

Parks and an Analysis of their Role in Improving the Quality of Urban Life, Using Seeking-Escaping Model. Case Study: Tehran Urban Parks

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1 ABSTRACT

Global efforts to preserve the natural environment primarily pay attention to relatively pristine ecosystems with biodiversity and the conservation of unique animal and plant species. But because of the growth of concretization and congestion in cities, and nature being neglected at the same time, the small green spaces within cities and their benefits for people get lesser attention. On one hand, green spaces improve the environmental situation of cities, and on the other they also provide suitable condition for citizens' leisure. The main goal of this paper is to review psychological and social effects of urban parks to improve citizens' quality of life through the parks attraction factors, to cover the repulsion factors of their location by using Seeking-Escaping pattern. Research findings also indicate that the citizens of Tehran, in order to find access to healthy air, family fun, gaining vitality, avoiding pollution, walking, refreshment and for escaping from the monotony of life turn to urban parks.

2 INTRODUCTION

The necessity to create new urban land uses to meet the growing needs of urban dwellers gradually reduces the share of urban green space for gardens. This leads to limited human access to nature. (Peier Moureh, J., 1994,72) Studies have shown that increasing population and expanding urbanization led to urban green spaces with hard, impermeable concrete surfaces. This process is manifesting itself, especially in developing countries and the Third World, where it is a more serious problem. (Shi, 2002, 28)

Urban green spaces provide various social, economic, and ecological purposes which include therapeutic benefits, desirable surroundings for child rearing, social integration, conservation easements, and community development potential. (Hague and Siegel, 2002; Miller, 1997; Milton, 2002). According to the subjects mentioned, this article tries to explore the rate of influence urban parks have on the quality of life of citizens in the city of Tehran when the seeking – escaping method is utilized.

3 RESEARCH LITERATURE

In order to provide a theoretical framework for the field of study and research and to achieve the desired result it was deemed necessary to focus on the main concepts and study the relationships between them and the methods used. They are briefly discussed.

Public green spaces are green spaces that have social efficiency. People use them for leisure, fun, and companionship and for social and cultural gatherings. These green spaces have been primarily designed or equipped for these purposes. Urban parks are the part of public spaces which, in addition to having the function of recreational, cultural, and environmental uses; they service different areas of the city well. (Saidnia, 1379, 32)

The highest goal of development and urban management is quality of life improvement and the happiness of citizens. Quality of life enhancement is a multidimensional discipline and includes different aspects. In general, quality of life considerations include material and immaterial issues. Physical dimensions such as life standards, infrastructure facilities, economic output, employment, prices and the like are considered. These are included in the quality of life issues such as health, entertainment, leisure, culture, art, etc. They all fit into this considered category. In non-material concepts, quality of life considerations include the personal experience of people and their understanding as well as the feedback of their real lives.

Most of the theories regarding urban space have come to similar conclusions when they considered the following beneficial features regarding the context of the quality of life: a general feeling of happiness, a

sense of positive social relationships, and the ability of individuals to achieve their potential and take hold of opportunities. Quality of life studies are a multi-dimensional discipline. Measuring the correct dimensions of the quality of life requires a broad study. In total, the quality of life studies considered variables such as health, political stability and security, family life, group living, job security, and so on.

Regarding quality of life, happiness and life satisfaction are considered as an indicator of general and mental health. In this study the quality of life and its relationship to urban parks is surveyed. Health factors, family life, and the collective experience were analyzed and the ameliorating effect of urban parks in improving these variables is measured.

Urban parks, as one of the most important public spaces in cities, have play a large role in improving social, economic, and environmental conditions of urban areas. Parallel to the growth and agglomeration of urban areas, green spaces are being considered in various communities. These green spaces are being utilized using different strategies as to their allocation and proper distribution in the developed urban environment .(Ghorbani, 1386, 54)

Scientists have come to realize that green space will help people relax more and thus reduce violence. Aside from the social and psychological benefits, urban nature provides economic benefits for managers and citizens. For example: The air purification trees provide can lead to less pollution, thus lowering the costs of reducing pollution. In addition to greater aesthetic value, historical and recreational urban parks will result in the increased use of city attractions and expanded tourism. This brings with it greater income for the city.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research data were collected from citizens of Tehran who were visitors of Jamshidieh, Laleh, Besat and Mellat parks.

