

The Life of Place

Spaces
Places and Narratives

Edited by
Khalilah Zakariya
Nor Zalina Harun
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The Life of Place

Spaces, Places and Narratives

The book is a collection of selected case studies predominantly in Malaysia and an international case study in New Zealand that examines people's experiences in public spaces. The public spaces gathered in this book include street markets, parks, historical sites, open spaces, coastal areas and cities. Written from the perspective of people's experiences and responses towards the selected public spaces, the aim of the book is to share their narratives as users, as a way of guiding designers and planners how they might re-think about engaging with places and people.

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Chapter 2

Parks as People Places

Nurhayati Abdul Malek

Introduction

Since the nineteenth century, the provision of parks has been a major focus in promoting places for relaxation and recreation. In other words, parks have been designed to promote public health and to give some aesthetic values to an urban setting. Urban parks therefore can be regarded as open spaces, which cater for the needs of urban dwellers and the communities as a whole. Here, urban open spaces are seen as the alternative venues for urban getaways.



Figure 2.1: Urban Parks Today are Seen not Only as an Alternative Venues for Leisure Activities but Also as the Pride of a Community and Cities
(Author's Archive, Brisbane Parklands, 2004)

Open Spaces Hierarchy

The open space hierarchical approach according to Williams (1995) is a conventional central place theory which could provide a rationale for planned provision of recreational facilities. Based on Figure 2.2 below, with the provision of open spaces, the next step is to consider how the open spaces can be used for recreational purposes. Theoretically, according to Williams (1995), the pattern of recreational use can be determined by several factors, which includes the composition of

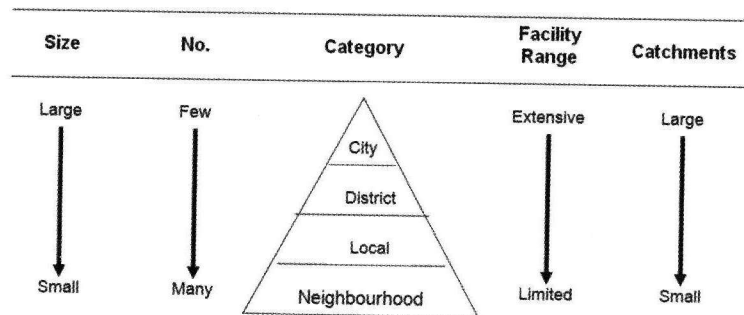


Figure 2.2: Theoretical Open Space Hierarchy. Adapted from Williams (1995)



Figure 2.3: Outdoor Recreation was Proven to Improve Quality of Life
(Author's Archive, Taman Bukit Kiara, Malaysia, 2008)

the household, the value its user places upon the open space area, the presence within the household of recreational interests that may be accommodated in the open space, and probably the size and configuration of the plot area.

Therefore, the size and arrangement of the open space design could influence recreational activities in several ways. Firstly, the greater the available space, the greater the scope that the space can absorb, i. e. a diverse range of recreations. Secondly, the arrangement of space is theoretically important. It actually influences recreational behaviors and patterns of activities, in which the arrangement of space is a significant factor in regulating layout and usage. Despite the developing conditions, urban parks remain valuable assets to the city landscape. They help bring communities together. They are also a place for recreation, relaxation, and spiritual peace, places that make cities attractive to residents and tourists.

Patterns of Use in Urban Open Spaces

Today, outdoor recreation facilities are readily available to more people than in the past. More people now live in metropolitan areas, whether they are in a developed or developing country. The role of an open space is to provide relief from problems of urban life, and is even a part of a wider approach towards social control through provision of recreation facilities (Walker & Duffield, 1983 cited in Williams, 1995).

