



EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF GREEN OPEN SPACES IN ADO-EKITI, EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The essentials of urban open space management recommend that a mindfully implemented urban improvement should incorporate more than just great buildings. It ought to incorporate parks and open spaces on the ground that both buildings and open spaces benefit from each other through the quality of each space. Furthermore, it provides benefits from the economical, social, communal, environmental and aesthetical aspects. Parks and open spaces improved the personal satisfaction of urban communities and neighborhood by the city enhancements and facilities. The reasonable system on nature of a neighborhood park in this paper is gotten from a multidisciplinary study in the fields of landscaping design, relaxation, amusement, tourism industry and the environment. This system takes into consideration theory based combination of certainties and thoughts as well as functional ramifications for the advancement of tools to assess the aspects of value in Ado Ekiti Neighborhood Park. Neighborhood Park as the subject of evaluation for this tool since it has social, monetary and social qualities on our everyday lives. In addition to the fact that it provides income benefits for health and mental prosperity, it also serves as a societal and community gathering place for certain residential neighborhood. This paper fundamentally evaluates the result of investigations literature that characterizes the idea of quality for a neighborhood park. The outcome of this study would be utilized to control future development of a structure to characterize parts of value in Ado-Ekiti neighborhood parks.

Introduction

Local neighborhood parks are developed and used for numerous purposes, during leisure time such as for recreation, social and cultural interaction as well as protection of our habitat. The main focus of this paper is to identify measures to appraise the quality value of parks with regard to the use of neighbourhood parks as urban residents' gateways to their daily outdoor recreational and leisure venues (McLean, 2015). McRobie (2000) and Christiansen, Conner, and McCrudden, SUPER group (2001), emphasized that parks are primarily designed for recreation which give enormous benefits to the neighbourhood and the community in the areas of health improvement, social well-being and enhancing enjoyment of the local environment.

The benefits of recreation also cover physical health, psychosocial well-being, self actualization, spirituality and self-identity, family bonding, child development, environmental education and social skills development (Veal and Lynch, 2001). The important role of urban open spaces is recognized both in the character and the life they bring to towns and cities around the world (Olowookere, 2018). Urban open spaces provide a place for meetings for all categories of people, or a place for a person to be alone or for those who can transcend within the crowd and be unidentified (Ward Thompson, 2002).

Recreational spaces, as public spaces, constitute a common good, a scene of everyday life of urban communities whose needs should be taken into account during their designing and planning. Among these needs, apart from a sense of security and identification with the environment, there is also a need for aesthetics. The improper development of public spaces for the needs to rest, a lack of care for continuity and reference to the tissue of historical places, as well as a lack of care for aesthetic values, make these spaces neglected, chaotic and incomprehensible to recipients (Justyna Mokras-Grabowska, 2018).

However, all categories of open spaces have different kinds of opportunities and constraints, hence little



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research has been carried out to explore and identify the needs and preferences as well as the effect of recreation on the use users, including parents and children towards park facilities and its surroundings (Bjerke et al., 2006; Arnberger, 2006; Tucker et al., 2007) towards achieving a quality neighbourhood park. Therefore, there is the need for this research so as to understand how location, size and number, design as well as the management of trails and open spaces affect use patterns, perceptions and preferences of users. Enhancing the quality of open spaces include natural features, provision of social interaction as well as reducing the level of annoyance in order to improve the quality and access to neighbourhood parks which will directly contribute to the increasing amount of outdoor activities especially among older people (Sugiyama and Ward Thompson, 2008).

Bell, Hamilton, Montarzino, Rothnie, Travlou, and Alves (2008) in their study stated that more methods were required for evaluating projects, so as to obtain a high quality of evidence for better methods of action research. They also mentioned that, more research is needed to develop practical planning tools and decision support system which, as in this review, attempts to assess the quality of neighbourhood park through the understanding of park users' preferences, needs and use pattern (Aribigbola, 2016). Crowford, (2008), suggested that more research is required to examine relations between the quality of parks, park features, as well as other key determinants. Hence, the reason, why the goal of this paper is to understand the strength of interrelationships among the constructs of quality neighbourhood parks, satisfaction, preferences, needs and use pattern, which should better equip park managers and designers to develop and manage neighbourhood parks (Taiwo, 2018). It is important to focus on improving the quality of open spaces, including their natural features and the provision for social interaction (Sugiyama and Ward Thompson, 2008).

