

EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING RECREATIONAL PARTICIPATION AT TEMPLER PARK, SELANGOR

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Abstract: Recreational activities are receiving much attention especially among urban communities. It is known that open green space is always capable of providing recreational opportunities to the local community. Templer Park, located between Rawang and Selayang, is seen as a strategic location to attract nearby communities from heavily populated areas to perform their recreational activities. However, the function of the park may be in doubt if the park has not successfully fulfilled the recreational needs and demands among local residents. Since more and more people are living in cities, Templer Park's function as one of the most important green spaces in the state of Selangor must be understood because people's interest for recreation activities is increasing too. Therefore, this study investigated the factors influencing participation in recreational activities at Templer Park. A total of 200 respondents were involved in this study by answering survey questionnaires regarding the factors that might contribute to their decision to choose Templer Park as a place for them to carry out recreational activities. Based on the data collected, this study found that the two main factors which put off respondents living nearby from coming to the park include being too busy with other chores and they thought that there was nothing interesting about the park that could attract them to go there. The findings showed that Templer Park is lacking in terms of being an attractive place to be visited by the residents living nearby to it; thus, there is a need of further action from the local authority to enhance the role of the park such as upgrading the signboards, updating the park information and keeping public provisions such as toilets and connecting roads in good condition in order to improve the perception of local residents toward the park.

Keywords: Green space, park use, recreational participation

1. Introduction

Open green space is known as a place to provide recreational opportunities for the local community especially in urban areas. Urban community is exposed to the increasing level of stress due to the work pressure. Therefore, different types of recreational activities such as cycling, jogging, walking at parks and spending their quality time with family and friends are hoped to retain their physical and mental well-being. Schipperijn (2010) defined the open green space usage as any types of visits to the open green space regardless of their types of activities and the time length of the stay. Nor Akmar et al. (2018) emphasized the need to collect accurate and current information regarding the usage of open green space in an urban area such as Kuala Lumpur to encourage and support the open green space management and planning strategies. Typically, a recreational purpose is the most important usage for open green space and by focusing on the recreational use it will help urban park planners and managers to fulfil the needs and demands among urban communities (Nor Akmar et al., 2018).

Ibrahim et al. (2013) argued that open green space inside cities is being compromised for urban development and not to mention those lands surrounding these cities which are being termed as urban fringe are also affected. A park is usually available in the form of a neighborhood, city, state, regional or national park. The forms and functions of a park may include to provide protection for wildlife and trees, a place for researchers to study nature as well as for recreation provisions aimed at visitors use. As one of the most important recreational parks in Malaysia, Templer Park is one of those open green spaces which are accessible to the urban population who live in close by towns such as Rawang and

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Selayang located in the state of Selangor. Therefore, questions arise whether Templer Park has successfully functioned in terms of providing recreational opportunities among local residents and what are the motivation factors that could encourage more recreational use of the park.

It is known that people want to go to open green space in order to release their stress due to the busy lifestyles. An environment full of greenery will help people to feel relaxed after having to endure the hectic life in cities. However, there is evidence which shows that the open green space is not adequate for the benefit of the people. In the Malaysian context, for example, it was highlighted the importance of proper planning for parks such as Templer Park in order to cater for the needs of urban population. Similarly, the *Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semenanjung Malaysia (2006)* has emphasized on the issue of the lack of recreation areas in major towns in Malaysia as could be seen in the *Dasar Perbandaran Negara's* document. In the same document, it was stated that the population range for the National Growth Conurbation hierarchy towns such as Selayang Baru and Rawang, both of which are situated close to Templer Park, stands at 2.5 million and above. This figure is projected to increase up to 8.5 million people in year 2020. It also stated that National Growth Conurbation towns should have provisions such as a national park, a regional or state park and a town park.

Actual consumption or participation in recreational activities solely depend on the supply of the related opportunities (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Therefore, limited recreational opportunities in the form of limited open green space will result in limited recreational participation. Some differentiation can be made between the potential demand for recreation and the supply of opportunities available to realise the so-called demand. These variables can be grouped into the demographic, socioeconomic and situational characteristics, which generate a tendency to recreate, and those external factors which facilitate or constrain the decision as well as the choice of activity and site (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that if opportunities are less than ideal, people will actually participate less in recreation than their expected level of demand would indicate. The changing needs and demands for recreational participation can be fulfilled by implementing the efficient management strategies such as the creation of new recreational opportunities or the improvement and upgrading of existing facilities such as encompassing land or water acquisition, hardening the landscape and the green space interpretation.

