



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**USERS' PREFERENCES OF USABILITY OF URBAN PARKS IN
TABRIZ, IRAN**

**AHMAD HAMI
FRSB 2009 6**

**USERS' PREFERENCES OF USABILITY OF URBAN PARKS IN TABRIZ,
IRAN**

By

AHMAD HAMI

**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for Master Science**

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DEDICATION

To my lovely mother



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master Science

USERS' PREFERENCES OF USABILITY OF URBAN PARKS IN TABRIZ, IRAN

By

AHMAD HAMI

November 2009

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Nowadays, urban parks are considered one of the most important and essential parts of urban fabrics. Parks introduce multiple opportunities for users including, active and passive recreation, social communication, and conservation of nature environments. It is important that parks design meets residents' needs and demands. In many cases, urban parks are designed based on designers' insights and knowledge, and most of the time the design doesn't meet the users' needs; the ultimate result being low, or no, use of urban parks. Urban parks in Tabriz, Iran, experience this problem probably due to wrong speculation of users' motivation for park use and preferred activities there in. This research aims at understanding users' motivations behind visiting parks and their preferred activities in urban parks at Tabriz, Iran. A survey study was deemed appropriate for answering the research questions and meeting its objectives. The survey instrument was designed to have both open and close-ended questions about how people go to parks, motives for visiting parks, and their preferred park's activities. The survey questionnaire was conducted via randomly sampling method among 208 of the parks' users in Tabriz.



Two local parks; El Goli and Big Park, were selected for this study. The results indicate that nature in the park is the most important motive for people to visit the parks in Tabriz. Socialization with family and passive recreation were found to be the most preferred visitor activities. In addition, the participants highlighted that safety of El Goli Park's environment and maintenance of Big Park need to be improved. This research unfolds user's insights and opinions about pattern, orientation, and tendencies of park use in Tabriz. It is highly recommended that future research be conducted to explore other segment of society such as teenagers' motives and preferences for park activities and visitation. It is also essential that the future designs of parks in Tabriz put the findings of this study into practice.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**USERS' PREFERENCES OF USABILITY OF URBAN PARKS IN TABRIZ,
IRAN**

Oleh

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Pada masa ini, taman bandaran dianggap sebagai satu bahagian yang penting dan mustahak dalam struktur bandaran. Taman mampu menyediakan pelbagai kemudahan untuk pengguna termasuklah rekreasi aktif dan pasif, komunikasi sosial serta pemuliharaan alam semulajadi. Adalah sesuatu yang penting reka bentuk taman ini memenuhi keperluan dan kehendak pengguna. Dalam banyak kes, taman bandaran direka bentuk berdasarkan tanggapan dan pengetahuan pereka bentuk, dan selalunya reka bentuk tersebut tidak dapat memenuhi keperluan pengguna; keputusan akhirnya akan menyebabkan taman bandaran itu tidak digunakan. Taman bandaran di Tabriz, Iran, menghadapi masalah yang sama disebabkan kesalahan spekulasi mengenai motivasi pengguna terhadap penggunaan taman dan aktiviti yang harus dijalankan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memahami motivasi pengguna untuk mengunjungi taman serta aktiviti yang digemari di taman bandaran di Tabriz, Iran. Kaji selidik telah dijalankan bersesuaian untuk menjawab persoalan kajian dan memenuhi objektifnya. Instrumen kaji selidik iaitu tinjauan terhadap orang ramai servei orang ramai telah direka dengan mempunyai soalan berbentuk terbuka dan tertutup berkenaan



bagaimana orang pergi ke taman, motif mengunjunginya dan aktiviti yang digemari dilakukan di taman. Tinjauan soal selidik dilakukan dengan menggunakan metod persampelan secara rawak kepada 208 pengguna taman di Tabriz. Dua taman tempatan; El Goli dan Big Park, telah dipilih untuk kajian ini. Kajian terhadap keputusan mendapati sifat semulajadi taman adalah motif yang paling penting oleh pengunjung di dalam mengunjungi taman di Tabriz. Bermesra dengan keluarga dan terlibat dengan rekreasi pasif dikenalpasti sebagai aktiviti yang paling digemari. Sebagai tambahan, responden juga menekankan bahawa keselamatan persekitaran El Goli Park dan penyelenggaraan Big Park perlu dipertingkatkan. Kajian ini menyimpulkan tanggapan dan pendapat pengguna terhadap pola, orientasi, dan kecenderungan terhadap penggunaan taman di Tabriz. Adalah dicadangkan, kajian akan datang mengenalpasti motif kumpulan masyarakat khusus seperti remaja dan aktiviti pilihan mereka di taman bandaran di Tabriz. Adalah juga penting bahawa reka bentuk taman di Tabriz mengambilkira untuk mengaplikasi hasil kajian ini pada reka bentuk taman di masa hadapan.



