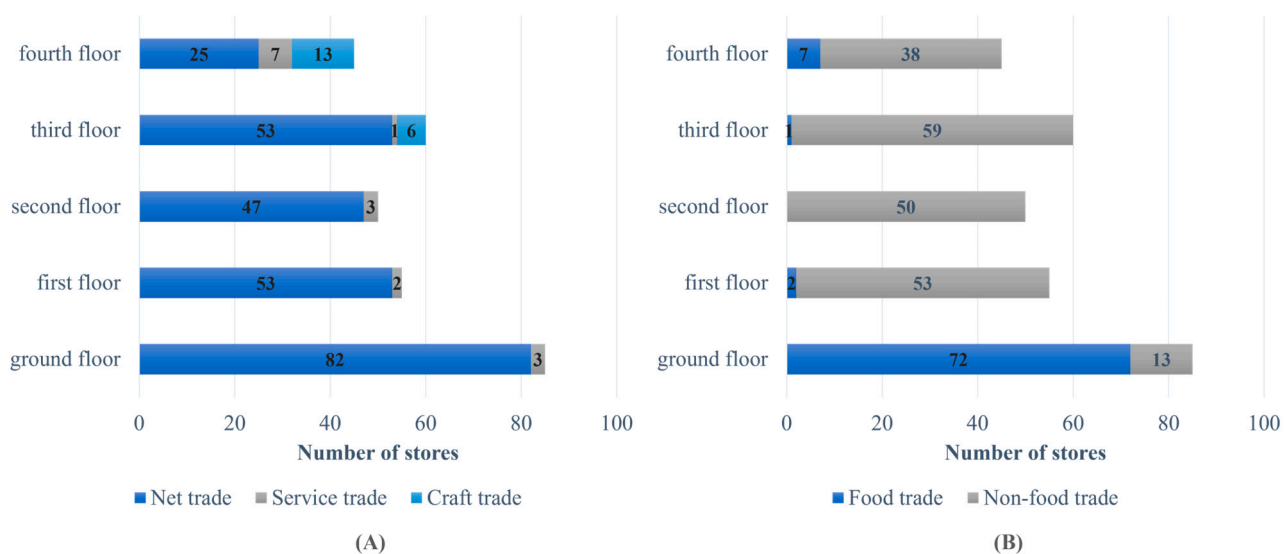
4. Results

4.1. Brief Analytical Study of Ritaj Mall

To support our research, a brief analytical review of Ritaj Mall highlights key trade distribution patterns. Net trade dominated (roughly 88% of shops) across all floors, while service trade (6%) remained limited, peaking on the fourth floor, which is designed for catering. Craft trade (6%), primarily jewelry-related, was strategically concentrated on the third and fourth floors due to space and security requirements. Non-food trade (72%) significantly surpassed food trade (28%) in total volume, with a strong presence on the ground floor and a balanced distribution across upper levels. The calculated attraction force of 2.59 confirmed the mall's solid commercial appeal (Table 5, Figure 3).

Table 5. Commercial density of the Ritaj Mall (2024). Source: Edited by the authors.

Floors	Area (m ²)	Number of Shops	Commercial Density (Store/1000 m ²)	Net Trade (Number)	Service Trade (Number)	Craft Trade (Number)	Food Trade (Number)	Non-Food Trade (Number)
Ground	6194	85	13.7	82	3	0	72	13
First	5741	55	9.6	53	2	0	2	53
Second	5741	50	8.7	47	3	0	0	50
Third	5741	60	10.4	53	1	6	1	59
Fourth	5741	45	7.8	25	7	13	7	38

**Figure 3.** Distributions of trade types (N = 295) across floors of Ritaj Mall. (A) Distribution of (net, service, craft) trade on the floors in Ritaj Mall; (B) Distribution of food and non-food trade on the floors of Ritaj Mall. Source: Edited by the authors based on pilot study (N = 65).

4.2. Demographic Patterns of Clients

We can highlight Ritaj Mall's broad and diverse appeal by analyzing the visitor demographics and behaviors. Geographically, it attracts both local visitors (27.7% from nearby areas) and international ones (7.7% from Tunisia, Libya, and France), reinforcing its regional significance (Figure 4A). Age distribution was well-balanced, catering to various groups (Figure 4B). Visitors frequented the mall for multiple reasons, including shopping (27.7%), educational proximity (26.1%), and work (10.8%), emphasizing its multifunctional role (Figure 4C). Income levels varied across different brackets, with the largest group earning 40,000–59,999 DZD, reflecting a broad socio-economic mix (Figure 4D). Consumer behavior is diverse, with 47.7% planning purchases, while others being engaged in spontaneous shopping (Figure 4E). Ritaj Mall's standing as a significant retail and social hub is substantiated by its ability to attract a wide demographic across shopping, education, and commerce. This assertion is further validated by the mall's policy of welcoming all income groups, as opposed to targeting a specific class.

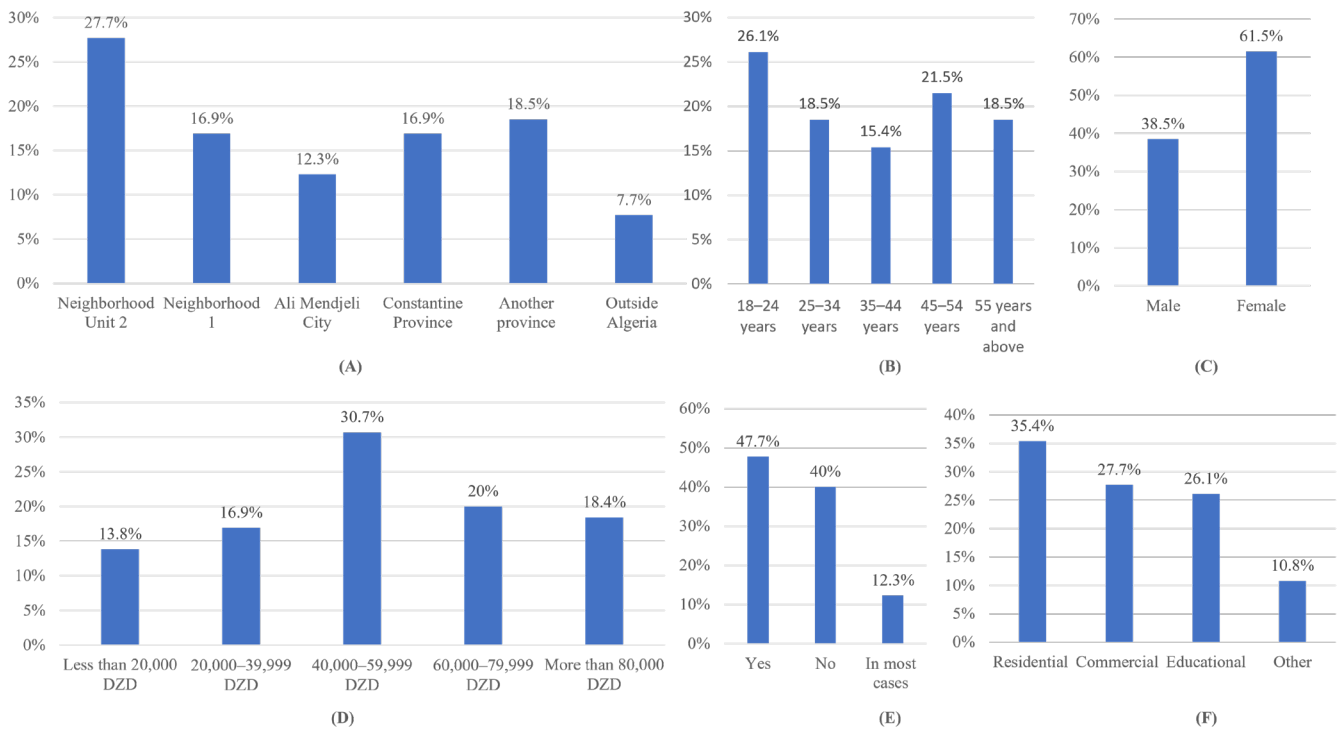


Figure 4. Demographic data of clients retrieved from the survey (N = 65). (A) Place of living; (B) Age distribution; (C) Gender distribution; (D) Monthly income; (E) Purchase planning; (F) Reason for being in Ali Mendjeli. Source: Edited by the authors survey-based.

4.3. Components of Multifunctionality

4.3.1. Social Aspects

Ritaj Mall serves as a multifunctional space, with visitors' perceptions varying by distance (Figure 5). Shopping was the most recognized function, with 75% of nearby residents agreeing, but this dropped to 45% for those coming from farther away. Entertainment saw 65% agreement among locals but 65% disagreement from visitors residing in other provinces. Services were strongly associated with the mall by 75% of nearby visitors, dropping to 45% for distant ones. Social interaction was the least agreed upon purpose, with 80% of distant visitors disagreeing. Overall, proximity played a key role in shaping visitor experiences, with entertainment and social interaction showing greater variability based on distance, while shopping and services were the strongest attractions for nearby residents. The Kruskal–Wallis's test was applied to the original 5-point ordinal Likert responses, yielding statistically significant differences in perceptions of both the "entertainment" ($p < 0.001$) and "services" ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, perceptions of "shopping" ($p = 0.117$) and "social interaction" ($p = 0.065$) did not differ significantly cross distance groups. These findings highlight the varying roles of Ritaj Mall depending on visitor location and purpose, indicating that multifunctionality is stratified by spatial proximity: nearby residents primarily experienced the mall as a site of consumption and services, whereas distant visitors perceived it less as a social or leisure hub.

To identify the profiles most inclined to participate in mall events, we examined the relationship between place of residence and the frequency of event attendance. Following standard statistical practice, categories of both place of residence and event attendance frequency were aggregated into analytically meaningful groups to satisfy chi-square test assumptions, reduce sparse cells, and preserve the ordinal and conceptual structure of the variables. After aggregation, the assumptions of the Pearson chi-square test were satisfied,

with no more than 20% of cells having expected counts below 5 and all minimum expected counts exceeding 1.

