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"Warning in Spaces: Blending Heritage, Nature and Design"

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Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (Hons.)
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Faculty of Built Environment, UiTM Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus



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"Harmony in Spaces : Blending Heritage, Nature and Design"

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The Psychological Benefits of Visiting Public Parks: A Study of User Well-being.

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Abstract

Public parks have become a part of everyday life in the city. They give people a space to slow down, take a breath, and escape from the stress that comes with work or study. Still, everyone experiences parks differently. For some, just being surrounded by trees and open spaces can bring a sense of calm and balance. For others, the feeling depends on how comfortable or welcoming the place feels. Parks that are filled with greenery, open lawns, and places to sit or talk often make people feel more at ease and connected. But when a park feels dull, lacks greenery, or seems unwelcoming, its ability to bring psychological comfort can be greatly reduced. This study looks into how spending time in public parks can help improve emotional well-being. It focuses on how parks help people relax, lift their mood, and cope with stress in everyday life. Using a qualitative approach, the research gathers insights through semi-structured interviews with regular park visitors to better understand their personal experiences and perceptions. By emphasizing individual stories and emotional responses, the study aims to reveal how park visits impact psychological wellbeing. The findings are expected to enrich our understanding of the psychological benefits of public park and offer guidance for designing parks that truly support mental health and resilience in city life.

Keyword: Emotional well-being, Stress reduction, Mental health

INTRODUCTION

Public parks were not merely leisure spots; for many city residents, they served as quiet sanctuaries where life slowed down, offering space to breathe, reflect, and feel less constrained by the rush of urban life. Urban green spaces like Oval Park serve as essential zones for emotional decompression, allowing residents to mitigate the psychological impacts of constant urban strain. Nature in the urban environment can reduce stress (Thompson et al, 2012) and improve emotional well-being (van den Bosch and Ode Sang, 2017). This was particularly significant in contemporary cities, where many individuals experienced mental health challenges due to lifestyle, environmental pressures and limited opportunities for mental rest.

Kaplan & Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (1989) explained that mental tiredness occurs when people utilize directed attention for long periods of time. According to ART, natural environments helped restore this capacity by providing a sense of 'being away.' Natural settings also contained elements of 'soft fascination' that attracted attention effortlessly, allowing the mind to recover. Similar to this, Ulrich's Stress Recovery Theory (SRT) (1983) suggested that spending time in nature helped reduce physiological stresses including heart rate and tense muscles. Stress levels dropped and emotional

equilibrium was restored when psychological separation and gentle fascination took place. Empirical evidence supported these perspectives as Roe and Aspinall (2011) found that people feel more mentally-restored after walking in nature compared to walking in urban settings.

Most existing knowledge about the restorative impacts of public parks was derived from quantitative studies focusing on numerical data. However, the human psychological experiences in public parks were often missing. Quantitative data could not fully explain how individuals felt or which specific elements provided them with comfort. Qualitative research revealed these experiences by allowing individuals to describe their feelings through their own narratives. For this reason, the present study aims to explore the psychological benefits of visiting public parks through a qualitative approach. It focused on how individuals describe their emotional psychological experiences and how physical and sociocultural elements influence those experiences. By understanding these lived experiences, this study sought to deepen the understanding of public park design and provide better planning for mental health.

Problem Statement

Although many researches have shown that green spaces can improve well-being, there remains a need to understand how people personally experience these benefits in public parks. Most existing research tends to focus on quantitative measures, such as the amount of greenery or the number of parks in a neighbourhood. These studies often use statistical analyses to link park provision with mental health outcomes, showing that mental well-being scores generally increase with better park accessibility (Wood et al., 2017). However, this emphasis on numerical outcomes often overlooks the emotional and sensory aspects of park visits that reflect how people actually feel when they engage with natural spaces, including experiences of calm, relaxation, and meaning that are not fully captured by quantitative data. In Malaysia, some researchers have begun to explore park users' perceptions and mental health outcomes. For example, Nath et al. (2018) who studied Kuala Lumpur parks through semi-structured interviews, surveys and quantitative analysis have found that urban green spaces contribute positively to mental health. However, very little is known about park users' psychological experience. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the psychological experiences of visiting public parks from a qualitative perspective, focusing on how individuals describe their own experiences, emotions, and perceptions on the benefits of public parks in relation to the physical and socio-cultural characteristics.

Aim

The main aim of this study is to investigate how visiting public parks contributes to psychological well-being through the lived experiences of park users.

Objectives:

1. To explore how individuals describe their psychological experiences when visiting public parks.
2. To understand how public park's physical and sociocultural elements influence park visitor's psychological experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Restoration in Public Parks

Psychological benefits of public parks are often experienced through their restorativeness. The restorative power of public parks can be better understood through two major theories in environmental psychology: the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and the Stress Recovery Theory (SRT). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) propose in ART that being in nature improves mental fatigue by offering a sense of “being away” from everyday demands. In addition to “being away,” ART identifies three other key elements that contribute to restoration: “extent”, which refers to the richness and coherence of the environment that provides a sense of immersion; “fascination”, where involuntary attention is captured by interesting features of nature without effort; and “compatibility”, which is the alignment between the environment and the individual’s purposes or desires, allowing them to engage in preferred activities easily. Together, these elements facilitate cognitive and emotional restoration, helping individuals feel refreshed and mentally replenished.

In a similar way, Ulrich’s (1983) SRT explains that exposure to natural elements can spark positive emotions and physical relaxation, helping to lower stress and lift one’s mood. Previous studies have provided strong evidence for these ideas. Evidence from Roe and Aspinall’s (2011) quantitative inquiry suggests that natural landscapes possess a higher restorative capacity than urban ones. By applying objective scales, the study confirmed that exposure to nature leads to a marked decrease in stress and more favorable affective states. Interestingly, they also discovered that individuals who were already experiencing poorer mental health showed the greatest improvement, suggesting that natural spaces can act as a form of emotional therapy. Together, these findings highlight how public parks offer peaceful environments where nature itself promotes mental fatigue recovery and relaxation.