In this research, seeking and escaping model are used to estimate the attraction and repulsion factors of citizens who had gone to the urban parks. In this model, description of reasons for trends or lack of trends to go to the public green spaces, questionnaire is used. To determine the sample size, necessary quorums were used to achieve the research objectives, which are as follows.

This research is descriptive and navigation. So quorums of sample size are observed for 100 people. Also the samples are selected completely, randomly and without regard of social status from visitors. Combination of questionnaires has been included in multiple choices and free questions. Questionnaire, inspiring of seeking and escaping of model, describes why people go to parks and experimental emotions of them and repulsion factors of their residence. And eventually, Likret's range method has been used to analyze the outlook of people.

Seeking in this theory means achieving personal awards in two dimensions; individual and between individual. Escape means avoiding the personal and between individual emotions and factors. Therefore, behavior of users is an interaction of avoiding forces from uneventful and stressful environment and seeking recreational space for achievement of psychological awards. In this process contacts between individual and between individual are adjusted to achieve a desirable form of social interaction. (Norman & Carlson, 2000. 27)

Psychologists have stated that motivation is an internal factor that affected on behavior of people. They have stated that the minds of most people trend toward the inner rewards. Inner rewards are divided into two groups. Gravity; about a person who has discovered his interests and has biased towards them. And repulsion; about someone who avoided something or left some daily habits.

These two types of motivational factors are affected by individual and collective factors. For this purpose, seeking and escaping model are used in this field of studies. According to this model people have tried to reduce conflicts and increase satisfaction and advantages.

5 CASE STUDIES

This paper focuses on analyzing four of the main public parks in Tehran: Jamshidiye Park, Laleh Park, Mellat park, and Be'sat Park.

Jamshidiye Park is one of the most beautiful parks in Tehran, occupying an area of about 10 hectares and limited in the north by Kolakchal Mountain. In comparison to other parks, Jamshidiye's distinctive better



weather and greater number of natural attractions accounts for the park's higher number of visitors coming from Tehran and also from surrounding cities.

On the other hand, Be'sat Park, situated adjacent to Tehran's South Bus Terminal, is mostly used by the surrounding neighborhoods and by travelers. Although it should be noted that this park, with an area of about 53 hectares, is in fact the first recreational complex established (built) in southern Tehran, it has played a significant role in social and environmental improvements in the area.

Mellat Park, located in the municipal district number three, takes up an area of about 23 hectares. Proximity to one of the main streets of the city (Valiasr Street), ease of access to public transportation, and adequate facilities are some of the characteristics which make this park attractive to a large part of the population.

Vicinity to four of the city's main streets and also museums of carpet and contemporary arts, makes Laleh Park one of the widely visited parks in the city. Laleh Park is situated in the sixth municipal district and has an area of about 35 hectares.

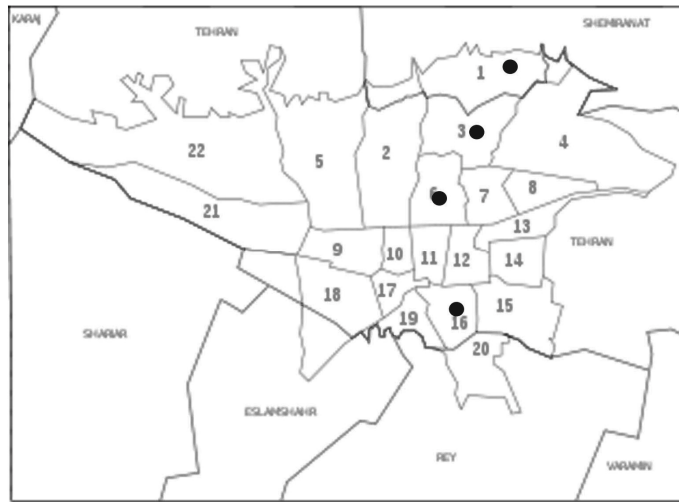


Fig. 1: Position of investigated parks in Tehran City

6 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In a survey conducted in the aforementioned parks, 70% of the participants were men. The age of participants ranged from 15 to 65. They were classified into eight groups. Most of the participants are in the 20–25 age-group with a total percentage of 27 and then there is the 25-30 class which constitutes 22% of the participants.

According to the method used in this research, the results can fall into four categories: incentives to go to the park, deficiencies in the residing area, mental effects on visitors, and advantage of parks over other Promenades.

