

The Function of the Synagogue in Leisure Culture

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The research literature on the topic of leisure indicates that leisure is perceived variably by different sectors and cultures. In Israel, affiliation with a certain religious group affects one's perception of leisure. The uniqueness of the current study involves the function of the synagogue as an influential element in Jewish leisure culture. The synagogue is not only a place of prayer, rather also a place of convening and gathering where many varied activities take place, beyond prayer. In practice, over the generations, the synagogue served as a site of leisure activities and as a means of enhancing unity and communal life in Jewish society both in Israel and elsewhere. The current study examines differences in perceptions of the synagogue as a place of prayer and as a place of leisure by worshippers and others. The study included 387 participants, who defined themselves as secular, traditional, religious, or ultra-Orthodox. The research findings indicate no difference between secular and religious participants with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, namely, the synagogue is not perceived as a place of leisure rather as a place of prayer. Moreover, a negative association was found between religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure; the more religious the participants the more they thought that the synagogue is utilized less as a place of leisure (and more as a place of prayer). Finally, the study showed a different gender-related attitude to the synagogue as a place of leisure, where men more than women perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure. The current study illuminates a site of leisure activity that has undergone an essential change from a religious place to one that bears communal-cultural-national significance, although it is not perceived as such by the various sectors within Israeli society. A discrepancy was found between actual practices and perception of the synagogue as a place of worship, where in practice the synagogue is used to celebrate dates with collective significance (for example, Jewish holidays) and to note events that are meaningful to the individual (such as marriages, bar mitzvahs, and births). This is an initial study that can lead to further research, which will continue to explore the perceptions of the Jewish population regarding the synagogue as a place with communal and personal significance, during leisure time as well. The synagogue as a site of leisure culture has the potential to unite the various sectors.

Keywords: synagogue, leisure, culture, Jewish society

Introduction

This study focuses on the transformations that have occurred in perceptions of the synagogue as a religious-sacred place, to those that see the synagogue as an influential element of leisure culture (Davidovitch & Lazar, 2017). The synagogue is not only a place of prayer rather also a place of gathering, where many varied activities take place both during prayer times and beyond these times.

Many researchers have addressed the different definitions of leisure—as time, activity, a conscious mental state, or a value. Researchers have also discussed perceptions of leisure in traditional-religious society versus the attitude to leisure in modern society (Soen & Rabinovich, 2011; Davidovitch, 2016). In practice, the synagogue served over the generations as a place of leisure—a community-cultural and social center, during hours that are beyond the duty of prayer, based on a personal-social desire that is not dictated by prayer, as a value aimed at enhancing unity and communal life in Jewish society, throughout the generations and the diverse social trends. In Israel, religious affiliation determines to a certain degree people's general cultural affiliation and, particularly, their perception of leisure (Amir, 2017). With regard to the function of the synagogue in Jewish culture, it is possible to understand that although Jewish culture sanctified mainly the discourse between man and God and Torah study in the synagogue (Davidovitch, 2016); in practice, the synagogue also served as a place of leisure as it was a means of enhancing unity and communal life (Ne'eman, 2008). Meaningful changes have occurred, which enabled the introduction of innovations and changes in perceptions of the synagogue (Layosh, 2015).

The synagogue is, first and foremost, a place of prayer, a place of thrice daily religious worship, and a place of Torah lessons and of rabbinical sermons. In addition, the synagogue is a place that gathers people into a community, such as on festivals, Rosh Hodesh (the first day of the month), and special Sabbaths, and even facilitates interpersonal encounters at events, such as at bris celebrations, bar mitzvahs, birthdays, and weddings (Deshen, 1971a). In fact, the synagogue is active every day of the year.

The atmosphere at the synagogue is not only “religious”. The synagogue creates a community-social-culture atmosphere that centers on society and unites members of society to form one family, where each person has a “synagogue” with which he relates on a personal level and with which he has a cultural-communal affiliation. The synagogue is similar to a club with specific contents, one that includes refreshments, a dress code, language, and behavioral norms that have sacred dimensions.

Changes have occurred in the perception of the synagogue also among the community that defines itself as secular. In recent years, it is possible to see that more secular people are holding Jewish ceremonies and prayers in synagogues and alternative places of prayer, as part of preserving Jewish tradition (Azulay & Tavori, 2008). Some synagogues have been given names that indicate freshness and innovation, such as “Shira Hadasha” in Jerusalem (see <http://shirahadasha.org.il/hebrew>).