Emotional and Mood-Enhancing Effects

Another method of studying the psychological benefits of public parks involved analysing their emotional and mood-enhancing effects. Research consistently showed that spending time in parks could improve mood and promote feelings of calmness and happiness. A quantitative study by Larson, Jennings, and Cloutier (2016) identified park quantity as a key determinant of urban happiness and life satisfaction. Utilizing standardised questionnaires to evaluate emotional states, the researchers concluded that green environments facilitate the restoration of emotional balance. Their findings emphasize that the quietude and greenery of public parks provide mental health benefits regardless of whether the users are physically active or not. Similar findings were reported by Hussain et al. (2010), who applied a quantitative approach using structured questionnaires to study park users in Pakistan. Approximately 60% of their respondents stated that they felt mentally relaxed and less stressed after spending time in the park, while around 70% agreed that public parks improve their psychological health. Many visitors noted that natural elements, such as trees and open spaces, helped them feel more at ease.

Furthermore, Li et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of visual and environmental features. Their study combined quantitative surveys with observational assessments to evaluate how greenery and well-maintained surroundings impacted visitors’ mood. The researchers suggested that when parks were visually appealing and environmentally pleasant, visitors were more likely to experience sensory comfort and emotional relief.

Perceptions and Psychological Experiences

The way people felt about public parks largely depended on how they personally perceived and connected with these spaces. For instance, Roe and Aspinall (2011) utilized a quasi-experimental approach to examine the advantages of walking in nature versus urban environments for healing. By measuring psychological changes through standardized scales, they found that participants, especially those with poorer mental health, reported significant improvements in mood and a reduction in stress after engaging with natural environments. These findings demonstrated that the restorative effects of parks were deeply rooted in the immediate psychological relief provided by nature. Similarly, Li et al. (2021) employed mixed-method approaches, combining surveys and observational assessments, to demonstrate that judgments regarding a park's cleanliness and environmental quality could significantly affect emotional enjoyment. When a park was perceived as well-maintained, it naturally fostered a stronger emotional connection between visitors and the surrounding environment. Hussain et al. (2010) also applied a quantitative approach using structured questionnaires, finding that visitors appreciated simple features, such as greenery, quiet spaces, and clean surroundings, because these elements helped them feel calm and mentally refreshed.

In a separate qualitative study, Swierad and Huang (2018) explored the psychosocial pathways of park effects on health, emphasizing that perceptions of safety, comfort, and aesthetics were crucial in facilitating emotional benefits during park visits. They found that if an individual perceived a park as peaceful, tidy, and visually appealing, they tended to feel more relaxed and less stressed while visiting. These findings illustrated that the sense of peace experienced in parks was not solely determined by natural elements themselves, but also by how individuals personally interpreted and engaged with the environment. Beyond their environmental value, public parks functioned as vital sanctuaries where individuals could decompress, regain mental clarity, and find emotional stability.

Research Gaps

A great deal of research has shown that public parks contribute to mental well-being, but many of these studies rely heavily on quantitative data rather than personal experiences. For example, studies by Larson et al. (2016), Li et al. (2021), and Hussain et al. (2010) mainly use surveys and statistical measures to examine how park visits are linked to happiness, stress reduction, and emotional balance. While these findings are valuable, they do not fully capture how individuals personally feel, interpret, or experience the park environment in their daily lives. Past studies have primarily concentrated on the tangible and aesthetic elements of parks, including vegetation, aquatic elements, and overall spatial layout. However, the social atmosphere, activities taking place, and the presence of other visitors may also influence psychological comfort and emotional well-being.

In the Malaysian context, most existing studies have focused on parks in large urban cities, while smaller towns, particularly educational towns such as Seri Iskandar, Perak, have received far less attention. The unique sociocultural character of these communities—including student lifestyles, academic pressures, and local social interactions—may shape how park users experience emotional restoration and well-being. For this reason, This study seeks to examine the first-hand experiences of individuals who frequent the public parks located in Seri Iskandar to better understand how they emotionally connect with the public park environment. Quantitative data may show general trends, but it often overlooks the sensory, emotional, and

reflective aspects of being in nature. A qualitative approach allows individuals to describe what they notice, how they feel, and how their mood changes during a park visit. Gaining insight into these personal experiences can help planners and designers create public parks that do more than simply provide recreational spaces. Well-designed parks can also become meaningful environments that support emotional relief, mental restoration, and overall psychological well-being.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

To investigate the psychological benefits that individuals experienced when visiting public parks, this research employs a qualitative inquiry to gather in-depth personal insights. A qualitative method was appropriate because the research focused on personal emotions, feelings, and subjective well-being—things that were best captured through the participants' own stories rather than just numerical data. This approach was consistent with previous studies that had used interviews to investigate emotional recovery and psychological experiences in nature. For instance, Iqbal and Mansell (2021) used a qualitative design to explore how different ways of engaging with nature led to better well-being. By using interviews, they were able to uncover the personal and emotional pathways that connected nature activities to mental health improvements. This showed that qualitative inquiry was perfectly suited for understanding the deep and often complex psychological responses people had to natural environments.

Study Area

The research was conducted at Oval Park, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), Seri Iskandar, Perak, a widely used recreational space frequented by students, families, and local residents. The park included jogging paths, seating areas, and a lakeside setting, providing opportunities for relaxation, reflection, and social interaction. These characteristics made Oval Park a suitable site to investigate how everyday park use supported psychological well-being.