Williams and Green (2001) reviewed the literature on public spaces and local environments and found that the key factors that undermine public spaces, as well as undermining the quality of public spaces or their use include traffic, business activity, anti-social behaviour and crime, poor design, conflicting roles and privatization of the public realm. Furthermore, it is also stated that design often lies at the heart of what makes a successful urban green space hence, design is also a key factor in tackling many of the barriers to the use of urban green spaces (Dunnet, N., Swanwick, C., & Woolley, H., 2002).

For this purpose, several inclusion and exclusion criteria will be addressed. This will only include studies that are reporting the impact or affects of green spaces on quality or success of green open spaces within residential areas, preferences factors, human needs factors, use pattern and user focus or users and visitors in general. This will exclude studies that are within the topics of environmental, air or scenic quality, service and performance quality in general, and health behaviours (physical and social). This study only include spaces in studies on neighbourhood parks, residential open spaces, residential green, residential green open spaces and neighbourhood playfields but exclude urban parks in general, backyards and private gardens, forest and national parks, wilderness and wetlands, greenbelt and country parks.

Why do we need research on quality of green open spaces within residential area?

The inconsistencies in assessing quality of green open spaces within residential neighbourhood area are due to difficulties in defining, measuring, and assessing quality of a park or neighbourhood parks. In this study, a structural equation modeling (SEM) method was adopted to validate causal relationship between variables and to examine the association with the quality of a neighbourhood parks. Chiesura's (2004) study suggested that the current sustainable indicator for urban development which is much related to most city planners and urban designers in their work should take into account the availability of public spaces and green open areas as they have been proven to fulfill the needs and expectations for the satisfaction of their living environment which should lead to a sustainable city. Therefore, the role of park is clear in providing social services and importance towards city sustainability. The valuation of urban parks must start from the appraisal of the needs, wants and beliefs towards sustainable city strategies which are in fact the primary intentions of this paper.

Ozguner's and Kendle's (2006) stated that landscape professionals often tend to appreciate the richness of the small intimate pictures that nature creates compared to the simpler structures and lines of man-made designs. It should not only imply the interests of professionals responsible for planning and management of urban green spaces, but should also reflect the needs of the general public. Indeed, there are several benefits that can be



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learned from this paper. It should be of interest to landscape architects, park designers, urban designers, city planners, architects, developers as well as any other professional involved in the development of a new residential neighbourhood from the public or the park users' point of view.

The study is a tool to help designers promote qualities and to hinder dissatisfaction about residential green open spaces and thereby help to enhance community development socially, mentally, physically and spiritually. Different forms of open spaces require a range of appropriate benchmark standards (Doick et al., 2009). It will help designers and developers to evaluate their residential and community design options and to generalize in order to optimize quality towards their outdoor settings which are closely related to the requirements from its users.

Table 1.1: Acceptable Standard for Land allocation for Open Recreation Space in Cities.

City population	Percentage of urban land
Under 50,000	6.0 – 7.5
50,001 – 100,000	7.0 - 8.5
100,001 – 500,000	7.5 - 10.5
Over 500,000	8.0 – 10.0

Source: Obateru (2009)

The standard for open recreational spaces differs from one planned area to another. Out of the five types of outdoor recreational areas that may be shown on urban structures plans, district, neighbourhood, city playground and regional urban parks are prominent.