Parks, according to Williams (1995), were originally designed to provide an experience of the countryside in the city, a version of rural landscape where recreation for the urban population at that time was limited. Generally, the patterns of use in the urban open space are concisely summarised by Walker and Duffield (1983), Williams (1995), an Burgess, Harrison and Limb (1988)

1. Urban parks attract visitors from the urban communities;
2. Usually, 60 to 80 percent of users originates from within an area of 2 km of the park;
3. Urban parks are used primarily for informal, passive recreations within an environment that caters for quiet and restorative surroundings;

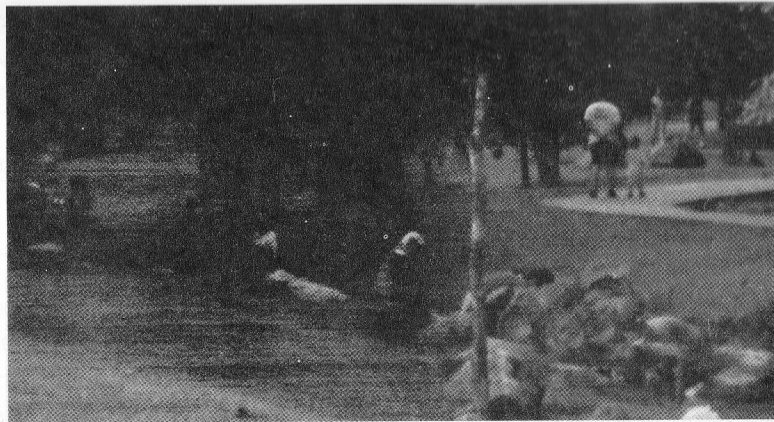


Figure 2.4: Urbanites Today are Often Encouraged to Spend their Leisure Time Doing Outdoor Activities
(Author's Archive, Taman Bukit Kiara, Malaysia, 2008)

4. Features of urban parks that are usually preferred are the ones with natural features, that offer peace and quiet, and a sense of space and freedom;
5. Although it is true that public open space draws usage from a wide spectrum of the community, it does not draw uniformly according to age, gender or economic status (adapted from a survey of park in Leicester (Leicester City Council [LCC], 1985);
6. The behavioral patterns associated with parks and open space reflects a distinctive pattern of informality and engagement in casual activities, such as, walking, sitting, watching people, or events, and general relaxation; and
7. Urban open space also attracts incidental usage like forming a short cut, or a more preferable route away from a busy street.

The Concept of Outdoor Recreation in the Urban Context

Recreation can be described in a very broad philosophy which differs from one author to another. Here, recreation is defined as *the natural expression of certain human interests and needs seeking satisfaction*

during free time (Russell, 1982). Thus, Russell (1982) described recreation as an experience rather than a specific activity. Recreation is what happens to a person as the result of an activity, rather than the activity itself. Similarly, Williams (1995), in his work, defines recreation as an *active use of free time within an individual's lifestyle*. Hence, recreation should help each individual to extend his or her intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being. On the other hand, recreation can sometime be interchangeable with, the concept of leisure. Otherwise, recreation can have variety of functions and meanings but primarily, it focuses on the activities which the participants have chosen to be engaged in (Williams, 1995).



Figure 2.5: The Use of a Neighborhood Space Depends on Many Factors Other Than the Design of the Space
(Golden Gate Mothers Group.Org)

Outdoor recreation is a resource-oriented recreation. It is defined as those recreational activities which occur in a natural outdoor environment and which relate directly to that environment (Jensen, 1977, p. 8 in Russell, 1982). According to Ibrahim and Cordes (1993), outdoor recreation can be defined as an organised free time activities that are participated for the users' own sake and there is an interaction between the participants and the elements of nature. Regardless of the level of recreation plans,

the following twelve principles in outdoor recreation should be observed (Jensen, 1985 cited in Ibrahim & Cordes, 1993, p. 250):

1. Park and recreational areas should provide opportunities for all persons regardless of race, age, gender or economic status;
2. The design of outdoor recreation should meet the needs of the geographical area and the resources available such as lakes, streams, natural forests and mountains, historical and archeological sites, areas of scenic values and areas of special interests;
3. Multiple uses of an area should be considered but with a very systematic approach to avoid over-use;
4. Early comprehensive recreation plan is essential in any acquisition of land for development;
5. Timely evaluation should be made of the current recreational needs to project accurate trends for the future;
6. Recreational areas and facilities should be properly planned, designed and distributed in accordance to the population to have equal availability of recreational opportunities;
7. The overall design of any urban open spaces and recreational sites should be as flexible as possible to accommodate changing recreational patterns;
8. Design for easy access in any recreational areas should be considered for elderly, the handicapped and others with mobility restrictions;
9. In the early planning process, citizen involvement should be considered to allow good ideas and participation towards using and caring for the area once they are developed;
10. Responsibilities among various governmental and private agencies should be defined to avoid duplication of areas, facilities, and services, in order to provide for the best opportunity to the public;
11. Parks and recreational lands should be protected against encroachment and non-recreational purposes; and
12. Park and recreation planning should not be isolated in the overall plan and detailed design, such as facilities and activities for the recreational areas, and should be carefully integrated with the whole Master Plan for any development.

