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

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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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05-3742716
uitmperakpress@gmail.com

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The Impacts Of Green Spaces On Urban Well-Being In Rapidly Urbanized City Of Kuala Lumpur: Urban Inhabitants' Preferences And Perceptions

Wan Akmal Syazwan Wan Mohd Hatta¹, *Amalina Mohd Fauzi¹, Salina Mohamed Ali¹

^{1,2,3,4}*Faculty of Built Environment
University Technology Mara (UiTM) Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor.*

Abstract

Urban green spaces are vital for fostering social connections, community participation, and overall human well-being, which play a significant role in shaping the quality of urban well-being. This aims to investigate urban inhabitants' preferences and perceptions in rapidly urbanized city of Kuala Lumpur. Quantitative method was used to achieve the research aims, where 160 visitors of three urban parks in Kuala Lumpur were involved. The three parks include KLCC Park, Perdana Botanical Garden and Taman Tugu. The results revealed that beauty of the landscape is the most preferred by the visitors. Besides, a well-managed, safe, and easily accessible parks are preferred over parks that offer wide spaces and a variety of activities. The results also demonstrated that unpleasant smell, dust pollution, illegal activities in the park and noise pollution has major impacts to the parks' surrounding that give discomfort to the visitors. This study underscores the importance of considering people's perceptions in creating and organizing urban public areas. To design inclusive, lively, and sustainable urban green spaces that enhance the overall urban environment and contribute to urban inhabitants' well-being, landscape architects and urban planners must understand the diverse viewpoints and experiences of the visitors.

Keywords: *Urban green space, Urban well-being, Urban inhabitants' preferences, Urban inhabitants' perception*

INTRODUCTION

Any area of the urban fabric that is accessible to the general public is referred to as the public realm. In general, it is the setting for urban inhabitants' direct physical contact with the provided elements. Poor urban environments have a negative impact on people's quality of life, reactions to urban green spaces, and social interactions. Urban green space is one of the important components of urban public realm that give significant influence to the social, cultural, and economic factors of urban areas (Oosterbroek et al., 2023). These spaces such as park, plaza, streetscape, and waterfront have provided spots for inhabitants to gather, interact, and engage in a range of activities (van den Bosch and Nieuwenhuijsen 2017). The way visitors view these spaces shape their experiences while engaging with urban green space. Understanding how people view urban public life is crucial for landscape architects, urban planners, and designers to create inclusive and sustainable landscape that meets the needs of diverse groups of urban inhabitants.

Urban green space is perceived differently by individuals depending on variety of factors, including personal experiences and the physical layout of the green space (Porzi et al., 2015). Understanding how people view urban green spaces is essential to design successful and meaningful green space in an urban setting. In relation to the current rapid development of urbanisation, urban inhabitants have less opportunity to engage with greenery. Besides, urbanisation also lead to the urban phenomena that give negative impacts to inhabitants' well-being. For

example, the phenomena of urban heat islands and carbon footprint. Thus, this study aims to investigate urban inhabitants' preferences and perceptions in rapidly urbanized city of Kuala Lumpur. The outcomes of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Landscape Architecture, which provide significant perspective on how urban green space in Malaysia contribute to the inhabitants' behaviours while engaging with the area. Besides, the results will be useful to landscape architects, urban planners, and designers in developing sustainable and inclusive urban public spaces that promote well-being to the visitors. The study might potentially be used as a guide for upcoming research on urban green spaces and people's perceptions of the spaces, which improves urban's quality of life and fosters greater social interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide range of academic disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, environmental psychology, landscape architecture, and urban planning, have contributed to the corpus of knowledge on how people view urban green spaces. The evaluation of previously published material offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field's knowledge and research.

