

ECO-TOURISM AND CULTURAL ROLES OF PARKS AND GARDENS IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS, RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the eco-tourism and cultural roles of parks and gardens in urban recreational activities in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. The existence of a high density population in Port Harcourt metropolis suggests a strong need for open space facilities to enable individuals to get away from the crowd when desired. To achieve the objectives set for this study, the nature and operations, conditions that determine participation as well as the challenges and relevance of the existing parks/gardens to urban recreation exercise were evaluated. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Data collected from primary sources was based on preliminary survey, selection of sample parks/gardens, destinations/sites. The Findings of this research showed that certain factors tend to deter participation in parks/gardens recreation exercise in Port Harcourt metropolis. These include insecurity, inadequate facilities and poor management. More so, in all the parks/gardens visited and sampled, the problem of insufficient funds were reported which has made it impossible to provide a range of services and programmes. From the findings, it was recommended among other things, that the public urban development policies should give recreational matters a higher priority rating than has been the case.

Keywords: Tourism, Culture, Recreation, Parks, Gardens

Introduction

How and where one enjoys recreation (leisure) period is increasingly becoming interesting questions to social researchers especially in urban areas. Interestingly too is the question of availability and quality of valuable recreational facilities in our urban areas. Walker (2004) noted that what is paramount to recreation managers are the four questions; who uses a park – which can show whether some groups of people are being missed. How people use a park – which can identify whether specific facilities are being over, under, or misused – thus helping guide park investments and management. Why community members do (or do not) use a park, which can guide outreach efforts or initiatives to improve or change services; and what features visitors value, which can help resolve conflicts among groups about park priorities.

In a common parlance, people say, “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”. The ‘play’ connotes, recreation in the view of wholesome use of leisure – time”. After a long time of work or tedious activities, one needs a leisure period to set him afresh by engaging in different passive or active physical and mental exercises in order to restore one’s mind, soul and body. In this regard, recreation performs biological, psychological and socio-economic functions to the individual and directly as social balance mechanism. This view is common to majority of the authors in the context “recreation as a wholesome leisure-time” activity, in taking such exercises, one naturally gets,

refreshed and set for another round of work. This will help boost productivity and also appreciates one's potential in his immediate environment. Hence, recreational exercise is a fundamental aspect of life and an important routine to embrace. To an extent, effective and exciting recreation serves as a natural antidote against myriad of urban tension and stresses. It also serves as a lubricant that oils the body and mind not only for efficient performance but also for long span of life.

According to the Holy Bible, God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). Afterwards he was able to examine His job so far and then planned for the next action. One can quickly say that this contributed to the perfect design of the earth and other activities going on in it. Thereafter, He seriously recommended those Israelites should take some days off the month round the year to rest, which was later passed into law that is relatively observed by all up till this day (Ex. 20:9).

The relevance of recreation is recognized in public and private lives and organizations. Routinely, every establishment and institution, both private and public, no matter the size observes a specific period for their daily recreation. In schools, primary, secondary and tertiary, the same thing applies. Hence recreation can be viewed systematically as rights to individuals irrespective of age and not just a privilege. Mayer and Brightbill as cited in Torkildsen (1994) summarily supported these views by stating that valued wholesome leisure time activities can produce feeling of well being, satisfaction pertaining to positive identity, growth, creativeness, balanced competition, character, mental capacity, physical conditioning, socialization, coping attitude and dignity of individuals; all together provide self-fulfillment and satisfaction

Hence, recreation is an invaluable asset. It becomes more important in urban centres where a large number of people aggregate for various functions. However because large number of people in the town and the bustling nature of the urban areas, most urban recreations take place outside homes; hence, the need for designated centers created and established to serve the purpose of recreation cannot be overemphasized. As a matter of fact, the growing interest on the relevance of recreation also makes research into the nature, operation, quantity, quality, and relevance of such areas to urban society basically inevitable. Though recreational facilities as parks/gardens, games and entertainment centers, clubs, open spaces, tourist area, poolrooms, concert-saloon, theatres, beaches etc can serve this purpose in our urban areas, this research will focus on parks/gardens alone.