Another example of such a change can be seen among immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States who arrived in Israel in the 1990s and over the years embraced Jewish symbols and an enhanced Jewish consciousness (Remennick & Prashizky, 2013). The synagogue has the potential to unite the local and national community, to preserve Jewish culture, to recognize the uniqueness of the community and its customs (Leon, 2001). Therefore, in the current study, the author shall focus on the differences between the various religious groups in Israel, according to their sociological-religious definition: secular, traditional, religious, and ultra-Orthodox with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer and as a place of leisure.

Literature Review

Leisure and Leisure Culture

In recent years, the topic of leisure has been receiving more legitimacy in Israeli society. The attitude to leisure is manifested on two spheres: the objective sphere and the subjective sphere. On the objective sphere,

the attitude to leisure is as something measurable as regards the amount of time devoted to leisure, the amount of resources devoted to leisure, the frequency of leisure activities, and the duration of the activity (Davidovitch & Milgram, 2010). On the subjective sphere, this is a value that is not measurable but is identified with the meaning that one awards leisure. This is ethical legitimization and not something, that is measurable. Accordingly, leisure is related to the meaning that one gives activities or to one's mood in certain situations and times (Davidovitch, 2016). A previous study (Davidovitch & Soen, 2016) shows that leisure is culture-dependent. Culture affects the type of leisure customary in a certain society, the time normally devoted to leisure, and the legitimization of leisure in that society (Weber, 2010). Values and norms within the culture are those that determine which activity is acceptable and which is not, and they legitimize the activities. Therefore, differences between cultures generate differences in their leisure cultures, such that while one society might sanctify leisure and devote much time and resources to it, another might denounce leisure and treat it as a waste of time, something undesirable. In Jewish culture, for instance, in the years immediately preceding and following Israel's establishment, work was highly valued and was one of the most esteemed values of local culture.

Over Israel's 70 years, a change is evident, from a society that sanctifies work—to one that sanctifies leisure as a value. Existential exigencies have changed and the current generation was raised in circumstances of abundance. This is also true of other cultures, where work is perceived as a means of achieving a goal—and that goal is leisure (Van Der Poel, 2006).

Moreover, Israeli society underwent many transformations and over the years transitioned from a communal society to an individualist society that sanctifies the value of the individual. Where in the past people worked to provide for the next generation and to contribute their part to the community, over the years people have shifted to working in order to fund the present moment, valuing the sanctity of contemporary life, and work became a means of creating personal experiences and funding hedonism (Davidovich, 2016). Israel is defined as a developed country by socio-economic and technological measures (Aguilar & Hurst, 2007). Jewish society, in Israel and elsewhere, is comprised of different sectors and different streams with diverse leisure conceptions. Over the years, leisure culture in Jewish society has undergone various transformations and each group has received a different place. The divergent leisure culture enhanced the differences between the sectors and emphasized their disparities (Davidovitch, 2016).

The disparities are manifested particularly in the amount of time that each sector devotes to leisure, the type of activity, and the "level" of the activity. The boundaries between high leisure culture and popular leisure culture have been clarified. The differences between religious and secular people concerning their leisure culture have been gradually becoming more evident and strong (Soen & Rabinovich, 2011). Nonetheless, it is now possible to see new changes that have occurred in the leisure culture of the various sectors, for instance, it is possible to see that religious people devote more time to leisure than previously and spend more time than they used to, for example, in the cinema (Davidovitch, 2016). In practice, a "Jewish experience" genre has developed a Torah-oriented culture that includes artists from various sectors and participants that represent Israel's entire social array. It is possible to see that in all sectors there is a type of "sanctification" of leisure culture in general, self-gratification and pampering, as evident with regard to the time devoted to work. In the past studies showed that Israelis work a much larger number of hours than average, but today studies show that Israelis devote an equal amount of time to work and leisure (Brandman Institute, 2002).

Leisure Culture in Judaism and Changes in Perceptions of Leisure Culture

Judaism became exposed to the concept of leisure culture from the time that the Roman Empire ruled Palestine. At that time, the Jews considered leisure activities and leisure culture to be impure, an abomination, and kept their distance from them, although this was one of the many impacts of Roman culture, which was a wide-ranging and strong culture that left an impression even many years after its demise. In this era, there were various leisure activities, such as public games, theatre, and shows, which were perceived by Jews in Palestine as pagan ceremonies. Historians presume that in this period, the Jews did not participate in the games and shows. Some say that at the time, attending these shows was forbidden outright in the Jewish community (Weiss, 2001). Nonetheless, analysis of Talmudic sources and mentions in general literature show some indications that the simple people did visit contemporary sites of entertainment (Weiss, 2001), although the Talmudic literature reflects the outlook of Jewish leaders in that period and their conception of leisure and revulsion at it.