1.1 Recreational usage of open green space

The needs and demands for recreational opportunities are changing from year to year caused by the changes in trends and interests among urban residents. Therefore, a very critical step should be taken in the form of assessing these changing needs and demands to ensure the open green space fulfill its role to provide the recreational opportunities and enhancing the people's quality of life. Nor Akmar et al. (2011) emphasized the needs of conducting research to examine the open green space usage in order to meet the green space planning and management strategies. By encouraging more access toward open green space, it will attract more visitors, increase many types of recreational activities engagement, enhance the recreational usage and improving health and well-being of the people (Thompson, 2011). Furthermore, open green space in urban areas play a very important role to enhance the sustainability of urban communities as well as supporting biodiversity system in an urban area (Fangzheng et al., 2020).

A study conducted by Damisah et al. (2017) found that youths at urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur were aware and satisfied on the recreational opportunities provided, but only for the popular recreational activities such as jogging and futsal. Due to the high number of population in urban areas, the demand for the recreational opportunities is also high (Damisah et al., 2017). Popular sports and recreational activities are receiving much interests from the community and open green space is one of the places that allow them to spend their quality time and enhance the quality of life among urban community. On the other hand, the potential of open green space to provide the benefits for community and the non-economic value of the place is still lacking in decision-making process for open green space planning and management strategies (Mohamad et al., 2013).

1.2 Studies on the factors influencing recreational participation

Few studies have found that the distance of the park in the neighbourhood area becomes one of the factors that encourage the open green space visitation. Urban residents prefer to visit their neighbourhood park but the frequency of visitation is declining equivalent with the distance from their home to the park (Grahm et al., 2003; Nielsen et al., 2007; Neuvonen et al., 2007). Meanwhile, the accessibility of the park may be affecting the decision-making process in terms of frequency of visitation. The heavily populated areas may increase the number of nearby park visitors. Therefore, the accessibility of the open green space is affecting the recreational use in different ways and to different degrees.

Studies conducted by Brown et al. (2014) and Koohsari et al. (2015) listed several factors that contribute to the reduction of a gap between green space supply and demand which include the characteristics of a city such as its size, population and the socio-economic characteristics followed by the attributes of the open green space and the surrounding environmental characteristics. Background on the socio-economic profile among nearby residents also proved to influence the open green space visitation. Gross domestic product (GDP), income from the public budgeting and annual per capita living income could improve the availability of open green space which also increases the recreational opportunities among urban residents (Fangzheng et al., 2020). These factors should be considered while providing, designing and managing open green space for public purposes.

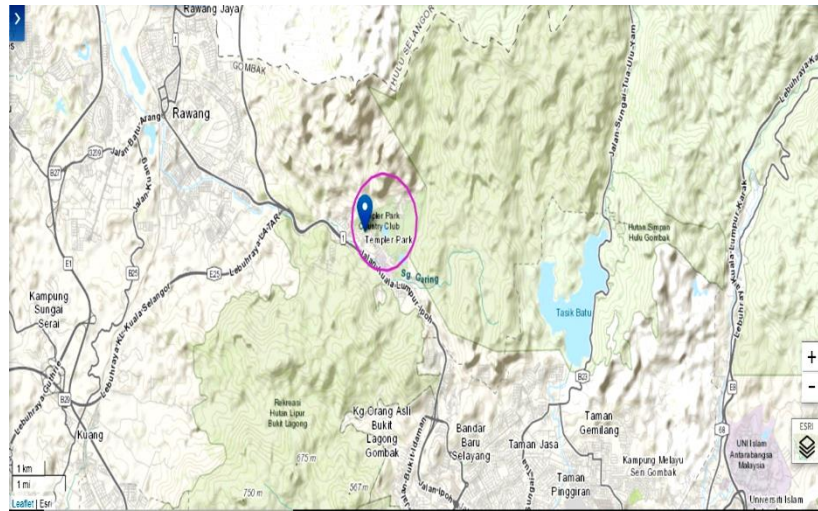
Environmental characteristics of the green space such as the size of the park, the attractive factors of the park, the provision of the park facilities, the quality of vegetation at the park and entrance fee were reported to be related with the use of the park among nearby residents (Cohen et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018). Therefore, the ability of the open green space characteristics to attract a large number of visitors should be enhanced to ensure these recreational opportunities manage to be translated into maximising the expected benefits especially among urban residents.