Table 1.2: The Characteristics of Urban Outdoor Recreation System

Hierarchy		Type		The area in Ha. (Minimum)	
Order	Designation	Play Ground	Parks	Play ground	Park
1st order	Local	Children	—	0.2	--
2nd order	Neighbourhood	Neighbourhood	Neighbourhood	1.6	0.8
3rd order	District	District	District	6	2
4th order	City	Stadium	City	6	20
5th order	Regional	-----	Regional	---	240

Source: Obateru (2009)

Theory Supporting the Quality Neighbourhood Parks

Reviewing literature alone is somehow insufficient if there are no links with certain theories. Hence, this paper focuses on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) which was among the fundamental theory to behavioural prediction which was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975. This theory is based on the assumption that human beings are usually quite rational and make systematic use of the information available to them. It was argued that people consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not to engage in their behaviour. According to this theory, a person's intention is a function of two basic determinants, one is personal in nature and the other is reflecting social influences. The personal factor is the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behaviour. This factor is termed attitude towards the behaviour.

It implies the person's judgement on performing the behaviour, whether it is good or bad, that he is also in favour of or against performing the behaviour. In the general sense, individuals would intend to perform behaviour when they evaluate it positively and when they believe it is important that others think they should perform it. TRA gave brief perspectives and social themes of human behaviour in order to understand the true meaning of their perception on personal space that is very important to this paper (refer to Figure 1 below). It is the hope of the authors that the readers will share the same interest on the relationship between attitude and preferences of park users who use neighbourhood parks in Ado-Ekiti as their daily



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recreational venues. This help to answer the questions on the preferences, needs, and use pattern of Ado Ekiti park users about their leisure behaviour or outdoor recreational activities in the urban open space areas.

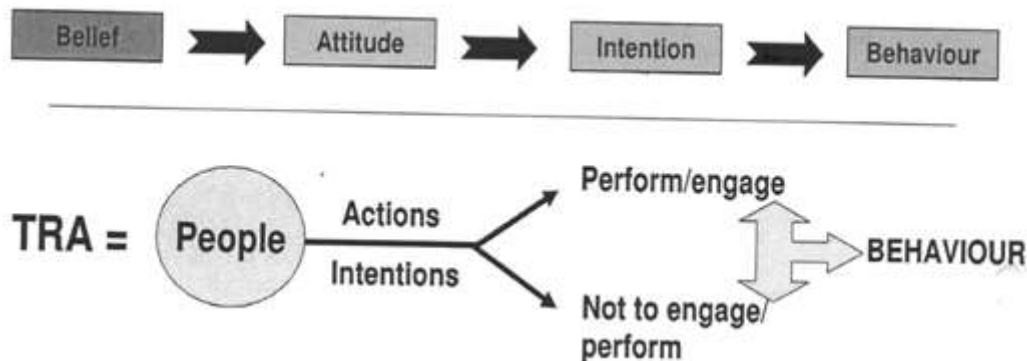


Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action diagram. Adapted from Ajzen & Fishbein (1980).

Researches on Quality

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), defined quality as the ‘gestalt’ attitude towards service which was acquired over a period of time after many experiences with it. The high quality service in outdoor recreation exists when recreation opportunities meet the needs of its visitors. It is also the degree to which opportunities satisfy the motivations for which they were designed. Hence, the challenge of providing high quality recreational services would become less difficult when agencies are aware of what their patrons desire from their services (Mackay and Crompton, 1990).

Furthermore, the value of public open spaces increases because they have the potential to enhance the positive qualities of urban life in term of opportunities, physical settings, sociability and cultural diversity. Willie (1992) argued that quality is about people and attitudes. Quality is not only about techniques and procedures but it also includes people who actually use the techniques or procedures in the context of ‘total quality management’. Among definitions of quality given by Willie are ‘fitness for use’, ‘conformance to requirements’, ‘continuous improvement’, and ‘delighting the customers’. Quality is also the degree of excellence by which we satisfy the needs of the customers.

Smith, Nelischer, and Perkins, (1997) assessed the physical elements that contribute to the quality of a community. The quality community is one which meets the needs and desires of its visitors and inhabitants. This could be evaluated in term of the community open spaces or in this context is the neighbourhood park. The principle criteria, among others, include the concept of livability, character, connection, mobility, personal freedom and diversity.