Rabbi Frankel (1981) said that, according to the Jewish sources and to Tractate Avot, an exemplary Jew is one who has no leisure time. Leisure is interpreted as a waste of time that should be spent on Torah study, as a person is instructed to devote every spare moment to the labor of Torah, to sit and study Torah. Judaism instructs a person concerning all his routines, including leisure. From a halakhic perspective, one should not waste his time and every moment must be filled with content. Contemporary culture has breached these limits as well and reached observant people, and it is now possible to see observant people who devote their time to reading literature, newspapers, watching movies, taking trips, etc. Nevertheless, it is evident that religiosity causes people to avoid the more permissive forms of recreation (Ne'eman, 2008) and attempts are made to combine modern leisure with Torah-traditional contents, in effect integrating the new with the old.

Jewish tradition was found to have a significant effect on both Jewish and Israeli culture. Jewish tradition relates to leisure as a waste of time, something that lacks value. According to Judaism, one's time should be devoted to the study of Torah and leisure is not on a par with the study of Torah (Davidovitch, 2016).

So, in Israel too, in its first days when labor was the supreme value and leisure was a means of expressing the significance of this value. In this era, songs were written about labor and work and literature glorified war and soldiers (Caspi & Limor, 1992).

Notably, there are discrepancies between the different Jewish denominations with regard to their perception of the world in general and of cultural and art activities (Amir, 2017). Religious affiliation was found to determine people's cultural affiliation to a certain degree, and belonging to a certain group or subgroup leads to the fashioning of the individual, as a joint world view and point of origin is formed for all members of the group. With regard to leisure, for example, Amir (2017) explained that the group can affect how its members perceive poetry, theatre, cinema, or engaging in sculpture or music.

Hence, although throughout history Jewish culture sanctified mainly the study of Torah (Davidovitch, 2016), in practice, the synagogue also served for leisure purposes as it was a means of enhancing residents' unity and communal life. At present in Israel, Jewish society differs greatly from society in those times. Jews who observe the halakhic decrees are divided into denominations, with the most conspicuous being the ultra-Orthodox and the modern Orthodox, which differ from each other, and they too are divided internally. Both the ultra-Orthodox and the modern Orthodox observe the precepts and are guided by halakha, but the modern Orthodox have an awareness of combining halakhic life with modern life and contemporary culture

(Ne'eman, 2008). Moreover, significant transformations are occurring among both men and women in ultra-Orthodox society with regard to leisure culture; changes are enabling the introduction of innovativeness and changes in this community (Layosh, 2015).

In summary, it may be said that leisure culture in the Jewish community has undergone changes over the years, and at present, there are religious denominations that encourage the integration of halakhic life with contemporary culture (Ne'eman, 2008). Now, after this paper has examined the concept of leisure, leisure culture and its presence in Jewish life historically and in current-day Israel, we shall focus on the function of the synagogue in Judaism, in order to understand how the synagogue is perceived as a place of leisure and prayer.

The Synagogue and Its Place in Judaism and in Israel

The synagogue—what is it? Researchers disagree as to the precise time at which the term “synagogue” was first initiated. Some say that this institution began as “city streets”—a place where people would gather, during the time of the temple, for prayer—but only became consolidated after the destruction of the temple. There was need for a spiritual-national center. The synagogue was utilized for various public needs, not necessarily for prayer, but its formation and realization as a permanent place for prayers and study only began after the destruction of the temple. We shall explore the sources that emphasize the significance of the synagogue as a house of prayer and as a community center that served for leisure purposes—both for individuals and for the public.

The synagogue as a place of prayer. “With no synagogues and houses of study, the Holy One blessed be He will not inspire the world with His Divine Presence” (Esther Rabbah Petihta, 11). Throughout all stages of Jewish history, the synagogue symbolized the strength of Judaism—the strength that underlies the continued existence of Jews as Jews wherever they are, in Israel and elsewhere. The synagogue expresses the commitment to maintain a place for prayer, mainly in order to bolster people’s Jewish faith and spirit in tough times in Jewish history. In Jewish law as well, we see the significance of the synagogue: Wherever there are 10 Jews, a house must be prepared where they will gather for prayer at all prayer times, and this place is that which is called the synagogue (Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah, 11:1).

The power of prayer in a synagogue is explained by the understanding that gathering in a synagogue unites people. Why does the synagogue constitute the prime place of prayer? The synagogue is a replacement for the Temple, a place where the Holy One blessed be he inspires his divine spirit and the place where he resides (Yerushalmi Berachot, 3:3). Although the Israelites have become distant from the Temple, the author shall be a small temple—indicating the synagogues that will serve to turn to Me in prayer, and shall be with them (Abarbanel on site). “Seek the Lord while he may be found”—Where is he found? In the synagogue... (Yerushalmi Berachot, 5:1).