Current Malaysian Policies and Guidelines for Parks and Open Spaces

The implementation of recreation policy according to Stewart, Parry and Glover (2008) shifts the responsibility for social and human welfares to individuals themselves. They cite examples such as the *Active Living* policies (see www.activeliving.org) which have been designed to promote physically active lifestyles among people. The *Active Living* policies have been intended to promote a social agenda of preventative health and adopted widely across North America as public health initiatives to combat obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and stress. Parks and recreation are considered significant platform in targeting individuals to achieve broader physical activity change in their lifestyles (Stewart et al., 2008).



Figure 2.6: Neighborhood Park Intended to Provide a Passive and Active Recreation for the Community, Usually for Non-Organised Activities (Author, 2008)

Sadly, such ideal outdoor recreational policies do not exist in the Malaysian context. The only related policy that introduces outdoor recreation option is the National Forestry Policy (NFP) under the National Forestry Council. According to Har (2002), the revised NFP in 1992 addressed and incorporated concerns relating to the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable utilisation of forest resources, ecological and environmental stability, as well as, the role of local communities

in forest development, no longer focusing only on timber production in forest management. The NFP also provided for the development of recreational forests for ecotourism and could play an important role in increasing public awareness and appreciation of the multiple roles of forests to society.

Similarly according to Sharma and Leong (2008), the National Urbanisation Policy (NUP) prepared by the Department of Town and Country Planning is targeted for open spaces. One of the measures identified under the policy is to provide adequate public open spaces by the adoption of a standard of 2 hectares per 1,000 urban populations. The policy also calls for recreational areas to be gazetted and their development to be monitored, for environmentally sensitive areas to be protected, and for green areas to be established as buffer zones to limit urban development.

The other relevant policy should be the National Landscape Policy which focuses more on building functional landscape development such as the greening of cities, development of public parks, and recreational areas, as well as, the conservation and maintenance of natural assets. This is according to the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP), which is to emphasise on care and conservation of the environment, while maintaining the beauty of nature, as well as, protecting landscape resources as invaluable national heritage and aesthetics assets for future generations (*Daily Express Sabah*, 2006).

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, it is important to understand why parks are used as a recreational option while there are always booming shopping malls around Klang Valley nowadays. Recreation and park facilities have captured increasing interest and involvement from all parties and agencies. However, the significance has not been documented properly. Hence, there is no listing of recreational park usage or any statistical data to support this research. Although leisure services administrators in Malaysia are currently positioned under every municipal or city council, there is no individual or specific unit or department who has the full responsibility for developing policies, planning and executing

budgets, and implementing recreation programmes, specifically towards building parks and recreational services.

Malaysia needs to consider serious aspect of outdoor recreation planning which should involve the public, park administrators, park designers, related government agencies (local, state and federal) as well as, private organisations. The planning part should take into consideration the general purpose related to the kind of service being offered or suggested. There should be local outdoor recreational plans both in the rural or urban context where the plans address the demand and supply for local recreational opportunities and predictions for future demands.

As for the 10 percent open spaces that is required in the Malaysian housing and planning guidelines, there should be a serious reconsideration to realise the true concept of having Malaysia as Garden Nation. The percentage should not be the subdividing component, but it should be the minimum guideline for open spaces in all new developments. According to Jensen (1985), in developing the plan, three major phases should be targeted which include, the collection of data about past history and present status of recreational needs, the projection of future park and recreational needs, and finally the formulation of a realistic proposals for both near and long-term future regarding the outdoor recreational needs. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings from this study will be used for future park designs and management in any current and future Malaysian parks.

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