

Impact of Urban Landscape on Human Well-being as a Tool for Achievement of Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The urbanized world is facing unprecedented social-demographic, technological and environmental changes and in the face of these changes, an important set of questions arises related to how to plan and manage urban green spaces for the benefit of both urban dwellers and biodiversity. The diversity and quality of urban green spaces and human well-being are tightly linked as urban green areas provide a number of benefits for people. This study aimed to promote the characters of natural environment as a platform to enhance human well-being in urban areas and mainly was conducted to determine the need of urban community related to urban parks. The findings of this research can be used as guiding reference in related areas to improve and enhance the quality of public spaces in urban parks as an urban environment to fulfill the needs and requirements of visitors.

Keywords: Landscape, Human, Sustainable, Urban.

1. Introduction

A landscape is the expression of the interaction between the natural environment and man's activities to make the environment more suitable for his life and needs (Antrop, 1998). Within urban areas, landscapes are highly affected and even dominated by human activities. The outward forms of those city landscapes have significant connections with their economic, social or cultural functions (Wu, 2006, 2010, 2014; Lin et al., 2016).

In the last few decades, newer fields integrating natural and social sciences have emerged to investigate urban systems and address complex problems. Urban ecology, an offshoot of ecology, is an interdisciplinary field that aims to understand the whole city as an ecosystem comprised of both humans and other living organisms that coexist in human-dominated systems (Wu, 2014; Gopal et al., 2016).

In new approach regarding urban ecology, landscape is a visible and noticeable artifact of often unnoticed and sometimes invisible natural and societal processes. Because landscapes are visible, landscape can bring different people into a common experience of environmental systems. Across all scales of environmental phenomena, the scale at which landscape patterns are perceived by humans, the "perceptible realm," is decisive for landscape change (Gobster et. al, 2007; Nassauer, 2012).

The "urban landscape" - considered as a dynamic organism - "comprises three main categories: monumental heritage of exceptional cultural value; non-exceptional heritage elements but present in a coherent way with a relative abundance; new urban elements to be considered (the urban built form; the open spaces, streets, public open spaces, urban

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infrastructure, material networks and equipment," (UNESCO, 2011). Specifically, the "historic urban landscape" approach moves beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focuses on the entire human environment with all of its tangible and intangible qualities. It seeks to increase the sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values. The idea of "historic urban landscape" is the result of the layering and intertwining of cultural and natural features over time. Besides the notion of "historic urban center", it includes the broader urban context and its geographical setting. The layers overlapped are: cultural practices, infrastructures, built environment, diversity and identity, geomorphology, urban structure, economic processes, topography, open space, social values, hydrology (UNESCO, 2011). This approach considers the urban landscape with its tangible and intangible components the key resource to improve urban quality and livability, to pursue economic development and social cohesion in a constantly changing global context. In particular, the UNESCO recommendations call for an integration of urban heritage protection strategies within the wider framework of sustainable development objectives (Ragozino, 2016).

The use of urban parks, a newly added element to urban life, has changed over time. The need of individuals living in industrialized cities, in the transition to this new way of life, to bond with the nature in the form of green spaces resulted in use of public parks by the citizens. This transformation of public space from belonging mainly to the bourgeois into areas used by all citizens changed the definition of public space and its usage patterns. The design of landscaped spaces, that were mainly used as a tool to serve political power, after the Industrial revolution came under the influence of contemporary views of human beings and the social reality of urban life. Early pleasure gardens and the gardens of the courtly life were replaced by the public parks (1840-1900), then, parks as instrument of social reform (1900-1930), parks as active recreational facilities (1930-1965), and now open space systems serving both ecological and more passive recreational purposes (Cranz, 1989). Today, the changing concept of public park with new social, cultural, and symbolic meanings creates new relationships with the citizens and has a new mission in a modern world where the death of public space is in discussion (Uludağ, 1998; Ekinci & Saglam, 2016).

This study aimed to promote the characters of natural environment as a platform to enhance human well-being in urban areas. The findings of this research can be used as guiding reference in related areas to improve and enhance the quality of public spaces in urban parks as an urban environment to fulfill the needs and requirements of visitors.

2. Research Area

This study involved two different urban parks in Tabriz, a city in northwest of Iran as study areas. The first study area is Golestan Garden, a historical urban park located in historic area in city center, and the second study area is Elgoli Garden, an urban park with several natural features which was constructed as country recreational garden but now located in urban district.

