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Measuring Public Satisfaction on Urban Parks (A Case Study: Sari City)

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Abstract

Planning, designing, and management of public parks are important issues since these parks are one of the main spaces of urban life, especially with the rapid population growth in recent years. This research investigates public preferences regarding urban parks to evaluate the preferences in order to achieve appropriate standards for designing and running urban parks. This article is descriptive-analysis on the applied research. A survey method is used to collect required information. The research was conducted on 384 people in Sari city by using simple random sampling. The results are tested by binomial test with help of a statistic program.

The results suggest that increasing public satisfaction for urban parks depends on the following measurements: establishing appropriate landscape, forming physical and financial security, giving attention to different age groups and their needs in Designing Park. The study concludes by providing some solutions and recommendations.

Keywords: Urban Parks, Green Space, Public Place, Public Preferences, Environment and Landscape.

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Introduction

Urbanization and urban development is considered one of the most important phenomena of recent times (Hesamiyan, 1998: 41). In recent years, urbanization has always faced with the growing growth, so that between 1975 and 2000, the urban population has increased from 1500 million people to more than 2,800 million people, which approximately forms 45 percent of the world's population. At the end of 2007 for the first time in the history of mankind, the populations who lived in cities have been more than rural population and has been estimated that by 2020, 60 percent of the world's population will be formed by urbanization (Parivar et al., 2009: 56). Today in cities, the poor role of human presence in urban spaces and thus its social revolution is more prominent and apparent than ever (Khoshouie & Alborzi, 2016: 405). The loss of vegetation is one of the consequences of urbanization in the world (Landry, 2010: 94). With the development of urbanization, people are gradually moving away from nature. Therefore, excessive density of population has increased environmental requirements and demands on physical and spiritual needs (Saeidnia, 2000: 26). Creation of urban green spaces is one of the solutions for solving environmental problems and even more this effort converts urban environment to habitable environment for citizens (Taghizadeh, 2004: 29). Urban green spaces can be considered as a space that meets basic human needs (Khoshouie & Alborzi, 2016: 405). The purpose of urban green space is a kind of the levels of urban land use and man-made vegetation that has socio-economic efficiency and also ecological efficiency (Suzanchi, 2004: 5).

Green space unlike the meaning that it may create in mind, it is not the only place that contains some trees and benches, but it is a symbol of cultural and social thoughts of a society and it is considered an important factor in urban space that it is considered by all people from the social, cultural, psychological aspects and plays an important role in urban planning (Salehi Fard, 2010: 51). Therefore, exist green spaces in the physical and lifeless part of cities in line with playing multiple roles is an obvious issue (Azani et al., 2010: 3). Today, a significant part of urban green space is created in parks.

Urban parks as an important part of urban infrastructure in addition to increase citizens' quality of life also provide social and environmental services (entertainment, welfare, health) for citizens (Ioja, Patroescu, Nita, Rozyłowicz, Vanau, Ioja & Onose, 2010: 308-316). The best parks are those that pay attention to the social, cultural, psychological needs of different age and sex groups and provide charming and appropriate atmosphere for them (Saeidnia, 2000: 159).

Although, today the green idea and followed by green city is considered the goals and sublime thoughts in the cities of developed countries, but face with the issue of urban green space in cities in Iran have been largely empirical and accidental (Hataminezhad, 2010: 67). As urban green spaces can be the place of appearance of human virtues with planning and designing, on the other hand it can be changed to the place of incidence of urban crimes through abandonment and incorrect and simplistic planning and has social effects, cultural and psychological adversely on citizens (Salehi Fard, 2010: 53). The problem of green space is considered the requirements of urbanization life. Growth and development of cities, the effects of modernity and urbanization, the development of the more physical, the quality and quantity of green space and park that has effective role in improving environmental conditions are strongly required and people trying to connect with nature at every opportunity that happens refuge it, because access to open green spaces is the main key to human health. Now with regard to urban environmental problems and social needs of the people, the officials pay attention to extend green space that including it we see an increase in constructing local parks and gardens around the cities (Hamidi and Namiriyan, 2012: 1).

Today, a significant part of urban green space is created in the parks. The role of these parks is fully evident in the reduction of environmental problems, in addition to the beauties that create in the perspective of urban development it can be considered one of the most suitable places to spend leisure time of citizens and cultural activities, social, recreational, and etc. The observation of landscape and its perception by humans play an important role in the perception and his knowledge of the environment and determine the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of it.