6.1 Incentives to go to the park

People's attraction towards nature and its related activities demonstrates their need for natural places. This attraction also brings about other requirements which need to be satisfied. This kind of information can help decision makers come up with initiatives that are most relevant to the public need. To discover what incentives make people want go to parks, this question was asked: "What motivates you to come to the park?"

In analyzing the incentives, the participants were given positive and negative statements, (positive aspects of the park they visited, and negative aspects of their residing area) hence providing the data required for two of the intended categories.

Frequency analysis of the answers shows that 85% of the participants had chosen "spending time with family and friends" as one of their motivations for visiting the park. This highlights the importance of considering this aspect of social life in the city. 43% introduced "watching natural scenery" as their incentive. This

reflects man's innate need to connect with nature."Escaping a monotonous and humdrum life" is in second place with 49% suggesting people's willingness to diversify their lives.

Other motivations include: providing a place for children to play, hiking, meeting new people, and getting away from life's difficulties. All of these statements indicate the importance of public parks, therefore these motivations should be considered in the planning and designing of parks in metropolitan areas.

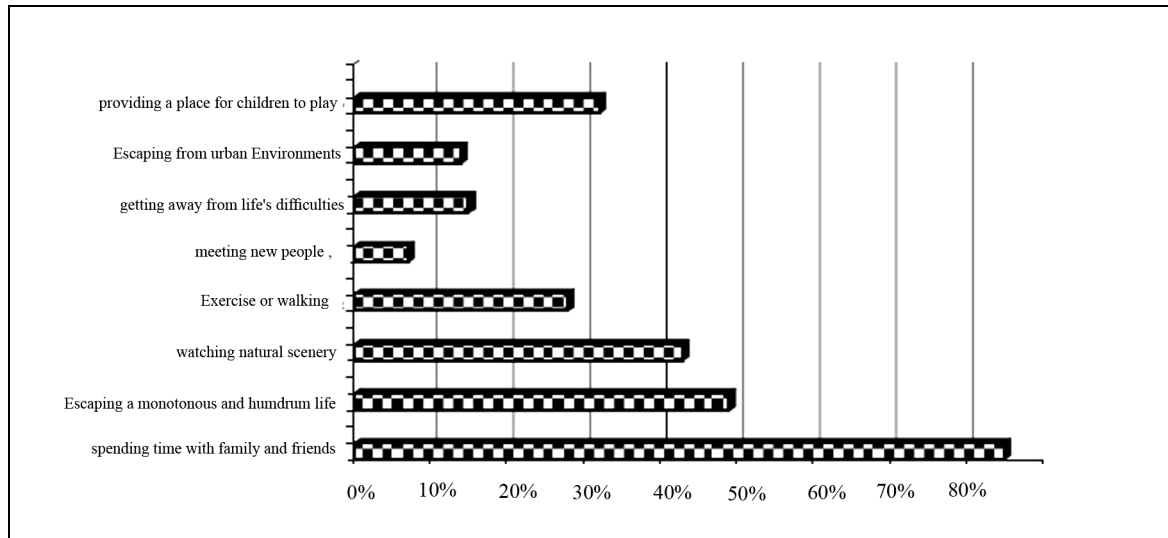


Fig.2: The main incentive for citizens to visit parks

6.2 Advantage of parks over other Promenades

According to the answers, factors such as fresh air in parks (62%), overall calmness (52%), proximity, and availability are some of the most important reasons which contribute to people choosing to spend time in parks instead of other Promenades. Having better landscapes and the ability to use parks for sport-related activities can also give prominence to public parks.