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I certify that a thesis examination committee has meet on 13 November 2009 to conduct the final examination of Ahmad Hami on his thesis entitled “Users’ Preferences of Usability of Urban Parks in Tabriz, Iran” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except concept of quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

AHMAD HAMI
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1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, urban parks are considered as one of the most important and essential parts of the cities. Urban parks can be mostly found in most great cities and they are noticeable as one of the open public spaces in the aforementioned cities. Urban parks can offer multiple functions of spaces for urban dwellers such as area for active and passive recreations, social communications, and contact for natural environments (Iamtrakul, 2005).

Urban parks are known as places for recreation, activity, and enjoyment (C.Y. Jim & Wendy Y. Chen, 2006). They have been also defines as places which include formal landscape, playground areas, adult's recreational areas, as well as open space areas. They play a main role to keep social communications among urban dwellers (Cranz, 1982). However, according to Gobster (2002), urban parks can be defined as places for leisure activities, experience of nature, preserving areas for cultural features, and socialization. Parks can also be in a significant position in the cities to provide a venue for tranquility and pleasure.

The background history of public parks may be traced back to the ancient countries such as Greece, when for instance, open spaces were established for pleasure and socialization in the capital of Athens (Reeves, 2000). During Renaissance, parks were created as great private gardens, places for recreation, sport activities, and pleasure. In that time, those gardens were built by wealthy people for their own enjoyments and pleasures by engaging in sport activities and nature involvements.



The new concept of the urban park was begun in the early nineteenth century and throughout the Industrial Revolution period (Suhardi, 2002). For example, in 1845, the first park was designed by Joseph Paxton in Birkenhead, British country (Reeves, 2000). At the same time, the provisions of the public parks in the cities have been transmitted to the United States of America and the European countries. In the USA, in 1858, Fredrick Law Olmstead designed Central Park in New York to provide more public spaces (*c.f.* Reeves, 2000). A very large population can use the park to do healthy activities as well as spend their leisure times.

With high rapid urbanization and industrialization in the mid 1800 [as well as today], urban parks can be considered as inevitable purification resource and essential lungs for urban areas. Today, with the expansion of many new styles of buildings, parks can be noticed as places which could enhance vividness and liveliness of residential areas. Furthermore, since stress in life may be cited as one of the most common affection to the urban dwellers, parks can prepare opportunity to the abatement of stress by providing areas to escape from noisy atmospheres of cities (Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991). In addition, urban designers also started to consider urban parks as places that may renew natural environment and biodiversity. Oguz (2000) reminded that urban parks can be a conduit to connect people with natural environments, and to enhance mental and physical health to the urban dwellers (Hansmann, Hug, & Seeland, 2007).

The history of public space in Iran can be traced back from the Persian Empire period around 500 years B.C. Majnonian (1996) has stated that public spaces were used for different purposes such as a place for national ceremonies, announcing important news, crowning ceremony, and etc. During 14th century A.D., public



spaces such as 'Chahar Bagh' emerged as the most important part of the cities. During this time, public spaces were used as a venue for social communication, national and religious ceremonies. In addition, Persian gardens were also introduced as a place to experience nature. In the early of 20th century A.D., Persian gardens became public urban parks for people's recreation and socialization in most of big cities in Iran including Tabriz (Romianfar, 2008).

In addition, public spaces in Iran can be considered as multi-purpose areas. Urban parks are defined as active green public spaces which provide opportunities for camping, recreations, and family gathering (Majnonian, 1996). In addition, parks in Iran are regarded as an important venue to fulfill resident's leisure times and they are known as important destinations for residents in big cities such as Tabriz to spend their holidays (Nohorly, 1999).

The scenarios about the western and Iranian urban parks are presented above and it is clearly shown that both have different demands, activities, and goals. In addition, the public use and requirements of parks may also become different with the planners' viewpoints (Hayward & Wehitzer, 1984). Unlike people's demands and intention for parks in western countries, very little information are known about Iranian's demands, preferences, and intentions regarding urban parks. In fact, the information is vital to design better urban parks for Iranians in the near future.

Moreover, understanding people's behaviors such as why and how they interact with environment can also be considered as an appropriate way to help designers to create the most successful plan and design for urban parks. It is argued that parks

designers, authorities, and social scientists need to realize how to determine the effect of social behavior and apply this information to create better urban parks (Suhardi, 2002). However, people's life style, beliefs, and culture are different from place to place and society to society. With this belief in my mind, some of the result of studies in other countries cannot be applied to other country or societies due to different culture, society, and living context.