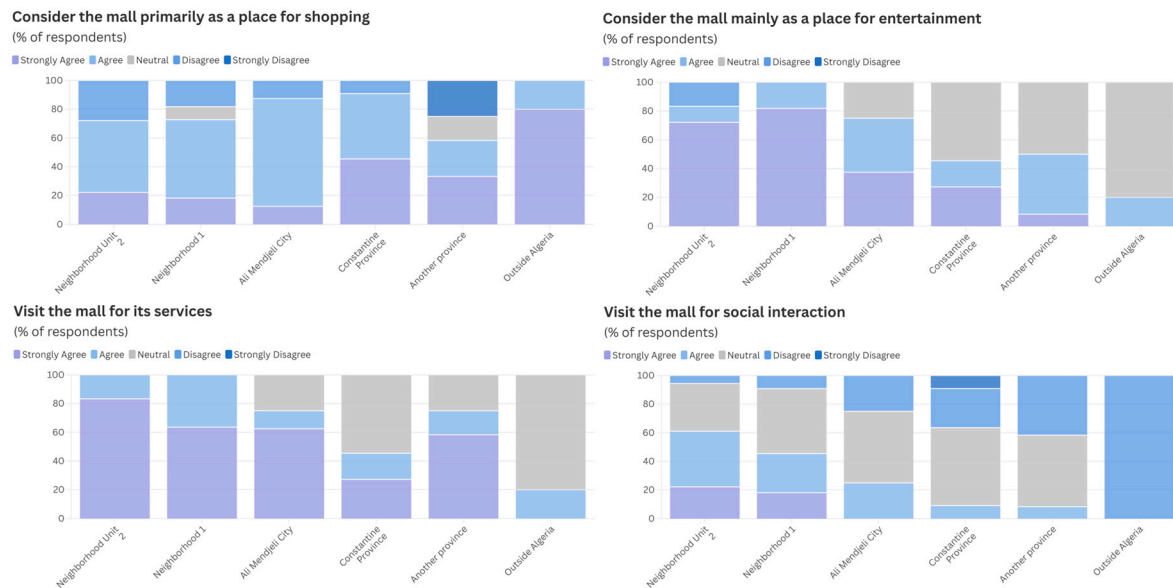


Figure 5. Correlation between place of living with the four purposes of visiting Ritaj Mall (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

The results indicate a statistically significant association between geographic proximity to Ritaj Mall and attendance frequency (Pearson $\chi^2 = 57.222$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, respondents living nearby (within NU02 or within the neighborhood 01) were the most active participants, reporting frequent attendance (“always/often”), whereas respondents from other provinces and outside Algeria predominantly reported rare or no attendance. The Linear-by-Linear Association test was also statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 24.994$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a directional trend in which greater distance from the mall is associated with lower attendance frequency (Table 6). These findings suggest that spatial proximity plays a decisive role in shaping cultural participation patterns. To complement this inferential analysis, a heatmap visualizes the joint distribution of place of residence, attendance frequency, and satisfaction with mall activities, providing an integrated interpretation of behavioral intensity and perceptual outcomes while maintaining the statistical rigor of the chi-square analysis (Figure 6).

In contrast, individuals residing farther away tended to view the mall less favorably, particularly concerning its entertainment and social interaction offerings. The robust statistical findings emphasize the influence of geographic factors on visitor perceptions. Residential visitors typically spent shorter visits, with 60.9% staying less than an hour, while 55.6% of commercial visitors stayed at least three hours, showing higher engagement. University visitors had moderate visit durations, whereas those with other purposes stayed longer than residential visitors. Notably, visitors traveling from greater distances, especially for commercial reasons, tended to extend their visits to maximize the utility of their trip (Figure 7). These patterns indicate that the mall’s multifunctional appeal is closely shaped by spatial proximity, with this stratification reflecting underlying socio-economic and leisure dynamics within the urban context.

Table 6. Chi-square test of the correlation between event attendance frequency and place of residence.
Source: Edited by the authors.

Place of Residence (Merged)			Event Attendance Frequency (Merged)
Nearby (within neighborhood unit 2 + within neighborhood 1)			Frequent (always & often)
Within Ali Mendjeli City & outside Ali Mendjeli but within Constantine province			Occasional
Other provinces & outside Algeria			Rare & never
Chi-square test results			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	57.222 ^a	8	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	58.809	8	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.994	1	0.000
No. of Valid Cases	65		

^a: 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.12. Note: Categories were merged to meet the chi-square assumptions. All expected counts exceeded the minimum thresholds. The test applied to all categories.

Satisfaction level (1–10) N/A 5 6 7 8 9 10

Frequency of event attendance

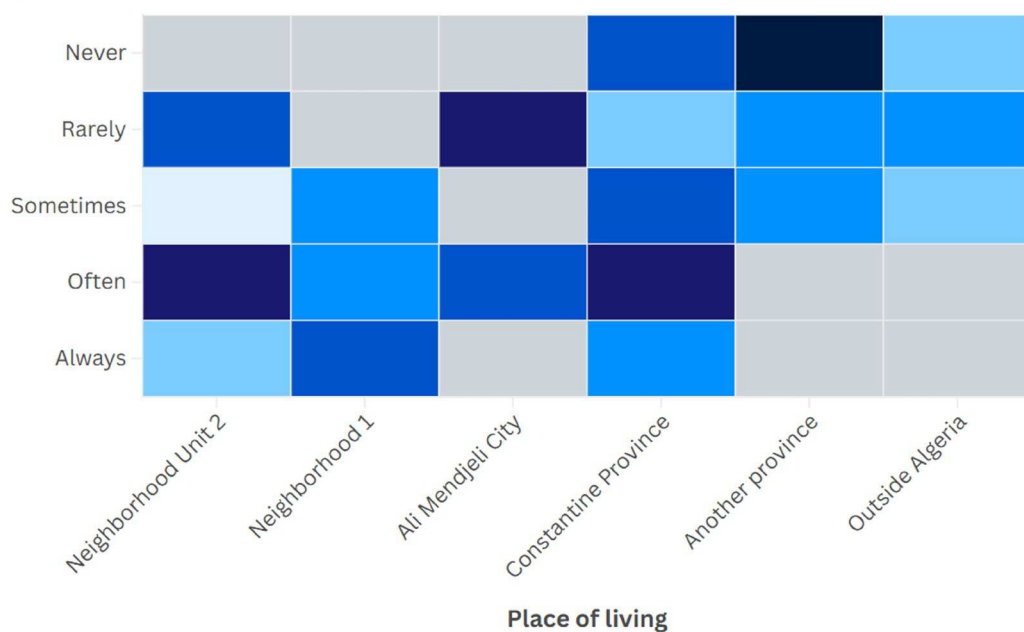


Figure 6. Frequency of event attendance by place of living and satisfaction with mall activities (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

Overall, the findings show that the multifunctionality of Ritaj Mall is stratified by spatial proximity. Nearby residents primarily saw it as a site of consumption and services. In contrast, distant visitors used it less as a social or leisure hub. Proximity is decisive in cultural participation, positioning the mall as locally embedded but unevenly accessible. This spatial stratification reflects broader socio-economic and leisure dynamics. The correlation between event attendance and satisfaction highlights how community-oriented initiatives, ranging from national celebrations to humanitarian campaigns, such as cancer awareness drive, enhance both the visitor experience and the mall's role as a socially responsible actor (Figure 8).

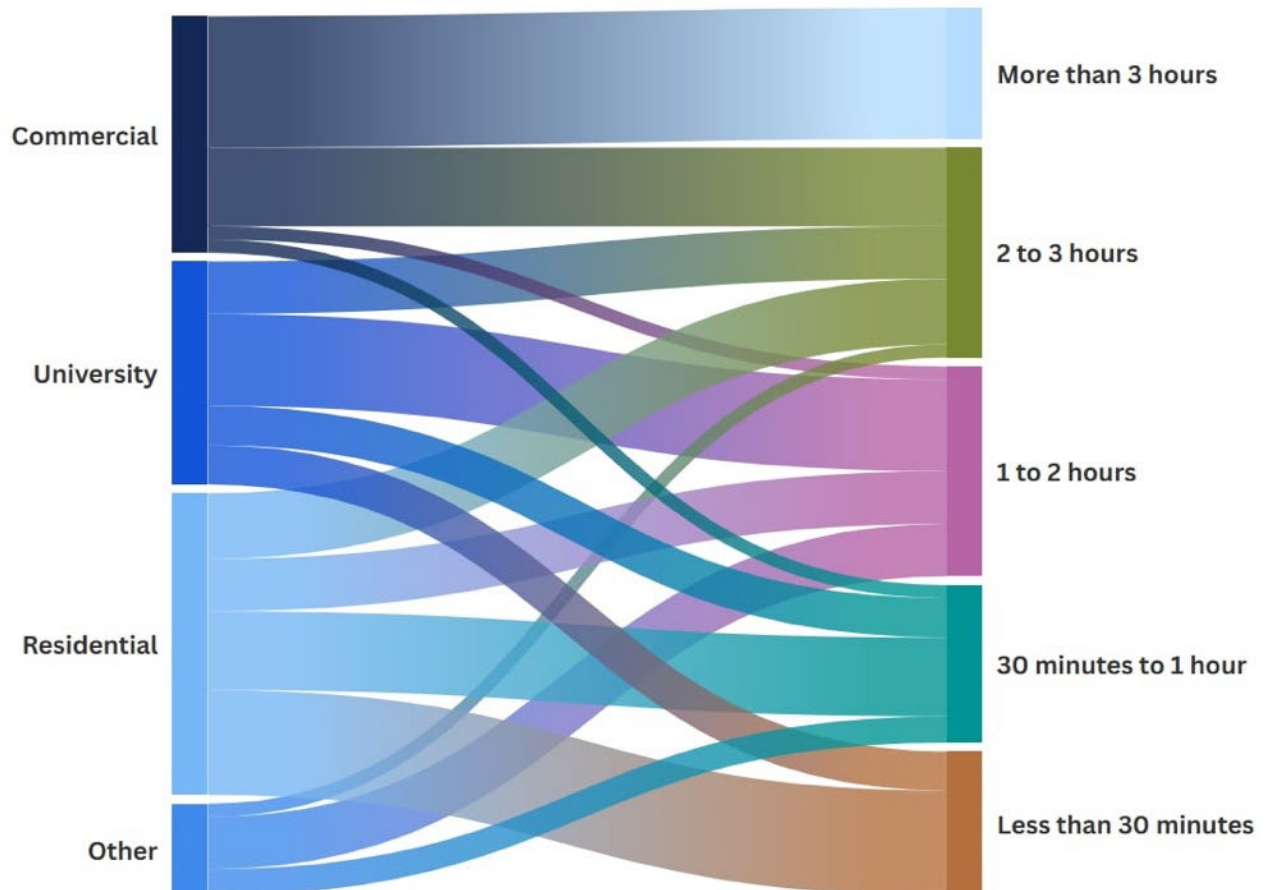


Figure 7. The purpose of being in Ali Mendjeli by time spent there (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.