People Perceptions Towards Urban Park in Kuala Lumpur

Urban public areas' form, structure, magnitude, and aesthetic appeal all greatly influence how people view the spaces. Visitors are more likely to think favorably of well-designed areas that provide comfortable and tranquil surrounding (Macháč et al., 2022, Knight et al., 2022). Perceptions of comfort, safety, and accessibility are additional factors that might affect the appearance of urban green spaces, which include enclosure, openness, and legibility. A person's emotional attachment, past experiences, personal preferences, and knowledge of the area can all have an impact on how they perceive and engage with particular urban green spaces (Ewing and Handy, 2009; Samuelsson et al., 2018). For example, previous research has demonstrated that past encounters of an individual in a metropolitan public space can influence how secure, comfortable, and joyful people feel (e.g. Yan et al., 2024). Additionally, inhabitants' psychological and emotional factors also influencing their perceptions on urban well-being that include stress management, environmental preferences, cognitive function, and emotional health. Inhabitants' engagement with urban green spaces places favourable exposure to environmental factors such as plants, water, and sunlight, which in turn promotes better mental well-being, less stress, and better cognitive function (Bratman et al., 2015). In sum, there are particular tangible and intangible indicators that influence inhabitants' preferences and perceptions on a specific urban green space, which lead to the engagement with the spaces and enhance their well-being.

Social Interaction in Green Spaces

The socio-demographics, cultural norms, and social dynamics of visitors of an urban green space, collectively known as their social and cultural contexts, significantly influence how people view their surroundings. Research indicates that the social composition of urban green space, including the existence of various user groups, social events, and social standards, can impact people's ideas of social engagement, and belonging (Daniel et al., 2012). Additionally, the elements like the impact of regional customs, traditions, and legacies may have an impact on how people observe life in cities. Distinct spaces are varied in terms of functions that attract different age group depending on the activities offered (Leach et al., 2018). While some studies have looked at the views or life objectives of various age groups (Abdullah et al., 2013; Nurmi, 1992; Cross and Marcus, 1991). Views on urban green spaces have been connected to several components of well-being, such as mental, social, and physical health

life quality (Wu and Kim, 2021). Studies show that people's perceptions of urban public green spaces might have a favorable or unfavorable effect on their welfare. Positive impressions in terms of sense of safety, comfort, and social connectivity are lead to better urban inhabitants' well-being, while unfavourable perceptions that make one feel frightened or unpleasant might be detrimental. In sum, urban green spaces that offer leisure activities may beneficial to inhabitants' health, as well as influence their perception and preferences towards the areas.

The literature review concludes that by highlighting the complex ways in which individuals interpret urban green spaces, a perception that is shaped by variety of factors such as physical design, social and cultural context, individual experiences and preferences, as well as psychological and emotional aspects. The landscape architects, urban planners, and practitioners who want to create inclusive urban green spaces that are people-centred, promote pleasant human experiences, and support the health of the community, it is crucial to comprehend all the elements that contribute to urban inhabitants' well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate how visitors perceive the urban green spaces. The aim is to investigate visitors' perceptions and preferences towards urban green spaces in rapidly urbanised city of Kuala Lumpur.

Study Area

Three urban parks in Kuala Lumpur were selected as study area due to the location of the parks that situated at the centre of the city. The city is a rapidly urbanised and increasingly populated until this period. Table 1 demonstrates the criteria of each urban parks. The differences between the selected urban parks, which is in term of the functions, have influence the impact that inhabitants get when access to the green spaces (Mexia et al., 2018). In addition, Figure 1 shows the situatedness of the urban parks that located in the largest metropolitan area in Malaysia, which is one of the reasons why the rate of urbanisation of the district is rapidly increasing. Site observations were conducted before the distribution of survey questionnaire. These observations involved with capturing photographs of the urban parks to provide visual evidence supporting participants' perceptions and preferences.