Notably, we have the national parks and urban public parks. For clarity, the national park is distinct from the urban public parks discussed in this work. The national parks are located mostly in the rural areas away from urban areas and form both tourist and recreation functions. In urban areas like Port Harcourt, public parks/gardens are meant for urban recreational services. They simply mean relaxation, feel of excitement and associated activities. They also serve as environmental preservation and beautification mechanisms. An encompassing definition of public parks and gardens were given by Omara-Tungu, (1992) and the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary to mean an organized area of land in a town where people go to walk, play, relax, do sports publicly etc. Examples of there found in Port Harcourt area are listed in table 2.1. Although parks/gardens are not restricted to be provided by government alone, researchers before now show that the general interest on their establishment witness marginal priority rating from both the government and the public.

Therefore, the extension has not gone beyond just providing mere parks/gardens to qualitative recreation facilities that can meet with individual preferences. Variety is a necessity in the choice of recreational activities. Meyer and Brightbill (1994) said that variety of form, motivation enjoyment etc is the characteristic of recreation that contributes to fulfilling human needs. From all indication, it has not been applauded in Port Harcourt City. Recreational matters in Port Harcourt are still accorded low level of awareness and marginal priority rating both in provision and utilization. However, compared to national parks or other federally managed outdoor recreation environments, little research has been undertaken concerning urban recreation environments. There are several reasons for this. Albinio recreation activities were associated to the elite and well to do, (Cross cited in Graet and Parker, 1987). Secondly, according to Veal, (1990) the notion that recreation exercise is improper of consideration in a situation of economic quagmire has apparently for long excluded it from realistic social and economic planning of most developing cities including Nigeria. Recreation is most often in discretionary reference. To some extent it becomes time that it may become difficult to meet as long as the nation's real income remains very low.

Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of recreation has evoked an immense variety of interpretations among scholars about its origin, benefit, problems and place in society. While many recreation theories view the concept of play and recreation as one and the same, some views offer diverse expression of the human condition, exploring the influence of social: psychological and environmental antecedents on recreation (Murphy in Graefe 1987). It must be realized that for many centuries now each proponent defined recreation according to his perception of human behaviour. Human behaviour is largely dependable on the culture, socio-economic and other environmental stimuli in the society. Therefore interpretation [vary from society to society. Torkildsen (1904) asserts, it is evident that there is considerable confusion both in a definition and an understanding of recreation. While it would be easy to say, "it is whatever you think it is", that is hardly a means of explanation. The confusion that does exist was portrayed dramatically in an editorial in parks and Recreation, which listed about 200 words or phrases describing how different people perceive recreation. Though hundreds of theories of recreation exist, the range of ideas and theories about recreation is reviewed briefly. They do not fall into any clear or logical categories.

In this research an attempt was made to simply highlight one of the conceptual theories that have widespread application.

Recreation as a Wholesome Leisure Activity/Destination

The word recreation came from the Latin '*recreatio*' meaning restoration to health. Hence traditionally the term has been thought of as a process that restores or recreates the individual. The historical approach in defining recreation has been to consider it as an activity that renews people for work. While some definitions refer to recreation as restoration, most focus on it as a form of activity. Others while corroborating the activity approach apply the condition of social acceptance. For instance, Dictionary of Sociology defines recreation as any activity pursued during leisure, either

individually or collective, that is free and pleasurable, having its own immediate appeal, not impelled by a delayed reward beyond itself. Hutchinson, (1994) supports the social acceptance theory thus:

recreation is a worthwhile, socially acceptable leisure experience providing immediate, inherent satisfaction to the individual who voluntarily participates in activity.

The three concepts discussed above provide a wholesome theory needed in the study of recreation concept. The concepts articulated together put out the more recent, synthesizing and integrated theoretical approach "recreation as a wholesome leisure-time activity". It can also be referred to as the theory of HOLISM. It has a potentially more complete way to interpret the recreation. This perspective incorporates a grand theoretical framework and identified recreation experiences in all aspect of life and by what means and facilities to achieve them. According to the holistic theory, recreation can be experiences in a wide variety of activities work, play, education, religion etc. However, this basis formed theoretical framework on which the whole idea of this research is built upon. Early and pioneering workers like Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and Tinsley and Tinsley (1982) did prominent interpretation of the holistic perspective of recreation. But the more recent explanation by Torkildsen (1992) was more appropriate for this work. Torkildsen looked at holistic interpretation of recreation in two main ways – activity and experience foci. From activity, base, recreation is seen to be an activity related to sports, games, art and other leisure- time pursuits.