Over the years, special Jewish laws have been composed for the synagogue as well as norms of conduct within it. For example:

- Rising early to go to the synagogue, walking there, and being there—One should always rise early to go to the synagogue and attend in the evening (Rambam Hilchot Tefillah, 8:1) and R. Yehoshua ben Levi said, one should always rise early to go to the synagogue in order to have the privilege and be counted among the first ten to complete the quorum, as even if one hundred people arrive after him, he receives the reward of them all (Berachot, 47b).

- “Keep silence and hear, Israel”... Gather in groups and engage in the Torah, as the Torah is only imparted in a gathering (Berachot, 63b).
- The essence of Torah is in public, in the synagogue. It was taught in a baraita that Abba Binyamin said: One’s prayer is only fully heard in a synagogue, as it is stated: “To listen to the song and the prayer” in a place of song, there prayer should be (Berachot, 6a).
- In the direction of Jerusalem—According to the Rambam, one who prays alone should always imagine the Divine Presence before him—“I keep my eyes always on the Lord”—all the more so when he prays in the synagogue, where the Divine Presence is always present (“Kad Hakemach”, under synagogue).
- Prayer in a quorum—at least 10. Why is prayer in a community so important? What are the virtues of praying in the synagogue with a crowd? That one can answer “amen” after all the blessings that are repeated by the cantor.
- The Sages taught in a baraita: With regard to synagogues: One may not act inside them with frivolity. Therefore, one may not eat in them nor may one drink in them; and one may not adorn oneself inside them; nor may one wander about inside them; nor may one enter them in the sun for protection from the sun, or in the rain to find shelter from the rain; nor may one offer a eulogy inside them for an individual (Megillah, 28).
- One should not degrade a synagogue even in speech...nor call the synagogue the house of the people because everyone gathers there and it is a form of degradation... (Shabbat, 32a).

When praying with a quorum of ten God’s name is sanctified in the community (Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah, 8:6).

The synagogue as a communal-cultural-Jewish center. Prayer is indeed, in essence, an intimate relationship between a person and his Creator—an outburst of internal feelings, requests, and thanksgiving—but worshippers also share an intimate social relationship. People’s shared worship enhances their proximity and connections. “Sweet was our fellowship; we walked together in God’s house”.

Sharing one’s most private things with a friend emphasizes that which they have in common and consequently enhances the individual’s feeling of belonging to a collective (when many people are involved). One of the synagogue’s roles was to unite the people, particularly by stressing their common ideology regarding religion and worship and preventing rifts. This idea is evident in many precepts, such as the thrice yearly pilgrimage. The synagogue draws the people together wherever they happen to be, undivided by class, language, etc. The very name *Beit Knesset* (i.e., house of gathering), rather than “house of prayer” emphasizes its nature as uniting a gathering of people, of *Knesset Israel* (the Jewish people) (see <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/maaliyot/hashivut-2.htm>).

In the synagogue, every person depends on the other: A quorum of 10 is necessary, when reading the Torah several people are called up; there is need for a *gabai* (manager), cantor, reader of the Torah, etc. In this way, people are dependent on each other in order to reach a state of “perfection”, stressing the connections that turn individuals into a community.

The Maharal explains that when Israelites gather and are engaged in prayer, Torah study, and philanthropy, they become elevated towards God. Esther’s command to Mordechai, when they sought rescue from the tragedy of annihilation, can be explained accordingly: “Go gather all the Jews”—first it is necessary to gather together for prayer, to be united, and then we will naturally be closer to God and he will save us from any adversity and calamity.

The consolidation while in exile can also be seen in its practical aspects. All synagogues in the world have, as a rule, the same customs and procedures aside from small changes, such as wordings, customs concerning when to stand and when to sit. Thus, any Jew who travels and visits any place in the world where there are Jews can enter a synagogue and feel “at home”. From the late 16th century the custom of designating a “women’s section” became once again prevalent.

The synagogue serves as a place of prayer on weekdays, Sabbaths, and festivals. Ceremonies required of the entire community are held in it, as well as ceremonies that celebrate important events in the life of community members, such as a bris, bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah, weddings, and memorials. Sometimes, the synagogue complex also includes study rooms, a wedding hall, and community offices. In this way, the synagogue serves as a religious and community center.

A new initiative is now emerging to transform the synagogue into a cross-sector community center, independent of one’s level of religiosity (Tzofiya Hirschfeld, April 16, 2009, see <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3701998,00.html>).