The objective of evaluation is the visual qualitative of landscape, identify the indicators and criteria by which to be able to conserve, restore and reconstruct landscape. In fact, by this way, people can preserve landscapes that are beautiful and, if necessary, repaire and revive them.

By explaining these cases, the visual importance of landscape and its impact on citizens' behavior appears more and ever on us and on these cases, if urban administrators of sustainable spaces and environments want, it is necessary to consider evaluations of people to urban areas in the focus of its planning and use people preferences in kinds of urban designs.

Theoretical Foundation

Urban Parks

In the old tradition of Iran, the survival of the city depends on garden. The city was able to continue to its existence until be stationed at the entrance of the garden. In fact, the garden represents the image of the world of example and evokes idea of heaven or idea of transcendent nature that is better than nature itself. During the nineteenth century with the development of cities and the formation of the metropolis in the field of public open space planning, spots of nature in the name of the park were replaced by private gardens in order to meet social needs and beautify the urban landscape (Behbahani, 1998; 68). Urban parks are among urban spaces that during the history of urbanization have had increasing importance and effectiveness on the quality of urban life and citizens. In designing parks and past urban green spaces, aesthetic is the only perspective that regardless of environmental compatibilities and ecology of range was considered. While green space is a part of the natural environment and the urban environment and the bond between the two, and closeness of man and nature (Sheibani, 1996; 34). Urban green space and parks in the city, not only are considered perfect places to spend leisure time and recreational sites, but also these spaces in many cases prevent the unconsidered development of cities (Fazelniya et al., 2011: 139-140). Security and peace have been symbols for regional development and can attract countless tourists (Anabestani & Partners, 2016, 394). Urban parks have recreational, cultural and environmental factors and their role is to serve the citizens of the different urban areas (Mohammadi, 2006: 12). The main objective of urban parks is to return the open space toward the urban life that in addition to attention to the aspect of aesthetics and improve the quality of urban space, including simultaneously improving environmental aspects and increasing urban health (Teimuri et al., 2010: 140).

Peter Walker (2004) discusses in describing what he calls the new park such this that such landscapes are essential to ecological and social health of urban environment and should be taken into consideration and are discernible. Their plans must be in line with choosing useful direction, helps to residents of the community to improve health condition through exercise and intellectual challenge and promote civic participation and improve adjacent districts by encouraging public participation in the design and management (Mofidi Shemirani et al., 2009: 82). Paul Bary (2004) believes that new parks provide the basis for redefining the city appearance. In a world that urban places are increasingly similar, and such similarity reduces the dynamics of urban space attention to the concept of park that promotes natural and

cultural concepts at the same time improves communications of management and steps in order to combine protection activities from environment and education and leisure and recreation and sustainable development, it leads to redefining and creating quality of place (Mofidi Shemirani et al., 2009: 82).

Eye-catching natural environments suggest that it is a necessity for urban administrators to consider visual elements while designing parks according to citizens' satisfaction (Bazi, Mirshekari, 2005, 99).

Park as a vital pulse of a city needs attention and sympathy of everyone in society and everyone should be careful of such an environment. Therefore, the cohesion and collaboration between community members can be affected by the efficiency of park. In that way, a mutual relationship can be considered between the degree of cohesion of a community and the efficacy of park (Nazari et al., 2011: 127). In the planning and management of public spaces such as urban green spaces, it is needed to be considered the understanding of users from these spaces (Chen, Adimo and Bao, 2009: 76), because users of urban landscape have expectations that if not match with reality, leading to conflict between space and citizens (Daniel, 2001: 267). From the perspective of Briggs and France (1980), two direct and indirect main approaches are used to evaluate the landscape that in the direct approach, the public preferences about landscape are investigated and studied, the main criterion for evaluation is to emphasize the view of users from landscape and how to percept and interpret its visual features. While in the indirect approach, evaluation is done based on descriptive study of the components forming landscape and its features (Daniel, 2001, 277). So it is required designers and planners categorize park space into several zones and design every zone based on the taste and preferences of citizens. This encourages citizens to come to park and leads people to use all areas of the park by welcoming (Bazi, et al., 2013: 64).

Research Background

Bazi et al, 2013, in their article titled *Assess the Preferences of Different Age Groups from Visual Landscapes of Mellat park of Zahedan* states that although the importance of the urban landscapes in identity of cities is a lot, however, designers and planners have paid little attention to this matter and so landscapes that could create favorable image in the mind of its citizens is less. Many urban parks in the country are experiencing this problem and the need for more attention to create beautiful landscapes in the parks is necessary. The most important

recommendation related to manage parks in urban planning is the use of citizen and user preferences while planning and designing parks.