2. Methodology

This study focused solely on the factors influencing the recreational participation and will therefore be contributing to the number of visitors at Templer Park, Selangor. Survey questionnaires were distributed to assess and identify the viewpoints of respondents on the factors that influence their decision-making process toward visiting Templer Park. The data were collected and later analysed with SPSS analytic tool to achieve the aim of the study.

2.1 Study area

Templer Park is a forest reserve in Rawang, a district in Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia. It is 1,214 hectares in size and plays a crucial role as regional park for the nearby residents. Situated only a mere 30 minutes drive away from the Kuala Lumpur city, the park is always a great choice for the urban residents to chill, relax and destress while performing their preferred recreational activities. A private villa, retreat homes and homestays can also be found at the park for visitors who would like to stay in a long time to indulge in the forest while being surrounded by the trees. In addition, the park consists of multi-tiered waterfalls, streams and jungle trails that allow visitors to participate in recreational activities. Additionally, several amenities are provided at the park such as the parking lots, public toilets, stalls, fishing spots and picnic ground to make sure visitors feel comfortable and safe during the trip.



Source: Landsat Explorer (2021)

Figure 1: The Location of Study Area

2.2 Secondary data collection

Literature review helped in developing the research framework in order to assess the factors influencing the recreational participation among visitors at Templer Park, Selangor. Previous studies on the socio-ecological model in understanding the recreational usage at open green space were identified and reviewed for further understanding on the related topic. The environmental attributes of the Templer Park were gathered from the personal interview session with the local authority to be included in the survey questionnaire.

2.3 Primary data collection – survey questionnaire and interviews

This study involved 200 respondents who were visitors at Templer Park that came to the park on their own interests. The visitors either spend few hours at the park or even stayed overnight. With the help of four enumerators or interviewers to carry out the survey, a total of 159 visitors successfully responded by completing the survey questionnaire being handed out to them. Two of the enumerators were located at the base of the park (consists of a stream and car park) while another 2 were located higher up on the park where a waterfall was located. It took 2 days on a weekend (Saturday, Sunday) to complete the task. During the distribution of the survey questionnaires, interview sessions were conducted too to get in-depth personal viewpoints or preferences from the respondents.

In order to extend the data collection process, the questionnaire forms were also dropped into nearby residents' mailboxes. It was found that the housing areas which were located within 5km to Templer Park were all located in Rawang. Several residential areas in Selayang were quite difficult to be reached due to its distance from the park and also due to the lack of security posts located at housing areas in order to ease the process of collecting questionnaire forms from residents. Hence, two housing areas located in Rawang were selected for data collection namely Taman Templer Suasana and Taman Templer Saujana.

Around 50 questionnaire copies were successfully distributed to houses (placed in mailboxes) at Taman Templer Saujana while another 100 copies distributed at Taman Templer Suasana. Unlike Taman Templer Saujana, there was an absence of security guard at Taman Templer Suasana, so a brown box with a signage on it was placed at the entrance of the housing area for residents to return the questionnaire forms. Two weeks after the questionnaire forms were distributed, a total of 16 copies of questionnaire forms (4 from Saujana and 12 from Suasana) were successfully collected at these two housing areas.

Another target respondent consisting of residents from Rawang and Selayang were recruited from the popular social network platform, Facebook, in which people with their page profile displaying "current city" Rawang were invited to respond to the survey published at www.surveygizmo.com.