Table 1: The criteria of selected urban park in Kuala Lumpur

Criteria	Urban Park		
	KLCC Park	Perdana Botanical Garden	Taman Tugu
Location	KLCC	Lembah Pantai	Taman Tugu
Site Context	Petronas Twin Towers	KL Sentral Station	Dataran Merdeka
Stand Age	27 years	135 years	26 years
Park Features	Lake symphony, jogging track and footpath	Kuala Lumpur Bird Park, Kuala Lumpur Butterfly Park	Jogging trail and footpath

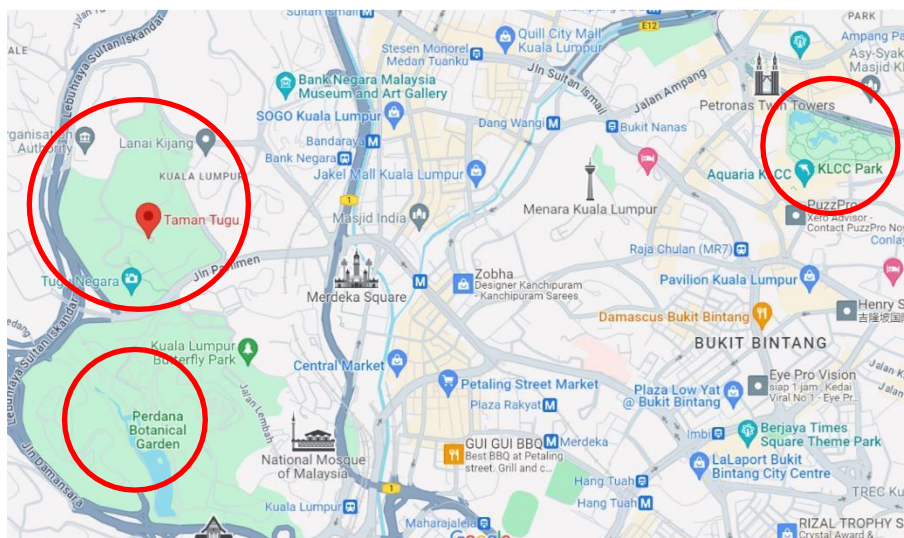


Figure 1: The location for each urban parks

Survey Questionnaire

The data for this study was collected using survey questionnaire to explore the opinions of visitors based on their experiences of visiting urban green space in Kuala Lumpur. A list of questions has been constructed that covers two main aspects, which are visitors' demographic factors and their preferences and perceptions on the visited urban green spaces. The questionnaire survey was completed and submitted through a platform, specifically a Google form. There are three types of question that involved, which are closed-ended, multiple choice and four-point Likert scale questions.

The first section of the questionnaire is aimed to gather information about the respondents' demographic factors. The questions include the urban park that they have visited in Kuala Lumpur, and visitors' demographic background such as gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, and level of education. On the other hand, the second section is focus on assessing participants' preferences and perceptions towards the urban park that they have ticked in the first section. The section starts with the question about the distance between their house to the park, followed by the questions related to factors that encourage and discourage visitors to use and relax at the park, and factors that disturb visitors to relax in the park. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement using a four-point Likert scale questions.

The sampling method involved randomly approached 106 visitors of the urban park. This approach aimed to include a diverse range of park users as the unit of analysis for this study. The collected data were analysed using descriptive analysis. Throughout the data collection process, ethical considerations were prioritized. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary participation was emphasized. They were assured of the confidentiality and privacy of their responses. Consent was obtained from each participant before data collection, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines. The maintenance of participant information as confidential was crucial to protect their privacy, establish trust, adhere to ethical standards, and uphold the objectivity of the research process (Baez, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of a study on people's perception of urban public green spaces would typically involve the analysis and interpretation of the data collected using the chosen methodology. Here are some general points that may be included in the results and discussion section.

Demographic Background

The first phase of data analysis is the descriptive analysis on respondents' demographic background. Figure 2 shows where the respondents answered the surveys. 64 respondents (60.4%) were doing surveys in KLCC Park, followed by 25 respondents (23.6%) in Perdana Botanical Garden and 17 respondents (16%) in Taman Tugu.