Aminzadeh and Ghoreishi, 2007, in their article titled *Public Preferences and its Application in the Design of Natural Woodland Parks (Case Study: Forest Park of Sysangan)* suggest that the most important factor influencing the preferences of individuals about forest landscapes is that users be able to consider themselves as a part of the existing landscape and although, aesthetic features of landscape is one of the most important factors in choosing location for tourism activities, but cannot ignore the role of design and possibilities and requirements of walkway in choosing tourism place by users.

Gashtasb Miguni et al, 2008, in their article titled *Investigating the Votes and Recreational Needs of Forest Park Visitors of Sisangan* assert that to maintain natural status of park, lack of facilities and adequate facilities and inadequate facilities available in the park has been approved by most of the visitors. To improve the facilities of park, most of the visitors are willing to pay an entrance fee for and almost all tourists emphasized importance of parks in terms of health.

Tekye Khah et al, 2013, in their article titled *Investigating the Pathology of Parks and Recreational Green Spaces in Sanandaj* affirm that the sense of security in parks is affected by environmental design and adjacent to the park with surrounding users. As the interviewees believed that the place of park establishment in the district is corresponded with amount and type of social damage.

Amirfakhrian et al, 2012, in their article titled *Investigating and Analyzing the Role of Social Functions of Urban Parks Based on Spatial Status and General Condition of District: the Case Study of Districts 1 and 6 of Mashhad Municipality* state that the process of planning and physical development of urban parks is associated with the aim of promoting their current functions. For this purpose it is necessary first to be prevented from adopting a single procedure about the same development pattern of parks in all urban districts specially the study area. Second, the physical development of the parks to be associated with the promotion of economic and ecological functions and in particular their social functions, because the attitude of citizens regarding the social functions of urban parks will play an important role in the use and proper utilization of these spaces and their vitality.

Nazari et al, 2011, in their article titled *Explaining the Sociology of Function of Urban Parks (Case Study of Urban Parks of Esfahan)* claim that the social and cultural dimensions is more important than other factors in determining the efficiency of parks.

Research Methodology

This study bases on a university project and by its nature used descriptive-analytical methodology in the field of applied research. The study used a questionnaire to gather the required information, thus, from another angle, this study can be considered a survey research (field). The study population is Sari city and according to Morgan table, 384 samples are used, which derived as simple random sampling.

The variables of this research are: 1) public recommendations are effective in designing urban parks. 2) Designers and officials do not welcome the public recommendations in designing urban parks. The relationship between these variables are tested by using BINOMIAL TEST with SPSS program.

Sampling

The results of the questionnaire by Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.874 are as follows:

1- Gender distribution of interviewees is almost evenly distributed: 52.3 percent women and 47.7 percent men. The highest cluster of respondents, which is 43.8 percent is, placed in the age between 25-50 years.

2- Most of respondents have university education by 57 percent. In the meantime, 18 percent has high school diploma; while, 16.7 percent lower education level. Illiterate people constitute the rest 8.3 percent.

3- Occupation of respondents relatively is 27.1 percent students, 26.6 percent self-employer, 25.5 percent unemployed, 10.7 percent laborer, and 10.2 percent retired people.

4- Majority of respondents live in apartment (67.2 percent), while the others live in villa (32.8 percent).

5- Regarding household members, considering 384 respondents, 39.6 percent have one to three people, 46.1 percent have four to five people, and 14.3 percent have more than six people under the same roof.

Hypothesis testing and analysis of research findings

Investigating normality of research variables:

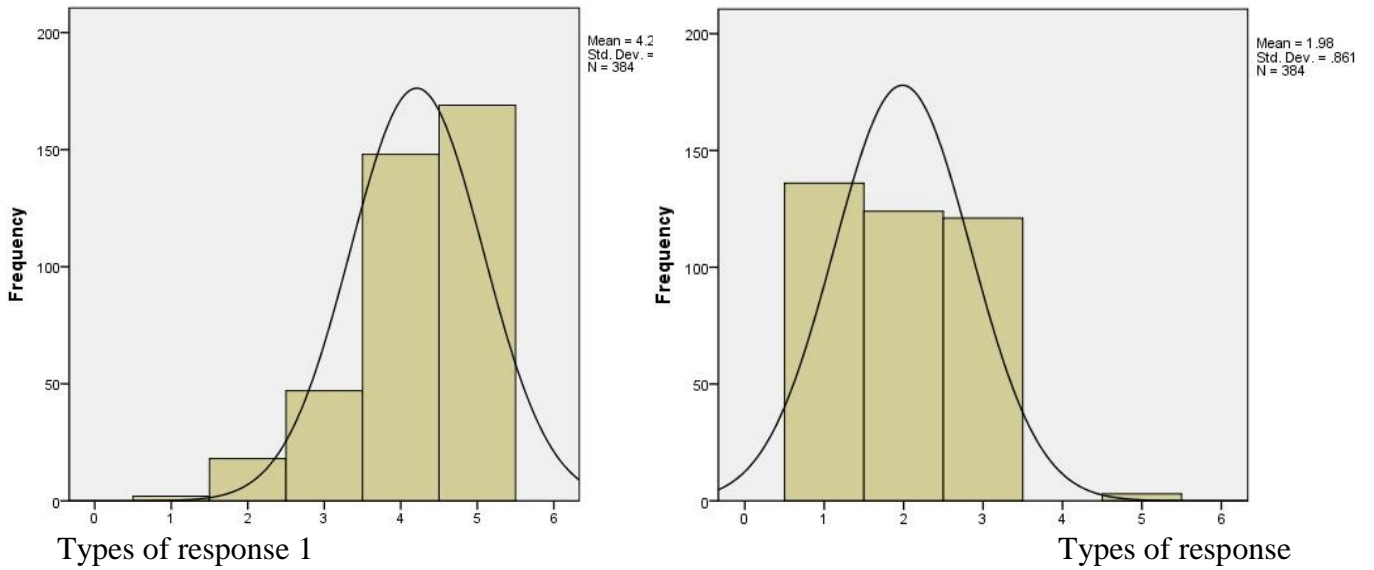
1- Frequency distribution of responses to the effect of recommendations:

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

The main hypothesis: measurement criteria of public welcome from urban parks									
Variable	Indices	N	Normal mean	Parameters Std. Deviation	Most Extreme Absolute	Differences		Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
						Negative	Positive		
The effect of public recommendations in designing urban parks		384	4.21	0.869	0.259	0.181	-0.259	5.074	0.000
The welcome of designers and officials from public recommendations in designing urban parks		384	1.98	0.861	0.228	0.228	-0.204	4.462	0.000

Table 1. "Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for investigating normality of data distribution"

2- Frequency distribution of responses to welcome the designers and officials



2

As the results in Table 1 show, in the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test for variables related to main hypothesis, significant level was lower than permissible error margin (0.05), and it cannot be assumed normal the distribution of data. For this reason, it can be used the binomial nonparametric test for test of main hypothesis.

Hypotheses

Fist Hypothesis

H1 – Public recommendations are effective in designing urban parks.

H0 – Public recommendations are not effective in designing urban parks.

		Categor	N	Observed Pr	Test Pro	Asymp. Sig.(2-tailed)
the effectiveness of public recommendations in designing urban parks	Group	3=>	67	0.17	0.50	0.000a
	Group	3<	317	0.83		
	Total		484	1.00		

Table 2. "Results of frequency test of medium to higher responses on the effectiveness of public recommendations in designing urban parks"

Since the data distribution is not normal in this hypothesis, so to test this hypothesis, the binomial non-parametric distribution was used. Results in Table (2) show that the frequency of responses is more than the average with 317 cases (83%); while only 67 cases (17%) are below the average. Considering that the significance level is lower than 0.05, so difference of frequency of two groups from responses is statistically meaningful. Therefore, the null hypothesis based on "public recommendations are not effective in designing urban parks" is rejected.

Second Hypothesis

H1 – Designers and officials don't welcome public recommendations in designing urban parks.

H0 - Designers and officials welcome public recommendations in designing urban parks.

		Category	N	Observed Pr	Test Pro	Asymp. Sig.(2-tailed)
Welcome of designers and officials from public recommendations designing urban parks	Group	3=>	381	0.99	0.50	0.000a
	Group	3<	3	0.01		
	Total		384	1.00		

Table 3. Results of frequency test of medium and higher responses about designers and officials welcome public recommendations in designing urban parks

Since the data distribution is not normal in this hypothesis, so to test this hypothesis, the binomial non-parametric distribution was used. Results of Table 3 show that the frequency of responses is less than the average with 381 cases (99%); while others have only 3 cases (01%). Considering that the significant level is lower than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis based on "designers and officials welcome public recommendations in designing urban parks" is rejected.