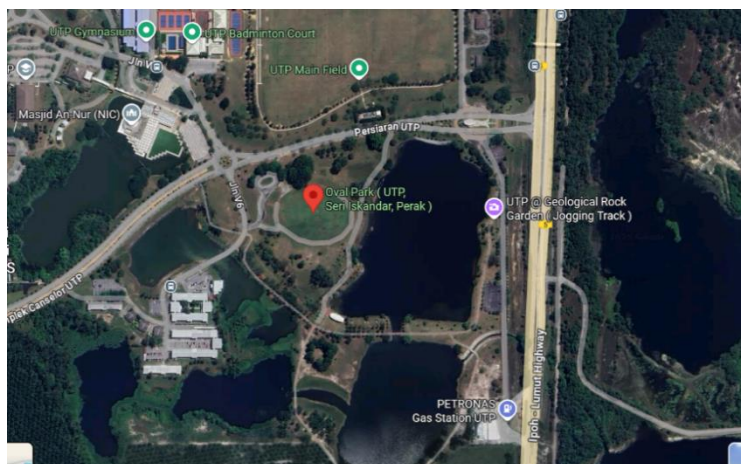


Figure 1: Location plan, Oval Park, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), Seri Iskandar, Perak
(Source: Google Maps, Satellite View of Oval Park, UTP (2024))



Figure 2: General view of Oval Park, UTP showing the lakeside setting and greenery.
(Source: Mapcarta / Google Maps, 2024)

Participants and Sampling

This study aimed to collect insights from six to ten participants, using purposive sampling. The selection criteria were based on individuals who actively use the park, ensuring that each participant had relevant experiences to share about the emotional and psychological impacts of park visits. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select participants capable of providing rich and detailed insights. However, the researcher was only able to recruit six participants due to the rainy season in December, when the recruitment and data collection process took place. Participants were recruited on-site during a visit to the case study. The participants included Participant 1, a 48-year-old male; Participant 2, a 21-year-old male; Participant 3, a 22-year-old female; Participant 4, a 20-year-old male; Participant 5, a 44-year-old female; and Participant 6, a 35-year-old male as shown in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0 List of participants.

Participants	Age	Gender
1	48-year-old	Male
2	21-year-old	Male
3	22-year-old	Female
4	20-year-old	Male
5	44-year-old	Female
6	35-year-old	Male

Data Collection Method

To allow for open-ended feedback, semi-structured interviews were used as the main data source because this approach allowed participants to describe their experiences, emotions, and personal perceptions in their own words. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of their feelings and reflections. To fully grasp the situational contexts and personal experiences of participants, Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that a qualitative method is indispensable. It offers a comprehensive lens through which complex human issues can be understood, providing a level of depth and detail that quantitative datasets typically cannot provide. Each interview was conducted in person and recorded with the participants' informed consent. Later, these recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure every detail of their stories was captured accurately and completely.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using deductive thematic analysis, a method frequently employed in psychological well-being research to identify specific patterns within participants' experiences. This approach utilized a priori themes derived from the study's theoretical framework, specifically the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and Stress Recovery Theory (SRT). For example, Iqbal and Mansell (2021) applied thematic analysis to interpret semi-structured interview data from participants who engaged in nature activities to support their well-being.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were carefully followed throughout the entire research process. Every participant was fully informed about the purpose of the study, and they all provided their written consent after reading the participant information sheet. To make sure their privacy was protected, I used pseudonyms instead of real names, and only recorded general details like their age. I also made sure that no photographs or videos of the participants were taken at any point. The interviews were audio-recorded, and I was the only person who had access to these files. For security, all the data collected was stored on password-protected digital devices, while the printed transcripts were kept safely in a locked cabinet. Lastly, all participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time just by informing the researcher.

Sample Questions from the Semi-structured Interview Instrument

Section 1: *Background Information*

1. How old are you?
2. Are you currently working or studying?
3. How often do you visit Oval Park?
4. What do you usually come here for?

Section 2: *Experience and Emotional Well-being*

1. How would you describe your overall experience when spending time in this public park?
2. What kinds of emotions or thoughts do you usually feel while you are in the park?
3. Are there particular places in the park that make you feel calm, relaxed, or emotionally refreshed?
4. In what ways do activities like walking, sitting, or socializing in the park affect your mood or stress levels?

Section 3: *Sensory and Environmental Qualities*

1. How do the surrounding environmental features influence your mood or sense of peace?
2. What sensory experiences do you notice most during your time in the park, and how do they make you feel?

Section 4: *Restorative and Satisfying Aspects*

1. From your perspective, what elements of the park make it a pleasant and restorative place to visit?
2. Are there any aspects of the park that you think could be improved to enhance comfort, relaxation, or emotional well-being for visitors?

Section 5: *Closing Questions*

1. What encourages you to visit the park again in the future?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share about how the park affects your mental or emotional state?

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis Overview

The qualitative data for this study was managed and analyzed using ATLAS.ti 9, which allowed for a systematic approach to theme coding and interpretation. The primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted at Oval Park, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS. These interviews were held on-site at various quiet locations within the park, such as the shaded benches and gazebo areas, to allow participants to reflect on their immediate surroundings. Each session lasted approximately 20 to 35 minutes, ensuring enough time for an in-depth exploration of their experiences.

Before analysis, each recording was transcribed verbatim and double-checked for accuracy. To protect participant privacy, all transcripts were assigned specific codes representing six diverse participants: P1 (Male, 48), P2 (Male, 21), P3 (Female, 22), P4 (Male, 20), P5 (Female, 44), and P6 (Male, 35).

In order to retain the original cultural context, the transcripts were analyzed based on the language spoken during the interviews. However, for the presentation and discussion of findings, the English translation of relevant quotations is provided to ensure a clear and consistent understanding of the results.

Transcripts were first read immersively to highlight common trends in the way participants perceived and experienced the park. For the first objective, coding focused on psychological states such as “feeling of calmness,” “stress relief,” and “positive mood enhancement.” The second objective examined external factors, including “natural landscape,” “cleanliness and fresh air,” “natural sounds,” and “buffer zone,” alongside sociocultural elements like “social interaction and togetherness” and “physical activity for well-being.” These themes were then refined and supported by specific quotations to ensure the findings remained grounded in the participants' actual lived experiences.

Objective 1: Emotional and Psychological Experiences of Park Visitors

The psychological impact of the park is defined by a restorative journey where visitors transition from high-stress states to emotional equilibrium. This experience is captured through three core themes: Feeling of Calmness, Stress Relief and Positive Mood Enhancement.

