



SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CENTER

International Journal of Scientific Studies

ISSN 2348-3008

Volume 1, Issue 2, pp. 28-42

An Analysis of the Social Functions of the Parks from the Viewpoint of the Citizens

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Abstract

By the development and extension of city life, human beings have been gradually far from natural environment, and building human-made spaces has revealed more environmental, sensual, and spiritual needs of theirs. Generally speaking, the function of landscape gardening in the cities is in such a way that its underestimation would not make the cities be stable. Among the most important issues of stable cities, is social stabilization. Each of the people of a society would make the social capital and are the supply of social and human resources. Development could both improve and destroy such social resources (Shakouyi, 1373). As a result, if parks would be considered essential, as parts of the city area with the function of city service, they could not be separated from the needs of urban society. Hence, landscape gardening should be developed based on the needs of the society, in terms of quality and quantity. There are two parks in the town of Qaemshahr, which are almost designed, and being of 5.2 Hectares along with the general landscape of the city. The landscape budget of the town is 0.33 (2001). In the present research, there has been an attempt at analyzing the qualitative and quantitative development of the parks. As a result, the research hypothesis would be as follow: There would be a significant relationship between the development of parks and the social data of the citizens. The population of the study includes the citizens of three urban areas, among which there were 300 samples, for each there were 100 subjects questioned. The gathered data resulted from the subjects in relation to the urban parks of Qaemshahr, indicated the prioritization of all the gender and age groups to the family recreation in the parks, a direct correlation between the distance between the parks and the how many times a week they would go to the parks. Most of the subjects were more interested in going to local parks. Moreover, the elements and parts of the urban parks were assessed of moderate level by the subjects in Qaemshahr. Totally, the results show a significant relationship between the development of the parks and the social functions.

Keywords: development of the urban parks, social function, Qaemshahr

1. Introduction

The cumulative urban development in all the cities of the world, including Iran, is among the inevitable results of the age of knowledge and technique. Nowadays, the unbalanced development of the cities has increased the negative side effects of the development of the urban living, among which not stability is of highest importance.

The irregular extension and urban non stability, have caused increase in suburban living, destroying the urban landscape, and increasing the request for urban grounds; which is itself the basis for the destroy of urban landscape and the functional change in such grounds. Being a part of the city view, landscape gardening is among the real phenomena, which is of the first issues that human being has always been dealing with.

With the development of the urban living, human beings have been gradually far from the nature, and the overload of the population, interference in the natural environment, and making human-made areas have increased the environmental, physical, and spiritual needs of human beings. In order to meet such needs, urban human has embarked on making artificial gardens and landscapes inside the cities.

Thoughtful human would attempt at calling upon the natural resuscitative works from

which he has been left away, although accepting its high cost (Sa'eednia, 26, 2004). The most important effect of the gardening landscape and parks in the cities is the environmental function, which would make the cities significant as human environment, as well as struggling against the negative effects of the irregular urban development as well as increasing the living quality in the cities. The items related to the effects of the irregular developments of the cities could harm the biological system of the cities in various ways.

Generally, the function of the parks in the cities is in a way that it is inevitable to keep the cities stable without them. In other words, lack of fulfillment of the above issues, would question the urban stability, which is actually keeping and using the resources without harming the needs of the future generation. Among the most essential issues in a city, are the social functions. Each person of the society is among the social and human capital of it.

Development could either reinforce or harm such social resources (Shakouyi, 1993). Social needs include meeting basic needs, seeking justice, physical and mental wellness of the population, keeping cultural and biological heritage in a people-oriented way, and finally improving life conditions. It would also relate the design of the public places with the social wellness, the enthusiasm of the citizens. Improving the social conditions of the city involves stable urban economy and environment (register, 2002).

Therefore, if a park is valued as a part of the city area through its city service function; it could not be considered separate from the needs of urban society. Hence,

parks must be built qualitatively and quantitatively in accordance with the physical space of the city (buildings, streets, and roads) and the society needs (in terms of psychological aspects, passing leisure time, and hygiene), with regards to its ecological conditions, and its future development procedure. As a result, it could have environmental and stable output as an active landscape gardening.

