

Received: 11 November 2022 Accepted: 28 March, 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/rr.v8i4.118>

A Critical Review of Parks as Urban Public Spaces

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Abstract

Urban public spaces play a major role in the city development and towns. It is a major component defining the built mass and urban fabric of the city. The life, form, and experience of towns and cities are greatly influenced by open spaces on a global scale. Recently, there has been a more significant focus on the necessity of reclaiming the sense of community that we somehow lost when we stopped engaging in social activities and stopped frequently going to the neighbourhood gathering spots. This paper classifies various typologies of urban public spaces and different types of parks at the macro and micro levels. Further, this study understands and explores the status of parks at the micro level to derive the issues and concerns in neighbourhood urban green spaces. The exploratory study has been adopted to identify the existing issues faced by users and the impact they have on parks.

Keywords: *Urban Public Spaces; Urban Green Spaces; Parks; Typology; Issues*

Introduction

Open Public Spaces play a major role in city development and towns. It is a major component defining the built mass and urban fabric of the city. The life, form, and experience of towns and cities are greatly influenced by open spaces on a global scale. Urban open space is essential because it offers social, health, and economic benefits as well as environmental and environmental benefits (Howard, 2013). If the space is of high quality, people have been seen to use it more frequently for physical activity. Additionally, living close to open public spaces like parks, green spaces, and other open spaces has major health advantages (Vadim Saraev, 2015). According to the Charter of Public Space “Publicly owned areas, are open to the public, free to use, and unrestricted by commercial interests are known as open public spaces” (Carmona, 2019). All people, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, have access to public spaces (Sciences, 2008). Public networks, such as public transportation, and public buildings for cultural and religious practices should be well connected to public spaces. The architectural proportions of the buildings that surround and enclose open spaces, the type and variety of activities, human scale, and attractive landscape design to satisfy the quantity and quality needs of the local community are all necessary for open spaces to draw people (Lai et al., 2020).

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Recently, there has been a more significant focus on the necessity of reclaiming the sense of community that we somehow lost when we stopped engaging in social activities and stopped frequently going to the neighbourhood gathering spots. Neighbourhood parks are important "Spaces," or public areas with scenic relief that promote cross-cultural exchange and environmental sustainability.

Literature Review

Typology of Open Public Spaces at City Level

Open Public Spaces can be categorized broadly into three major parts privately owned, semi-privately and publicly owned (Stanley et al., 2012) (Figure 1).

1. Privately owned open public spaces

Despite being privately owned, privately- owned open public space is a type of public space that, following a city's zoning ordinance or another land-use law, must be accessible to the general public. These types of spaces cover institutes, university campuses and housing estates.

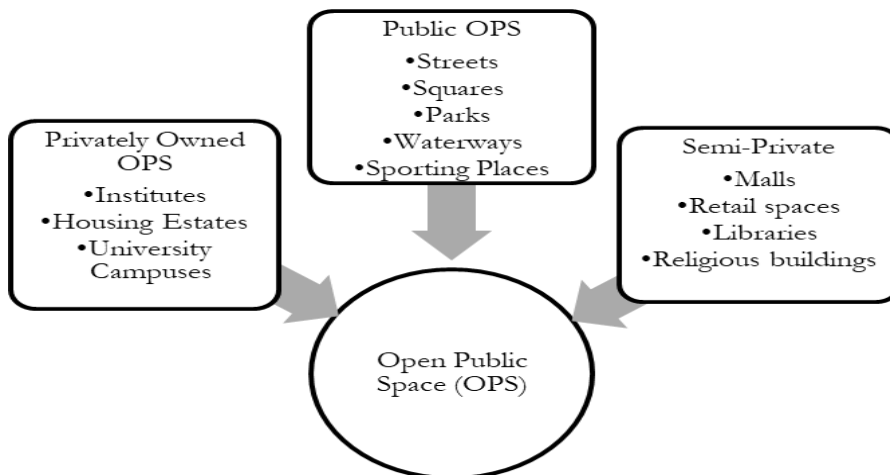


Figure 1. Typology of Open Public Spaces at City Level

Source: Prepared by the Author

2. Semi-privately owned open public spaces

A semi-private space is a portion of the urban surroundings that tend to be private and that a member of the general public will only enter if they have a reason to do so. Even though this

area may be small and only differ from the paved public street, we tend to be socially programmed to only use a surface (a gravel path and grass lawn, for example) when we are on the owner's property. The benefits of semi-public spaces include safer public access and the ability to safeguard slightly more delicate environments from vandalism and other forms of abuse. It includes retail spaces, libraries, malls and religious buildings.