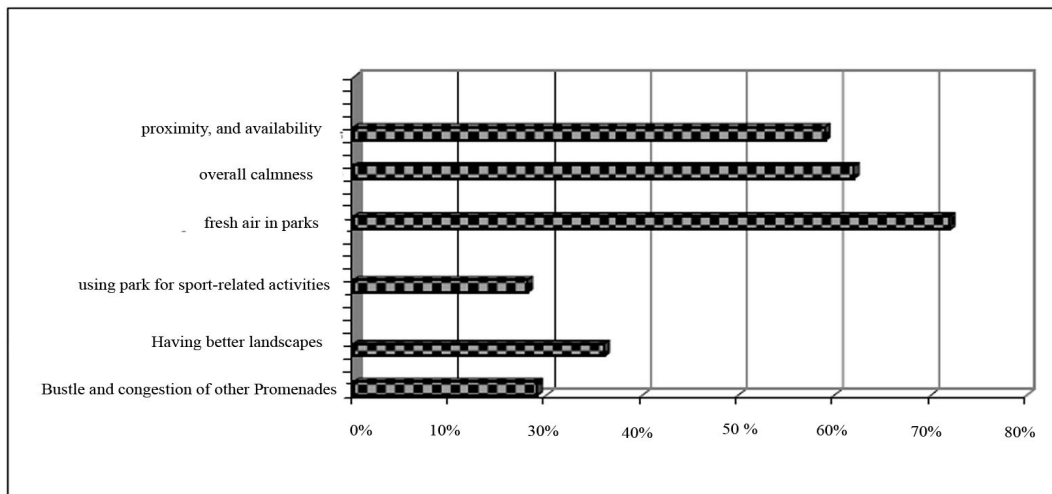


Fig.3: the reasons of Advantage of parks over other Promenades

6.3 Mental and social effects of urban parks (green spaces)

Research results discover emotional dimensions and experiences based on nature which result in advantageous feelings, and which, in the end, bring about a feeling of satisfaction and prosperity. In order to address this aspect, participants were asked to answer this question: "How do you feel about being in the park?"

"Feeling of joy and happiness and enjoying life" was chosen 64 times. Following this are: "resting and recovering" with 58% and "reliving pent up emotions" with 46% of the answers. These results indicate that



people go to parks to improve the quality of their lives. Other answers include: unifying with nature (29%), and freedom (22%), with the lowest percentage going to "feeling more self confident".

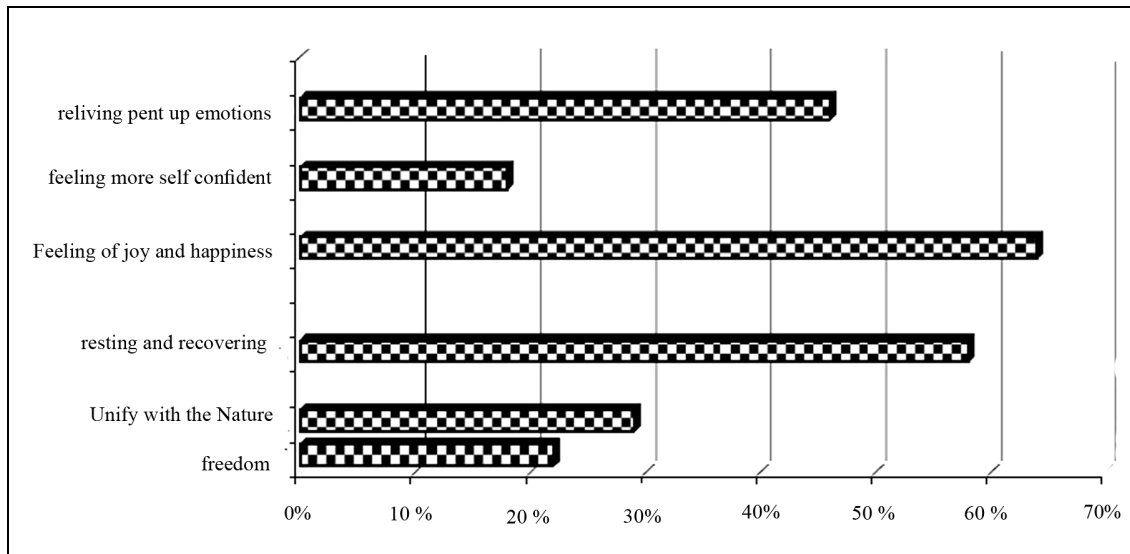


Fig.4: Feelings manifest at these parks of Tehran

6.4 Deficiencies in residing area

This part of the research is looking for characteristics that cause people to leave their dwelling area when looking for recreational activities. The question, "What makes you leave your neighborhood in your leisure time?", is targeted in this aspect of the research

Low air quality is the most important reason that drives people away from their neighborhoods (59%). Lack of recreational facilities at home (47%), living in apartment buildings (30%), over-population, small houses, and conflicts between family members, are also reasons stated by the participant as deficiencies in the residing area.