“The synagogue is not only a place for prayer, it must be a place that will be a community center, that people can enter for different needs and feel comfortable”, says Rabbi Kenneth Brander, Dean of the Center for the Jewish Future at Yeshiva University in the US, who together with the Tzohar organization has established a project aiming to transform synagogues into community centers.

The project, which is now completing its pilot year, aims to transform houses of prayer into foci of spiritual and social activity not only for observant Jews. The vision of the project’s initiators is based on the American model, where synagogues serve members of the community for varied needs and constitute a place of encounter for both the religious and the secular.

“In America the synagogue is a place where people feel at ease”, Rabbi Brander explains:

It is open at all times and to everyone. We want, together with Tzohar, to turn synagogues in Israel into an accessible place for the entire community. To reach a state where a person who enlists in the army can come and pray there before enlistment, that a person who wants to study, to give thanks, to celebrate, to seek help, will come. The separation in Israel between the religious and the secular is a result of an insufficient common language. If synagogues will be transformed into a place where the general public will come to experience things together then it will also be a place where separation will disappear (Brandman Institute, 2002)

During the first year, 10 communities took part in the project all over Israel: “There is a feeling of revolution, that the thing we are initiating is the new future of the People of Israel”, says Rabbi Ronen Neuwirth, head of the Open Communities project, who is responsible for foreign relations in Tzohar and himself heads a community-oriented synagogue in Raanana.

We are trying to form a movement of social and perceptual change, that will open doors and hearts and change the existing reality in Israeli communities. A movement that will also become relevant for people who do not define themselves as religious but seek spirituality. If we manage to realize this vision and to reach hundreds of communities, it will change the country’s character and atmosphere. (Brandman Institute, 2002)

In summary, the three faiths accord major significance to community-based worship of God, and for this purpose, each faith formed structures intended for gathering and holding religious activities—synagogues in Judaism, churches in Christianity, and mosques in Islam. The major activity that occurs in these structures is prayer.

The Hebrew names of the synagogue (*beit kneset*, i.e., house of gathering) and church (*knesiya*, place of

gathering) indicate their role: They come from the root k.n.s—gathering. The Hebrew and Arabic names of the Muslim house of prayer—*misgad* or *masjad*—mean place of worship, i.e., the place where man expresses his submission and gratitude to God. These places of convening also fulfill social roles. For example, synagogues have lost and found announcements, as well as charity boxes for various needs of community members.

In summary, the synagogue is in essence a place of prayer, but that is not its only purpose. The synagogue is a place that unites people in a community, facilitates interpersonal encounters and the holding of joint ceremonies. This is a social place that stresses connections between the worshippers. A social-communal culture is often formed in the synagogue (Deshen, 1971b). The atmosphere in the synagogue centers on the community and unites members of the community in one family.

Moreover, among the secular community, as well, changes are evident in the perception of the synagogue, and in recent years, it is possible to see that more secular people are holding Jewish ceremonies and prayers at synagogues and alternative houses of prayer as part of preserving Jewish tradition (Azulay & Tavori, 2008).

Hence, the synagogue serves mainly its worshippers, which become a cultural community, and also enhances the nature of the community. Thus, it may be assumed that religious people, who attend the synagogue more often, will see the synagogue as a place of leisure more than secular people. The research hypotheses are as follows:

1. A positive association will be found between participant's religiosity and their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, such that the higher the religiosity reported by participants the more they will perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure.
2. A difference will be found between the religious and the secular with regard to perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, with religious people perceiving the synagogue as a place of leisure more than secular people.

Research Method

Research Tool

The current study aimed to explore the function of the synagogue as a place of leisure and of prayer among Israel's secular and religious populations. For this purpose, a questionnaire was prepared, comprised of questions that examined participant's religiosity and level of observance, as well as their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure and as a place of prayer. In addition, a demographic questionnaire was administered to examine different variables, such as participant's age, sex, marital status, economic status, religiosity, and residential area.

In order to examine participant's religiosity, the demographic questionnaire included one item that explored religiosity (secular, traditional, religious, and ultra-Orthodox). This is because the research literature utilizes this distribution for the purpose of selecting one's social religious group of affiliation in Israel (Clodie & Yoel, 1998). In addition, a 7-item questionnaire was administered to examine participant's religiosity by their observance of Jewish precepts. Participants were asked to rank each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), for example: "To what degree do you fast on Yom Kippur" and "To what degree do you observe the Sabbath". The questionnaire was taken from a study conducted by Ben Yaakov (2014). In order to examine the reliability of these seven items, a test was held to check Cronbach's alpha reliability, showing high reliability between the seven items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.96). Therefore, the variable of mean religiosity will be examined throughout the current study also through the mean of these seven items.