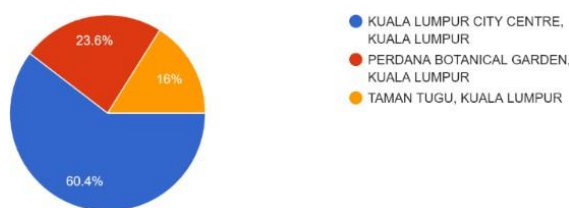


Figure 2: Percentage of urban parks that visited by the respondents

Figure 3 (a) demonstrates the percentage of respondents based on their age groups. 53 respondents (50%) are aged between 18-24. 30 respondents (28.3%) are aged between 45-54, and 16 respondents (15.1%) are aged between 25-34. 5 respondents (4.7%) are aged between 55-64. Lastly, 2 respondents (1.9%) are aged between 35-44. Figure 3 (b) shows percentage of gender among the respondents. 70 respondents (66%) are male. 36 respondents (34%) are female.

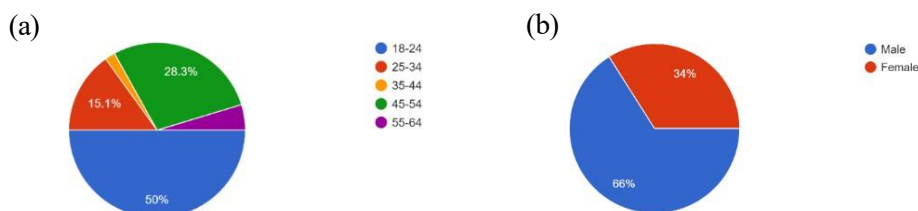


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents based on their (a) age groups and (b) gender

Figure 4 illustrates percentages of ethnicity among the respondents. 101 respondents (95.3%) are Malay, 2 respondents (1.9%) are Chinese, 2 respondents (1.9%) are Indian and 1 respondent (0.9%) is among another ethnicity which is Dusun.

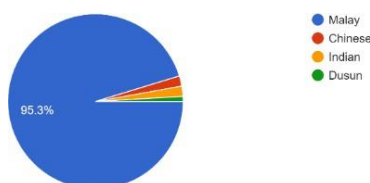


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents based on their ethnicity

Figure 5 (a) shows occupations of the respondents that visited the urban parks. 45 respondents (42.5%) are among students followed by 30 respondents (28.3%) are from private sector, 17 respondents (16%) are among self-employed, 8 respondents (7.5 %) are in government sector, 5 respondents (4.7%) are pensioners and 1 respondent (0.9%) is among housewives. Figure 5 (b) demonstrates the level of education of the respondents. 82 respondents (77.4%) are among university graduates, 19 respondents (17.9%) are college graduates, 2 respondents (1.9%) are in secondary school, 1 respondent (0.9 %) has professional qualification, 1 respondent (1.9%) has master and 1 respondent (0.9%) is among primary school students.

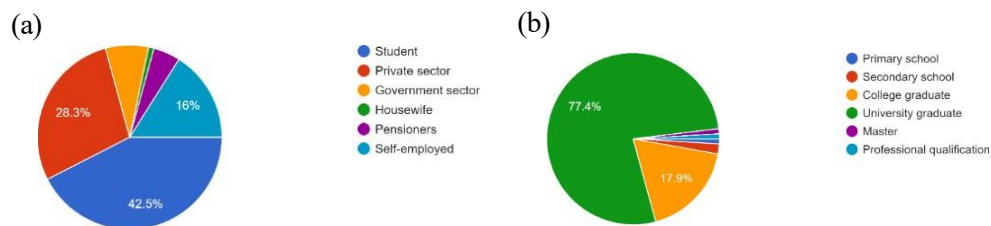


Figure 5: Percentage of respondents based on their (a) occupations and (b) level of education

Figure 6 shows how far is the urban park to the respondents' house. 89 respondents (84%) are more than 6.0 km, 6 respondents (5.7%) are between 1.0 km-1.5 km, 5 respondents (4.7%) are between 1.5 km-4.0 km, 5 respondents (4.7 %) are between 4.0 km-6.0 km and 1 respondent (0.9%) are between 0-0.5 km. This result revealed that urban inhabitants in Kuala Lumpur are willing to travel more than six kilometres to get accessed to their preferable urban park.