Figure 8. Events organized by Ritaj Mall. Source: Official Facebook page of Ritaj Mall.

4.3.2. Economic Aspects

Ritaj Mall drives regional economic growth by creating jobs, attracting customers, and supporting businesses. Survey analysis showed a link between income, spending, and transport choices. Visitors from other provinces spent more per visit, with high spending (21,000 DZD+) mainly among distant travelers, likely due to infrequent visits. Local visitors typically spent 5000–10,000 DZD. The mall generated over 3000 direct jobs (Interview 1) in retail, management, and security, plus indirect jobs in transport and cleaning. Most visitors (95.4%) recognized its role in local business growth and employment. Beyond commerce, it impacts real estate, initially promoting multifunctionality but now driving rent increases. Before the mall's success, three-room apartments rented for 1500 DZD; now, residential rent is 3500 DZD (+133%), and commercial conversions, like medical clinics, reach 4000 DZD (+167%) (Interview 2). This rise stems from demand and economic activity rather than inflation, reinforcing the mall's role as a regional commercial and social hub.

The contribution of Ritaj Mall to the local economy is significant, with nearly half (49.2%) of its visitors utilizing public transportation to reach the location. The mall is close to the tram station, which is just five minutes away, and a bus station to other provinces within a one-minute walk. Furthermore, 40% of visitors arrive by private vehicle, while 10.8% arrive on foot, underscoring the mall's accessibility. This mall's convenient accessibility encourages higher foot traffic, which positively impacts retail sales and supports businesses within the mall. Providing various transportation options enables the mall to attract a diverse demographic of shoppers, enhancing its role as a key economic hub in the area (Interview 2). Transportation is directly linked to spending behavior, accessibility costs, and consumer engagement. Expenses such as fuel, public transit, and ridesharing represent financial commitments that shape visitors' budgets and shopping patterns. Viewing transportation as an economic factor offers key insights into consumer behavior, financial responsibility, and the mall's broader economic impact.

Ritaj Mall's private-sector partnerships foster both commercial success and local business growth. By offering affordable spaces, the mall enables small businesses, artisans, and service providers to reach a diverse customer base, encouraging entrepreneurship and cultural preservation. This approach enriches the retail environment, enhances community engagement, and stimulates economic growth. A significant partnership with Hypermarket Ilf creates around 100 direct jobs, not including supply chain positions. Additionally, the mall has leased a space from the private sector to mitigate parking shortages. These initiatives reinforce Ritaj Mall's role as a venue that combines economic viability with support for local businesses and cultural sustainability (Interview 1).

The findings show that 95% of traders recognized the benefits of proximity to transport hubs, while 98.3% linked higher sales to nearby university and residences. All respondents agreed the Ali Mendjeli bus station attracts clients from various provinces. However, only 56.6% saw Main Road No. 10 as advantageous, with 33.3% neutral. Additionally, 61.6% valued nearby institutions like the military hospital and CNAL (National Housing Fund), though 38.4% were neutral or disagreed. Moreover, 91.6% believed diverse stores inside and outside the mall boosted business. This is corroborated by the pilot study, which revealed that stores in the surrounding area of Ritaj Mall, particularly in NU02, either complement the mall's commercial complex primarily through food service trades or benefit directly from its increased commercial activity (Figure 9).

The analysis examined the relationships between income level, spending behavior, and visit duration at Ritaj Mall. We employed the Spearman's rank correlation due to the ordinal nature of the variables, indicating that spending increased with time spent in the mall, as visitors staying 1–2 h were more likely to spend over 10,000 DZD, whereas those under 30 min typically spent under 5000 DZD. Higher-income visitors (60,000 DZD

and above) were more likely to exceed 10,000 DZD per visit, while approximately 70% of lower-income visitors (below 20,000 DZD) spent less than this amount, regardless of visit duration. The analysis revealed a moderately positive correlation between spending and visit duration ($p = 0.565$, $p < 0.001$) and a stronger correlation between spending and income ($p = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, income and visit duration were not significantly related ($p = 0.026$, $p = 0.839$), indicating that income influences spending but not time allocation.

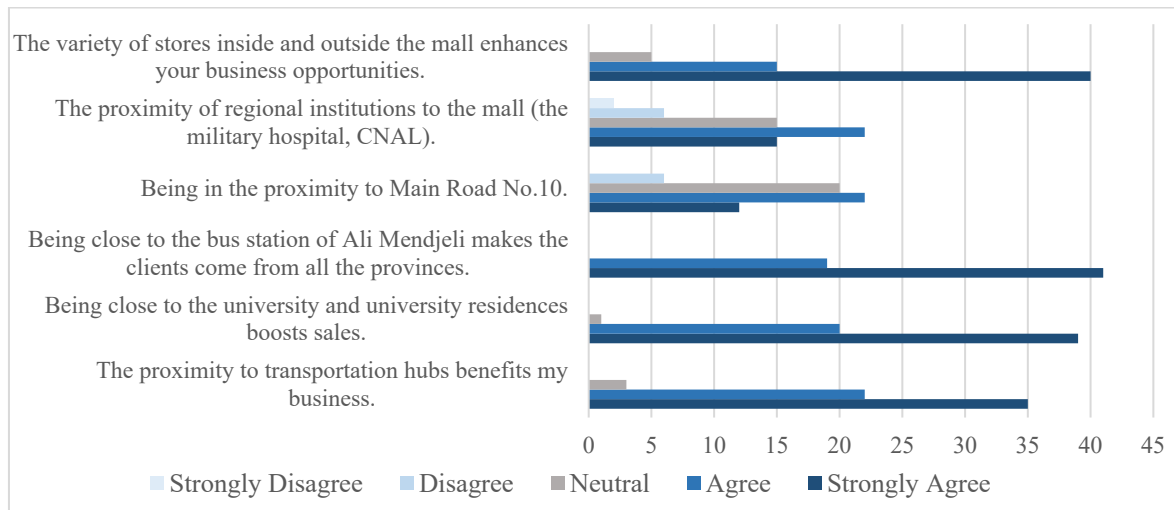


Figure 9. Traders' agreement on Ritaj Mall's location advantages (N = 60). Source: Edited by the authors based on the pilot study.

The distribution patterns illustrated in the stacked bar chart indicate that lower-income visitors constituted the largest share of short visits (under 30 min), mid-income groups (20,000–59,999 DZD) were prevalent in intermediate durations (30 min–2 h), and higher-income groups (60,000 DZD and above) were proportionately better represented in longer visits (2–3 h). However, extended stays of more than 3 h remained relatively rare across all income levels. These patterns suggest that income primarily affects spending behavior rather than visit duration, highlighting the mall's role as an inclusive commercial environment attracting a socioeconomically diverse clientele (Figure 10).

We investigated the relationship between money spent per mall visit, gender, and place of residence. We conducted a cross-tabulation analysis to examine the distributional patterns across these categorical variables. To address low expected cell counts in some categories, spending was aggregated into three levels (Low, Medium, High) for the gender analysis and into two levels (Low-Medium vs. High) for the residence analysis, with residence grouped into Within Ali Mendjeli and Outside Ali Mendjeli. For gender and spending, the chi-square assumptions were satisfied (16.7% of cells with expected counts below 5; minimum expected count = 3.46), and the test indicated no statistically significant association (χ^2 (2, N = 65) = 0.165, $p = 0.921$), suggesting that spending levels do not differ significantly between males and females. For residence and spending, because 50% of cells had expected counts below 5, Fisher's Exact Test was applied. The results revealed a statistically significant association (two-sided $p = 0.003$), indicating that visitors from farther locations are more likely to fall into the higher spending category.

The spending patterns were broadly similar across genders, with most visitors spending between 5000 and 20,000 DZD. Distance from the mall appeared to influence expenditure behavior, with visitors traveling longer distances tending to spend more.