With regards to the mentioned issues, the attention and specialty of the urban management would be essential for the precise management and planning of the urban parks (Majnounian, 45,1994). Consequently, in order to have dynamic urban society, the need for the identification and reinforcement of the social functions of the landscape gardening in the cities seems essential, among which is the quality and quantity of urban parks. Qaemshahr has two parks which are approximately designed; one of which is 28000 square meters and the other being 2676 square meters.

Hence, total area devoted to the urban parks in the city is about 3.5 hectares as well as the total area for the general landscape gardening being about 1.97 hectares. The total area devoted to the parks and general landscape in Qaemshahr would be 5.20 hectares, with a capitation of 0.33 for each individual (1999). Regarding the recommended landscape gardening capitation of 9 meters for our country Iran and on the other hand, the climatic condition of Mazandaran that benefits from the essential potential for having stable urban landscape gardening development.

In the present research, the clarification of the social indexes from the viewpoints of the citizens and the qualitative and quantitative development of the urban parks in terms of social benefits in Qaemshahr would be analyzed. Moreover, there would be an applicable plan given for a rather stable landscape gardening in the city.

2. Theoretical support

What is considered a crisis for our cities in the beginning of the 21st century and would make the view of the cities ugly and disorganized, and has made the citizens bored, tired and annoyed, is the gradual deterioration of the connection between human beings and nature. In fact, there has been little attention paid to this issue along with urban development and urbanization (Zangi Abadi and Mokhtari Malak Abadi, 2004).

According to this, the thinkers have considered the reinforcement of the connection between human beings and nature as one of the major ways of solving urban problems. In the late 19th century, among the solutions recommended for many of the problems of living in the cities, was creating cities similar to gardens, which was suggested by English person, Ebenezer Howard (Shahivandi, 1385). He suggested three magnets of city, village, and rural-city. He maintained that the magnet of the city-village was the guarantee of a wealthy human life.

Chicago School, which is also called environmentology, has a controversial and critical approach toward the matter of the relationship between mankind and urban environment (Howard, 1989). Such attitude would consider the city as a geographical extension, in which the ecological procedures such as plant and animal society would take place. The main social motivations for the followers of such a school are the cumulative growth of the urban population, entrance of the emigrants, heterogeneous population, and social separation.

Lokorbuzieh, has valued urban landscapes a lot and maintained that in each residential unit of urban area, landscape gardening should also be taken into account (Tavasoli, 2005). The ability of the general landscape gardening as the natural painkillers in urban areas (among which stress is an important general aspect), is quite essential (Hekmati, 1991).

Considering the necessity of the position of general landscape gardening and parks in the cities, the author believes that urban landscape is a kind of functional level of urban area with human-made plant covering, which involves both social and ecological output. Paying attention to the humanistic dimension in the urban landscape planning and design is necessary for the elaboration on the aforementioned social and functional effect of the. Hence, in the beginning, the recognition and introduction of the social effects of the urban landscape gardening seems essential in order to reach urban stability.

The analyses show that recognizing the social conditions at the level of urban society is in line with the concept of life quality and wellness. In fact, it would be accessed through the indexes as the accessibility to hygienic, educational, housing, security services, as well as income and the degree of deprivation (Bryden, 9, 2002). As a result, the social stability in the urban areas would be defined as healthy lifestyle through meeting basic needs of the urban society individuals, considering the lifestyle quality and in line with maintaining environmental quality, related to the economical systems on the way to access the highest level of life satisfaction.

By such a meaning, social wellness and stability would not be stable without the environmental health and economical dynamism; meaning that the above goal would be reached though the interaction between the three factors of stability (Torjman, 2, 2002). The domain of the present study is Qaemshahr. The main motivation for selecting such a research topic and area is deep rooted in the studies and experiences of the author in the town.