1. *Feeling of Calmness*

The most prevalent emotion reported is a deep sense of calm, largely driven by the park's natural aesthetics. Participant 2 (Male, 21) emphasized that the visual combination of the lake and trees is a primary source of peace: *"The view of the lake and the trees. Looking at that scenery makes me feel calm."* He further explained that this environment provides a mental "breathing space" (8:11), making his mind feel more open and less restricted compared to his campus room: *"My mind feels more open, I don't feel as*

pressured." This sentiment is echoed by the older participants. Participant 5 (Female, 44) shared that the stillness of the water makes it easier to rest the mind: *"The lake view really gives a sense of calm... it's easy to rest the mind."* She finds that even a short visit is enough to clear a cluttered mind: *"My mind isn't as cluttered, it feels a bit more open."* For Participant 3 (Female, 22), the calmness is felt immediately because the area is not overly noisy: *"This area is wooded and not too noisy. It makes me feel calmer."* Meanwhile, Participant 6 (Male, 35) views the site as a necessary destination for mental clarity: *"we have to go to a place where we can find peace, and one of those places is here."*

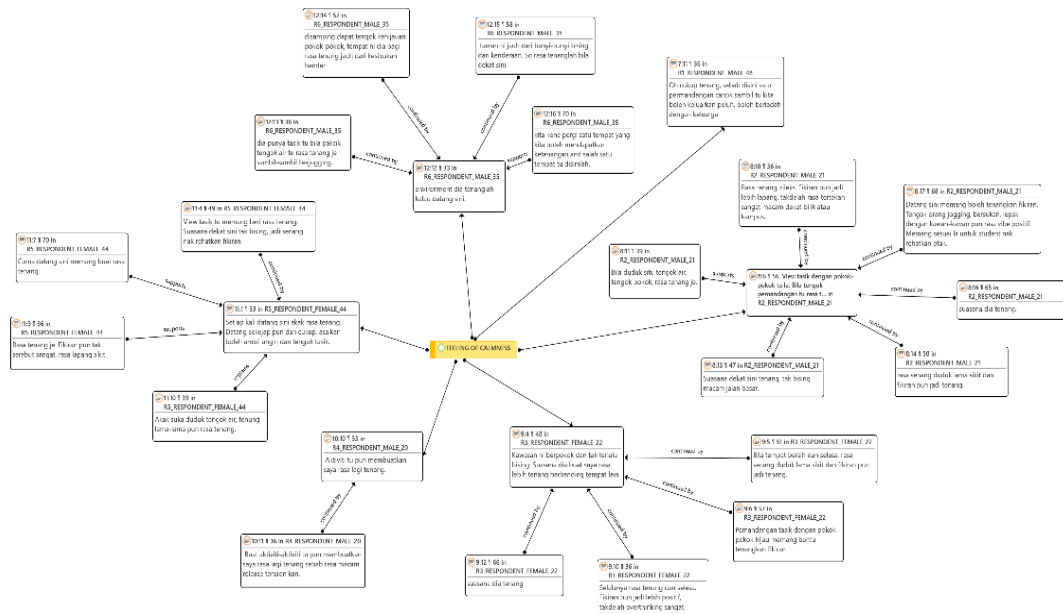


Figure 3: Network Feeling of Calmness

The findings showed that a sense of calm was the most common emotion felt by visitors, primarily due to the park's natural beauty. Both male and female visitors agreed that the combination of the lake and trees was the main reason they felt at peace. The immediate sense of tranquility triggered by green and blue spaces aligns with the principles of Stress Recovery Theory (SRT), where Ulrich (1983) argues that such natural settings are fundamental in accelerating the human recovery process from stress. While both genders experienced psychological benefits, their reflections aligned with different restorative components. Male participants, such as Participant 2, viewed the park as a 'breathing space,' which reflects the 'Being Away' component of ART. This suggests that for them, the park provides a necessary mental distance from daily routines and obligations. In contrast, female participants like Participant 3 and Participant 5 described their experience as 'immediate relief,' a reaction more closely associated with the 'Stress Recovery Theory (SRT)', where natural environments trigger a rapid, affective shift from a stressed state to a positive mood.

2. Stress Relief

The park functions as a therapeutic tool for "unburdening" mental fatigue. Participant 2 (Male, 21) explicitly uses the space to escape academic pressures: *"When I come here, I feel like I can release the stress of studying and assignments."* For him, the park makes it easy to release stress because of its

accessible nature (8:15) and the reduction of tension through walking (8:12). Participant 4 (Male, 20) views the park as a sanctuary for "healing" and solitary reflection: *"This park is great for me to release tension because it is spacious; I can even go for 'healing' by myself if I want to."* He seeks the park to clear a "cluttered mind": *"the closest area to clear a cluttered mind, as people say.* The older demographic also utilizes the park for significant stress mitigation. Participant 1 (Male, 48) noted that the environment allows one to forget life's problems: *"by looking at the scenery, we can forget many of our problems."* He finds that exercising until sweating helps in releasing stress: *"here we can release our stress while exercising and breaking a sweat."* Participant 5 (Female, 44) finds that her mood improves and stress decreases just by sitting and looking at the view: *"Just a short walk, then sitting and looking at the view is enough. My mood improves, and stress decreases."*