Unfortunately, no people with “current city” Selayang were found in Facebook. Therefore, total responses only came from people in Rawang. They were approached through private messages by introducing them to the study and then invited to visit www.surveygizmo.com to answer the survey questionnaire. Some 25 respondents successfully answered.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

There is a continuous process in which a person would normally go through before making a decision to choose and do activities at a particular site. This process starts with the demographic background of the person before moving on to the socioeconomic characteristics which include the household gross income, among other things. Maslow’s own theory (as cited in Veal, 2010) also indicated that humans tend to focus their activities on the lower needs such as working on a job to get income before pursuing higher needs. Therefore, it is important to identify the importance of Templer Park in terms of providing recreational opportunities for the people with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

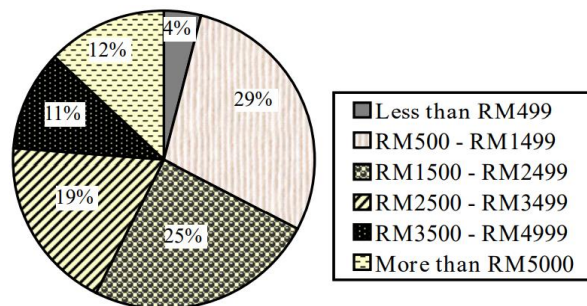


Figure 2: Respondents’ Monthly Household Income

Figure 2 shows a breakdown for the number of respondents in this study according to their monthly household gross income. It is apparent from Figure 2 that more than half of total respondents’ household (58%) belong to the lower income group earning less than RM499 to a maximum of RM2499 per month. The rest of the respondents’ household consist of those earning more than RM2500 monthly that make up less than half (42%) of the total number of respondents. This trend could indicate that Templer Park was more popular and important as well among the visitors coming from the lower income group (below RM2500 monthly) compared to the visitors from the higher income group (more than RM2500 monthly).

3.2 Recreational use of the park

In terms of respondents preferred activities when visiting Templer Park, these activities could give some picture about the park’s role as a regional park whose function was to attract people and visitors coming from farther away towns and cities to do recreational activities. The important thing to be considered is that activities chosen by respondents at the park are the important elements in the decision-making process after they have made up their mind about what they wanted to do for recreation and how they perceived the potential place that they would want to go to in order to carry out these activities.

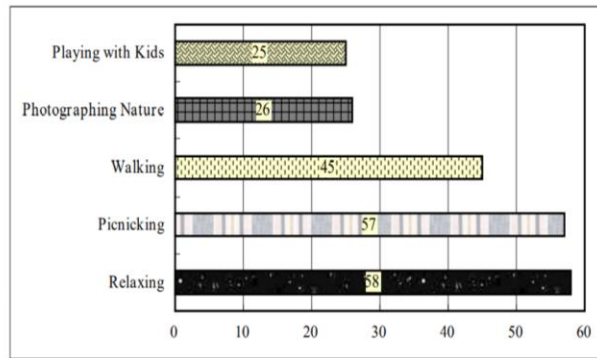


Figure 3: Percentage of Respondents According to Chosen Activities at Templer Park

More than half of the respondents (57%) chose relaxing and picnicking as activities they undertook at Templer Park followed by less than half (45%) chose walking as the preferred activity. In the Malaysian context, it was stated that a regional park should be equipped with picnic and camping areas as well as activities like fishing, boating, hiking and so on. From Figure 2, it could be seen that there were some differences between the activities most respondents carried out at the park and what was supposed to be offered there. Perhaps the respondents at Templer Park were not aware or not looking forward to activities like hiking that is more associated with a regional park.

3.3 Factors influencing recreational participation at Templer Park

There is a continuous process in which a person would normally go through before making a decision to go and carry out activities at a site. This process starts with the demographic background of the person before moving on to the socioeconomic characteristics which include the household gross income, among other things. Maslow’s own theory (as cited in Veal, 2010) also indicated that humans tend to focus their activities on the lower needs such as working to get income before pursuing higher needs. Therefore, this study tried to explore whether monthly household income really affects respondents’ tendency to go out and do recreational activities.

A yes or no question was asked to respondents as stated in Table 1 to see if they had visited Templer Park in the last 30 days. Less than half of the respondents who made up the RM2499 and below income group said they did not visit the park in the last 30 days. Meanwhile, more than half of respondents from the higher income group of RM2500 and above answered no to the same question. This trend of answers indicates that Templer Park is an important place to be visited by people from the lower income group (below RM2500 monthly) compared to those from the higher income group. Therefore, earning less monthly income does not seem to affect respondents’ visit to Templer Park in order to pursue recreational activities as opposed to Maslow’s theory (as cited in Veal, 2010) which suggested that humans tend to focus on fulfilling lower needs before moving onto pursuing the higher ones.