In this respect, recreation is product-oriented and concerned with facilities and programmes. The activity focus presents recreation as a structure, a framework and as a social institution in society. The experience focus is process- oriented and concerns with what an activity does for a person. Its concern is with self-fulfillment. A recreation can occur in varying degrees depending on choice, level of satisfaction experienced, much the same as other feelings, which may be of stronger or weaker intensity. Looking at recreation experience, it follows that whatever activity or situation that renews, revives, refreshes and recreates for the individual: is a recreation for him or her at that time. Although recreation can occur at any time and almost any situation can function for it to occur, it is during free time for leisure that recreation is more likely to come about. All these have far-reaching implications for recreation service. As part of social acceptance and activity focus of holistic theory, Kraus, (1971) views recreation as a social institution, which refers to all the social institutions which have been created or formed to meet the leisure needs of people. It includes facility, activities and organizations, which are sponsored by individuals, government of various levels, school, churches, industries, voluntary agencies and business world- all of which provide varied recreational opportunities for over all self - fulfillment. Finally as we proceed the complexity in defining recreation as evident in the proliferation of the theories and concepts has unavoidably made room for the possibility of imploring other conceptual and theoretical contents that was hardly discussed in this section. Nevertheless, effort has been made to minimize by all means further confusion that may emanate from their applications.

Historical Development of Urban Parks/Gardens

What constitutes recreation is not as easy to specify, as it might seem (Akintola-Arikawe in Abiodun, 1985). Drawing inspiration from the framework discussed above, although recreation could

be generally conceived as the consumption of leisure time or leisure facilities for the purpose of refreshing oneself, (Lagos State Ministry of Works and Planning and the United Nations, 1978), a distinction can readily be made on the one hand between active recreation involving participants in sports and games and on the other hand, passive recreation in which the individual is essentially a spectator (as in sightseeing, relaxation and the like). Such a distinction stems from an appreciation of the fact that for different individuals or the same individual at different time, recreation could vary from active competition through some form of amusement to quiet relaxation or somber meditation. In any of the events, the use of land for such recreation purpose involves for the most part outdoor activities on site consciously developed and equipped with facilities that permit both active and passive recreation involvement (Northam, 1978).

The emergence of parks/gardens developed along this recreation consciousness. According to Welch, (1992), parks/gardens are one of the oldest leisure provision developed from the vestiges and relics of the ancestral public squares of ancient Greek and Rome which were community gathering grounds acting as places of assembly, meeting and festival. The market places of medieval own had much the same range of function.

In Egypt, Welch, (1992) recorded that Ramesis III founded public pleasure ground and more than five hundred gardens. Though he was motivated by politics, he carved a niche in the historical emergence of parks/gardens. He thought it would make him more popular if he provided for open-air recreation and gave pleasant relaxed places for reflection and contemplation. He also wanted to be the pioneer of a bright new idea.

In the same vein, Julius Caesar left his orchards to pleasure grounds for the people of Rome. One of the arguments deployed in favour of providing new better, more extensive leisure facilities is that they help to keep young people occupied with the stated alternative being an increase in vandalism and juvenile crimes. However, the history of parks/gardens in Nigeria during these early stages ancient and medieval periods remains irrelevant as a result of virtually non-existence of records. That is not to say that play grounds that can be designated as historical parks were not existing but more so in folks.

Parks have had a continued history of development ever since the previous periods. The industrial revolution in Europe triggered off a new dimension in leisure consumption and perhaps park development. In Great Britain, the blossom of parks and gardens followed the rhythm of Industrial Revolution. Rapid unmanaged expansion of urban centres preceded the revolution. A flood of people was drawn to them. Soon after high birth rates, added to the problems of overcrowding and bad sanitation. These posed health threat. The pressure to provide parks as a means of ameliorating the awfulness of these new towns stemmed in part from the idea that they would let in fresh air for health balance. On the other part were economic motives.

It was said that the choice for recreation and exercise in the open air would improve productivity and prolong the active life of city dwellers. According, to Welch, the Parliamentary Committee on public walks, 1833 in Britain said that some open spaces reserved for the amusement of the humbler classes would assist to wean them from low and debasing pleasures. Godhey, (1987) asserted that the process of industrialization begun in Europe and transported to North America, profoundly shaped all aspects of life including recreation and leisure. Parks/gardens

and other leisure facilities sprang up in many cities. Beside the reason of urban reform brought about by the revolution, other important reasons such as urban quality management benefit of modern parks/gardens. For quality urban leisure activities and industrial workers, parks development started to gain reputation in 19th century. Godbey (1987) confirmed that both the park movement and the recreation movement were part of a trend toward urban reform, which sought to improve the quality of life through increased opportunities for wholesome recreation. The development in the pattern of leisure time since the industrial revolution followed the same movement in industrializing nations. (Cranz, 1982) identifies four general historic eras in recreation and urban park development in Britain;

The pleasure ground era – prior to 1900: This period witnessed the mapping out of large land in the middle of a city in an attempt to recreate rural countryside. These parks were designed for all day use and intend to represent “a class of opposite conditions” from urban life, (Cranz, 1982).