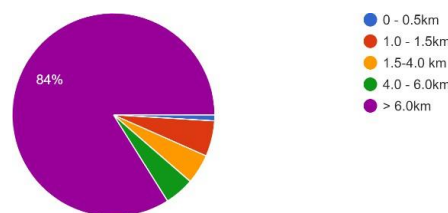


Figure 6: Percentage of respondents based on their location of house

Visitors' Preferences and Perceptions

Figure 7 shows the respondents' preferences on the factors that encourage them to use and relax in the parks. Results discovered that beauty of the landscape are the most preferred by the visitors, which reflect on the visual quality offered by the urban parks. In relation to the rapidly urbanised city of Kuala Lumpur, urban inhabitants have less contact with greenery. Hence, beauty of the landscape has play significant role in providing tranquil surrounding that encourage visitors to use the urban parks. Besides the other factors that moderately preferred by the visitors, the existence of fences was less preferred. This revealed that fence is not an important aspect in encouraging visitors to use and relax in the parks.

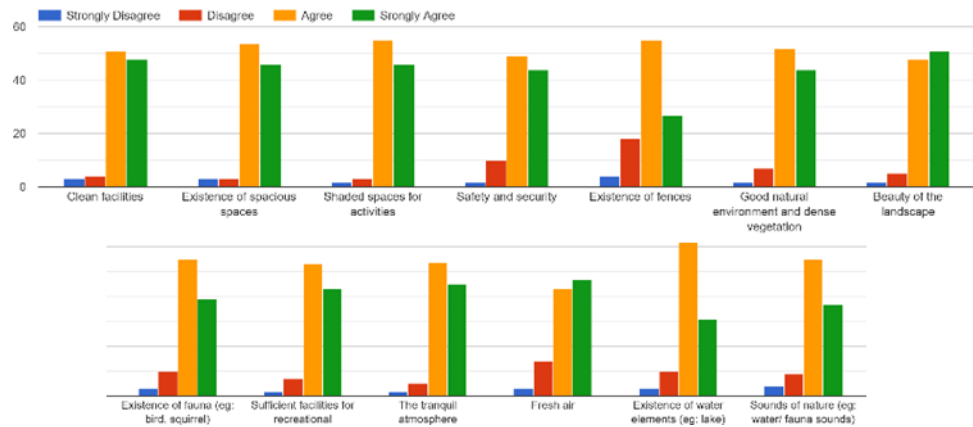


Figure 7: Respondents' preferences on the factors and facilities that encourage them to use and relax in the parks

Figure 8 shows the percentage of respondents' preferences on the factors and facilities that discourage them to use and relax in the parks. The results demonstrated that there are five factors that discourage urban inhabitants to use and relax in the parks, which are improper park management, absence of safety and security, distance from home, inaccessible for transportation, and lack of parking area. Other factors that related to the greenery, spaces and facilities for recreational activities, were moderately impacted visitors' preferences in visiting the parks. This shows that well-managed, safe, and easily accessible parks are preferred over parks that offer wide spaces and a variety of activities. Addressing these concerns, can contribute to a more positive park experience for urban inhabitants.