In order to examine participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, a 6-item questionnaire was prepared for the current study, examining to what degree participants perceive the synagogue as a place utilized for leisure. Participants were asked to rank each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). For example: "The synagogue is a place for meeting close friends" and "The synagogue is a place for holding different extra-curricular activities for children and adults". In order to examine the reliability of these six items, a test was held to check Cronbach's alpha reliability, showing high reliability between the six items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88). Therefore, the variable of participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure will be examined throughout the current study through the mean of these six items.

Furthermore, in order to examine participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer, a 6-item questionnaire was prepared for the current study, examining to what degree participants perceive the synagogue as a place utilized for prayer. Participants were asked to rank each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). For example: "The synagogue serves as a place where daily prayers are held (Shacharit, Mincha, Maariv)" and "The synagogue serves as a place where assembly prayers are held (prayers designating national events)". In order to examine the reliability of these six items, a test was held to check Cronbach's alpha reliability, showing high reliability between the six items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84). Therefore, the variable of participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer will be examined throughout the current study through the mean of these six items.

Research Procedure

Participants in the current study were located by preparing an online questionnaire distributed on social networks and by sending e-mails to acquaintances and volunteers who agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire was prepared using the Google Forms platform. Notably, all participants received a clarification that the questionnaire is being administered as part of undergraduate studies at Ariel University in the Department of Behavioral Sciences. They were also told that the study is being conducted as part of a seminar project on the function of the synagogue in Israeli society. Before completion of the questionnaire, they were informed that the questionnaire is anonymous and that the data collected would only be used for the current study.

Research Participants

The research participants included 387 individuals, 297 women (constituting 76.9% of the sample) and 89 men (constituting 23.1% of the sample). The mean age of the research participants was 36.71 ($SD = 15.003$), with an age range of 18-87 years. Table 1 details the descriptive statistics of the demographic variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Demographic Variables

Name of variable	Values of variable	Frequency f(x)	Frequency in percentages (%)
Marital status	Single	59	15.2
	Married	307	79.3
	Divorced	14	3.6
	Widowed	7	1.8
Religiosity	Secular	85	22.1
	Traditional	41	10.7
	Religious	103	26.8
	Ultra-Orthodox	155	40.4

(Table 1 continued)

Name of variable	Values of variable	Frequency f(x)	Frequency in percentages (%)
Level of education	Secondary	67	17.5
	Tertiary	128	33.5
	Bachelor's degree	140	36.6
	Master's degree or higher	47	12.3
Economic status	Below average	162	42.7
	Average	113	29.8
	Above average	104	27.4

Table 1 shows that most of the research participants were married (79.3%) and that most were from the religious and ultra-Orthodox sector (67.2% together). It is also evident that about half the research participants had a secondary or tertiary level of education (51%) and the rest a Bachelor's degree or a Master's degree or higher (49%).

Findings

Table 2 lists the distribution of the three main variables in this study.

Table 2

Distribution of the Research Variables

Name of variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Mean religiosity	4.02	1.32	1	5
Participants' perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure	2.07	0.94	1	5
Participants perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer	4.41	0.78	1	5

Mean religiosity was found to be higher among the research participants relative to the possible range for this measure (1-5), namely, most of the research participants are indeed religious/ultra-Orthodox, as seen in the Methods chapter. In addition, it is evident that they perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure significantly less ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 0.94$) than they perceive the synagogue as a place of prayer ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.78$).

The first hypothesis was that a positive association would be found between participant's religiosity and their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, such that the higher the religiosity reported by participants the more they would perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure. In order to examine the association between mean religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer and as a place of leisure, two tests were held to examine Pearson correlations. The research findings show a positive and strong significant association between each participant's religiosity and perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer ($rp = 0.49$, $Sig. < 0.001$), such that the more religious the participants the more they think that the synagogue serves as a place of prayer. Moreover, no significant correlation was found between religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure ($rp = 0.06$, $Sig. > 0.05$).

Furthermore, in order to examine these associations between the variable of religiosity that ranks participants as secular, traditional, religious, or ultra-Orthodox and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer and of leisure, two additional tests were conducted to examine Spearman correlations. The research findings show a weak positive significant correlation between the participant's religiosity and perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer ($rp = 0.19$, $Sig. < 0.001$), such that the more religious the

participants the more they think that the synagogue serves as a place of prayer, in accordance with the finding presented above. In addition, the findings indicate a weak negative significant correlation between religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure ($rp = -0.2$, $Sig. < 0.001$), such that the more religious the participants the more they thought that the synagogue is less utilized as a place of leisure.