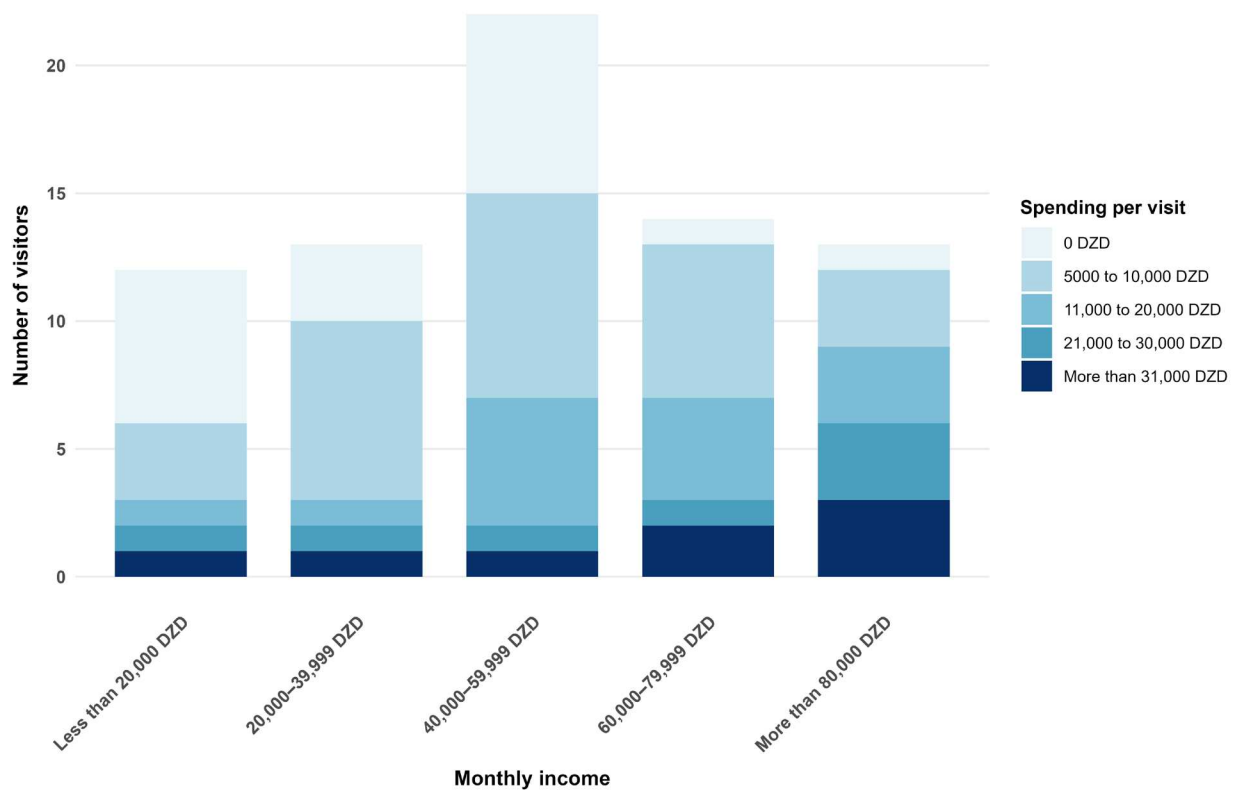


Figure 10. Spending per visit based on time spent in Ritaj Mall by monthly income (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

Overall, spending behaviors remained consistent across groups, with distance influencing both time spent and expenditure and occasional high-spending visitors standing out (Figure 11). While income dictates the logistics of access, the social appropriation of the mall space is further nuanced by cultural and gendered dimensions. From a gender perspective, this pattern indicates that for many women, ‘window shopping’ serves as a form of social participation rather than a purely consumption-driven activity, reflecting the mall’s dual role as a marketplace and a social anchor. In the Algerian context, shopping malls provide a closed, securitized, and socially regulated environment that operates as a semi-public space governed by defined behavioral norms. Such environments offer women a socially legitimate setting for leisure and public visibility that might be less accessible in traditional street-level urban spaces. Consequently, extended time spent in the mall does not necessarily translate into higher individual expenditure but reflects the mall’s role as a culturally acceptable ‘third place’ for engagement. Furthermore, purchasing decisions, especially for high-value goods, are frequently moderated by collective household-based patterns rather than individual impulse. This interpretation is supported by the survey results, which showed that 47.7% of respondents planned their purchases (Figure 4E), confirming that consumption in this context is often a structured, intentional process.

We examined the relationship between monthly income and the transportation mode used to reach the mall. Because 60% of cells had expected counts below 5, the assumptions for Pearson’s Chi-Square were not satisfied, therefore, we applied Fisher’s Exact Test. The results revealed a strong, statistically significant association (two-sided $p = 0.000$), indicating that transportation mode choice varies by income. The Linear-by-Linear Association also showed a significant trend (5.260, $p = 0.022$), with lower-income individuals (20,000–39,999 DZD) predominantly using public transportation (65%), while higher-income groups increasingly relied on private cars, representing 50% of those earning 40,000–79,999 DZD and 75% of those earning more than 80,000 DZD. Walking was the

least common mode, occurring primarily within the 20,000–39,999 DZD group (around 15%). This pattern underscores the influence of income on transportation choice, where higher-income individuals tend to favor private cars while lower-income groups rely more on public transportation (Figure 12).

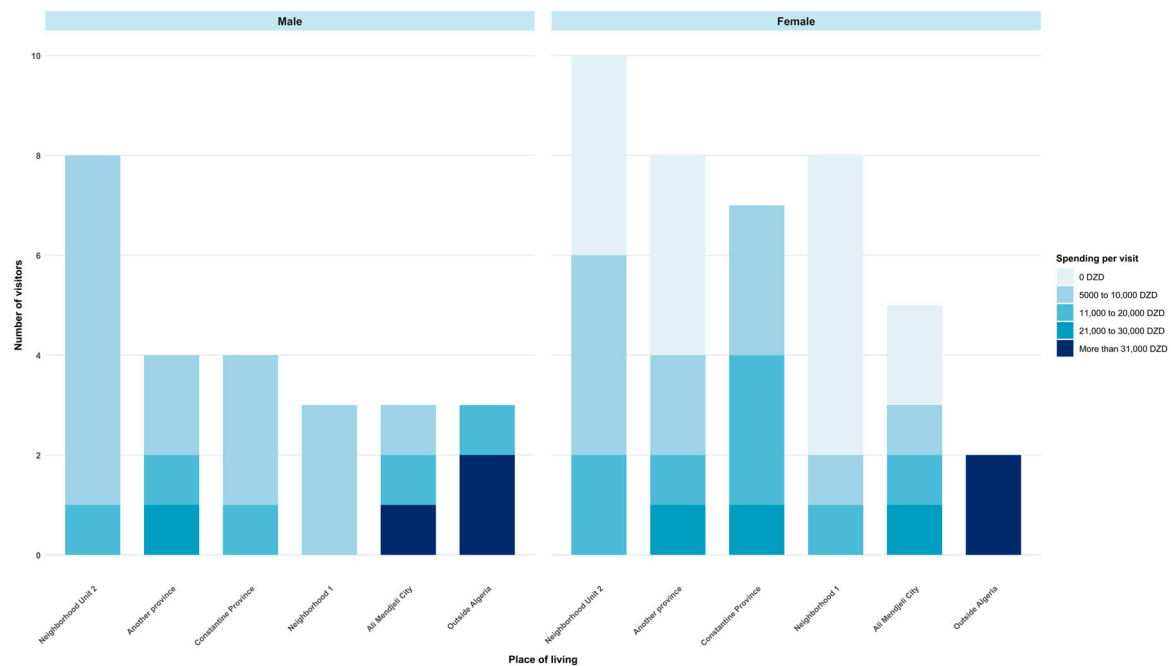


Figure 11. Money spent in Ritaj Mall based on gender by place of residence (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

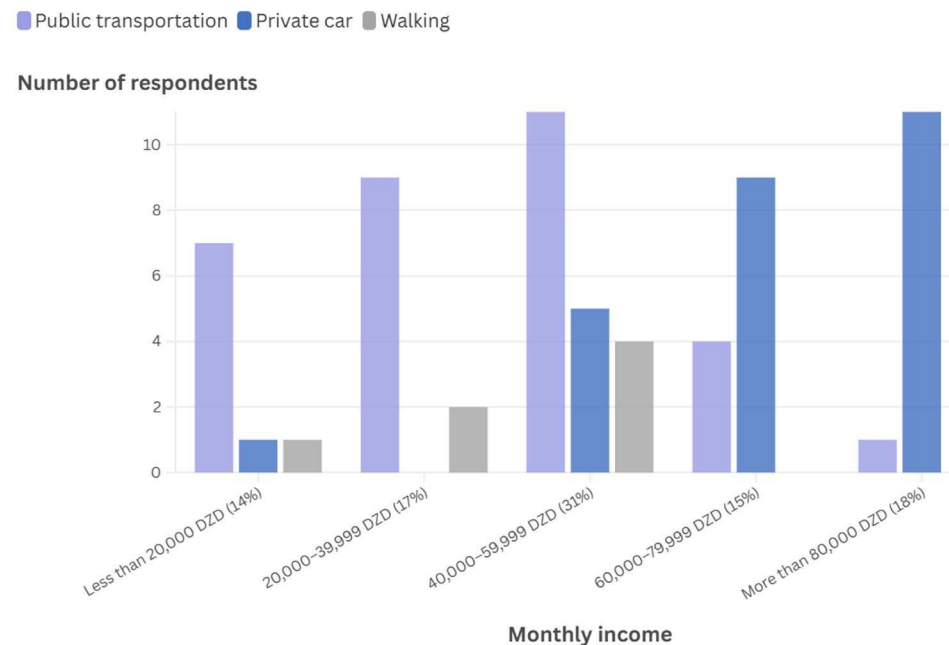


Figure 12. Mode of transportation used to reach Ritaj Mall based on the approximate monthly income (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

Economically, Ritaj Mall shapes both its surroundings and its visitors' behaviors. Stores in NU02 benefit from its commercial flows, particularly in food services, while the mall has also increased the surrounding property values and boosted market activity. This aligns with Zhang's findings on malls' impact on housing prices [74], where value

appreciation occurs post-completion but diminishes with distance. Ritaj Mall's presence has heightened area appeal, increased transaction volumes, and driven price growth, making it a key economic hub. These dynamics reflect Alonso's bid-rent theory, which suggests that high-rent areas attract economic activity, leading to commercial clustering [75]. Around Ritaj Mall, rising land values reinforce this pattern, drawing businesses while gradually displacing low-income residents due to escalating costs. While beneficial for property owners and traders, this trend presents affordability challenges for renters. Meanwhile, income primarily affected transport choices, private cars for wealthier groups, public transit for lower-income ones, rather than the duration of visits. Despite these differences, spending patterns remained largely consistent across groups, though occasionally high-spending visitors stand out. Designed to attract a socially diverse clientele, the mall functions not only as a commercial hub but also as an inclusive space for different social classes, even as its growth raises questions of accessibility and equity [74,76].