Arigbibola, (2016), listed various external and internal factors for the success of a community park in Akure, Ondo State. The external factors include: surrounding neighbourhood factors; social diversity of park users; the strong neighbourhood and community group as well as well established advisory council while the internal factors also include: the physical design of the park which plays an important role as well as management of the park and finally supervision of its users and park management are the key roles in ensuring that a park is successful in serving its diverse users.

Cabe Space (2005) confirmed that the link between high quality green spaces and the increased housing prices have the following benefits: improving the image of an area in order to attract investment; contribution to biodiversity; contribution in promoting physical activities and the benefits to health and also overcoming the anti-social behaviour through design and management. Qualities of a successful green



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space were adopted in this study as to determine the quality criteria for a neighbourhood park. Among the qualities are sustainability, character and distinctiveness, definition and enclosure, connectivity and accessibility, legibility, adaptability and robustness, inclusiveness and biodiversity.

Defining 'Neighbourhood Park'

The important components of a neighbourhood according to Hester (1984) are a focal point, such as school and recreational area, where each house should be adjoined to a planned open space area. Although many sociologists debated that a definition of the neighbourhood was irrelevant simply because the concept of neighbourhood was vast and had evolved through time. However, this paper will correspondingly use the definition terms of a neighbourhood space instead, where the concept according to Hester is a space limited to the public and that it is an outdoor territory close to home.

A neighbourhood park according to Chapman (1999) is a place where diverse needs are met without the necessity of travelling a long distance, providing basic recreational amenities for all users; it is also usually located within the center of a development. Similarly, Obateru (2009) defines Neighbourhood Parks as places which serves both active and passive recreation providing a local park function and facilities to a wide range of people. Usually, it contributes to an area of 0.2 to 0.8 kilometer radius or catchment area. Nevertheless, the term neighbourhood park in this study refer to green open space which is public, available for leisure and recreational purposes similar to those mentioned by Oladeji,(2014) in their research examining the relationship between various aspects of neighbourhood open spaces with older adults walking for transport and recreation.

However, neighbourhood parks in this context refer to parks that are situated within a community neighbourhood housing area and which offer leisure and recreational purposes for local and immediate communities. For the purpose of this study, a quality of neighbourhood park will be defined as: 'Quality Neighbourhood Park' is 'a successful and excellent public green open space within a residential neighbourhood area that conforms to the needs and requirements of the people including various techniques in using the space and upon agreed standard that is beyond the usual outdoor recreation and leisure expectations'.

Strength of Evaluation

The main reevaluation of this paper is the importance of predicting and explaining the causal relationship between use patterns, needs, and preferences towards achieving a Quality Neighbourhood Park in Ado-Ekiti. A confirmatory path analysis model where the causal or chains of relationship between dependent variables (use patterns, needs, and preferences) to be proven fit against the data collected is shown below (see Figure 2 below). The causal relationship using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through path analysis diagram will lead to the development of a criteria or model for a Quality Neighbourhood Park Criteria (QNPC).

This criteria or model can be useful for the future and the new Neighbourhood Park development established within residential areas. This structure will also give the impact to the current body of literature as it will test the selected variables from the current findings developed by various Western scholars within the field of Landscape Architecture and Park and Recreation Management, and it can be developed as a single structure model to be tested against any context or environment. QNPC will be the guidelines or criteria suitable for any park designer or Landscape Architect in their work for developing a quality neighbourhood park.