Table 1: Crosstabulation of Respondents’ Income and Visit to Templer Park in the Last Month

Monthly Household Income	Visit to Templer Park within last 30 days		
	Yes	No	Total
Less than RM499	3	3	6
RM500 – RM1499	15	25	40
RM1500 – RM2499	19	17	36
RM2500 – RM3499	8	19	27
RM3500 – RM4999	5	11	16
More than RM5000	3	17	20

The perception of visitors is an important element that influences their decision-making to choose a particular site and how they should spend their time there. The appearance and condition of the park facilities are believed as one of the important factors to encourage visitation from the people. In order to measure the level of satisfaction towards the park facilities, a rating score was used in this study’s

survey questionnaire. A scale rating of 1-10 was used with 10 representing the most excellent, continued to the 5 that represented as only average and a score of 1 to be considered as the worst rating.

The facilities that acquired below the rate of average score at Templer Park were fishing area and public toilets as shown in Table 2. Park facilities such as picnic area, parking lots and streams area received better score compared to other facilities provided at the park. On the other hand, fishing area and public toilets were rated below average. The findings revealed that most of the respondents were requesting for the public toilets at Templer Park to be repaired and maintained properly. Respondents were also not reluctant to express their concern for the limited number of public toilets provided at the park. In conjunction to that, the finding of this study supported the statement by Thompson and Travlou (2007) who mentioned that clear signs and information available at the natural sites played an important role in determining whether people would visit the place.

Table 2: Crosstabulation between Mean Ratings of Templer Park’s Facilities and categories of Respondents

Templer Park’s Facilities	Category of Respondents					
	Park visitors		Nearby residents		Online residents	
	Count	Mean	Count	Mean	Count	Mean
Trails area	147	6.01	11	5.91	17	5.99
Picnic area	151	6.21	11	5.09	17	6.15
Fishing spots	123	4.72	7	5.00	14	4.67
Parking lots	149	6.05	11	5.73	17	6.02
Public toilets	139	4.74	11	4.73	15	4.74
Streams Area	133	6.50	11	5.82	17	6.39

In order to further explore the perception of respondents regarding Templer Park in general, a question of things they wanted to be improved there was asked as shown in Table 3. Several suggestions made by the respondents could become an indication regarding their perceptions toward the park itself. One-fourth of the respondents (26%) mentioned that the public toilets were broken and needed to be fixed. Another fourth of the respondents (26%) hoped for the provision of cafeteria selling food items to be made available and less than a fourth (23%) felt more toilets needed to be built. Even though it was apparent that respondents wanted an improvement on the condition of the park’s public toilets, there was also a strong case in terms of wanting to have cafeteria or food stalls selling food items at Templer Park.

Table 3: Suggestions by Respondents

Recommendations	Frequency	Percent
Need for improved toilets condition	33	26
Should introduce eateries	33	26
Build more toilets or changing rooms	29	23
Improve rubbish disposal and maintenance	16	12
More parking space and public transport	9	7
Improve and widen roads	7	5
Total	127	100

The next question asked in the survey questionnaire was regarding the reasons why respondents did not want to visit Templer Park. This point of interest is also an important element in people’s decision-making to carry out recreational activities because some people will decide not to visit a site of interest if the pre-conditions are not met such as having the interest to go for recreation and if opportunities are available at the site. When the question of why respondents did not visit Templer Park was asked as shown in Table 4, it was found that nearby respondents and online respondents stated that they did not have enough time and the place was perceived as not interesting to attract them to come there. Other respondents said that there were not enough parking spaces and the lack of maintenance of the park as the reasons for not visiting the park. However, these responses were collected from the nearby residents and online respondents who did not actually visit the place physically although they lived close to the park. Therefore, it could be argued that their answers were strong indicators for showing the factors that influence people in choosing the Templer Park for recreational activities.