3. Publicly owned open public spaces

An area that is accessible and open to the public is known as a public space. Public spaces include streets (including paved ones), public plazas, parks, and beaches. It is customary to imprecisely refer to other concepts as "public space," such as "meeting place," which is a subset of the more expansive notion of social space. Public areas have frequently been praised as democratic gathering places and forums for political engagement where various groups can speak up for their rights. People and cities can be connected in public spaces. It promotes harmonious coexistence and reflects diversity, which invites people to live on the streets by establishing the conditions for permanence.

Parks and other open public areas are regarded as the neighbourhoods' lungs, providing a place for residents to breathe, unwind, and feel at home. Prominent open spaces or civic areas that serve the needs of the locals and the urban population help to create vibrant urban areas.

Categorization of Parks

The National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) further categorized parks at the Macro level and Micro Level referenced from Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) guidelines (Figure 2.).

Macro level parks cover City Parks, Community parks, District parks, and Specialized parks.

City Parks include historical sites, ecological preserves, and urban forests are all included in city parks. These parks cater to a population of 10,00,000 people and are assigned an area of 10,00,000 sqm. These parks typically include a multipurpose field and an 80,000-square-meter play area.

The district park caters to a population of about 5,00,000 people. This must include a park of about 2,50,000 sqm and a multipurpose ground of 40,000 sqm.

The community park caters to a population of 100,000 with a space of around 50,000 sqm. Additionally, It also has a 20,000 sqm multipurpose area that can be utilized for cultural activities and social occasions. It also includes space for a play.

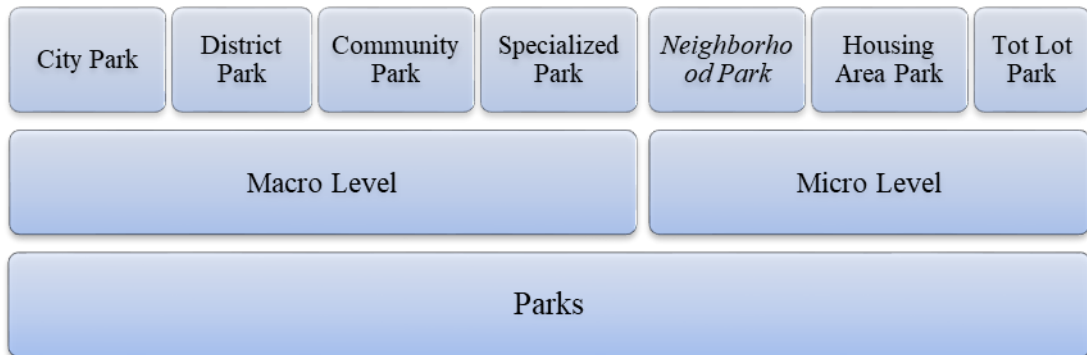


Figure 2. Categorization of Parks

Source: Prepared by the Author

Specialized parks include historic places, art galleries, parks with rich wildlife, etc. Their sizes vary and are close to a district park or a city park. These parks include identified play spaces for children within the boundary.

Micro Level parks cover Neighborhood Parks, Housing Area Parks and Tot Lot Parks.

A broad category catering to a population of 10,000 under which the following are the two kinds of parks that are included: a). Neighborhood Park 10,000 sqm b). Neighbourhood playground – 5000 to 10,000 sqm.

A cluster of play spaces catering to a population of 5000. The housing area parks must be located around the inner streets. There can be up to 2 housing area parks with a total area of 5000 sqm in a neighbourhood.

Tot lots are small parks in the middle of the neighbourhood, or small parking spaces, leftover spaces turned into play areas for children within the 0–5-year age group of 125 sqm. Tot lots should be easily accessible (not more than a 10-minute walk away), so they can be an important part of everyday children’s play.