The reform park era, 1900-1930: This period identified the socio-economic relevance of parks and recreation. The leaders assumed that play could help develop character and that it needed guidance from qualified play leaders of good character. Playgrounds become a standard feature of parks and slowly evolved into recreation centres that were a combination of playground and settlement houses, (Godbey, 1987). A variety of organized recreation programs evolved from such centres.

The recreation facility era, 1930-1965: At this period, parks and recreation administrator began to abandon efforts to use parks and recreation services as devices for reform and instead become driven by the concept of ‘demand’ i.e. what people wanted (self-fulfillment.). Cities began to develop guidelines or open spaces and master plan for many more parks.

Open space system era, 1965 up to the contemporary: There was a lot of experimentation during this era, often aimed at making parks and recreation services more relevant to the lives of ethnic minorities and the urban poor. Open space which urban recreation planners defined simply as “all land and water in urban area, which is not covered by buildings” become an almost generic concept. Federal funding often in response to urban riots was increased during this period. This resulted in the acquisition and development of urban parks and variety of recreation facilities. Simultaneously, this era witnessed a renewed concern involving citizens, particularly the poor in the urban parks and recreation decision-making process. Equity in the distribution of public leisure services was analyzed and debated.

The research work of Akintola-Arikawe, a renowned urban planner cited in Abiodun. (1985) made several assertions. He said that public awareness of the need for and provision of facilities to support recreation would seem to vary not only with the level of development but also with the extent of urbanization. Thus, while in more developed countries, such as USA and Britain, provision for recreation and park facility have long become a routine component of plans for urban regions and the recreation could make to the quality of lives in urban environment seems to be just beginning. Indeed it is at least encouraging that the Fourth National Development Plan, 1981-85 recognizes (as did the third plan) that the rapid increase in urban population of Nigerian cities demands adequate provision for the development of various urban and rural infrastructure and amenities including parks/gardens.

(Federal Ministry of Planning, 1981 pp.81). Pred et al, in Adeyemo (2003) describes "the quality of life in a city or region to include accessibility of its inhabitants to employment alternatives, educational and medical facilities, and essential public social services, a representative range of commercial and cultural services, and 'nature', or extensive recreational open spaces. On this background, let us look into records from preliminary survey on the existing public parks/gardens in Port Harcourt metropolis with a view to ideally considering and presenting as much can be achieved in their background and measure of adequacy in respect to the city population threshold. Table 1.1 is the list of the parks in Port Harcourt city and some background information.

Table 1: Existing Sites of Parks/Gardens in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Parks/Gardens	Year of Establishment	Types of recreation facilities	Location	Area size (hectares)	Accessibility status
Isaac Boro	1986	Beautification, relaxation, walking, entertainment, party space	Mile 1 axis	30	Fee paying
Jubilee	1986	Beautification, relaxation, party space	Town	5	Free
Children	2005	Beautification, walking, children sports	UTC B/stop	30	Free
Tarichi	1995	Bar, relaxation, hotel, party space	First artillery	3	Free
Polo	1980	Bar, party space, horse ride	GRA	24	Limited
Amusement	2000	Children sports and amusement exercises		4	Fee paying
Total hectares				91	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015.

Explicit from the table is the fact that park/garden movement in the city is relatively a recent event barely three decades ago. Finally, Akintola-Arikawe, (1994); Graefe and Parker (1987) and many others commented on that criteria for the measure of park/garden adequacy in a given area. They firmly stated that the adequacy of urban recreational space is usually measured in two ways; the percentage of city area allocated to recreation use and the amount of recreational space available per unit of urban population. Though no standard of fixed magnitude has been accepted, 4.04 hectares per 10000 persons is considered generally average.

Wrestling as a Recreational Activity

Before we proceed further, let us look at Wrestling and Ogba-Rukwa as recreational activities outside Port Harcourt Metropolis of Ikwerre Ethnic group. Similarly, wrestling (*Ota*) in Emohua has some elements of drama example, dance, song & mime. *Ota* or *Egelege* is well known in Ikwerre and according to Elechi Amadi, it is "the yardstick by which all growing young men are judged and by which their tribal achievements are measured.