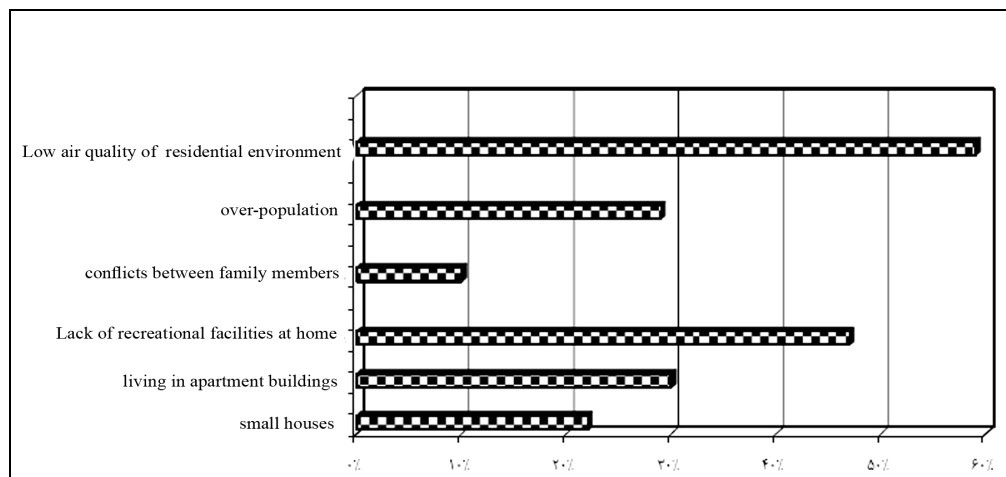


Fig.5: effective Location repulsion factors in attracting residents to the city parks

6.5 Analysis of the attractions of the urban parks and deficiencies of residing area, using Likert spectrum

The most widely used method in surveying complicated issues or weighing the existing differences between viewpoints, is "scales of calibration". Based on Likert's scale of calibration, which is the most common among similar methods, participants are asked to use grades to show whether they are for or against a specific subject.

In the first stage, pro and con options are used to gather viewpoints and different answers imply different values. This helps increase the flexibility in the next stage of analysis. Likert's spectrum consists of five

equal parts. According to the subject of research, participants are given a few statements and are asked to give their opinions about them.

Seven questions were asked from the parks' visitors. The answers are as follows:

- Being in park increases job, academic or family efficiencies.
- Being in park increases success, feeling and life enjoyment.
- Being in a park causes us to forget unpleasant thoughts.
- Being in park prompts physical health, mental health and reduces illnesses.
- Being in park increases enjoyment of collective life and being around of people.
- Being at home depresses me in my spare time.
- Being at home makes me feel boredom in my spare time.

This research has shown that there is a relationship between age of people and having a sense of escape from urban environment and integrating into the park.

Younger people are more willing to escape from urban life and problems and go to the parks. Most of visitors go to the parks to promote job, academic, family efficiency, sense of success, convenience and feel the collective life.

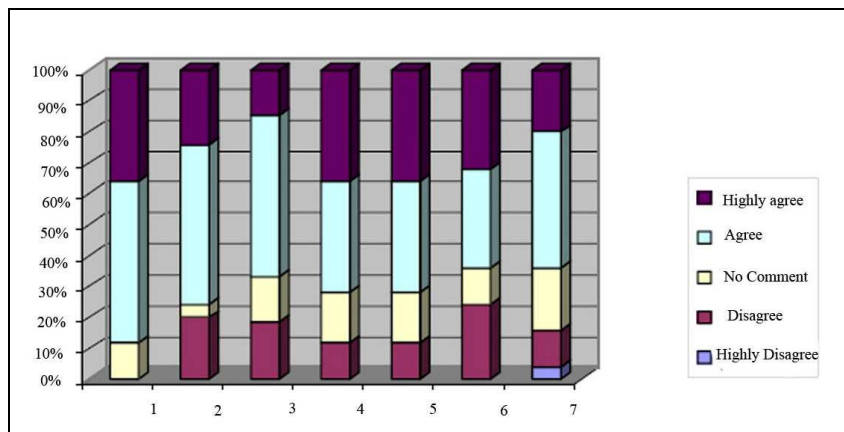


Fig.6: explanation of the attractions of the urban parks and deficiencies of residing area

6.6 Comparison of Jamshidieh, Laleh, Besat and Mellat Parks

During this study and research, it became clear that each of these parks have special features. Jamshidieh Park, because of its placement in the vicinity of the Kalkachal Mountain and having a more natural environment has made it play the role of a region park, much beyond the definition of a city park. This park also has features that attracted tourists.