Considering the special geographical situation and natural potentials, the town lacks enough urban landscape gardening qualitatively and quantitatively (only 2 approximately designed parks and about 0.33 capitations per individual). Therefore, regarding the probable relationship between the developments of the parks and the social conditions in order to improve social indexes through the development of the parks, regarding the process of global thoughts, including Ebenezer Howard, Chicago School, City Park Theory, along with the internal experiences of the theoretical background of the study have been discussed. As a result, recognizing the effect of landscape gardening in the social conditions is an effective action for the stability of the landscape in Qaemshahr.

3. Research method

In this study, clarification of the social indexes as well as the qualitative and quantitative development of the urban parks from the viewpoint of the citizens of Qaemshahr is analyzed. As a result, an effective action and applicable plan would be provided to have stable urban landscape gardening. According to this, the main research question is as follows:

- What are the roles of the urban parks in social conditions from the viewpoint of the citizens?

The population in this research includes three urban districts of Qaemshahr. The statistical features and analyzed samples in each district include 100 citizens who were randomly analyzed. With regards to the nature of this study, data gathering was done through the two methods of library research and case study. Using the library method, the available theories and approaches for the development of the landscape and its social functions were dealt with.

In order for the data collection about the area, there were some documents, maps, statistics, and reports of various organizations were used. Another part was done through questionnaire. In this research, a questionnaire on the role of the parks in the social conditions from the viewpoint of the citizens was used.

4. Results

The resulted data from the answers of the subjects in the three urban districts were applied in order to determine the characteristics of the parks in Qaemshahr. There was an attempt at having a general analysis to, the framework of gender and age of the people's coming to the parks, the number of their going there, their distance to the parks, and interest in the various types of urban parks. Consequently, using the results of this analysis, the required actions for developing the parks, planning for its

development, and recognizing the shortcomings in the cultural, service, and recreational, etc. activities would be done.

4.1. Distinction between the subjects based on gender and age

Analyzing the answers of the participants based on their age and gender indicated that in all the groups, familial rest was of the most percentage of the reason of going to the parks. Of course, as for the males, gathering together with friends was almost of high percentage of the reasons (45%). As for the female subjects, hanging out with friends in the parks was also of the second highest rank. The least reason for going to the parks in all the ages of males and females was visiting people and making friends with others.

Table 1. the reason of going to the parks based on gender and age groups

female		Male								reason do you like to go to the parks ?	o w
Nu mbe r of peop le	Perce ntage	Nu mbe r of peop le	perce ntage	Nu mbe r of peop le	perce ntage	Nu mbe r of peop le	perce ntage	Nu mbe r of peop le	perce ntage		
19	14.7	31	18.7	7	20	13	12.7	30	18.7	walki ng	1
6	4.4	6	3.6	.	.	2	1.9	10	1.6	Study ing and readi ng	2
30	22.3	45	27.2	12	34.2	24	23.5	39	24.07	Gath ering with frien d	3

4	2.9	8	4.8	.	.	4	3.9	8	4.9	Visiting people and making friends with others	4
45	33.5	43	26	10	28.6	31	30.3	47	29.01	Hanging out and familial rest	5
15	11.1	15	9	9	28	21	20.5	8	4/9	Games and exercise	6
9	6.7	3	1.8	2	5.8	3	2.9	7	4.3	Taking the children to play	7
6	4.4	14	8.4	3	8.6	4	3.9	13	8	others	8
134	100	165	100	35	100	102	100	162	100	Total	

4.2. The degree of using parks based on gender groups

With regards to answers of the subjects, the highest percentage of using the parks in the various ages was less than a week for the males and females, which is in positive correlation with their distance to the parks. Moreover, the ones who go there more than three times and once to three times, were mostly the ones living in the neighborhood. Of course, considering the elements of the urban parks, the frequency of going to the parks less than once a week, could be because of lack of satisfaction from the sections and parts of the urban parks of the study.