According to Olumati (2013:12), wrestling festival is an integral cultural life of the people, in the wrestling competition; different types of drumming instruments are used such as *Ikwirikwu*, *Ekwenkalu*, *Ngele*, *Mbamba* of different types, shapes and sizes etc, two competing camps will gather opposite one another with each camp having somebody who motivate their camp to wrestle well. The motivator holds some grasses, which he uses to whip the wrestlers. He whips their hands and buttocks and that is seen as the activator to start the wrestling and whoever that throws the other wins but if the wrestlers were unable to throw each other down, they say they have equalized or *Ogba-oga*. The side of the wrestlers that throws his opponent will be lifted up with little jubilation. They will dance round the play ground where the wrestling takes place, women will dance and dance, this kind of activities arouses the wrestlers. The wrestling takes place mainly among the age-grades, different age grades will wrestle beginning from the younger ones.

Ogba-Rukwa

The *Rukwa* cult in Emohua was a secret cult which is seen as the recreational activities mainly practiced and reserved for the elders. It is mainly a ritual, the *Rukwa* dance which is now extinct was, from oral tradition gathered from chief Sunday Okogbule, the oldest living member founded and organized by Olo Now Chenya and his brother Ohia. Among the founding members were also brave men called Itanwo Ehienkne and Obasi. These ancestors presently are spoken of as gods in Emohua. In performing a victory song, each member gyrated to the sound of a drum of hollow-wood and animal skin in his left armpit while holding in the right hand of sword or gun. However in later generations the cult members widened the scope to include every member of the Emohua society who had achieved excellence in his chosen endeavours. Consequently, the group came to include brave hunters, who killed such animals as the leopard, elephant or the hippopotamus etc. also renowned farmers were initiated.

During this period, however, the cult dance was no longer staged as a mark of victory only, but also to mark some important festivals like the coronation of a paramount chief. The second burial ceremony of a departed *Owhor* holder, warrior, brave hunters and a renowned farmer. This beautiful *Rukwa* cult (culture) which portrays the life style of the Emohua people, have now been relegated since the advent of modernization or western civilization.

Factors Influencing Park/Garden Recreation and Participation

Leisure patterns are not static or predetermined for either individuals or group, though once established they can become a part of the routine of our way of living. Not only are there a multitude of factors, which influence choice and participation, but also there is a complex relationship between them. In analyzing people's needs in leisure, we have seen how misleading it can be to rely on only those factors, which are easily quantifiable. There are both individual and social influences.

Because of the link and relationships between various influences, it is difficult, to classify or group the factors with any accuracy. For the purpose of this paper, three broad groupings are suggested; personal, social/circumstantial and opportunity factors, (Torkildsen, 1994). Some of these factors were discussed to illustrate how these ranges of influence are brought to bear on individual people in making choices of leisure activity.

The major literature reviewed is the works of Torkildsen (1994) and Graton and Taylor, (1990). According to Torkildsen, there is a complex mixture and interaction when thinking about the factors, which affect park recreation and participation. In table 1.2 he outlined some discernable factors which individually, jointly or collectively affect participation. However, this listing is by no means comprehensive, nor is it a classification but an illustration of the complexity and variety of influences, which bear on individual.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Leisure Participation

Personal	Social/circumstantial	Opportunity
Age	Occupation	Resources available
Stage in life cycle	Income	Facilities type and quality
Gender	Disposable income	Awareness
Marital status	Material wealth and goods	Perception of opportunities
Dependents and ages	Car ownership and mobility	Recreation services
Will and purpose in life	Time available	Distribution of facilities
Personal obligation	Duties and obligations	Access and location
Resourcefulness	Home and social environment	Choice of activities
Leisure perception	Friends and peer groups	Transport
Attitudes and motivation	Security	Cost
Interest and preoccupation	Social roles and contacts	Management
Still and ability	Environmental	Marketing
Personality and confidence	Mass leisure factors	Programming
Culture born into	Education and attainment	Organization
Upbringing and background	Population	Social accessibility
		Political policies

Age and stage in the family life cycle: Though recreation is intended for the enjoyment of all ages with no limitation of shape, size or skill level, (Mull et al, 1997), it has an important influence on leisure participation but its effect will vary depending on the person and the type of activity. Children have rapid changes within a very short space of time growing from toddler to junior and to teenager.