Therefore, the present research intends to study and determine the motivation of park users, demands and requirements, and preferred activities of Iranians on urban parks in Tabriz, Iran. For achieving this aim, the study concentrates on two urban parks (El Goli Park and Big Park) in the metropolis of Tabriz in the northwest of Iran.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The history of landscape design and development in Iran can be traced back to several thousand years ago. Wilber (1979) stated that Iranians have had a main role in developing and advancing the landscape design. For instance, Tabriz alone with 1.57 million population (Census Center Organization of Iran, 2006), the 4th biggest city in Iran (Ghorbani, 2006), has two urban parks for its dwellers, namely, El Goli Park and Big Park.. El Goli Park was built by an unknown king in 1785 (Wilber, 1979) and it was converted to be a public urban park in 1930 (Romianfar, 2008). Big Park, on the other hand, is the newest urban park in Tabriz. It was established around 1980, and covers 450 acres of the land.



Nowadays, urban parks in Tabriz are facing with wide ranges of issues which can affect people coming to parks (Ghorbani, 2006). The conducted research by Ghorbani (2006) was declared that urban parks are not used properly by residents in Tabriz. In other words, parks faced with 'less use' issue. His investigation discovered that low and useless facilities of the parks as important reason to emerge this phenomenon. It was concluded that parks do not provide facilities and activities appropriately for users. Moreover, the head of Parks and Green Spaces Organization of Tabriz has also stated that majority (62%) of urban parks, due to low facilities and activities are not used by the residents (Barzegar, 2008). Both of the statements agree that users do not receive proper activity and facility to involve with park and it causes users to lose their interest of visiting them. It is concluded that the park designers and managers need to consider users' preferred activities and facilities in parks. Furthermore, designers need to know basic and systematic information about users' motives and preferences for park activities because 'such information seems very important for planning and providing activity in the present and future urban parks (Hayward & Wehitzer, 1984). However, unlike studies regarding urban parks in the western countries, no research has been done concerning people preferences for urban parks in Iran or is not accessible. Hence, the basic and systematic information about user motives and preference for activity in park is not available.

These issues and problems (less-use) for urban parks can be seen all over the world. Less-use of urban parks is consequential problem because it shows that people are not interested in visiting urban parks (Hayward & Wehitzer, 1984). Therefore, it is important to know why those urban parks are not being used. Less understanding of people's motivations and needs may also cause to the problem of non-use and less-

use. So designers need to know what are the users' motives and needs in going to the park because users' mind and thought is different with designers' thought (Hayward & Wehitzer, 1984).

1.2 Goal of the Study

Less information was known about the public views toward motivation and activity in relation to urban parks in Tabriz. This research is a step to achieve better understanding of people's motivation and thoughts for usability of urban parks. Moreover, the users' opinion is integrated in order to propose suitable applications to create better and successful parks. Therefore, the objectives of this research have been outlined to answer the research questions.

1.3 Objectives:

1. To identify users' preferences for park activities in urban parks of Tabriz.
2. To identify people's motives to come to urban parks in Tabriz.
3. To identify reasons that influence people in going to urban parks in Tabriz.
4. To provide suggestions to improve parks design in Tabriz.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is necessary to conduct studies which produce general theoretical insights about public opinions on environment (Hayward & Wehitzer, 1984). In addition, these kinds of researches produce results which can be used to solve problems of urban

park management and planning. For instance, improvement of parks, contexts of new parks, and organization of recreation activities will be achieved by user's information, motivation, and suggestions.

It is essential for Iranian landscape designers and park planners to understand people's need for urban parks, their motivations to visit parks, and their preferences and requirements for parks. Iran, as a developing country, faced with quick urbanization during last three decades. This phenomenon together with an increasing population in Iran has increased the seeds for recreation areas and urban parks. The population of Iran has doubled in the last thirty years from 33.7 million in 1976 to 69.5 million in 2005 (Modarres, 2006). In addition, nearly 69% of the Iranian lived in cities in 2006, in contrast of only 34% in 1960 and 61% in 1996 (Ganeei, 2006).

From 1996 to 2006, Tabriz has experienced 6% increase of population from 61 to 67% (Ganeei, 2006). In fact, during that span, the life style of Iranian population has also changed from rural to urban. Metropolitans such as Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Isfahan received thousands of new residents every year, and this rapid urban growth has caused new social relationship among urban dwellers. With the change of the society and urban fabric, it is assumed that the needs and requirements of the city dwellers will also be changed. So, the results of this research are important for urban planners and designers to reassess the new public space designs and issues.

In addition, Iran is a country where its people do not participate widely in the process to develop public places so it is difficult to assemble different views and insights herein. This pioneer study intends to introduce research as a suitable



instrument and a proper way to discover and extract public opinions regarding park's activities and new plans. Since this research provides the basic information about people's demands and motivation for urban parks, it will help users to involve in park development process.

1.5 Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter explains the historical background and issues regarding urban parks, statement of the problem, the goal and objectives of the study, and the significance of the study. The second chapter describes the review of the literature including terminology definition. The third chapter describes the methods used in the study and data analysis. The results of analysis of the study are described in chapter four. Last chapter discusses the significant findings, the implications of the findings, the conclusion, and recommendations for future investigations.