2. The degree of using the parks based in gender and age

female		male		46and above		31- 45		15- 30		How often do you go to the parks in a week?	Row
Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage		
79	59.8	103	62.4	16	47.05	59	57.8	107	66.4	Less than Once	1
45	34.09	51	30.9	12	35.2	40	39.2	44	27.3	Once to Three Times	2
8	6	11	6.6	6	17.6	3	2.9	10	6.2	More than Three Times	3
132	100	165	100	34	100	102	100	161	100	Total	

4.3.The distance between the subjects' home to the parks, based on gender and age groups

Analyzing the answers of the subjects, considering the two parks of the study in the town, the highest percentage of the distance was given to more than three kilometers,

which is in positive correlation with the degree of using the park, in that the ones living within less than 1 km were going to the urban parks once to three times.

Table 3. the distance between the subjects to the parks based on age and gender groups

Female										far is your home from the park?	w
Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage	Number of People	Percentage		
34	25.3	61	27.7	20	58.8	30	29.1	45	27.7	Less than 1 Km	1
48	35.8	52	31.3	9	26.4	36	34.9	55	33.9	1 to 3 Km s	2
52	38.8	53	31.9	6	17.6	37	2.9	62	38.2	More than 3 Km s	3
134	100	169	100	34	100	103	100	162	100	Total	

4.4. The kinds of parks used based on gender and age groups

The answers from the subjects, showed the highest percentage in the males and females and various age groups to the parks based on the district. As for the age group of 15-30 years old, the second priority was given to the local parks. However, as for the other age groups, local area, zone, district, and neighborhood were successively

showing the order of their interest in the parks. Furthermore, this order was followed in the gender groups of males and females.

Table 4. the type of the parks used based on gender and age groups

Female		Male		46and Above		31 - 45		15- 30		kind of parks do you like most?	R o w
Perce ntage	Num ber of Peop le	Perce ntage	Num ber of Peop le	Perce ntage	Perce ntage	Num ber of Peop le	Perce ntage	Num ber of Peop le	Perce ntage		
17	12.6	21	12.8	5	14.2	13	12.8	20	12.4	Neighbo rhood	1
58	0.43	62	38	16	45.7	50	49.5	54	33.5	Local	2
28	20.8	43	26.3	7	20	23	22.7	44	27.3	Zone	3
28	20.8	37	26.6	7	20	15	14.8	43	26.7	Disctric t	4
134	100	163	100	35	100	101	100	161	100	Total	

4.5. Assessing the degree of the citizens' satisfaction of the conditions of the urban parks

In this part, the degree of the citizens' satisfaction of the urban parks in terms of the facilities and needs of a park are analyzed and the results are qualitatively presented. This analysis includes 4 different states (rather favorable, favorable, moderate, and unfavorable). Using the analysis, the positive and negative points of the parks were revealed, which could be used to attract more people to the parks.

Table 5. analyzing the satisfaction degree from the park elements

Analyzing the Satisfaction Degree of the Parks' Sections				Satisfaction Degree				Sections	The element
Unfavorable	Moderate	Favorable	Rather Favorable	Bad	Moderate	Good	Great		
			*	7	28.1	45.8	19	Library	Cultural Facilities
*				43.6	39.7	15.1	1.7	News Stand	
*				42.06	39.6	·	·	Amphitheatre	
	*			17.1	37	37.3	8.6	Praying Room	Service
	*			20.9	42.9	31.1	5.1	Café and Restaurant	
	*			31.5	45.4	17.3	5.8	Information Office	
	*			22.68	34.7	29.2	9.3	Set of games	Games
	*			40.9	46	10.7	2.4	Characters (elements and statues)	Visual Arts
	*			18.2	48.8	27.8	5.2	Social-Cultural	Security
	*			25.2	48.3	24.8	1.7	Facilities	
	*			29.1	39.9	26.7	4.4	Games	
	*			20.6	42.6	32	4.8	Centality (possibly to be localized using landscape gardening of urban places)	Localization the Parks
	*			20.1	45.5	30.6	3.8	Hierarchy (appropriateness of the landscape to its function based on neighborhood, locality, zone, district)	
			*	17.2	38.1	38.8	5.8	Accessibility	

			*	9.1	41.4	41.8	7.7	Benches and Recycle Bins	Furniture
			*	8.1	36.5	48	7.4	Ground and Lights	
			*	6.8	30.1	53.7	9.5	Landscape Gardening and Design	

The results of the Table 4-5 indicates that the subjects were rather satisfied with the furniture in the parks in Qaemshahr; including the benches, recycle bins, ground, light, and landscape gardening. This actually seems logical in the present research; because of repairing and building the two urban parks in the city during the recent years, as well as the attention paid to the satisfaction of the citizens.