The fundamental point in this research is priorities that are effective in increasing the public recommendations on urban parks. The results of the data analysis of the factors affecting in increasing public welcome from urban parks that is in Table 4, show that among the 17 factors considered, the highest value in sequence (3 major factors) "the appropriate landscape as exist a variety of trees, ponds or artificial lakes-physical and financial security in the park-attention to different age groups

and their needs in the design of the park "with average ratings of respectively 12.36, 11.85, and 10.73 and the least important factor in increasing the public welcome from urban parks has been "construct buildings to connect people with the city authorities" with average rating 3.10.

Factors affecting	Mean	FRIEDM	CHI-SQUA	DF	ASYMP.S
Appropriate landscape as exist diverse trees, ponds or artificial lake	12.36	1	1.610E3	16	0.000
Physical and financial security in the park	11.85	2			
Attention to different age groups and their needs in the design of the park	10.73	3			
Night lighting diversity	10.36	4			
Sense of cooperation and empathy of people in the park, such as compliance of other conditions, collaborating with park personnel, pour litter in the trash	10.16	5			
Breakdown of private spaces and solitude of crowds and noisy places	10.05	6			
Sports services such as sports halls, children's playgrounds, sports equipment	9.70	7			
Being close to public transport and taxi services	9.47	8			

Using different colors in space	9.22	9			
Utilities such as restaurant, parking lot, shop, accommodation space of travelers, etc.	9.06	10			
Breakdown service spaces, welfare, sports, etc.	8.28	11			
The park compatibility with surrounding users (ie, placement of compatible users together and incompatible apart from each other)	8.10	12			
Educational and exhibition spaces within the park	7.97	13			
Having a zoo away from the gathering place and resting of tourists	7.72	14			
Using architectural elements and sculpture	7.48	15			
Different designs and attractive in flooring	7.4	16			
Construct buildings to connect people with city officials	3.10	17			

Table 4. Results of rating Friedman to compare the factors affecting public welcome in urban parks

Conclusions and Providing Solution

Considering that green space is considered as a part of the living space of city, planning, design and scientific management are necessary issues. Urban green space has always been as an element for regulation and harmonizing the different users in physical of city and a factor in beauty of environment and pleasant of living space. The majority of urban green space is formed by parks that follow social, cultural, economic, environmental efficiency as well as mental health of citizens, which is why it is important to evaluate it in the cities.

The present research is conducted in order to achieve public preferences and users of the park, as well as evaluate the preferences in order to achieve the appropriate criteria of designing about urban parks to individual or user who consider themselves as a part of that space. In this article we had two main hypotheses: 1) Public recommendations are effective in designing urban parks and 2) Designers and officials don't welcome public recommendation in designing urban parks that according to the survey which took place, these two hypotheses were positive in the view of people.

The most important recommendation for managing parks in urban planning is the use of the preferences of users of the parks in the planning and designing of parks. Any decision in designing and creating space in urban parks must be made comply with the demands, interests, experiences and the values of citizenship otherwise it would not have good result and confronted with their lack of interest. According to this study, three main factors that are effective in increasing public recommendations on urban parks include: 1) using appropriate landscape as diverse trees, ponds and artificial lake; 2) providing physical and financial security in the park; and 3) giving attention to different age groups and their needs in the design of the park, which should be considered in the design of urban parks with other identified factors that were expressed in this study.

Urban parks as vital pulse of a city require attention and sympathy of everyone in society. In order to achieve this goal, by standing the results of this study, we provide some recommendations:

- Landscaping to enhance the quality of beauty of the park is important by using diverse vegetation, ponds or artificial lake as well as the use of natural elements for design facilities and accessories of park. Benefiting from natural and homogeneous materials improve the quality of the landscape.

- The necessary measures must be taken to control and protect the safety and security inside of the park, such as stationing guards in different parts of the park, not using mass planting, allowing enough space to observe between of trees, lightening pathways and around of the parks, as well as monitoring the performance of active units within urban parks.
- Paying attention to different age groups and their needs on the design of the park is also important.
- Due to the high volume of referrals and exposure in traffic routes, transportation services should be predicted to facilitate the movement of citizens as well as a car park be designed with more capacity and in a good location within the parks.
- Create cultural pavilions in the parks to provide cultural products including publications, authoring and media products.
- Create trade stands as small economic units to provide services to citizens, and create jobs through this such as craft booths.
- Create advertising stations to educate social challenges facing citizens and families, such as familiarity with drug addiction issue and other social anomalies that threaten the family center.
- Create health stations in parks for education and publication of culture of health in society in the form of teaching healthy eating, encourage exercise and spread it, provide guidelines for the prevention and treatment of common diseases and disorders in the community.
- To achieve the preferences of citizens and users of parks, designers and planners can classify parks in several zones, and design each zone based on the tastes and preferences of citizens.

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