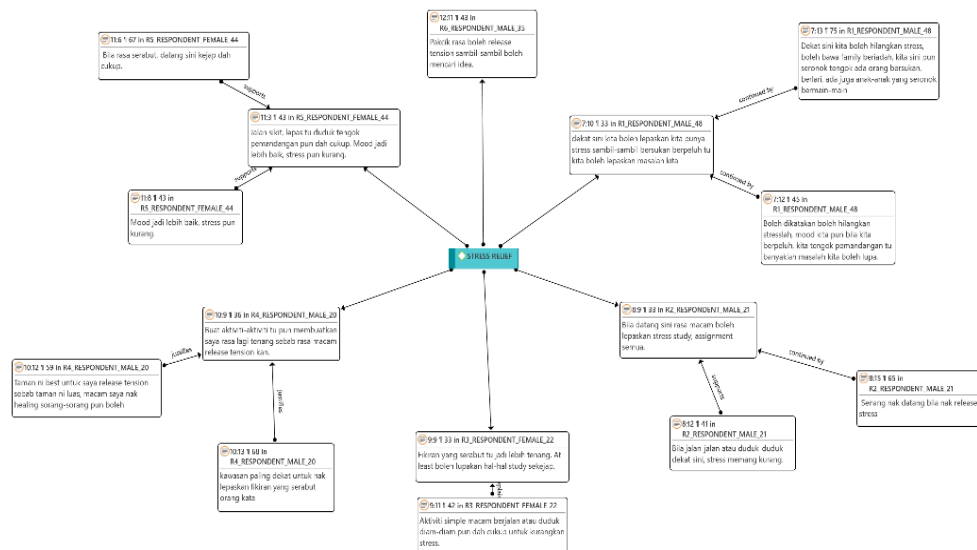


Figure 4: Network Stress Relief

The park worked as a vital tool to release mental fatigue for students (Participants 2, 3, and 4) facing university pressures. This experience strongly reflects the concept of 'Being Away' in Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) Attention Restoration Theory (ART), where the environment provides a psychological distance from daily stressors. Specifically, Participant 4 (Male, 20) viewed the park as a sanctuary for 'healing' and solitary reflection, stating, *'This park is great for me to release tension because it is spacious.'* This sentiment highlights the ART component of 'Extent', which refers to the environment's ability to feel like a 'whole world' or a coherent space that is vast enough to immerse oneself in. The spaciousness of Oval Park allows users like Participant 4 to feel completely disconnected from their academic environment, providing a sense of scope that is necessary for deep mental restoration. Interestingly, the way they handled stress differed by gender; males preferred physical activities or solitude to immerse themselves in this space, while females like Participant 5 achieved restoration through light walking and sitting.

3. Positive Mood Enhancement

The park does not just neutralize negative emotions; it actively fosters happiness. Participant 1 (Male, 48) described this shift as a feeling of "joy" when seeing the lake view and sunset: *"Like the view at the lake... that can also make my mood more cheerful."* He notes that physical activity further boosts this: *"when we*

break a sweat... the mood becomes even better.” Participant 6 (Male, 35) highlighted the multi-sensory effect on mood: *“With its greenery, the trees, the sound of birds, the lake... it will have an effect on our mood.”* For younger visitors, the “social vibe” is a key mood enhancer. Participant 2 (Male, 21) noted: *“Watching people jogging, playing sports, or hanging out with friends gives off a positive vibe.”* He feels his “head becomes lighter” after a walk in the park (8:3). Participant 3 (Female, 22) simply stated that after a visit, *“the mood becomes much better,”* while Participant 4 (Male, 20) finds that jogging with friends makes the experience more fun (10:14) and “great” (10:15). These quotations can be seen in the Positive Mood Enhancement Network in Figure 5.

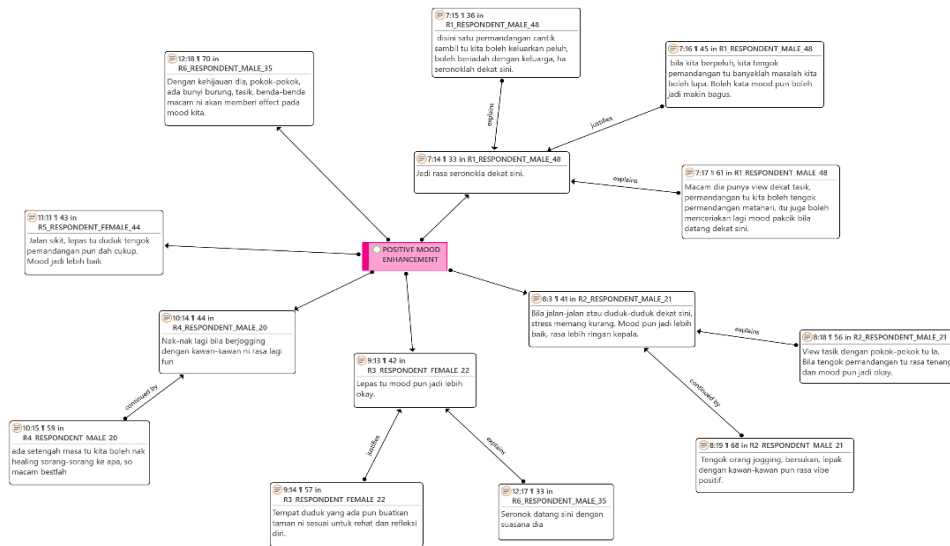


Figure 5: Positive Mood Enhancement Network

Beyond reducing negative feelings, the park actively fostered happiness and energy. Male participants (Participants 1 and 6) felt joy from the multi-sensory experience of sunsets and bird sounds, which relates to ART’s idea of “Soft Fascination” where nature captures attention without effort. For female visitors, mood improved through having a safe space away from chores. Younger visitors also benefited from the positive social atmosphere created by seeing others being active, which turned the park into a mood-boosting hub. This social dimension of nature exposure, as noted by Liu et al. (2022), suggests that the presence of an active community enhances the restorative quality of the space.

Objective 2: Influence of Physical and Sociocultural Elements on Psychological Experience

This objective examines how specific physical attributes and social dynamics within the park serve as the functional foundation for the visitors’ psychological well-being.

Natural Landscape

The visual appeal of the park’s flora and water bodies is the primary driver of visitor satisfaction. Participant 6 (Male, 35) visits specifically to enjoy the lake view while relaxing (12:3), noting that the greenery makes the environment feel like a true escape: *“looking at the greenery, the trees... it’s like being in nature”* (12:21, 12:22). Similarly, Participant 5 (Female, 44) emphasizes that the lake is a core requirement for her visit (11:13, 11:14): *“as long as I can get some fresh air and look at the lake”* (11:12).