Golestan Park is considered a historical and somewhat monumental park in Tabriz, Iran.

The park is located near to Qonqa Square in city center. The place, which was originally used as a public cemetery, has changed to a city park during the second Pahlavi era. Golestan is also one of the most popular traditional neighborhoods in Tabriz. Located in the core of the most westerly part of the historical district of the city, Golestan district contains many historical buildings and spaces that are considered as important elements of the city's architectural and cultural heritage. The Golestan Garden Historic District is considered to be very significant in the historical, archeological, and architectural heritage of the Tabriz. This neighborhood completely reflects the city's growth from the traditional pattern of urban life to a modern society influenced by western culture, yet is able to demonstrate the importance of the an urban garden in city's history (Golzarian and Zarei, 2013).

Early history of the Elgoli is not clear. However, it seems that it was used as a water resource for agricultural purposes and it was used as a summer palace for recreation during the Qajar dynasty (when Tabriz was the official residence of Prince of Iran). It contains a palace that is surrounded by a great square water pool almost 12 meters deep. Elgoli (previously called Shahgoli) Park is also known as the "Old Park" in Tabriz (Wilber, 1979; Hami et al, 2011). This was later declared as a public urban park in 1930 (Romianfar, 2008; Hami et al, 2011). Elgoli covers an area of 60.7 Hectares (150 acres) (Ghorbani, 2006; Hami et al, 2011) and located in the Southwest part of Tabriz. In 1930, renovation was done to the park by Tabriz Municipality and it became a public park (Romianfar, 2008; Hami et al, 2011).

3. Methodology

In this research, in order to gain necessary information and data, methods like observation, quantitative survey, qualitative survey and data analysis were used. These methods have been useful to collect and search both primary and secondary data of the research. The observation was conducted as a pilot survey on selected parks to gain the information how urban dweller interacts with nature in urban parks.

After these observations, preparation of the survey involved the development of a questionnaire for the quantitative and qualitative survey of data. The survey included the visitors of both gardens. This qualitative survey was conducted in a face-to-face manner which was very important for getting instant feedback from the participants. From the qualitative survey also we could identify the problem which was not obvious through the observation. The quantitative survey involved the users and visitors of both gardens. Questionnaires consisted of the demographic, open-ended and closed-ended questions related to the subject and were based on attributes, variables or elements motivating people to visit and the degree the visitation can affect their wellbeing. Filling in the questionnaire was not obligatory, and only those who were willing to participate the survey filled up the form. Then, collected data were analyzed using the software of SPSS to be clearer and easy to understand. A general characterization of participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characterization of Participants

Category	Golestan Park		Elgoli Park	
Number of participant	281 participants		237 participants	
Ethnic	Native	41.6%	Native	33.7%
	Permanent resident	39.9%	Permanent resident	23.6%
	Tourist	18.5%	Tourist	19.4%
			Foreigner	23.3%
Gender	Male	53%	Male	62%
	Female	47%	Female	38%
Material status	Single	53%	Single	26%
	Married	47%	Married	74%
Education level	Primary school	2.8%	Primary school	0%
	Lower secondary school	4.5%	Lower secondary school	11%
	Upper secondary school	18.2%	Upper secondary school	9%
	Diploma	39.5%	Diploma	17%
	Bachelor degree	25.2%	Bachelor degree	58%
	Master	6.3%	Others	5%
	Ph.D	3.5%		
Occupation	Public sector	8.4%	Public sector	38%
	Private sector	31.1%	Private sector	46%
	Self-employed	28.0%	Self-employed	10%
	Student	27.6%	Others	6%
	Retiree	2.8%		
	Housewife	1.7%		
	Unemployed	0.4%		

Most part of the criteria of the participants in both gardens had similarity and differences. The number of Golestan Garden participants are more than Elgoli Garden, which is 281 for Golestan Garden while 237 in Elgoli Garden.

