

Public Perceptions of Urban Park Benefits in Kerala

Rebecca Saju

B. Arch. Student, Department of Architecture, T. K. M College of Engineering, Kollam, India

Abstract: This dissertation is a study of the public perceptions of public park benefits in Kerala and the identity they foster among people. It addresses the conclusion that parks, by encouraging self-expression through interaction and use, contribute to the identity of that particular place.

Perception is an experience which is caused by the stimulation of sense organs. Understanding people's response to their surroundings leads to an understanding of perceptions of their self and community. Park benefits are gained through the interaction among the people and the surrounding environment. Activities which form these benefits include social interactions, health of mind and body, restorative setting, recreation and environmental education. This research study examines the perceptions of users and designers regarding two classifications of park benefits: social and psychological; literature review studies the existing knowledge base of open space and park use and their benefits. The study then ties these data to the two park benefits of social and psychological.

This research uses qualitative data collection and analysis techniques- observable behavior and interviews with data gathered from interviews with park users. The two public parks selected for the study include Subhash Bosepark, Ernakulam and Napier Museum ground, Trivandrum. Data from park visitors were included in the study to determine user perceptions regarding the two park benefits. Data collected from these observations and interviews revealed the qualitative effects of public park spaces on individuals as executed by park designers.

Keywords: Benefits of parks, open spaces, parks, perceptions, social and psychological benefits

1. Introduction

Parks are open spaces that provide people with opportunity for active and passive recreation. They also provide cities and metropolitan regions with areas to experience nature. Parks and open spaces improve physical and psychological health of the individual, strengthen communities, and make cities and neighborhoods more attractive places to live and work.

Urban parks have been recognized for the social benefits that it fulfils, like meeting areas and areas for entertainment, recreation and relaxation purposes, and its amenity values including opportunity to improve quality of life, aesthetic enjoyment, a meeting of security and freedom from urban noise and pollution. Poor environmental quality and health are strongly related. Social benefits of urban open spaces include: the maintenance of social ties through the distribution of parks produce and provision of food for feasts, the recreational and physical exercise benefits, and the educational importance to

urban dwellers and their family, who often have limited knowledge of appreciation of agriculture and its culturally important plants. The contributions of urban green spaces to community health and well-being can be through improvements in ambient environmental quality, more opportunities for healthy lifestyles, and opportunities to come in contact with nature. It important to conserve the nature in order to sustain the natural ecosystem for the wellbeing of the city dwellers because landscaped areas can itself be a source of satisfaction, whether or not anyone participates in their maintenance.

2. Need of the study

A. Scope

The significance of this study is to evaluate the perceptions of users regarding the two park benefits: social, and psychological. The intent of this study is to achieve a better understanding of user perceptions of the benefits derived from the availability and use of parks in urban areas and to analyse public awareness of the benefits and compare them with design intent.

B. Limitations

For the focus of this research, it is determined that observations, surveys and interviews provide the greatest depth of understanding on a broad range of settings and people. Literature suggests that there are many limitations when using interviews as data collection. They are primarily depend on the differences between an individual's words and actions. People may react according to the situations.

3. Methodology

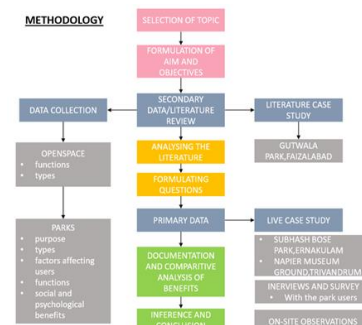


Fig. 1. Methodology

4. Literature review

A. Open spaces

Open spaces in urban areas are seen as individual ‘sites’ such as parks or squares, and looked at from this point of view they can take a wide variety of forms. In a broader sense, open space can also be considered as something wider and more all-encompassing, namely as the continuous matrix of all un-built land in urban areas – public parks as well as private gardens; urban streets as well as city squares.

B. Functions of Good Urban Spaces

The following three main groups of open space functions can be identified:

- Environmental and ecological functions
- Social and societal functions
- Structural and symbolic function

C. Factors influencing people's use of open space

- Mobility
- Physical Activity
- Time Budget

D. The functions of urban parks in sustainable cities



Fig. 2. Functions of urban parks in sustainable cities

5. Case study

The study sites were chosen based on their geographical location, and their surrounding community and accessibility to the researcher. Subhash Bose Park and Napier Museum ground were taken as case studies. Located in the heart of Ernakulam and Trivandrum districts, these parks serve a wide range of communities comprising of many neighborhoods within close proximity. These communities are primarily residential in character and provide a varying group of users who provide a rich source of information to enrich the study.

Questions posed to park users in the community in the surveys

- Sex, age, income?
- How do you come to the park?
- Where are you coming from?
- Do you visit the park frequently?
- What are the most important amenities that the park offers?

- What is your primary reason for using the park?
- What are the health and wellness benefits gained from the park?
- What are the social benefits gained from the park?
- What are the economic benefits gained from the park?
- What are the impacts of these three park benefits on the community?
- Would you care if the park were not there? Why?
- What improvements would you like to see added to the park?