These reasons indicate that in all cases that have been investigated, Jamshidieh Park is the only one for which the accessibility factor is not very important for the visitors. The reasons for going to these urban parks, in each of the four cases, were significantly different from each other. 80 % of people surveyed in the Jamshidieh Park, say that psychological convenience of being in the nature is the most important reason for visiting this park..

Convenient accessibility and being near the cultural and sporting areas of the city are the reasons that attract people to the Laleh park. High costs of travel out of the city and convenience as a family picnic destination, prompt people to come out their residences and go to the Melat Park. The most important reasons that attract people to Besat Park, are air conditioning and the presence of shady trees which are certainly soothing for the people during summer.



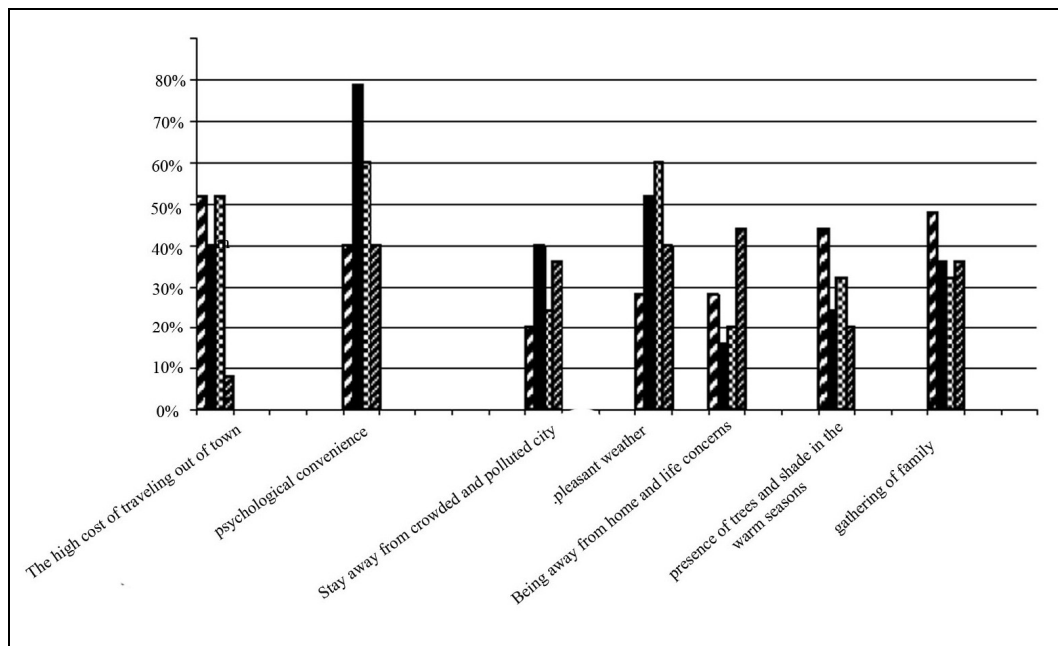


Fig 7: The most important reasons that attract people to parks

7 CONCLUSION

According to this study, in these four parks of Tehran the result is that all people, at all times and in all age groups notice and appreciate the role of nature and the benefits of it, for their improved mental, psychological and social status.

Most of people feel joyous and happy when they are close to the nature and they identify parks as a shelter to revitalize and refresh. It shows that, parks directly and indirectly, raise the quality of life. When unsuitable weather or lack of recreational facility makes a person to feel unhappy, he goes to the parks and green spaces to sooth his senses, even if it is a temporary salvation. Also, according to the survey of urban park visitors about the attraction and repulsion factors of urban parks, it was found that most people for passing their spare time prefer to go out of their residences to the parks and enjoy from collective life and being in other people's company.

People say that they go to parks to reduce their depression, increase their performance and escape from boredom. Considering the factors given above, and considering that parks are where people satisfy a part of their psychological and social needs, development and expansion of urban parks and green spaces, falls in line with the development of Tehran, and leading to an increase in the quality of urban life.. Also, considering that the citizens of Tehran spend two to four hours a day for recreation and leisure in many of the great urban parks, recreational facilities should be upgraded in them.

At the same time, because of the importance of the accessibility factor for the usage of urban parks by the citizens of Tehran, creation and expansion of parks in neighborhoods, could increase the utility of parks for the people and raise their quality of life.

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