

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**VARIATIONS IN LEISURE ACTIVITY  
PREFERENCES BASED ON ETHNICITY OF  
URBAN PARK USERS**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment  
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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis/dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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## ABSTRACT

Urban parks provide excellent setting for urbanites to pursue leisure time activities. In an ethnically diverse country as Malaysia, park designers, planners and managers are presented with challenges to ensure the promotion of equal access as well as to meet the needs and expectations of the different ethnic groups. Many urban parks failed to incorporate the socio-cultural and behavioural characteristics of the varied park users, focusing mainly on the material and physical aspects of their designs. The concern for ethnic variations in leisure activity preferences occurs due to the fact that the recreation behaviours of some groups may have caused them to be marginalised in their recreation experiences, or lead to facility damage and resource degradation, and also little is known on how ethnic background of recreational users shaped their recreational experiences. This research aims to examine the variations in leisure activity preferences of urban park users across three main groups, that is, Malays, Chinese and Indians. The leisure activity preferences examined includes park usage patterns and participation; social composition; and settings. Two urban parks located in Perak were studied, both being, Taiping Lake Garden (TLG) and Padang Polo, Ipoh (PPI). The data for this study was collected using two methods, that is, observation and survey; and data were then analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed differences and similarities related to leisure activity preferences of the three ethnic groups. Chinese park users were found to be the most enthusiastic users as compared to Malays and Indians. Physical exercising, such as walking, was preferred by most parks users. Majority of the park users preferred companion, especially of their same ethnic groups, when frequenting the parks. Different groups also have different setting preferences. Factors such as time availability, cultural values, park's physical characteristics, experiences sought and safety aspect, were identified to have contributed to the variations in leisure activity preferences. These findings contributed to a better understanding of the recreation style and leisure preferences of the culturally and ethnically diverse user groups. The findings will assist park designers, planners and managers to improve and enhance on the design, planning and management of urban parks. These can be achieved through better park designs, planned park activities and programmes, as well as, maintenance and clear management policies and strategies of the parks which will meet future park user's needs and expectations.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Leisure activity forms an essential part of human life and brings out feelings of contentment in life (Ragheb and Beard (1979) in Cato & Kunstler, 1988). It is significant to one's psychological welfare (Mokhtarian, Salomon, & Handy, 2006) and disregard of it will prompt unfavourable consequences. In general, leisure activity will contribute to good mental health and personal growth, as well as, enhancement of family bonds and community relations (Freysinger, Harris, Kimball, & Spencer, 2002). Leisure time physical activity can help to reduce morbidity and mortality by reducing heart disease and blood pressure (Bedimo, Mowen, & Cohen, 2005); reduce obesity, increases life expectancy and general good health (Home, Hunziker, & Bauer, 2012).

Leisure activity can take place in any kind of community environment, such as urban parks, and especially that which is accessible to all (Bedimo, et al., 2005). As accorded by McCormack, Rock, Toohey, & Hignell (2010) urban parks serve as a unique setting providing spaces for urbanites to pursue leisure physical activities, to be with nature, to socialise and to retreat from the hassle of urban life. Thus, by going to the parks one is able to fulfil the varied needs of the park users, especially that of physical, psychological and social benefits (Bedimo, et al., 2005). These plus features of urban parks make them invaluable assets for the city, fulfilling the physical, social as well as behavioural needs of the urbanites, and consequently contribute to the improved quality of urban life (Hayward, 1989).

As Gobster (2001, p.35) mentioned "urban parks mean many things to many people". They are viewed as settings where most activities either it being recreational or leisure are pursued, and provide unique experience from the showcase of natural and cultural elements. Harding (1999) asserted that park was an invariable feature in the ever-changing town setting, indispensable part of the urban- living, as well as a common ground to all where strain of city life could be allowed to pass by. Park