6. Results and discussion

- It was noted that there were variations in responses among the visitors however the results with respect to gender distribution showed that 48 % of the park visitors were males, while 52 % the park visitors were females.
- In Subash Bose park, 46% were males and remaining 53% were females while in Napier museum ground 49.3% were male and 50.6% were female.
- In Subash Bose park majority of the park visitors i.e. 56 % were in the age of 26 to 55 years, and 17.3% were in the age of 19 to 25 years, and 10.6% were in the age of 55 years and above. While in Napier museum ground major portion of park visitors i.e. 42.6% were in the age of 18 to 25 years, and 33.3% were in the age of 26 to 55 years and 14.6% were in the age of 55 years and above.
- 45.3 % of the visitors interviewed were married while 54.6 % were single and 27.3% having income 10000-20000/month.
- 28.6% of respondents liked to spend 1-2 hours in the parks and when reasons for visiting parks were explored, in Subash Bose park it was found that 16% respondents visit park for walking, while other reasons for visiting were jogging 13.3 %, children wish 24%, exercise 10.6% and 13.3% respondents came for outing purposes.

Respondents were asked to share their purpose of visit to parks. Results showed that they exchange views with friends and entertainment was the main reason which was given by people having 32% contribution. In response to the question about enjoyment associated with parks while visiting the parks, purpose of asking of this question was to develop an understanding on people enjoyments associated with their visits to the parks and based on this information to establish some relationship with enjoyment feature needed in the parks.

35 % were enjoying the greenery and the view to water body, 25% were enjoying through feeling calmness, 15.5% were releasing relief tension, 7.0% were enjoying walking on grass, 1.5% were enjoying the flowers and 15.5 % were enjoying hardscapes in parks.

A comparison of both parks with respect to the enjoyment

reveals that enjoying greenery and exercise was top priority among the visitors of Subash Bose park and Napier museum ground. Greenery was the most perceived enjoyment inferred from majority of visitors, which reflects towards the need of space required for vegetation and inflact it's the role and value of plants in their life.

A. Social and psychological benefits

Comparison of community benefits associated with Public Park showed that 84% of the park visitors were strongly agree and 12% were agreed that by visiting parks they get the opportunity of talking to people consisting and 4 % were disagreed.

Data reveals that majority of park visitors in Subash Bose park (74.6%) of park visitors were strongly agreed that parks provide the opportunity of talking to people and while 20% were agreed with the idea. 5.3% of park visitors were disagreed. While in Napier museum ground majority of park visitor's comprising of 93.3% of park visitors were strongly agreed, 4% were agreed, and 3% were disagreed that parks provide the opportunity to talk people.

Public opinion about parks showed that parks improve the living standard and social interaction of people. Public opinion about parks that parks help in making friends Showed that 64% of the park visitors were strongly agreed that parks help in making friends, 29% were agreed, and 6.6% were disagreed that parks help in making friends.

When we compare the two parks it is seen that in subash Bose park 61.3% strongly agree that park help to make friends. While in the case of Napier museum ground 68% strongly agree to this. Public opinion about parks showed that parks improve the living standard and social interaction of people. Public opinion about parks that parks help in making friends Showed that 64% of the park visitors were strongly agreed that parks help in making friends, 29% were agreed, and 6.6% were disagreed that parks help in making friends. When we compare the two parks it is seen that in Subash Bose park 61.3% strongly agree that park help to make friends. While in the case of Napier museum ground 68% strongly agree to this.

Data related to Public opinion about parks that increase aesthetic sense of people showed that 46% of the park visitors were strongly agreed that by visiting parks increase aesthetic sense of people, 33% were agreed and 1% were strongly disagreed that parks increase the aesthetic sense of people.

Data shows that 71% of the park visitors were strongly agreed that by visiting parks people concentrate on thinking, 23% were agreed and 6% disagreed that by visiting parks people concentrate on thinking.

Results also revealed that that 61% of the park visitors were strongly agreed that parks improve the quality of life, 32.6% were agreed and 6% were disagreed that parks improve the quality of life. Green spaces and water body where the common factor in these parks which provide an opportunity for outing for city residents where they spend some time in tension free environment.

Comparison among two parks with respect to control the pollution in urban areas reveal that majority of park visitors in Subash Bose park i.e.80% of park visitors were strongly agreed that parks control the pollution in urban areas, 17.3% were agreed. While in Napier museum ground majority of park visitor's i.e.70.6% of park visitors were strongly agreed and 29.3% were agreed.

It showed that trees and shrubs had controlled the environmental pollution. In comparison of the two parks it was found that most people agreed (53%) that Subhash Bose park as well as Napier museum ground is a good place for walking and exercises.

Public opinion that parks help in spending good time indicated that 71% of park visitors were strongly agreed that by visiting parks respondents spend good time and helps in community gathering and 20% were agreed that by visiting parks respondents spend good time.

Parks finally help in reducing the level of violence. Both the park strongly agree that it reduces the level of violence. Both the parks being in the heart of the city allows for gathering of people and the open spaces help in changing the mentality of people creating a space for better living.

7. Conclusion

- From the study it is seen that, the importance of parks are growing each day as the cities expand. The value of the city as a place to live and work in increased by providing clean open spaces and this also encourages the neighbourhood to grow and brings the people together.
- Parks provide gathering space for people of all age group and economic status and they use it regardless of how much they have to pay.
- Parks have many benefits and is an important element which provides recreation space and venue for community engagement. The local government bodies are expected to take care of the public parks in this era of high cost of living.
- It is also found out that a city which is well provided with a range of open spaces of varying types, size and of high quality, including parks with good facilities, is seen as more attractive to residents, businesses and investors.
- It is also seen that open spaces can be used as a tool to mitigate pollution in cities by improving air quality and thereby helping to sustain the cities biodiversity.
- Involving community into park management will be strengthen people's relationship with their local park, urban neighborly relations.
- In the busy developing urban world it is necessary to have parks and open spaces which can serve as a relaxing spot and in turn make people more into society as well gain a peaceful life.

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