4.3.3. Spatial Aspects

The spatial analysis shows that proximity significantly impacts visitor behavior, including visit duration, spending, and engagement at Ritaj Mall. The study examined how distance influences visit frequency and store visits, with data categorized by residence location and time spent at the mall (Figure 13). Place of residence was coded in ascending order of distance from the mall (from nearest to farthest), and visit duration and number of stores visited were treated as ordinal variables. Given the ordinal structure of the variables, Spearman's rank correlation was applied as the appropriate non-parametric test. The results indicated a strong positive association between visits and the number of stores visited ($\rho = 0.755, p < 0.001$), confirming that longer stays are associated with visiting more stores. Residents from distant areas showed extended visits and higher store visits, characteristic of "destination shopping". This pattern is further supported by a positive correlation between residence and time spent ($\rho = 0.750, p < 0.001$) and store visits ($\rho = 0.494, p < 0.001$). Overall, proximity strongly influences both visit duration and store visits, with distant residents staying longer and visiting more stores compared to those closer to the mall.

The analysis examined the association between place of residence and spending per visit at Ritaj Mall. Because both variables were treated as ordinal, and place of residence was coded in ascending order of distance from the mall, Spearman's rank correlation was applied. The results indicate a moderately positive association ($p = 0.352, p = 0.004$, significant at 0.01). Given the distance-based coding, this positive coefficient suggests that visitors living farther from the mall tend to spend more per visit, although the magnitude of the association was moderate. A box plot illustrates spending patterns: those within a 10-min drive showed lower, more consistent spending with approximately 20% outliers. As distance increased (within NU02, within Neighborhood 01), spending and variability rose, covering 30% and 25% of the sample. Visitors from other provinces or abroad (25%) exhibited the highest spending variation, including an extreme outlier in the "Outside Algeria" group, likely reflecting infrequent but high-value visits. These patterns suggest that while proximity moderately shapes spending behavior, distance introduces greater variability and occasionally higher expenditure levels (Figure 14).

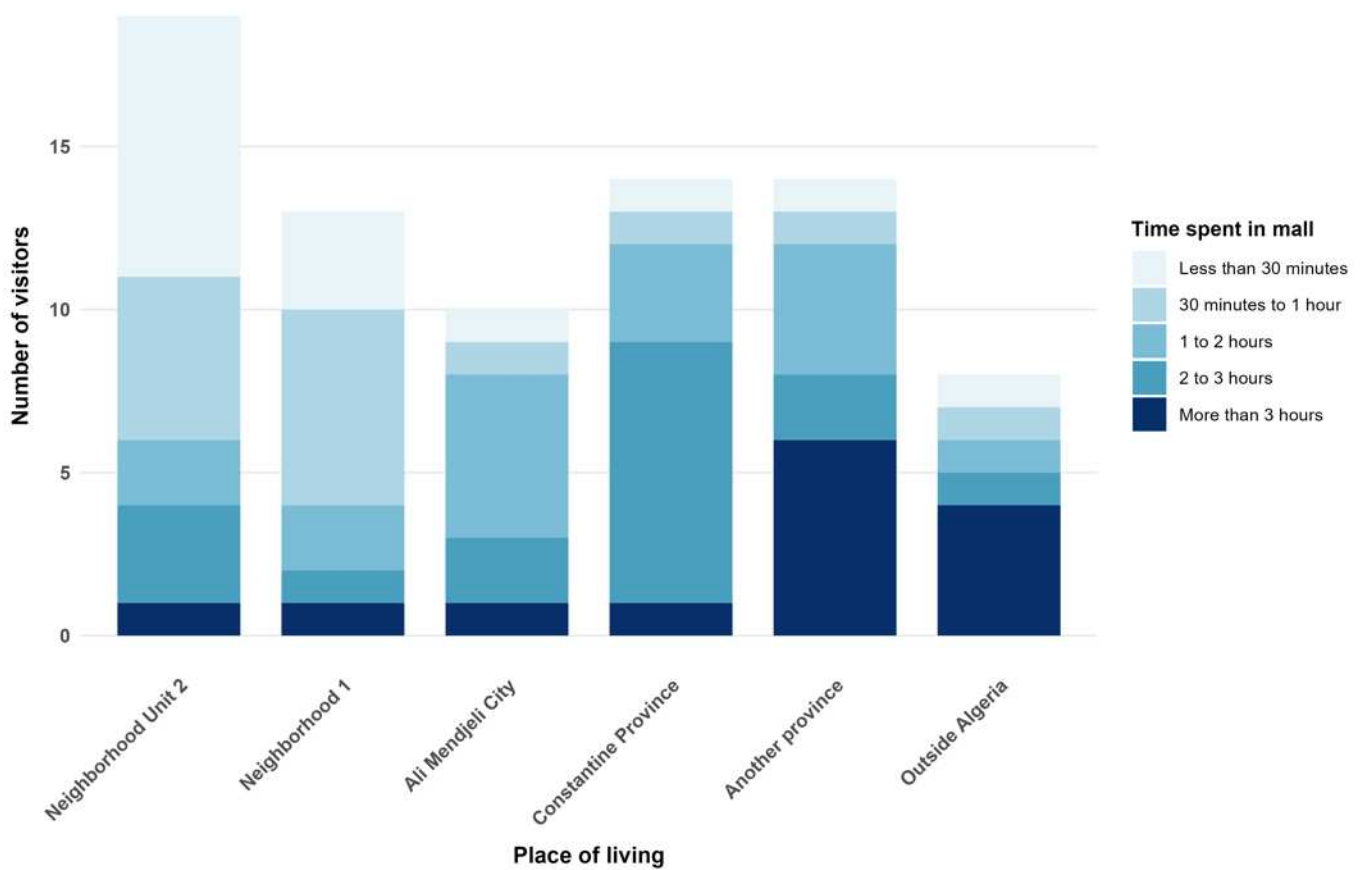


Figure 13. The average number of stores visited per mall trip, by time spent and place of residence (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

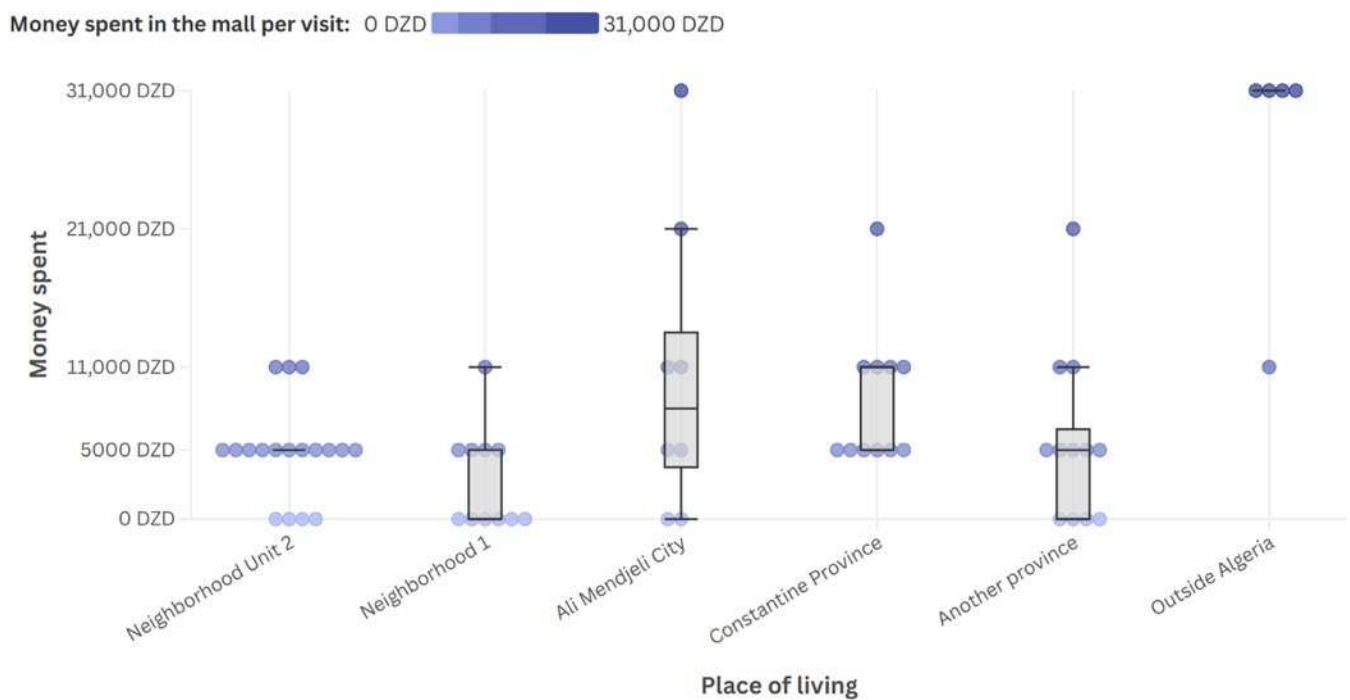


Figure 14. Money spent in Ritaj Mall per visit by place of living (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

To examine whether perceptions of Ritaj Mall's primary functions varied by length of residency in Ali Mendjeli, nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis tests were conducted because

the perception variables were ordinal and residency duration was categorical. Long-term residents (4+ years) tended to express stronger agreement with its function as a shopping hub, while newer residents (less than 3 years) relied on it for essentials but showed more varied responses. Agreement regarding the mall's role in entertainment and socializing was high across all groups. The results indicated no statistically significant differences in perceptions across residency duration groups (shopping: $p = 0.220$ and social interaction: $p = 0.331$). Because both p -values exceeded the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, suggesting that perceptions of the mall's shopping and social roles are broadly consistent regardless of length of residency. Nevertheless, descriptive tendencies suggest that, over time, the mall shifts from a practical shopping space for newcomers to a multifunctional community anchor (Figure 15).