She adds that the lush greenery is visually soothing: “*All that greenery makes it very pleasant for the eyes to behold*” (11:15). For Participant 4 (Male, 20), the beauty of the lake is captivating: “*because to me, the lake is beautiful. Even if I stare at it for a long time, I never get tired of it*” (10:16). Participant 1 (Male, 48) also values these visual cues, from watching birds fly (10:1) to enjoying the sunset (7:20), describing the site as a beautiful location for recreation (7:18).

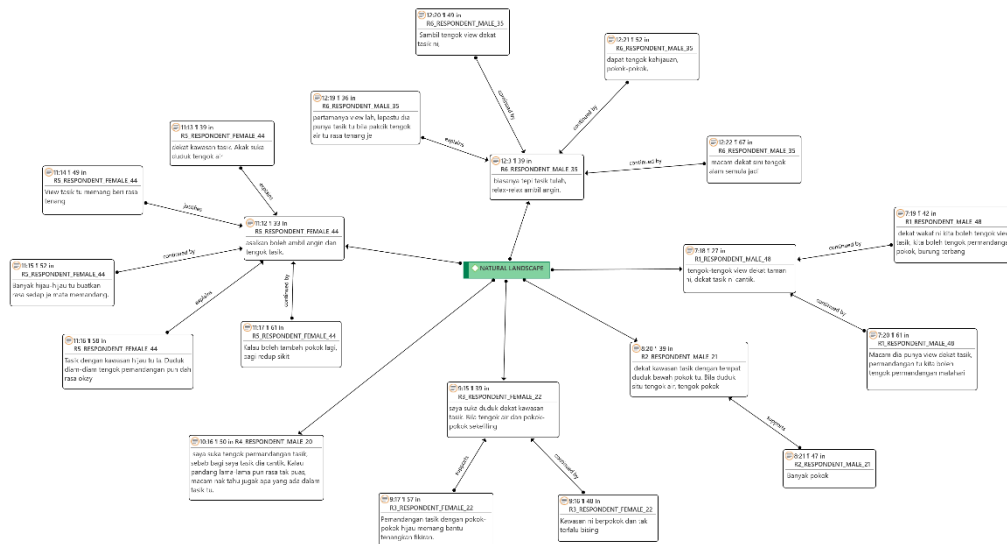


Figure 6: Network Natural Landscape

The visual appeal of the flora and lake was the primary driver of satisfaction. Both genders felt they were truly stepping into nature, which Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) describe as the “Extent” of a restorative environment. Female visitors valued the “lush greenery” for visual freshness, while male visitors like Participant 6 used these views to find “new ideas” and clear their heads. This shows that the landscape does more than just look good; it facilitates cognitive restoration and problem-solving.

Cleanliness and Fresh Air

Sensory comfort is heavily dictated by the park's maintenance and air quality. Participant 1 (Male, 48) links air quality directly to cleanliness: “*one of the good things about this park is its cleanliness; when the park is clean, the atmosphere and the air also feel fresh*” (7:25). Participant 6 (Male, 35) takes every opportunity to “*breathe in the fresh air*” (12:25), a sentiment shared by Participant 4 (Male, 20) who finds the fresh air makes breathing easier while walking (10:5). This cleanliness encourages longer stays, as noted by Participant 3 (Female, 22): “*When a place is clean and comfortable, I feel happy to stay a bit longer*” (9:20). Participant 2 (Male, 21) simply observes that the air quality is good (8:24) and the park is well-maintained (8:25).

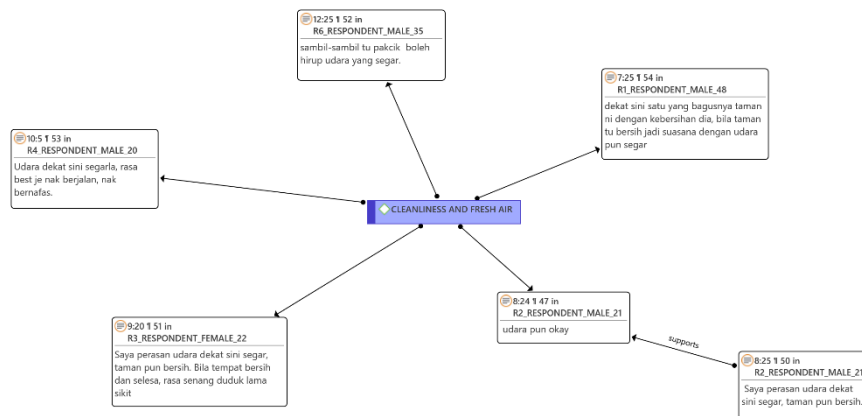


Figure 7: Network Cleanliness and Fresh Air

How comfortable a visitor feels depends heavily on how well the space is maintained. Both genders linked air quality directly to the cleanliness of the grounds, which aligns with Ulrich's Stress Recovery Theory (SRT). According to SRT, a well-kept environment reduces negative affect and promotes a sense of safety, allowing for faster emotional recovery. Participants 1 and 6 (males) noted that a clean park makes the air feel fresher, making it easier to breathe deeply. This is a clear physical sign of stress reduction. This sense of order also encourages people to stay longer. For example, Participant 3 (female) mentioned feeling much happier and more willing to relax in a place that feels well-kept. From an SRT perspective, this shows that the environment successfully shifted the user's mood from tension to relaxation.

Natural Sounds

The "acoustic sanctuary" provided by nature adds a therapeutic layer to the park experience. Participant 1 (Male, 48) describes the natural sounds as a way to disconnect from urban life: *"The sounds of nature's beauty also have an effect because it feels like we are escaping the hustle and bustle of the city"* (7:26, 7:27). For Participant 6 (Male, 35), the presence of birds chirping—"there's the sound of birds" (12:28)—is a vital component of the serene atmosphere. These sounds, combined with the rustling of trees, help visitors like Participant 5 (Female, 44) and Participant 3 (Female, 22) to find mental stillness (11:19, 9:21).