4. Findings

The major reasons leading the participants to visit both gardens which are concluded from the open-ended survey showed that there must exist a strong reason for people to come to both gardens. From table 2 it becomes obvious that 90 participants (32.02 %) said that, the reason why they visited the Golestan garden is for recreational activities or exercise that showed the highest percentage for this garden. While for Elgoli garden, the majority or the highest range of reasons for visitors also was recreational activities or exercise with 107 participants (45.14%). Beautiful place with historical background is the second highest reason ($f=69$, 24.55%) that encouraged visitors to come to the Golestan garden during different times. The second highest result for the Elgoli garden was natural beauty of the area, and the result was $f=81$, 34.18%. Other than that, third reason was being with family and friends ($f=58$, 20.65%), fourth to enjoy the natural beauty ($f=35$, 12.45%), and finally to release stress and relaxing were the main reasons for visiting the Golestan garden. The consecutive reasons for visitors of the

Elgoli garden participants were meeting or dating ($f=23$, 9.70%), to release stress and relaxing ($f=22$, 9.29%) and finally the location of some amenities like restaurants nearby the Elgoli garden ($f=4$, 1.69%). These results showed the similarity of the main reasons for inhabitants of Tabriz who visited both gardens. The results also proved that both gardens have the potential for attraction of people of the urban area and can act as suitable and desirable places for recreational activities of urban dwellers.

Table 2: The top reasons motivating participants to visit the gardens

Rank	Reasons for visiting Golestan Garden	f	%	Reasons for visiting Elgoli Garden	f	%	Rank
1	Recreation and Exercise	90	32.02	Recreation and Exercise	107	45.14	1
2	Beautiful Place	69	24.55	Enjoying the natural beauty	81	34.18	2
3	Being with Family and Friends	58	20.65	Meeting or Dating	23	9.70	3
4	Enjoy the Natural Beauty	35	12.45	Release Stress and Relaxation	22	9.29	4
5	Release Stress and Relaxation	29	10.33	Nearby Restaurants or Service Centers	4	1.69	5

Conclusion

The findings of this research revealed that the main reason of visiting both gardens (obtained from the responses of visitors) was the recreational purpose with 32.02 participants from Golestan Gardens and 45.14% participants from Elgoli Garden. Most participants pointed to the suitable recreational potential of both gardens, reinforcing the hypothesis of this research which considered the main function of the both gardens to be related to the recreational attractions. Besides, in both gardens, the variety of physical elements and natural attractions enriches the character of population who visit the parks can also be considered as the major factors related to the importance of these two gardens.

Even though recreational attractions were the main reason for visitors of both parks, participants were also motivated to visit the both gardens by many other factors and features including natural landform and vegetation that can contribute to the improvement of human well-being in an urban park or area. From the viewpoint of problems and deficiencies, the highest comments ($f=28$, 9.96 %) by Golestan Garden's participants were related to management including the lacking and maintenance of service facilities, while Elgoli park participants ($f=62$, 26.17%) suggested more informative ideas, activities and facilities with the highest percentage. Both garden participants also commented about lack of parking facilities and need to fundamental improvements in safety and security of pedestrians and cleanliness.

Table 3: Suggestions of participants for improvement of quality

Rank	Suggestions for Upgrading the Golestan Garden	f	%	Rank	Suggestions for Upgrading the Elgoli Garden	f	%
1	Lacking facilities shall be added	28	9.96	1	More informative ideas are necessary	62	26.17
2	Provide more parking area	27	9.60	2	Upgrade the maintenance	46	19.41
3	Upgrade the maintenance	72	25.62	3	Prohibit visitors from using motorized vehicle	30	12.66
4	Campaign to attract more tourist	26	9.28	4	Provide more parking area	17	7.18
5	Cleanliness should be prioritized	23	8.18	5	Vegetation is not attractive	16	6.75
6	Prohibit visitors from using motorized vehicle	45	16.01	6	Improve Security	14	5.90
7	Vegetation is not attractive	34	12.09	7	Cleanliness should be prioritized	17	7.17
8	Improve Security	8	2.84	8	Vegetation is not attractive	11	4.65
9	Natural elements shall be preserved	12	4.27	9	Campaign to attract more tourist	15	6.32
10	Provide more open areas	6	2.15	10	Natural elements shall be preserved	9	3.79

Finally, from the survey and research findings, it can be concluded that urban parks and gardens can be a place for the urban dweller to avoid daily life stresses and leave behind urban activities as stress environment. Besides, urban parks and gardens can be a contributor for visitors in improving human well-being by connecting a human with natural elements. Negative comments by participants showed that visitors were alerted to the both urban parks condition that could contribute to visitor's perception and acceptance towards the level of an urban park. Therefore, both gardens management authorities should consider these issues to attract more visitors to come to the both gardens, since successful urban parks will provide positive benefits not only for the visitors but also for the residents of entire city, rather than adding to the pressure imposed by an urban life style.

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