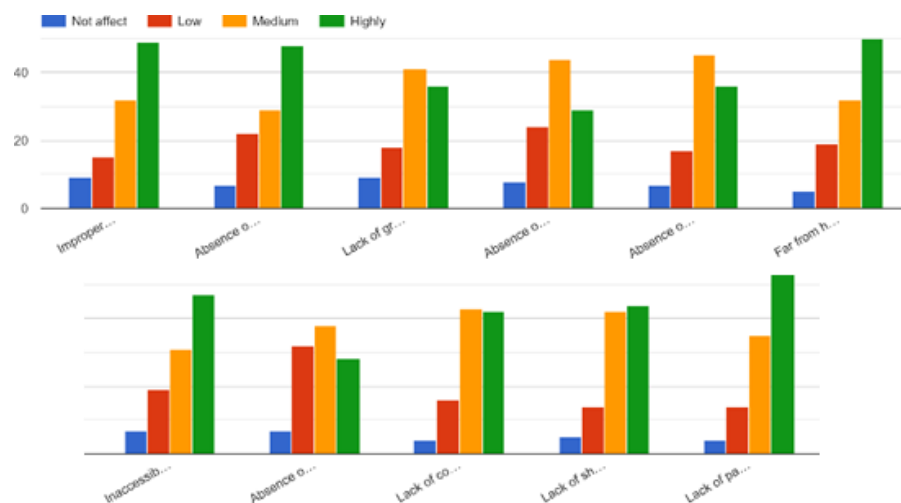


Figure 8: Respondents' preferences on the factors and facilities that discourage them to use and relax in the parks

Figure 9 shows the factors that disturb visitors while they are relaxing in the urban parks. The results revealed that unpleasant smell was the most that disturbed visitors, followed by dust pollution, illegal activities in the park and noise pollution. The percentages were in line with the setting of the urban parks, which located in the middle of the cities and surrounded with main road and mixed land use development. This situation has major impacts to the parks' surrounding that give discomfort to the visitors. Equally important, the results are linked to the results in Figure 7, where the fresh air of the urban parks was less liked by the visitors.

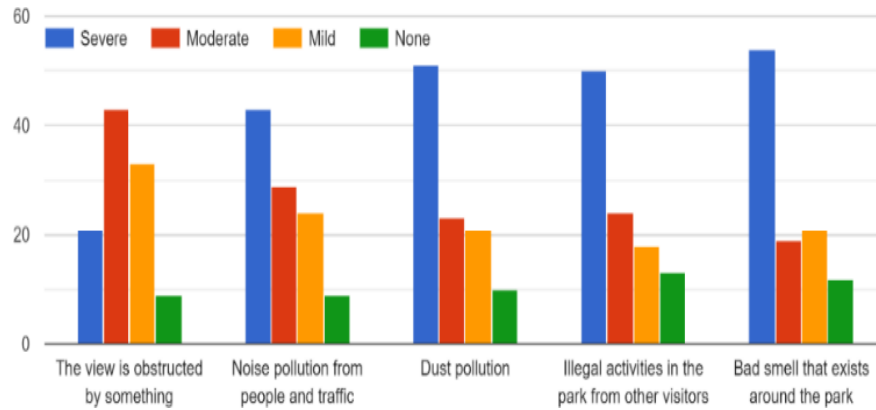


Figure 9: Factors that disturb visitors to relax in the park

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights on the factors that influence visitors' experiences while visiting the three urban parks. Urban inhabitants are generally appreciating clean facilities, spacious areas, and natural elements. Besides, there are notable concerns on safety, inadequate facilities, and disturbances like noise and pollution. It is crucial to address specific issues identified in this study to enhance the visitors' experiences. This includes improve the safety measures, enhancing facilities for children and recreational activities, managing pollution, and mitigating disturbances like noise and illegal activities.

Furthermore, considerations should be given to deal with unfavourable factors, such as those related to safety and security measures and the presence of fences. By implementing targeted improvements based on these survey findings, urban parks can strive to create a more positive, enjoyable, and inclusive environment for the urban inhabitants. Regular feedback and a responsive approach to address the concerns will contribute to the continuous enhancement of the urban park experiences.

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We also acknowledge the support and collaboration of all those involved in the planning and execution of this survey. Your efforts have been instrumental in gathering meaningful information and shaping the conclusions drawn from the data.

Thank you for being an integral part of this study, and we look forward to utilizing these findings to enhance the quality of urban park environments for everyone.

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