The sounds of nature added a deep, therapeutic layer that went beyond visual beauty. Participant 1 (male) used these sounds to "unplug" from city life, while female participants (Participants 3 and 22) found mental stillness through bird chirping and rustling trees. This confirms that the park provides an "acoustic sanctuary" that lowers anxiety. According to ART (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989), these natural sounds are part of a restorative setting that helps the mind recover from the noise of "directed attention" required in urban and academic life.

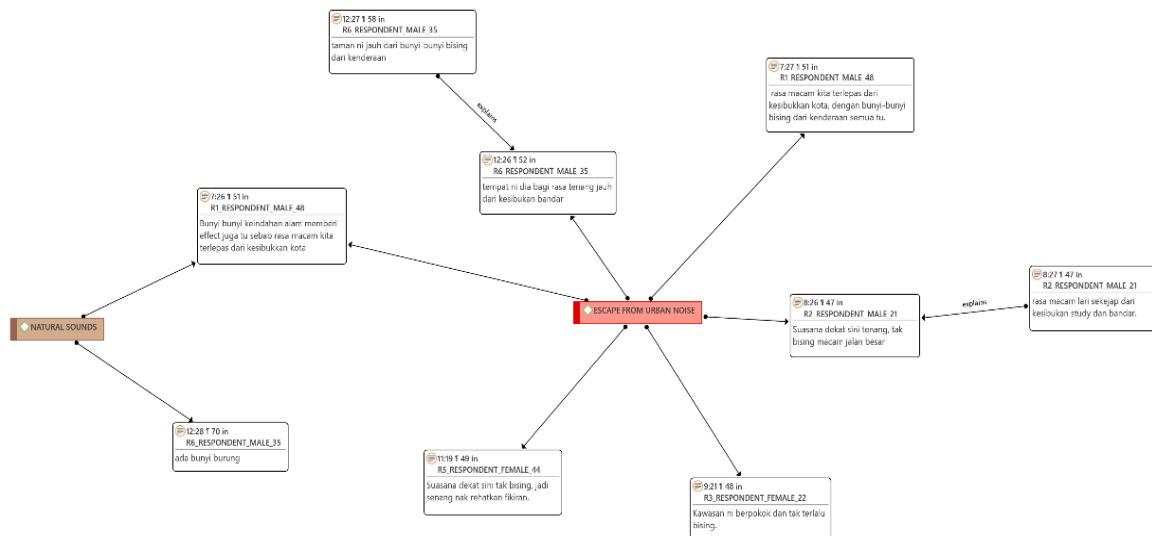


Figure 8: Network Natural Sounds & Escape from Urban Noise

Buffer Zone

The park serves as a vital "buffer zone" against the stressors of the city. Participant 6 (Male, 35) emphasizes that the location is strategically "*far from the noise of vehicles*" (12:15, 12:27) and allows him to feel "*calm, away from the hustle and bustle of the city*" (12:14, 12:26). For younger visitors like Participant 2 (Male, 21), the escape is also from academic pressures: "*escaping for a moment from the busyness of studying*" (8:27). This quietude is essential for Participant 5 (Female, 44) to rest her mind: "*The atmosphere here is calm and not noisy*" (11:4).

Many visitors saw the park as a vital "safe zone" protecting them from city and university stressors. Male participants emphasized the importance of being far from vehicle noise, while female participants valued the quietness for resting their minds. For younger visitors, this escape offered a rare moment of peace away from academic pressure. This "buffer" effect is a key component of Stress Recovery Theory (SRT), where a quiet, natural setting allows for the physiological and mental recovery of the individual.

Social Interaction and Togetherness

The park functions as a social hub that strengthens interpersonal bonds. Participant 4 (Male, 20) often visits with friends after class (10:22, 10:23) to play sports, noting that group activities are far more enjoyable: "*it's great because we get to play together in a large group*" (10:25, 10:26). For the older demographic, Participant 1 (Male, 48) enjoys the family-oriented atmosphere: "*we also feel joy seeing people playing sports, running, and children having fun playing around*" (7:31). He values the time spent to "*hang out with family*" (7:29) and "*recreate with the family*" (7:30). Participant 6 (Male, 35) also enjoys the social "vibe," watching the crowd (12:30) and meeting friends who are also jogging (12:29).

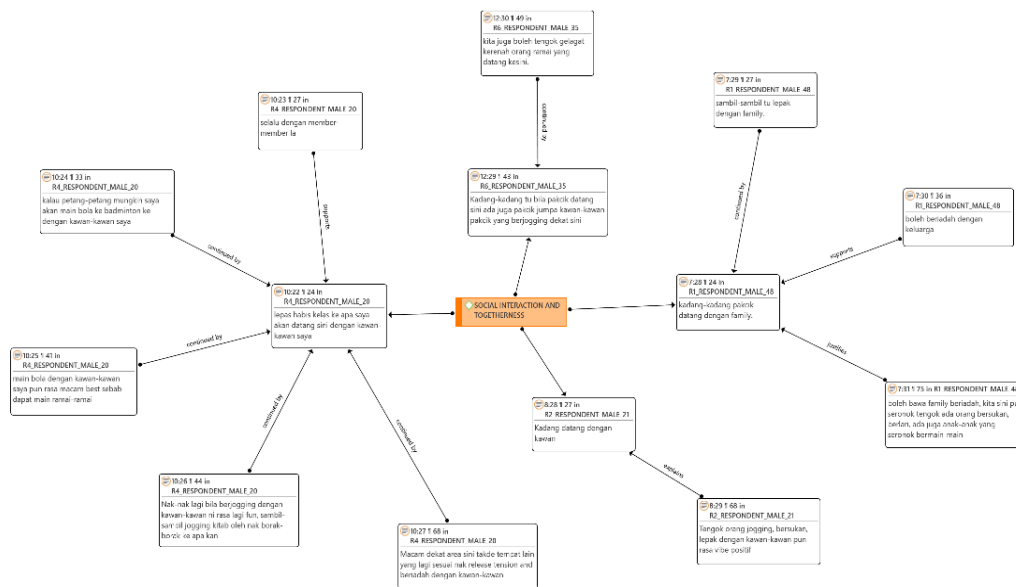


Figure 9: Network Social Interaction and Togetherness

The park served as an important social hub that strengthened community bonds. Younger male participants like Participant 4 enjoyed group sports, making exercise feel fun, while older males like Participant 1 valued "hanging out" with family. Seeing children play and others being active created a sense of community joy. This social interaction in a green setting is a known pathway to improved well-being, as explored in the qualitative study by Swierad and Huang (2018).