Each stage calls for very different kinds of park/garden facilities. Even for adults, there is a marked change with age. Participation in most active leisure pursuit decline sharply as people grow older. Available disposable time also has an influence on recreational participation. The greatest amount of free time seems to be concentrated at the ends of the age continuing with the adolescence and the retired having considerably more time at their disposal than the middle age group who live under a greater degree of time pressure, (Veal, 1990 and Torkildsen, 1994). The General Household Survey (1983) of London reveals that active leisure participation generally declines with increasing age and that some home-based activities are most popular with the middle aged. Some leisure activities are also considered in elastic with the change of age.

Income: Income levels are closely related to recreation participation rates. General Household Survey carried out, Torkildsen, (1994) shows that for almost all the leisure/recreation activities they

examined the proportion rose with income. Even where little or no financial outlay is incurred, such as walking, participation rates were also higher. It is perhaps not surprising that since income correlates with education and social class, the higher income group has the higher participation rates in many recreational activities. They also have disposable time. The choice of activities and the amount of money that people can spend on entrance fee,

Equipment and so on, is dependent on the extent of people's disposable income and the manual workers prefer undertaking overtime which in turn, diminishes the disposable time available for recreational participation. The survey of Russell, (2000) reiterated that low-income people prefer to work longer hours for higher income than have more leisure and less pay. Personal property also has a lot to do with leisure. People who earn or have more money have greater personal property the wherewithal to permit a wider choice of leisure pursuits. Owning a large use with a garden and driving a car may immediately open the door to leisure activities, which will be denied those without personal transport and with a low income. US Dept. of Interior, (1979) in Gratton and Taylor illustrates this point:

Another important factor that has produced increased recreation participation is the Nation's rising real income. As disposable income, increases, the proportion of money available to spend on recreation increases. While income must first be applied to meet basic needs, after a point its uses are discretionary and rise in real income implies a rise in discretionary income.

Awareness and recreation participation: One accessibility factor that is frequently considered in considering the linkage of demand for and supply of park/garden facilities and activities is awareness. If people do not, know that something exists, obviously they will not go to visit it, unless they stumble upon it. According Torkildsen, (1994), individual leisure facilities are not sought in the same way as shopping centre or work. Knowledge about them (particularly in urban areas) derives directly from seeing them, hearing about them or reading about them. It has been shown that people passing a leisure facility en route to work or the shops will more likely use that facility than a comparable one nearer home; they have become more aware of it. This factor has obvious implication with respect to the location of activities as well as advertising and other method of publicity.

Accessibility: Another important aspect of this section is access and supply of park and garden recreation services. Recreation undertaken outside the home involves some travel i.e. walking, cycling, bus, taxi, car etc. The method of travel can affect the level of satisfaction, (Torkildsen, 1994). Participation interest increases with the availability of convenient traveling means (mobility). Accessibility is also influenced by location. The actual location of a facility is of utmost importance and will affect use. The rate of use of the facility falls progressively as one moves farther away from the facility. Hence access and mobility are crucial elements relating to recreation opportunity.

Management: In the case of management, people's use of recreation facility is determined, as we have seen by a number of discrete and interrelated factors. The management aspects of facility, provision and recreation opportunity are no less important. It has been abundantly clear that the presence or absence of facilities and opportunity, their accessibility, quality, pricing structure and

policies could have substantial influences on park and other recreation participation. Planning and management policy determines what facilities are to be provided, pricing, administration and booking structure at park centres. All these could consciously or unconsciously establish a type of social filter in the spirit of participants.

Good management of park and garden is concerned with setting goals and meeting objectives and targets, achieving optimal use of resources, achieving financial objectives, meeting priority needs and offering the most attractive services to meet leisure and recreation demands. The quality of management determines to a large extent the type of use and viability of leisure services and facilities, Torkildsen (1994).

Relevance of Urban Park/Garden to Recreation

The relationship between urban park and recreation is a very simple one and can be described in two broad ways; traditional and new views.

Traditional View: From the beginning it was pointed out that recreation could be described in a number of ways. The two main ways outlined by the conceptual framework through which this work was built perceived recreation from activity and experience foci. From the activity point of view we saw recreation as activity that is related to sports, games, art and other leisure time pursuits both in active and passive participation terms. In this respect, it is product-oriented and concerned with facilities and programs.