The second research hypothesis was that a difference would be found between the religious and the secular with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, such that religious people would perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure more than secular people. In order to examine the difference between the religious and the secular, participants were categorized into two separate groups (secular-traditional/religious-ultra Orthodox). In order to compare the secular and the religious with regard to their perceptions of the synagogue as a place of leisure and as a place of prayer, two *t*-tests were held to examine the difference, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Difference between Secular and Religious in Their Perceptions of the Synagogue as a Place of Leisure and as a Place of Prayer

Name of variable	Secular		Religious		T-test score
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
Participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure	2.03	0.89	2.09	0.97	0.64
Participants perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer	3.97	1.05	4.62	0.48	6.63***

Table 3 and Figure 1 show no difference between the secular and the religious in their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure ($T(379) = 0.64$, $Sig. > 0.05$). This is compatible with the findings presented, which show no correlation between mean religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure. Moreover, a significant difference is apparent between secular and religious with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer ($T(149.71) = 6.63$, $Sig. < 0.001$), such that religious people see the synagogue as a place of prayer more than do secular people.

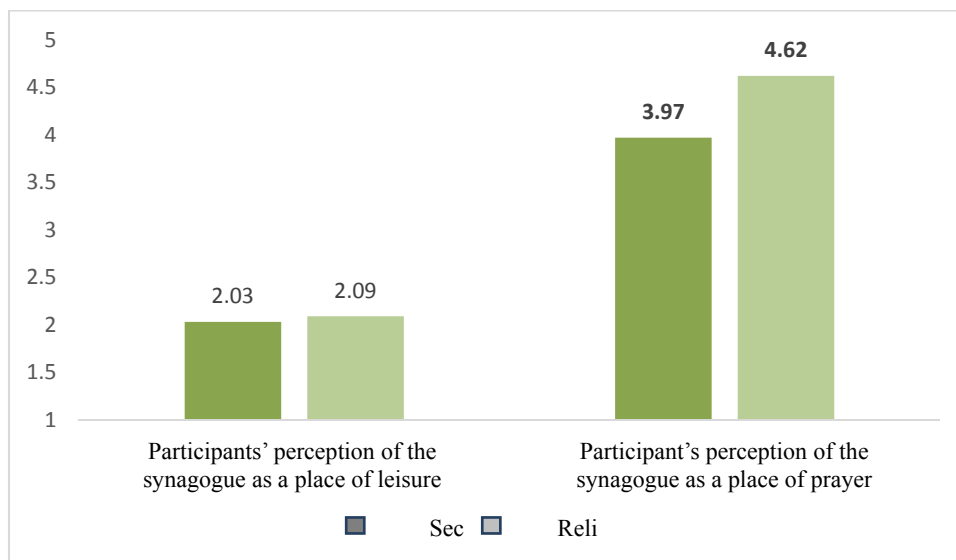


Figure 1. Difference between secular and religious in their perceptions of the synagogue as a place of leisure and as a place of prayer.

Aside from the research hypotheses, the study also examined whether gender is a variable that affects participant's perception of the synagogue. Two *t*-tests were conducted to examine the difference, presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Difference between Women and Men in Their Perceptions of the Synagogue as a Place of Leisure and as a Place of Prayer

Name of variable	Men		Women		T-test score
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
Participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure	2.37	1.04	1.99	0.89	3.42**
Participants perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer	4.36	0.84	4.43	0.76	0.8

Table 4 and Figure 2 show a significant difference between men and women in their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure ($T(381) = 0.64$, $Sig. > 0.01$), such that men perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure more than do women. Nonetheless, it is notable that no difference was found between the sexes with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer ($T(382) = 0.8$, $Sig. > 0.05$).