Physical Activity for Well-being

Engagement in physical movement is a key driver for both mental and physical health. Participant 6 (Male, 35) uses jogging as a dual-purpose activity: *"to release tension while also being able to find new ideas"* (12:11, 12:23, 12:24). For Participant 4 (Male, 20), regular jogging (10:17, 10:18) directly impacts his health—*"it makes me feel much healthier"* (10:21)—and aids in his "healing" process (10:19, 10:20). Even light activities are valued; Participant 5 (Female, 44) prefers a slow walk (11:18), while Participant 3 (Female, 22) finds a simple walk sufficient to relax (9:18, 9:19). Participant 2 (Male, 21) often combines a light walk with sitting down to relax (8:12, 8:22, 8:23).

Finally, engaging in physical movement was a major reason for visiting to maintain health. Male participants used jogging for both fitness and mental "healing," while female participants preferred lighter activities like walking to unwind. Whether high-intensity or a gentle stroll, being active in nature is a key factor in well-being. This dual benefit of physical activity and nature exposure is a core finding supported by Liu et al. (2022) and Roe and Aspinall (2011), who studied the restorative benefits of walking in different settings.

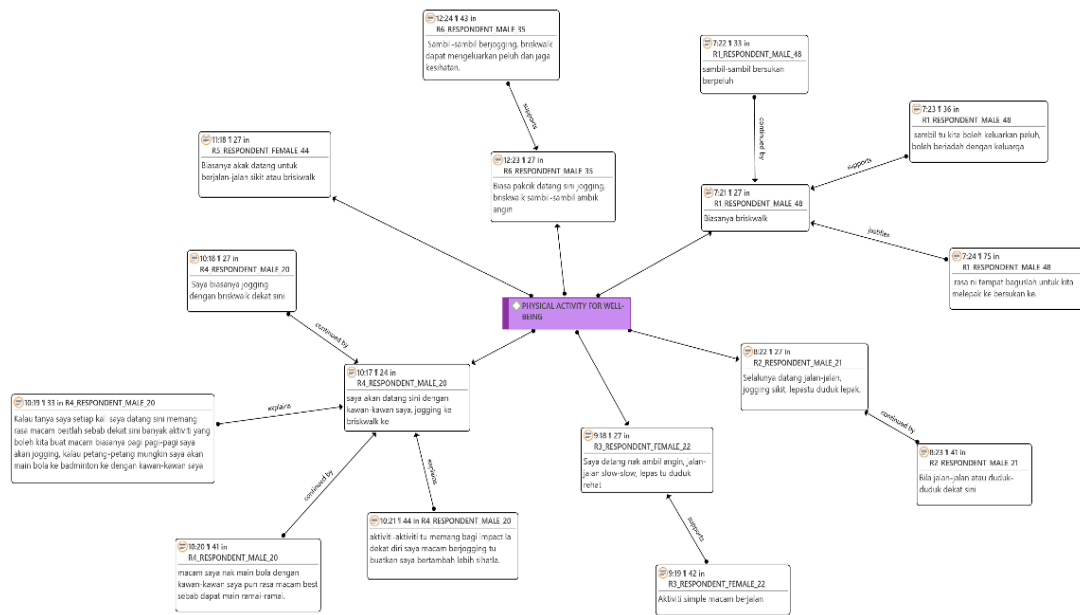


Figure 10: Network Physical Activity for Well-being

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this research was to explore the psychological benefits of visiting public parks, focusing on how individuals personally described their emotional experiences and how the physical and sociocultural elements of the park shaped those experiences. Through a qualitative lens, the findings provided a clear understanding of how these parks acted as restorative spaces within everyday urban life, especially in a student-centered town like Seri Iskandar.

The results suggested that visiting public parks supported psychological well-being by guiding visitors through a restorative journey. This process commenced with a feeling of calmness, which subsequently led to stress relief and an enhanced overall mood. Most participants reported feeling more relaxed and emotionally steady after their time in the park. It was found that natural elements—including the greenery, the lake, and the fresh air—were not merely background features but were essential in facilitating this peace. These lived experiences aligned with Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and Stress Recovery Theory (SRT), demonstrating how nature helped individuals mentally distance themselves from daily stressors and recover from mental fatigue without conscious effort.

Another key finding was the significance of physical and sociocultural elements in shaping psychological experiences. Elements such as park cleanliness and the absence of traffic noise were vital for sensory comfort, making the park a place where people actively sought to spend their time. Social aspects also played a role; whether through exercising with friends or simply being among others. In an educational town setting, the park served as a shared sanctuary where students and working adults could take a much-needed break from academic and work pressures.

This study also highlighted the importance of a qualitative approach in this field. While quantitative data can show general trends, the personal stories and sensory details shared by participants showed that individual interpretations are what truly drive the benefits of a park visit. These are deep, personal experiences that numerical data alone cannot fully capture.

Even though this study found useful information, it was limited because it only looked at one location and a small group of people. Because of this, there are a few suggestions for future research. First, researchers should compare different types of parks in different types of cities. For example, comparing small neighborhood parks to large forest areas could show if different settings provide different levels of mental benefits. Also, a further study could include more people from different backgrounds. This means including children, the elderly, and people with different health needs. Doing this would help us understand how visiting a park affects the well-being of all kinds of different users.

To sum up, public parks are far more than just areas for exercise; they are crucial for emotional recovery and social connection. By looking at how people experience these spaces on a personal level can help planners create parks that are both beautiful and genuinely beneficial for the public's mental and social health.

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