Issues Prevailing in Parks

Many cities in India are facing various problems such as issues with congestion, slums, pollution, and transportation and infrastructure. These conditions have made people's lives in Indian cities extremely chaotic. As there are no recreational activities in the vicinity at the neighbourhood level, due to which there is no proper connectivity which leads to a lack of sense of belongingness. Low-income groups find it difficult to locate recreational areas in cities, whereas people from wealthy backgrounds can sustain the construction of exquisite public spaces in their cities (Turna & Bhandari, 2022). Public authorities have a responsibility to offer public places for all, and all residents should be able to feel at ease in the city (Siregar, 2014). Low-income residents of the city reside in cramped quarters and depend on large public areas like green parks and commercial space for their livelihood (Chaudhry et al., 2015). The wasteful use of open space is a result of poor or absent facilities and amenities. There are no sights to see, there are no or poor connections to some locations, and there is a possibility of insecurity because there is insufficient nighttime lighting and overgrown vegetation needs to be removed. A few inconsistently applied components were also mentioned. Estate residents struggle to find parking as a result of an increase in personal vehicles and must rely on usable open spaces (Sharma, 2021). Size, design, landscape design of a park, lighting, and decorative elements like sculptures or water features are also important design elements. It is also likely that strategically placing park attractions like seats near a play area or drinking water amenities near sports fields is critical. Women living in high-poverty neighbourhoods use parks less for physical activity than men (Fontán-Vela et al., 2021). (Ujang & Moulay, 2018) further stated that Secluded areas encourage misuse, posing threats to pedestrians using footpaths and adjoining property. Poor infrastructure draws people away from parks. Due to a lack of safety and variety of activities, there is a lack of belongingness (Taylor et al., 2020). Some neighbourhoods do not have parks in the vicinity which can adversely affect residents' health (Sciences, 2008).

Methodology

Various research papers related to open public spaces and parks from journal databases (Scopus, WoS, Google Scholar etc) and websites were reviewed. Structured content analysis was used as a research tool to identify various issues that are existing in parks. Further, a reconnaissance survey was done to check the ground reality of parks. Participant observation and qualitative analysis have been done in a few neighbourhood parks of Mohali, a satellite town of Chandigarh.

Research Context

Chandigarh is a planned city based on the neighbourhood pattern so the scope of work is very less whereas Mohali being a satellite town has organic growth, due to which for the better quality of life which is missing right now there is a dire need to strengthen the open public spaces at neighbourhood level i.e. Parks. According to the Census 2011, Mohali's population is 1,77,000, so Mohali can be categorized as Medium Town II (URDPFI). There are a total of 400 parks in Mohali (GMADA, 2006). For the rocky survey parks of Mohali were chosen as the study area. From the below pictures of Mohali parks (Figure 3-6), various issues (Figure 7) were seen such as lack of maintenance, absence of physical infrastructure, poor maintenance of landscape elements, absence of walking trails which acts as crime spots, acts as dark areas in the built environment. Various other alarming issues that can be seen in the parks of Mohali are that due to poor infrastructure crime rate is more in these areas, illegal development is seen in the areas which are proposed for parks by various developers, no segregated spaces for different types of the user group, lack of basic amenities was observed in many parks.



Figure 3. Absence of physical infrastructure elements (Sector 54, Mohali)



Figure 4. Poor maintenance of landscape elements (Sector 53, Mohali)



Figure 5. Absence of walking trails which act as spots for crime (Sector 55 Mohali)



Figure. 6 Built environment near the park (Sector 63 Mohali)

So, from the above visual survey, it is proved that the parks of Mohali need to strengthen the utilization of parks for attaining quality of life in this medium town.



Figure 7. Major concerns about parks through reconnaissance survey

Source: Prepared by the Author

Conclusion

Residents demand communities that are aesthetically pleasing, socially appropriate, and cater to the needs of the people who live there," (DigitalCommons et al., 1977). As the visual has a greater influence on one's mind, many indicators are crucial in developing effective neighbourhoods that will act as a catalyst to draw in people of all ages. The relationship between the amount of commitment to a place, in this case, community parks, and the intensity of use, which in turn increases park utilisation, is discussed in this research paper. It also aids in understanding why similar urban recreational parks located in various locations experience varying user involvement, resulting in one park being overused compared to the other, while having insufficient access to the fundamental components of outdoor recreation. To prevent people from getting bored of frequent parks for the same activities, we also need to enhance our parks to be more dynamic and fascinating by incorporating artificial intelligence and digitalization, which can significantly alter how one perceives a park.

So, this study advocates that we need to design the parks as resilient and inclusive to increase the footfall in these spaces which are also known as the lungs of cities.

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