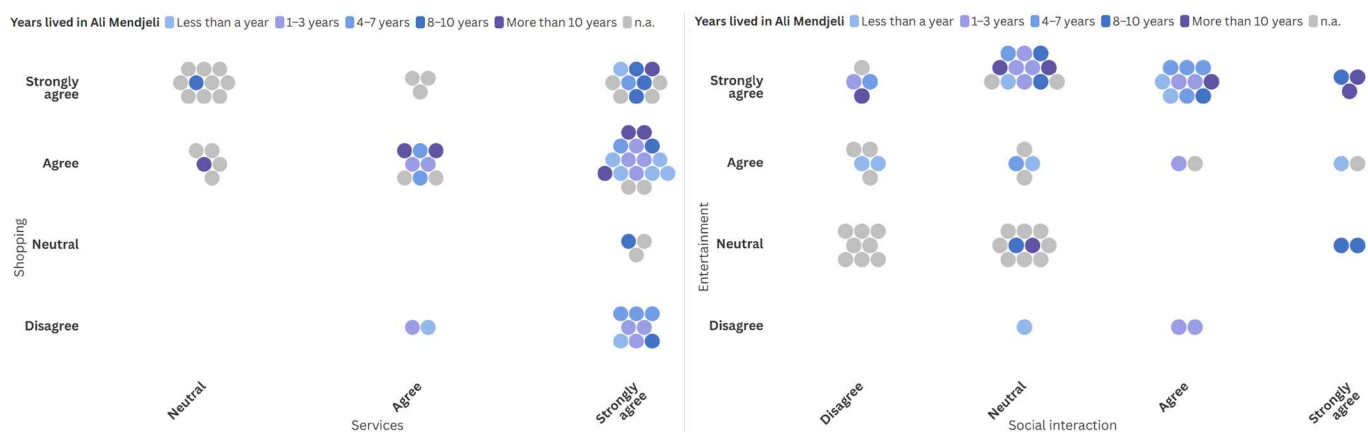


Figure 15. Perceptions of the mall's primary functions based on the length of residency in Ali Mendjeli (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

The analysis revealed notable differences in transportation habits based on the respondents' places of residence, emphasizing the accessibility of Ali Mendjeli and Ritaj Mall. Public transportation was the primary mode for 75% of respondents outside Algeria, from another province, and 91% of those residing within the same province but outside the city. In contrast, private cars were more commonly used by 62.5% of respondents living within Neighborhood 01 and 23% of those within NU02. Among respondents residing within NU02, 50% relied on private cars, 39% walked, and 11% used public transportation (Figure 16). Because 72.2% of cells had expected counts below 5, Pearson's Chi-square assumptions were violated; therefore, we applied Fisher's Exact Test, confirming a statistically significant association between place of residence and transportation mode (two-sided $p = 0.000$). Linear-by-Linear Association also indicated a significant trend ($p = 0.002$), highlighting the influence of proximity on mobility patterns. This variation underscores the affordability and variability of different transit options, enhancing access to the mall and supporting its role as a regional economic hub. Overall, these patterns indicate that transportation preferences, shaped by proximity and affordability, reinforce the mall's accessibility and its function in attracting a diverse demographic.

Spatial dynamics at Ritaj Mall show that distance influences visit duration, store visits, and spending variability, with distant residents staying longer and spending more. Over time, the mall has evolved from a practical shopping space into a multifunctional community anchor. Transportation preferences, shaped by proximity and affordability, attract a diverse demographic and reinforce accessibility. Environmental perceptions were uneven across demographic groups: distant visitors generally viewed the mall more favorably, while nearby residents, particularly older individuals, reported greater sensitivity to daily challenges, citing concerns such as congestion, noise, pollution, illegal trade, and

rising rents. Younger visitors, regardless of residence, tended to perceive the mall's impact positively, whereas older residents expressed more negative views. These patterns indicate that spatial proximity and age jointly shape how environmental and social impacts are experienced. Findings align with those of the pilot study indicate that stores in the vicinity of Ritaj Mall, particularly in NU02, either benefit directly from the mall's commercial flows or complement them through food service trades. However, the prominence of food-type trade has raised concerns among local residents regarding potential risks, such as fires and accidents, which have contributed to certain negative perceptions of Ritaj Mall. Together, these patterns highlight the interplay of spatial, behavioral, and environmental factors in shaping the mall's multifunctional role.

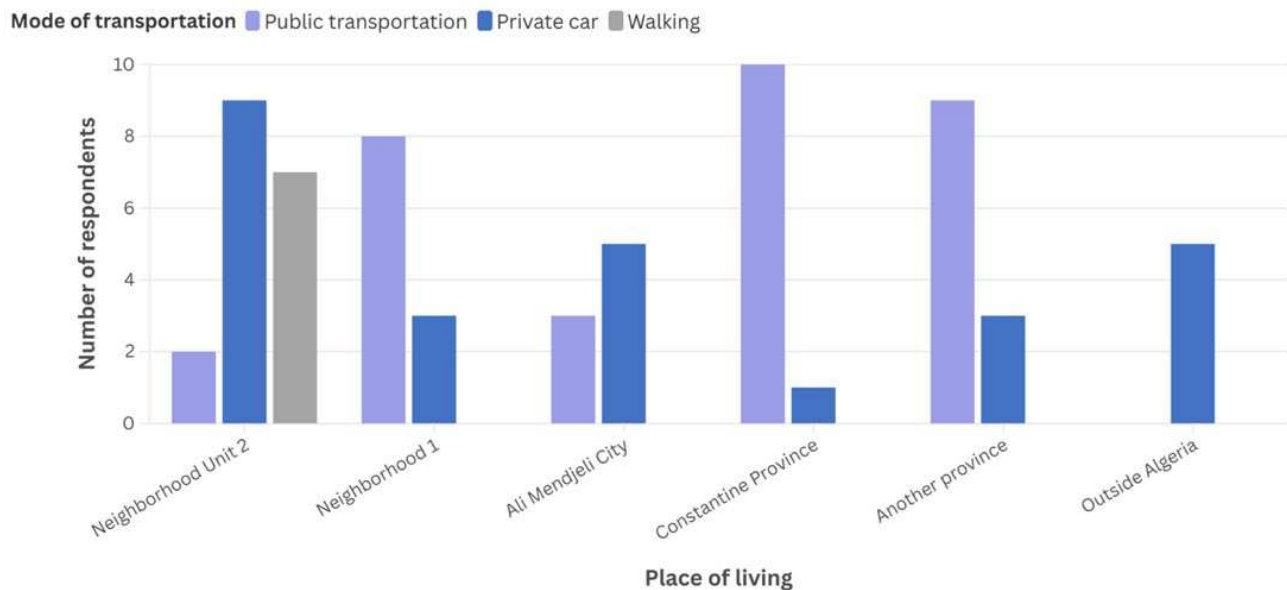


Figure 16. Mode of transportation used to reach Ritaj Mall based on place of residence (N = 65). Source: Edited by the authors based on surveys.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpreting Ritaj Mall Through Lefebvre's Spatial Triad

In this section, we applied the theory to unpack its implications on consumer behavior. Lefebvre's conceptual triad, comprising spatial practices (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (lived space), offers a productive framework for analyzing the spatial and social dynamics of Ritaj Mall. As perceived space, the mall materializes through its physical layout, commercial density, and circulation patterns, where there is a statistically significant association between proximity and frequency of attendance at events organized by Ritaj Mall (Pearson χ^2 , $p < 0.001$), which indicate that cultural engagement is embedded in everyday territorial routines. Accessibility thus conditions the regularity of participation, confirming that spatial practices are not neutral but structured by physical and social distance. Moreover, environmental perceptions varied by age and proximity: older, nearby residents reported greater sensitivity to congestion, noise, and pollution, while distant or younger visitors perceived these impacts more positively, highlighting the lived experience of environmental conditions within the perceived space. As conceived space, Ritaj Mall embodies the ambitions of planners and developers to establish a landmark of modernity in Ali Mendjeli, supported by infrastructure enhancements such as tramway extensions and integrated transport systems. These interventions strategically embed the mall within broader urban flows, positioning it as a regional economic node. Finally, the mall's lived space emerges through the meanings users

attach to it, ranging from middle-income families seeking leisure, to cross-border tourists, to lower-income residents experiencing exclusion through rising rents. These everyday practices and perceptions animate the space and reveal tensions between commercial intent and lived reality. Through this triadic lens, Ritaj Mall is not merely a physical or economic entity but a socially produced space where planning ideologies, economic imperatives, and everyday experiences intersect. Furthermore, consumer behavior at Ritaj Mall is shaped by an interplay of social, economic, and spatial transformations that reflect the production of space as theorized by Lefebvre [55]. Applying his triadic framework, perceived, conceived, and lived space reveals how consumption practices emerge not merely in response to supply but through active negotiation with the mall's evolving urban context.

5.2. Social Impact: Ritaj Mall as a Community Hub

Building on Lefebvre's theory, this section interprets the empirical findings through the lens of socially produced space, emphasizing how Ritaj Mall functions as more than a retail site. Events, indoor playgrounds, and recreational programming attract broad audiences, particularly residents of Constantine Province, underscoring its role as a platform for social interaction rather than more than just consumption. Survey evidence shows that nearly two-thirds of visitor's expressed satisfaction with these activities, a finding that resonates with Shields' conception of malls as "microcosms of urban life" [44], where individuals engage in communal activities, and Goss' (1993) recognition of malls as multifunctional spaces offering cultural and social opportunities [35].