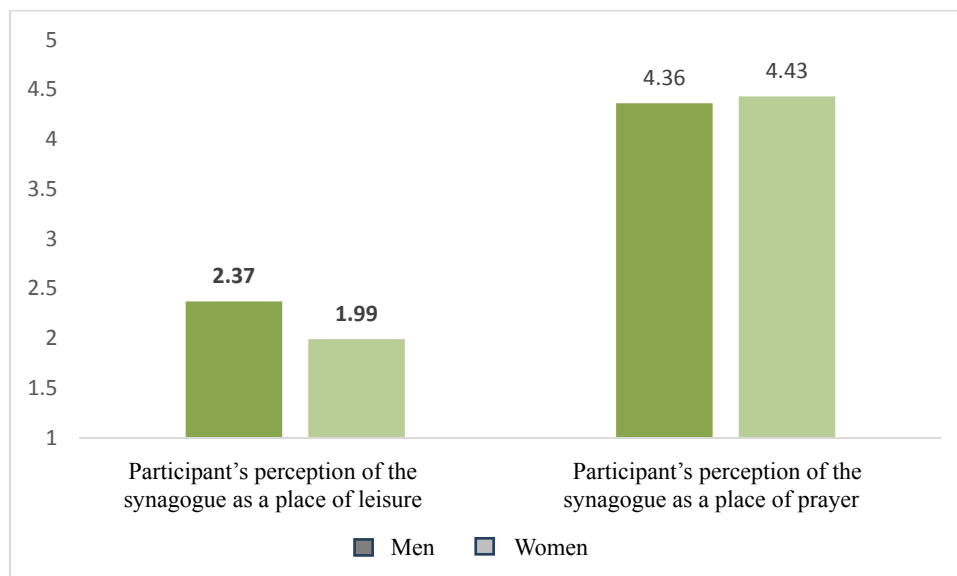


Figure 2. Difference between women and men in their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure and as a place of prayer.

We also investigated the relationship between participant's age and their perceptions of the synagogue as a place of leisure and as a place of prayer. For this purpose, two additional Pearson correlation tests were conducted. The findings in this study showed a moderate negative significant correlation between participant's age and their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer ($rp = -0.27$, $Sig. < 0.001$), such that the older the participants the less they perceive the synagogue as a place of prayer. Aside from this, it is notable that no significant correlation was found between participant's age and their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure ($rp = 0.07$, $Sig. > 0.05$).

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the association between one's religiosity and perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure. We hypothesized that an association would be found between one's religiosity and perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, such that the more religious the person, the more he or she would perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure. Another hypothesis was that differences would be found between religious and secular with regard to their perception of the function of the synagogue, such that secular people would perceive the synagogue only as a place of prayer while religious people would see it as both a place of prayer and a place of leisure.

The findings show that a positive association would be found between participant's religiosity and their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer, such that the more religious the participants the more they think that the synagogue serves as a place of prayer. No correlation was found between religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure. The findings also show a negative correlation between religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, such that the more religious the participants the more they thought that the synagogue is less utilized as a place of leisure. These findings contradict the first research hypothesis and the assumption of this study, which posited that religious people perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure more than do secular people. This may stem from the diminishing gap between religious and secular with regard to culture and leisure recreation and the fact that leisure differences are no longer as prominent as they were in the past. The spirit of the times is now one that enables people to absorb the spiritual experience as one that is cultural and not only religious. This may be compatible with the study conducted by Ne'eman (2008), who claims that the secular leisure culture has reached religious populations as well and that the differences and disparities are diminishing.

The findings of this study concerning the second research hypothesis show no difference between secular and religious with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure—and no correlation between mean religiosity and participant's perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure.

It is possible to see that there is a difference between secular and religious with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer, such that religious people see the synagogue as a place of prayer more than do secular people. These findings contradict the second research hypothesis, which claimed that there is a difference in the perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure between religious and secular, such that secular people would not see the synagogue as a place of leisure while religious people would. These findings contradict the contentions presented by Deshen (1971a), who says that the synagogue is a place of culture and leisure for its community or worshippers. In addition, the findings that show a difference in the perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer between religious and secular add a new perspective to the study and may stem from the fact that synagogues are usually utilized by religious populations and not by secular populations and perhaps as a result religious people see them as a place of prayer more than do secular people.

In addition to the research hypotheses, the study also explored whether gender too is a variable that affects participant's perception of the synagogue. A difference was found between men and women in their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure, with men perceiving the synagogue as a place of leisure more than do women. Nonetheless, it is notable that no difference was found between the sexes with regard to their perception of the synagogue as a place of prayer. These findings may be affected by the fact that in certain communities with various ethnic origins women do not attend synagogue regularly and come mostly for

prayers on festivals, as stated by Deshen (1971b), while men have an obligation to participate in prayer in a quorum of ten and attend the synagogue more often, and this may affect their perception of the synagogue as a place of leisure.

The current study can contribute on a theoretical level to researchers engaged in studying changes in Judaism and tradition and the discrepancies between different sectors in Israel. In addition, the study may show a difference in how women and men perceive the synagogue as a place of leisure, such that the current study can serve in this context as well as a pioneer study in its field, leading to further research on perceptions of the synagogue among the Jewish population and the discrepancies between the different sectors.

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