The experience thought looked at the process-oriented attribute of recreation and the focus is on what an activity does for a person. Its concern is with self-fulfillment derived from activity and participation. Explicit from these views the whole process of recreation is geared toward fulfilling individual satisfaction and experiences. However, before experience is obtained, action or event must precede. Implicitly too, the views corroborated that experience is derived from direct or indirect involvement in an event or through active and passive participation. Whether recreation is derived in the form of active or passive experiences, facilities must be directly or indirectly involved and utilized. Effective parks/gardens recreations provide unique experience in terms of facilities for fulfilling self-satisfactory leisure experience through both events. Hence, in providing public recreation activity and programs, park/garden facilities should encompass the satisfaction for both active and passive participants.

The need for designated places where participants can naturally carry out recreation activities as individuals and groups needs a priority consideration. Bucher and Bucher, (1994) have this to say; "recreation requires kinds of designed properties and facilities for its programs to function effectively. The parks/gardens represent a resource for providing both direct and indirect recreational functions". For instance, in the United States, according to Bucher and Bucher, parks/gardens make up the largest single setting for recreation supported by public funds. They house and incorporate playground, picnic sites, band shells, amphitheaters, museums, camps, beaches, swimming pools and many other resources as means of recreation exercise and activities. Parks/gardens also provide intermediary and indirect services to recreation activities; to the recreation participants and the society in general. Walker (2004) examined the above traditional relationship as is still widely embraced by people that

they provide open spaces and operate recreational facilities and programs. He opined that even those who do not use them value parks. For example, one study found that three-quarters of the respondents who said that they did not themselves use parks nonetheless reported receiving benefits from them, with many of those benefits tied to opportunities for children, (Godbey, Graefe, and James 1992).

The New View: Recognizing Broader Potential. Walker also made a wide contribution on the recent emergence of a new broader view of parks/gardens that goes beyond the traditional value. This new view focuses on how policymakers practitioners, and the public can begin to think about parks as valuable contributors to larger urban policy objectives, such as job opportunities, youth development, public health, and community building. This first in a series of policy briefs reviews the traditional value of parks and explains how parks are claiming new attention for their broader potential. The “new view” of urban parks calls attention to the broader contributions they can make to the vitality of communities and their residents. These contributions include; helping youth choose rewarding paths to adulthood by providing programs and opportunities, to build physical, intellectual, emotional and social strength; - helping new entrants to the workforce, find productive jobs by offering decent, entry-level employment opportunities in the community;- helping community residents improve their health by providing a place to enjoy fresh air and exercise; and helping citizens join together to make their communities better, by encouraging them to participate in park planning and management. For detailed explanation on these see Walker, (2004).

Challenges of Urban Parks/Gardens

The challenges facing urban parks/gardens are obviously numerous. Among other things, the major ones are as discussed below.

Documentation: The first most challenging factor to urban parks/gardens was highlighted by Harnik, (2004). In spite of the numerously mentioned importance, long and outstanding history of emergence that can be traced from the ancient and medieval periods, not much significant impact has been made in respect of proper documentation or comprehensive literature about them. This has been a drawback to the park/garden movement and research. It cuts across both developed and developing but more so in the later. Sympathetically, Harnik echoed:

everyone has memories about urban park romantic stroll, an athletic triumph, a Family gathering, a clamber in a playground, a bike ride, a hike through the layout etc. – yet the literature on these evocative places is slim.

There are thousands of books on urban cities; few of them mentioning parks, and there are thousands of books on natural areas and national parks almost none of them mentioning cities, but precious little on that complex amalgam”, (Harnik 2004). Studies have shown that our cities become unrecognized and unmemorable without open space. And yet we have compiled so little information about our urban parks/gardens; their locations and sizes, their geology and ecology, their histories, the politics of their creation and utilization. What they contain and how they are used, how much is spent on them and how many visitors they get, (Harnik, 2004). We have known even less about the larger issues – how much total parkland each city has; how many acres of open space per 1000 residents; and how much money spent per person or per acre. As stated by Godbey in Graefe and Parker,

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(1987), much of what has been discovered about urban leisure services has never found its way into research publications. And funding for such research has usually been extremely limited.

Apparently, knowledge about urban parks/gardens existence and improvement and sustainable patronage are not guaranteed without adequate research. And research is also prohibited without proper data documentation.

Funding: When we examine the current administrative and management textbooks in the field of recreation and urban parks/gardens, it becomes apparent that little attention has been given to the physical funding not only in the developing countries but also in some developed cities. Welch in Mills (1992) confirmed that urban parks/gardens even in England have not had the investment they need to develop, modernize or refurbish or even in some places to sustain standard of maintenance. Parks/gardens resources consume a great quantity of operational budgets and capital expenditure items. Planning, design, construction and maintenance are all capital demanding. Harnik, (2004) acknowledged this fact when he mentioned that creating urban public parks/gardens and keeping them in excellent condition is and has always been extraordinarily difficult.