Age and income diversity further demonstrate how inclusivity is evident in practice where visitors span from young adults (18–24) to seniors (+55), challenging the stereotype of malls, unlike traditional malls that primarily target younger, middle-to-high-income shoppers. In this sense, Ritaj Mall can be situated alongside Istanbul's malls, such as Istinye Park and Zorlu Center, where multifunctionality blends retail, leisure and culture. The appeal of night shopping also plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion due to the mall's opening hours, indicating that they prefer evening visits due to the convenience of combining social activities with shopping after work or family commitments. Such dynamics highlight the mall's adaptive capacity to local lifestyles while reflecting broader global patterns of multifunctional mall development. These patterns illustrate how Ritaj Mall produces a socially stratified environment, where multifunctional spaces are accessed differently across ages, income, and proximity, reflecting broader socio-spatial inequalities within urban life.

From Lefebvre's perspective, Ritaj Mall emerges as a lived space where individuals actively reconfigure the environment through everyday practices. Rather than passively consuming within a predefined commercial setting, visitors actively participate in transforming the mall into a communal and expressive site by attaching personal and collective meanings to cultural events, leisure zones, and shared rituals. This reconfiguration is amplified by "destination shopping", with 35.4% of visitors coming from outside Ali Mendjeli and 7.7% from abroad, further illustrating how social and spatial logics merge within everyday consumer behavior. These patterns show how the mall is not just a backdrop for social life but a lived spatial formation where identity, sociability, and routine intersect, underscoring how Ritaj Mall operates as a hybrid space that exceeds its commercial blueprint.

5.3. Economic Influence and Regional Impact

Ritaj Mall plays a pivotal role in local and regional economies, functioning as a significant multifunctional anchor. Its strategic location near the Ali Mendjeli land station and robust transportation networks enhance regional accessibility, attracting a diverse visitor base from Constantine, neighboring provinces and countries. Survey data showed

a strong association between geographic origin and visit duration (Spearman's $r = 0.750$, $p < 0.001$), with local residents typically reporting shorter, purpose-driven visits. Some visitors, particularly lower-income groups, engage in “window shopping”, spending time in the mall for social rather than purely economic purposes.

The mall supports employment and economic activity in the surrounding area, providing over 3000 direct jobs and contributing to retail sales by the partnership with the private–private sector either regarding the renting area to cover the deficit in parking lots and in Ilef Hypermarket, or renting places inside the mall for small businesses with symbolic prices (survey-based). Although these correlations suggest relationships among spatial accessibility, visitor behavior, and economic outcomes, we emphasize that the data show that additional unmeasured factors may influence these associations rather than causation, and the observed patterns.

From Lefebvre's perspective, this may reflect how conceived space operates through visible spatial design and economic strategies that shape consumption patterns. The mall's evolution into a multifunctional retail center is not incidental, but the result of intentional configurations, including integrated public–private investments, adjusted spatial allocations to accommodate informal economic actors, and ensured multi-modal connectivity. These interventions help shape consumer pathways, guiding where people move and how they consume. As such, consumer behaviors, including prolonged visits, differentiated use by income level, and the emergence of non-traditional consumption like window shopping, demonstrate how economic ambition is embedded within spatial control. Ritaj Mall thus functions as an engineered environment where conceived space mediates the economic rhythms of a diverse public, fostering both commercial circulation and socio-spatial accessibility.

5.4. Urban Development and Accessibility

Ritaj Mall has played a pivotal role in urban transformation, evolving from an unplanned development into major commercial hub that triggered both immediate and long-term urban interventions. Initial responses included urban upgrades and increased security measures implemented in 2017 by municipal authorities. Planners also had to address issues of accessibility, which was significantly improved by the extension of the Constantine tramway line. The tram began operating in July 2013, initially connecting Benabdelmalek station to Zouaghi Slimane station over 7.8 km. Further extensions were completed in June 2019, reaching Chahid Kadri Brahim station (6.9 km), and again in September 2021, extending to University Abdelhamid-Mehri in Ali Mendjeli (3.5 km) (Interview 2) [77,78]. Together with its proximity to Constantine University and Main Road No. 101, the mall enjoys high accessibility, making it a key destination. The nearby Ali Mendjeli land station serves as a major regional transportation hub covering 2300 square meters, including 15 urban bus lines operated by both public and private sectors connecting the city with surrounding municipalities and provinces to the south, east, and west. The station handles around one million passengers annually, operating 63 bus lines, further reinforcing the accessibility [79]. By structuring visitor flows and shaping daily routines, Ritaj Mall demonstrates how spatial design, infrastructural integration, and governance mechanisms actively mediate multifunctional urban practices, simultaneously influencing consumption patterns, local economic circulation, and socio-spatial inequalities, reflecting broader national trends in Algeria where concentrated investments in the northern regions, driven by population density, exacerbate regional imbalances and inequalities [80].

This commercial and infrastructural transformation around Ritaj Mall was paralleled by urban development in the area. The mall coincided with the establishment of key facilities such as two primary and middle schools in 2013, the Jaafar Ibn Abi Talib mosque,

and the Qadri Hussein Medical Clinic. Despite not being originally planned within the NU02 land occupation framework, Ritaj Mall has evolved into a key commercial hub. Initially designated as a hostel rather than a retail center, its success catalyzed further commercial developments, including the nearby “Yes Mall”. Like Ritaj Mall, “Yes Mall” was not initially intended for retail use; the land occupation framework (POS) had originally designated it as the administrative headquarters for Algeria Telecom. The POS, which regulates land use and urban development in Algeria, aims to ensure organized spatial growth and infrastructure provision [81]. However, since its opening in November 2023, “Yes Mall” has rapidly become a popular shopping destination, illustrating the broader trend of adapting infrastructure to meet evolving urban needs. These transformations underscore Ritaj Mall’s role in establishing commercial centrality and driving regional trade and commerce, as Lakehal [12] and Yahi and Dekoumi [82] highlighted. The area surrounding the mall now hosts a diverse mix of retail, administrative, medical, and religious services, reinforcing its status as a multifunctional hub. This evolution aligns with global trends observed in cases like Paradise Valley Mall in Arizona and Akmerkez Mall in Istanbul, where similar unplanned developments led to adaptive urban planning measures, including improvements to walkability and transportation networks [26].

Challenges still persist, particularly regarding parking availability. The pilot study conducted in 2023 revealed that the existing parking lot has the capacity to accommodate only 800 vehicles, which needs to be improved given the mall’s daily visitor flow. In response, the mall administration has initiated the construction of an additional 1000 parking spaces and established private–public partnerships to temporarily rent parking areas (Interview 1; field observation). Beyond accessibility, Ritaj Mall has driven urban expansion and reshaped the local commercial landscape. The mall’s owner is developing a recreational and aquatic park in NU04, strategically located opposite university residences. This development reflects the broader trend of businesses from Constantine’s historic city center expanding into modern hubs like Ali Mendjeli, where consumer preferences for integrated spaces combining shopping, leisure, and social interaction are better met [83]. Ritaj Mall’s success has reshaped Ali Mendjeli’s urban dynamics, spurring commercial growth and infrastructure upgrades by improving urban furnishings, such as night lighting to support evening programs and reinforced security for a safer environment. Public transportation access has been improved to accommodate increased foot traffic and commercial expansion, with plans to extend the tram line and provide additional taxi services in the surrounding area. In response to the mall’s economic impact, the municipality has also facilitated investment opportunities, encouraging private sector participation through public–private partnerships. This is particularly significant given that Ritaj Mall emerged as an unplanned commercial center within the land occupation plan. Recognizing its role in urban development, the municipality further supports commercial expansion with plans for three additional malls and the construction of an aquatic park. These projects, driven by both private developers and government initiatives, reflect the growing demand for retail and recreational spaces in Ali Mendjeli. The introduction of mixed-use developments, such as businesses renting garage spaces beneath residential buildings, has further shaped the local commercial landscape by providing residents with convenient access to retail services. However, integrating residential and commercial functions has also introduced challenges, including increased noise pollution and traffic congestion, negatively impacting neighborhood quality of life. Balancing these economic benefits with preserving community well-being has become a critical urban planning consideration. From Lefebvre’s perspective, as a perceived space, Ritaj Mall is shaped by its physical accessibility and infrastructural integration; through its tangible spatiality, it shapes how users encounter, move through, and interact with the built environment, where accessibility and design choreograph daily

practices. These spatial conditions promote new consumer rhythms, such as evening visits and prolonged stays, reflecting how users navigate and inhabit the space daily. The mall's internal configuration, vertical commercial density, open circulation pathways, and placement of anchor services further direct behavior by encouraging specific trajectories and temporalities of use. For instance, clustering leisure zones near high-traffic corridors extends dwell time and increases the likelihood of incidental purchases. Such arrangements support emerging behaviors like “multi-purpose visits”, where individuals combine errands, socializing, and leisure within a single spatial loop. Thus, perceived space here is not simply experienced but operationalized, shaping consumer engagement as an embodied spatial routine embedded in the wider urban fabric. Similarly, the success of the mall has contributed to the emergence of additional shopping hubs (Table 7). Although Algeria's national planning framework [84] formally promotes ecological sustainability, its implementation in large retail developments remains fragmented and weakly enforced [84,85]. This implementation gap illustrates how commercial urbanization often advances without the systematic integration of environmental considerations, reinforcing broader concerns highlighted in sustainability transitions and urban political ecology literature [86].

Table 7. Status of malls in Ali Mendjeli. Source: Edited by the authors based on Interview 2.