Generally speaking, other facilities of the parks in Qaemshahr were assessed as moderate by the visitors. Just regarding the cultural facilities, the park on Sari Street has been considered unfavorable, because of having a library in a rather satisfactory status, and the condition of the security guards and amphitheatre in the parks of the city. The total park facilities of the parks in the city were considered moderate by the subjects that are very thought-provoking, regarding the few number of parks in the city.

5. Results

With regards to their few number and lack of development, along with the present population growth, the urban parks of Qaemshahr are somewhat meeting the needs of the visitors, which is mostly in case of the ones in living in the neighborhood. In this case, there are shortcomings observed, either as for the landscape gardening capitation, or cultural, social, and sport services around the city.

Regarding the case study interpretations and the precise analysis of its results, it is clear that the availability of the parks is an important attractive factor for the visitors. Since the extent of the park is not such an attractive factor, the least percentage of the visitors preferred the district parks, while the highest percentage belonged to the local parks.

According to the results, the degree of going to the park in Qaemshahr is in positive correlation with the distance to it. Besides, more interest of the subjects in family hangout in the park reveals the attention to the park as a secure environment and strong social organization from the viewpoint of the citizens. When such analysis is along with the interest of the most of the subjects of all the age and gender groups in the local parks; the procedure of creating landscape gardening in Qaemshahr from the viewpoint of the citizens, which is to create local parks, is indicated.

It is in such a framework that the use of comprehensive plans and integrating the facilities and equipping the parks is of high importance in planning. Since parks is

considered a social organization and is in close connection with the social context of the area, the relationship between the functions and application of the landscape gardening with the dynamism of the social interactions of the visitors must be taken into consideration.

What is remarkable in the evaluation of the visitors' comments as for the elements of the parks of Qaemshahris that they considered it moderate, which was along with their boredom and complete lack of satisfaction of the elements, because of the presence of the author during asking the questions. With regards to the analysis of the results, the urban parks of the city were often of green space with appropriate benches, ground, and light, which is of unfavorable social function (Table 5), in which just the library, because of being the general library in the park on Sari Street of the city, is of favorable condition.

Based on the aforementioned points, the development of the parks according to the comments of the citizens to create local parks and improve the conditions of the available parks in case of social functions. As a result, the analysis of the citizens' comments indicates a significant relationship between the development of the functional development of the parks and social conditions of the studied area. Hence, there would be some recommendations given in order for the development of landscape gardening, including increasing the quality and improving the present status and quantitative development of the urban parks, which would lead in the attraction of the citizens and fulfillment of the social functions.

6. Recommendations

- Devoting a part of the urban parks to the place for temporary exhibitions and attracting the citizens through reinforcing the show conditions
- Activating the amphitheatre, placing it in available areas, and building a light structure for its roof to be used all the year
- More attraction of the citizens toward the parks, through the qualitative and quantitative increase of the news stands
- More activation of the parks through cultural and sport matches in them
- Placing praying room in the park margins to attract the passengers and travelers inside the parks, and possibly attractive design in its structure
- Appropriate distribution of the facilities and making sensible connections between the supermarket and other spaces in the park
- If possible, making the information office of the park independent from the security guard, and placing it in a noticeable spot
- Qualitative and quantitative improvement of the play grounds of the parks, considering the needs of various age groups
- Applying modern and secure playing instruments

- Increasing the cultural aspect of the park, through using abstract paradigm or statues in the main paths
- Considering the centrality, hierarchy, and availability in the design and location of the park
- Making local parks based on the comprehensive urban designs principles
- Reinforcing the local management in the landscape gardening
- Creating social organizations in the districts, through the function of landscape gardening
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