Few barriers, difficulties in accessibility, negative perception arises and lack of awareness may be other factors influencing respondents for not going to the park even they lived in a close proximity to it. The result of this study is quite similar to the study conducted by Payne et al. (2002) regarding

people who lived in northern region, where parklands were limited, tended to prefer having more parklands and nature-based activities as compared to those in southern region who preferred less on having more open green space because they already had so many of those in their locality. Nevertheless, the main issues local residents had to face to visit Templer Park include its far away distance from home, they are too busy with other chores and there is nothing interesting about the place.

Table 4: Crosstabulation between Reasons for not Going to Templer Park and Category of Respondents

Reasons for not Going to Templer Park	Category of Respondent	
	Nearby Residents	Online Respondents
Too far away from home	1	1
Not enough time and too busy	3	5
Lack of maintenance and user-friendliness	3	0
Nothing interesting	4	0
Lack of security measures	2	1
Lack of parking space	0	2
Total	13	9

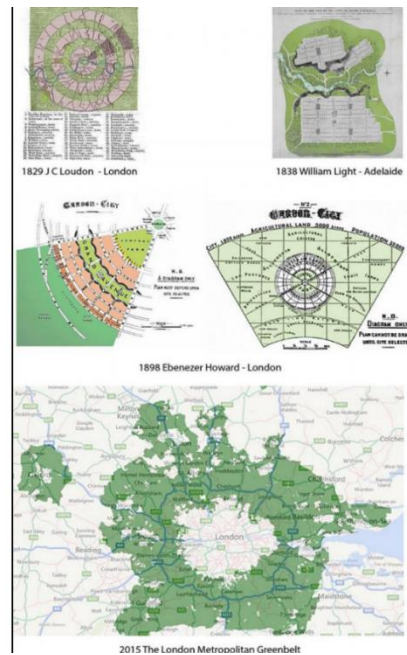
4. Conclusion

The role of Templer Park as a regional park is to attract people from farther away towns and cities but this does not mean the visitation from nearby residents for recreational activities are not important. In fact, the awareness from nearby residents toward the park is needed because they live surrounding the park and have the same responsibility as other people to value it. Because of today’s expansion of cities to cater for more urban populations, there is a need to replant trees at suitable areas and to protect the existing open green space in cities. Thus, the awareness of the nearby residents in particular toward the importance of valuing open green space is very important to ensure the sustainability of the green infrastructure in an urban area. Open green space will have more chance to be taken good care of if the people in general, and local residents in particular, start to feel appreciative of the place.

This study found that some respondents mentioned they did not have enough time or have very limited time availability to visit Templer Park. It could be argued they were not completely rejecting the idea of visiting the park for recreational activities, but simply did not have time to do so. Therefore, park authorities could respond to this kind of issue by developing recreational facilities closer to the urban population. Pigram and Jenkins (2006) noted that if opportunities are less than ideal, people will actually participate less in recreation. Therefore, both authors’ arguments for the need to establish recreational opportunities closer to homes hold true because the more opportunities and open green space being provided close to urban populations, the more likely people will have the tendency as well as time to go out for recreational activities.

One way to achieve the establishment of recreational opportunities closer to homes is to create parklands near cities. This idea was made popular in the city of London in what was termed as the green belt concept illustrated in Figure 4. Its function is to restrict the city’s expansion and gives “breathing spaces” for people and nature from rapid urbanization by allocating areas for the creation of open green space. It is possible to overcome the issues of open green space located far away from people’s homes if local authority considers the possibility of establishing this green belt concept by creating more open green space around towns and cities.

Lastly, it is recommended that in order to improve the perception of the people toward Templer Park, some of the public provisions at the park definitely need to be maintained better especially by improving on the toilets. This point was stated by Thompson and Travlou’s (2007) that emphasized signs and information and a tidy and welcoming appearance to be factors particularly important for infrequent woodland users and should be considered for increasing local residents’ awareness as mentioned previously about the need to keep these provisions in top quality in order to attract visitors. Other features that might need improvement to make the park more valuable to local community and visitors include better roads and cleanliness from rubbish.



Source: Landscape Architects Association (2016)

Figure 4: The Concept of Greenbelt Being Employed to Limit Cities' Expansion

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