Mall Status	Name	Location
Existing Malls	El-Ritaj	NU06
	Ritaj Mall	NU02
	Yes Mall	NU02
	Sans Visa Mall	NU07
	Salah Bey Mall	NU07
	Boubaya Mall	NU07
	Oscar Shopping Mall	West extension
	Square Shopping (180 stores—open market)	NU20
Malls Under Construction	Zekara Mall	NU18
	Shahla Mall	NU10
	2bm Mall	NU15
Planned Malls	El Medina shopping (300 stores-open market)	West extension
	Not Named yet (NN)	West extension
	NN	West extension
	NN	South extension
	Big Boss Mall	NU15
	NN	NU10

Beyond its contemporary commercial functions, Ritaj Mall may also be interpreted within a longer trajectory of commercial and social practices in Algerian cities. Historically, the souk or bazaar has operated not only as a marketplace but as a central social institution structuring urban life, exchange, and everyday interaction. While the spatial configuration of the modern shopping mall differs significantly in being enclosed, climate-controlled, and privately managed, it reproduces certain functional logics of the traditional souk: the concentration of diverse commercial activities, a high density of opportunities for social encounter, and the deliberate integration of consumption with leisure. Significantly, as shown in the revised version of Table 5, the entire ground floor of Ritaj Mall is predominantly dedicated to food trade. This echoes the traditional souk's emphasis on food and daily necessities as core commercial anchors, maintaining the “attractor” status of these essential assets while simultaneously packaging them within a modern, hybridized retail format.

However, important transformations are evident. Unlike the organically embedded and publicly accessible souk, the mall represents a highly “conceived” and regulated envi-

ronment, governed by private management and standardized retail formats. In this sense, the shopping mall does not simply replace traditional commercial culture but reinterprets it within a globalized model of consumption. Furthermore, as indicated in Table 6, the municipality's plan to develop "El Medina Shopping" (300 stores, open market) in Ali Mendjeli alongside similar initiatives in the "mother city" of Constantine suggests an institutional effort to balance contemporary mall-based retail with traditional open-market structures. This planning direction reflects a keen awareness of consumer behavior in Algeria, which appears to combine modern consumption practices with enduring cultural attachments to the souk. Ritaj Mall can therefore be understood as both a rupture and a continuity, maintaining the social centrality of commerce while reshaping it through new spatial, economic, and regulatory frameworks. This perspective situates the mall within a broader historical continuum, reinforcing its role as both a product and a producer of evolving socio-spatial practices.

5.5. Balancing Urban Challenges

While Ritaj Mall has driven urban growth, it has also introduced a number of challenges, including noise pollution, traffic congestion, and the encroachment of informal trade into public spaces. These issues disproportionately impact older residents living near the mall, who exhibit heightened sensitivity to disruptions in their immediate surroundings and frequently express concerns regarding the mall's environmental footprint.

In contrast, visitors from distant areas tend to view its impact more positively. Balancing these economic benefits with the well-being of nearby residents remains a critical consideration for urban planners.

Drawing parallels with unplanned or rapidly integrated malls like Paradise Valley Mall in Arizona or Akmerkez Mall in Istanbul, Ritaj Mall illustrates recurrent challenges observed in different urban contexts when integrating large commercial spaces into existing urban fabrics. These comparisons are not intended to imply structural equivalence between the cited international cases and the Algerian context. Instead, they are used analytically to highlight shared spatial dynamics, specifically the integration of multifunctional retail complexes into expanding metropolitan peripheries and the tensions that arise when rapid commercialization exceeds regulatory coordination. While Paradise Valley Mall and Akmerkez operate within more mature planning systems and higher-income consumer markets, they similarly faced challenges related to traffic management, land-use adaptation, and environmental externalities during their peak expansion phases. The comparison, therefore, serves a heuristic purpose, identifying convergent urban logics while explicitly acknowledging differences in governance structures, economic scale, and institutional capacity. These cases demonstrate how adaptive planning, such as improved transportation networks, zoning flexibility, and mixed-use space development, can mitigate negative impacts while fostering sustainable growth [26]. While Ritaj Mall epitomizes the rise of unplanned commercial centers reshaping new Algerian cities, similar patterns emerge both regionally and globally. In Algeria, Yes Mall in Ali Mendjeli emerged rapidly alongside Ritaj, highlighting how private developers capitalize on transit connections independently of an underlying planning framework mirroring Ritaj's trajectory. Internationally, projects like City Center in Houston, Texas, and Horton Plaza in San Diego, USA, demonstrate how mixed-use retail developments have reshaped underused urban zones into walkable, multifunctional districts, fueling local regeneration [39]. Like these examples, Ritaj Mall leverages its prime location and strong transport connectivity, however, it lacks the coordinated spatial planning or sustainability integration seen in the matured versions of these international models. This suggests that the phenomenon of powerful, yet loosely regulated mall developments is not confined to Algeria; rather, it aligns with a broader global

trend of commercial urbanism that outpaces formal planning, calling for more holistic and regulatory alignment to guide healthy urban growth.

The transformation observed in Ali Mendjeli is not an isolated case. The entrepreneur behind Ritaj Mall, one of the city's major commercial centers, is also actively expanding into other wilayas, including Oran and Algiers, with new mall projects that are not simple branches but fully independent retail hubs. This trend illustrates how commercial actors respond to emerging urban economies by replicating successful models in other growing cities. This territorial expansion reinforces the argument that such developments are central to redefining the urban landscape of planned towns in Algeria. The strategy further supports the idea that these commercial poles are not just local responses but part of a broader regional dynamic, where commerce increasingly drives urban identity, social behavior, and spatial structure [87].

6. Conclusions

The case study of Ritaj Mall provides a preliminary understanding of its role in shaping Ali Mendjeli's economic, social, and spatial dynamics. As a multifunctional hub, the mall extends beyond retail to include entertainment, leisure, and social spaces, aligning with mixed-use development principles and reinforcing its significance as a commercial and social focal point. The mall may contribute to local economic growth by generating employment opportunities across retail, security, and management sectors, but it has also stimulated private investment, leading to the emergence of additional commercial and entertainment hubs. Its influence on consumer behavior is suggested by the rise of "night shopping" and "window shopping", which reflect the mall's function as both a marketplace and a social gathering space. Moreover, Ritaj Mall appears to promote social inclusivity, attracting visitors from diverse socio-economic backgrounds including tourists from Tunisia and Libya. However, rising rental prices and increased land values, while beneficial for property owners, pose affordability challenges for lower-income residents, a trend consistent with the bid-rent theory. The mall's success has also reshaped the spatial organization of Ali Mendjeli, prompting urban infrastructure improvements such as the extension of the tramway, enhanced taxi services, and security reinforcements. These developments enhance connectivity and accessibility, balancing mobility-related inequalities and integrating the mall into the broader urban framework. Despite its contributions to economic growth and urban transformation, Ritaj Mall's rapid expansion has introduced challenges, particularly increased traffic congestion, noise pollution, and the commercialization of residential areas. These changes necessitate a balanced approach in urban planning to sustain economic benefits while preserving residents' quality of life. As demonstrated through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial triad, consumer behavior at Ritaj Mall emerges from the dynamic interplay of conceived intentions, perceived spatial conditions, and lived social experiences revealing the mall not merely as a commercial site, but as an active producer and product of urban transformation. While previous studies often examined these three aspects in isolation, our study links them empirically in a single framework, showing how their interaction shapes visitor behavior, cultural participation, and the mall's influence on urban form. This integrated perspective highlights the complex ways in which multifunctional retail spaces interact with social dynamics, economic strategies, and urban development, offering a nuanced understanding of their role in contemporary cities. Overall, the validation of the study's propositions across conceived, perceived, and lived dimensions demonstrates that Ritaj Mall's multifunctionality is spatially and socially differentiated, underscoring that multifunctional urban spaces must be understood as stratified socio-spatial formations rather than uniformly accessible environments. Ultimately, Ritaj Mall exemplifies how large-scale retail developments function as economic engines and

social catalysts, reinforcing the need for strategic policies to manage their long-term impact on urban spaces.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The present study had some limitations as it focused exclusively on a single case study, Ritaj Mall, which limits the generalizability of the findings beyond this specific urban-commercial context. The modest sample size limits statistical power notably, as the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) demonstrated only “mediocre” suitability with borderline KMO values, suggesting that factor interpretations should be approached cautiously. The results should therefore be interpreted as indicative of contextual patterns rather than representative of wider populations. Additionally, while the primary survey was conducted during the summer period (July–August), comparative analysis with pilot data collected in March suggests that visitor patterns and the proportion of foreign visitors remain consistent; however, the seasonal nature of data collection may still influence certain behavioral patterns.

Furthermore, the study primarily identified associations rather than causal relationships; thus, the behavioral mechanisms underlying the observed economic and spatial patterns remain open to interpretation. The operationalization of multifunctionality and spatial dynamics is exploratory and preliminary and would benefit from future research designs incorporating longitudinal data, expanded sampling frameworks, and more targeted qualitative instruments.

In future research, a more diversified approach could be adopted by examining all of the existing malls in all neighborhood units (Table 6) to assess commercial centralization more systematically. Comparative case studies of other shopping malls in Ali Mendjeli, as well as across different Algerian cities or the broader Maghreb region, could provide deeper insights into variations in mall multifunctionality, accessibility, user appropriation, and planning integration across different urban, cultural, and economic contexts. Such comparative investigations would help identify convergences and divergences in how malls contribute to urban transformation. Moreover, further research is warranted to examine the long-term social, economic and spatial impacts of shopping malls on urban development. While international research, as well as the findings of the present study, suggest that malls may generate environmental and socio-spatial pressures, this study did not directly measure environmental performance indicators or sustainability practices, thus, sustainability considerations remain contextual rather than empirically verified. Additionally, future study directions may also involve the discussion of virtual space with the integration of innovative features in shopping malls, aligned with the socio-economic, and spatial realities of the local context.

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