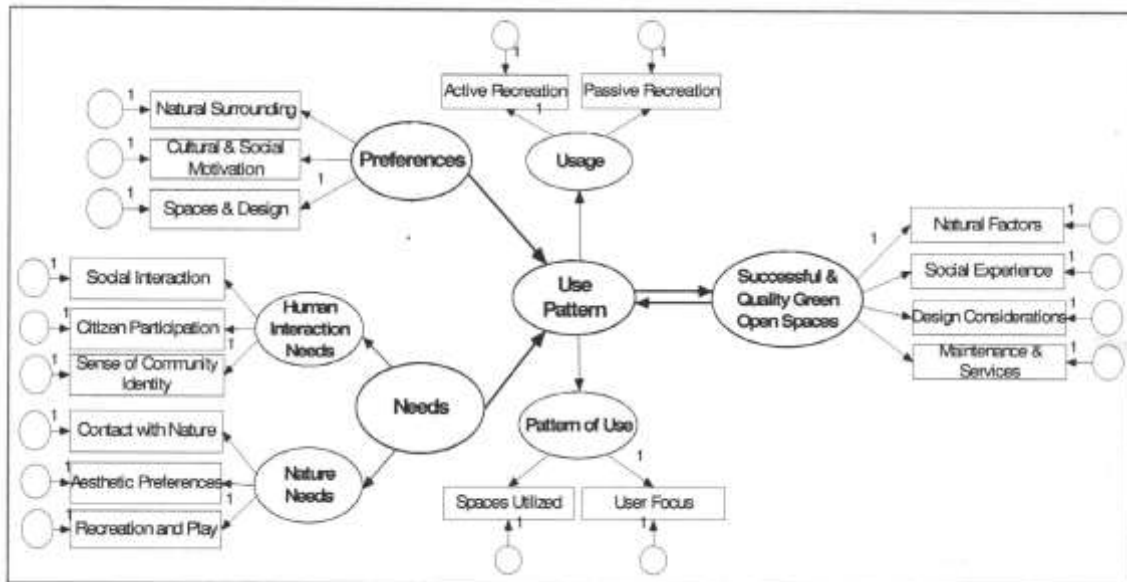


Figure 2: An extended hypothesized model used to identify the Quality Neighbourhood Park

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship among variables stated hence the summary of findings from the table above is as follows:

- The needs will affect park user's use pattern.
- Preferences will affect park user's use pattern.
- Needs will affect preferences of park users for their recreational activities.
- Specific use pattern of park users will affect the success and quality of green open spaces.
- Better understanding about the use pattern of park users will contribute to the development of a quality Neighbourhood Park.
- The success and quality of green open spaces will contribute to better use.

Conclusion

In order, to achieve quality of a neighbourhood park, several important measures should be addressed as had been discussed on the findings above. Hence, this paper only looked into ways and means in which services and facilities could be improved, the overall and best variables to be considered for a quality neighbourhood park in an urban context, combining the design attributes as well as understanding the overall neighbourhood satisfaction level, looking into gender, socio-economic status and the cultural background aspects in a neighbourhood park setting.

The role of park is also very important in increasing the quality of life of the people especially in urban areas. This paper has also specifically looked into the objective of environmental attributes such as the natural recreation resources, environmental quality and man-made recreation attributes as well as the main concepts of livability, environmental quality, quality of life and sustainability, and presented examples of underlying conceptual models as a framework. Apart from that, meeting basic human needs towards urban open spaces in the urban landscape environment is important in order to achieve quality of life and developing the quality of a Neighbourhood Park. This paper focused on fulfilling the needs and perceived usefulness of park users towards a sustainable city development, similarities or differences among park users' preferences, green open spaces in residential neighbourhood as



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the type of site to be used or as the controlled environment to be tested on the nature and human needs towards a neighborhood park environment, and finally to identify ethnicity utilization, activities and frequency of use to further indicate the relationship between perceived benefit and park use in the neighborhood park setting.

The quality criteria developed through this review should be universally adapted, because it provides a very relevant framework for research in the area of landscape architecture, park and recreation management, urban forestry, and urban planning. At every level of the Ado Ekiti Local Government, recreation and park facilities have captured increasing interest and involvement from all parties and agencies concerned.

Although, quality in the field of recreation and tourism often managed to subscribe to many management and marketing researches, quality in the field of landscape planning and recreation remains limited. Hence, research on quality green open spaces as a whole cannot ignore the role of users' satisfaction, preferences, use pattern and needs. As a result, the operational definition and the construct of 'quality of neighborhood park' developed in this study can be a valid and reliable measure to quantify the success and quality of open spaces as a whole in future research. Due to both theoretical and practical significance, the 'Quality Neighborhood Parks Criteria' is a tool to help achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding on quality towards green open spaces in Ado Ekiti, as to increase the quality of life among users.

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