Though government, private, voluntary, and commercial agencies are all involved in the provision of park/garden recreation services, the government at all levels play the major role. Because of the huge capital outlay, government intervention is unavoidable. For instance, the study by Howard cited in Graefe and Parker, (1987) on the state of effective park/garden recreation in Canada and USA stated that the government sector make substantial commitment to the provision of leisure resources and programs in these places. Government expenditure for urban parks and recreation services amounted to \$8.9 billion in USA in 1982. Both the federal government and state government agencies expanded approximately a billion and a half each on recreation resources in 1983. Considering this example, it becomes obvious that recreation services require a lot of money. Unfortunately, most governments of the developing cities have blindly ignored this responsibility. Without new ones, most of the parks that perhaps emanated from the colonial planning have been ignorantly told as relics and monument that deserve no maintenance. This condition resulted in park insecurity, deterioration of facilities and consequently repulsion of participants. However, management buried deep without cash. Cash starvation reduces standards and more customers are lost. Welch, (1990) reiterated, "shabby parks/gardens without structures languishing for want of investment attract fewer or no people. Fallen attendance produces lower status. Diminished status results in lower priority".

In alternative and summary, attractive, safe and usable park prop up their neighborhood, but cities need a strong economic base to fix or create parks/gardens in the first place, (Harnik, 2004).

Security: Safety has been a major stigma as it continues to inhibit the progress of park recreation participation. What is the appropriate level of safety in the parks/gardens. Many urban parks nationwide are losing their positive image as special places. This occurs because the number of homeless people, drug dealers and gang members who frequent public parks is increasing (Soderberg cited in Russell, 2006). These are crime generators who find most of their stay in public open spaces including parks/gardens. These crimes according to social researchers occur with greater frequency in poorer neighborhood of all cities but it can occur anywhere. Brantingham, (2006) also contributed

that crime is channeled by a city's routine social activities patterns. She further explained that urban crime often concentrates in places that cluster criminal opportunities; shopping and entertainment areas; major transit shop etc. Further study shows that crime concentrates in 'Hot spots'- crime attractors: places where crimes occur as a by-product of large volumes of people passing through or utilizing these areas.

The social problems associated with this growing use pattern stigmatize many urban parks as unsafe and unhealthy places for children and families to recreate. This condition further erodes the image of public parks and recreation communities as a positive social benefits, (Russell, 2006). This remains a vital problem for the future of urban public recreation.

Explicitly, park/garden safety has bearing not only on the provision made in regard to security around park environment but also heavily bears on the location of the facility. This has far-reaching and direct implications to park/garden service providers.

Conclusion

Solutions to improving urban public park/garden activities vary as many as the problems. The process for realizing the potential for recreation use identified for park/garden is suffice in at least three related steps mentioned by Arikawe cited in Abiodun, (1985). First a reappraisal of public urban development policies to give recreational matters a higher priority rating than has been the case. Second, the establishment or revitalization of a body strongly equipped both legally and financially, to take effective charge of recreational space matters and related facilities. Thirdly, the initiation of a vigorous programmes of parks/gardens development and management involving-not only an improved attitude towards the upkeep of existing facilities but also the acquisition, development and sustained maintenance of additional urban park areas. All with the objective of evolving a viable and adequate hierarchy of recreation spaces in the metropolitan area.

For one thing, the most fundamental step that involves an enhanced priority rating for recreation matters is essentially a political one. It would depend on the perception and societal philosophy of the government in power at a given time.

The second step seems to have an initial advantage in that it is known that an Open Space Committee was actually established some years back, (Federal Ministry of Planning, 1981) although its activities have not been impressive. However, since the idea already exists, a successful outcome in respect of the first step would probably enhance the emergence of a productive and revitalized Urban Park and Recreation Management Department (or whatever name is used), with all the powers it needs to function effectively.

The issue of development is tied to the first and second steps: if concern for recreational space receives positive public reappraisal and if the executing body is financially strong, that body should be able to undertake the relatively light development that recreational use of acquired park/garden lands would provide. On the one hand, the maintenance of publicly owned facilities has traditionally been inefficiently executed in Nigerian society. While on the other hand, a determined maintenance and policing system would be indispensable to improved and expanded system recreation space facilities in Port Harcourt metropolis.

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