Rethinking urban space in cities – A study of parks in Hyderabad, India

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Abstract. Urban areas being economically diversified attract large streams of migrants making for a burgeoning population. This is more prevalent in the developing countries. The concomitants of this are high density, heavy traffic movement and increased pollution levels. To reduce the stressful life of city dwellers it is important to have open spaces, where one can pursue leisure time activities a few removes from clutter. A public space is a space that is generally open and accessible to people. Roads, public parks, libraries etc, are typically considered public space. The term ‘public space’ is also often misconstrued to mean other things such as ‘gathering place’, which is an element of the larger concept of social space. Hyderabad, the historical city is the capital of Telangana, India and extends from longitude 78°23’ to 78°33’E and latitude of 17°17’ to 17°31’N. It is the second largest city in terms of area and fifth largest in terms of population. It is one of the fastest growing cities in India. There is a huge influx of people from other states in search of better opportunities. The main objectives of the study are; to study the sprawl and changing demographic structure of the city of Hyderabad, to study the accessibility of parks, to study the need for the emergence of a local public sphere. The data base will be mainly on secondary data collected from various government sources. A primary survey will be conducted based on a structured questionnaire. GIS and other mapping techniques will be applied to analyse the data.

1. Introduction

A place space is a social space that is generally open and accessible to people. Roads, public parks, libraries etc, are typically considered public space. The term ‘public space’ is also often misconstrued to mean other things such as ‘gathering place’, which is an element of the larger concept of social space. To a limited extent, government buildings which are open to the public, such as public libraries are public spaces, although they tend to have restricted areas and greater limits upon use. Although not considered public space, privately owned buildings or property visible from sidewalks and public thoroughfares may affect the public visual landscape, for example, by outdoor advertising. Recently, the concept of Shared space has been advanced to enhance the experience of pedestrians in public space jointly used by automobiles and other vehicles.
Public space has also become something of a touchstone for critical theory in relation to philosophy, (urban) geography, visual art, cultural studies, social studies and urban design. One of the earliest examples of public spaces is common. For example, no fees or paid tickets are required for entry. Non-government-owned malls are examples of 'private space' with the appearance of being 'public space'. The characteristics of a public space include: Promotes human contact and social activities, Is safe, welcoming, and accommodating for all users, Has design and architectural features that are visually interesting, Promotes community involvement, Reflects the local culture or history, Relates well to bordering uses, Is well maintained, Has a unique or special character. Public spaces are regarded as democratic because everybody can use them: places that, rhetorically at least, allows ‘community’ to exist and flourish. Public space is ‘our open-air living room, our outdoor leisure centre’ [1], important to the health and well-being of residents of all ages. Drummond states that, the space appears to the whole community; similarly Pumiao says the place that all residents have the right to use. In other words, public spaces link people with a space. Public spaces are always shared and used by the whole community. Claiming social space and being seen in public becomes a way for social groups to legitimate their right to belong in society. Yet because they can be used by everyone, public spaces are frequently considered contested spaces; places where the opposition, confrontation, resistance and subversion can be played out over ‘the right to space’ [2]. How space is understood and used may also depend on individual and group characteristics [3]. The public spaces are imbued with power relations: particular social groups can be encouraged, tolerated, regulated, and sometimes excluded from public space depending on the degree to which they might be deemed ‘in’ or ‘out of place’. For instance, acts as loitering, drinking, skateboarding or even ‘hanging out’ in public may be constructed as inappropriate because of particular social representations about what sorts of groups and activities should be seen out in public[4, 5].

**Objectives:** Parks provide places for people to experience nature, engage in physical activity, and relax. We studied how the city has been expanding and how the communities use public, urban parks and how parks contribute to physical activity.

**Methodology:** In 10 public parks, we used a survey method to document the number, gender, age group, and activity level of park users who visit daily on an average. We conducted face-to-face interviews in either English or Telugu (Native Language) with both park users (n = 100). Only persons over 18 years of age were eligible. At parks, respondents were recruited by field staff between observations (7:30 AM–11:30 AM and 5:30 PM–7:30 PM). Participants were selected from the busiest and least-busy target areas, and half in each target area was selected because they were sedentary, and half because they were active. We interviewed 100 park users for all the parks at an average of 10 nos. Per park. A questionnaire was formulated and designed to suit the needs of the study. SPSS software was used to generate the tables by using various variables, such as age, gender, religion, proximity to the park, and perceptions of park safety, park characteristics, and performance of park staff. To predict whether residents used the park once each week or more often versus less than once per week, we fit the data to bivariate correlation, Crosstab methods and frequency methods.. We analyzed the frequency of weekly leisure exercise as the number of the times per week a person exercises. Later, Arc GIS is used to generate maps.

2. Study area

Hyderabad, the historic, beautiful city is the capital of Telangana, India and extends from longitude 78°23’ to 78°33’E and latitude of 17°17’ to 17°31’N. It is the second largest city in terms of area and fifth largest in terms of population. It is one of the fastest growing cities in India. There is a huge influx of people from other states in search of better opportunities. The study area shown in Figure 1 covers about 217 km² and encompasses the administrative districts in the integrated town and city planning scheme which are greatly influenced by urban sprawl.
Public parks may have an important role to play in facilitating physical activity. They provide places for individuals to walk or jog, and many have specific facilities for sports, exercise, and other vigorous activities. In other words, parks can play a role in facilitating physical activity, but do not necessarily do so; indeed, parks also provide opportunities for people to engage in sedentary behavior. Information on who uses public parks and what they do there can elucidate the current and potential contribution of parks to physical activity. Features other than size may influence park use, including accessibility, availability, and quality of amenities. Use is also likely a reflection of individual preferences, as well as age, exercise habits, and race/ethnicity. Other important characteristics include the surrounding land use and availability of organized events that draw people to the park. In a review article, Godbey et al. emphasized the need to include objective measures of physical activity when studying parks. In this study, we used several methods, including direct observation, to examine how 10 parks in the City of Hyderabad were used, and how much physical and other activities occurs in them. We also explored how services might be changed to better serve residents. Table 1 gives a gist of parks and urban bio-diversity of the city of Hyderabad. There are a total of 49 parks and one reserved forest. The size of the parks, range from 1 acre to more than 300 acres.
Table 1. List of parks and urban biodiversity.

| Sl. No. | Resource                                               | No. | Area in acres |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|---------------|
| 1       | Major parks                                            | 49  | 266.91        |
| 2       | Colony parks in East Zone                              | 65  | 27.36         |
| 3       | Tree parks in East Zone                                | 29  | 11.60         |
| 4       | Traffic islands and central media in East Zone         | 5   | 0.43          |
| 5       | Colony parks in South Zone                             | 115 | 46.83         |
| 6       | Tree parks in South Zone                               | 122 | 43.04         |
| 7       | Traffic islands and central media in South Zone        | 30  | 8.39          |
| 8       | Colony parks in Central Zone                           | 212 | 83.31         |
| 9       | Tree parks in Central Zone                             | 22  | 59.14         |
| 10      | Traffic islands and central media in Central Zone      | 59  | 16.29         |
| 11      | Colony parks in West Zone                              | 58  | 30.88         |
| 12      | Tree parks in West Zone                                | 46  | 38.74         |
| 13      | Traffic islands and central media in West Zone         | 22  | 11.51         |
| 14      | Colony parks in North Zone                             | 71  | 22.52         |
| 15      | Tree parks in North Zone                               | 69  | 23.74         |
| 16      | Traffic islands and central media in North Zone        | 43  | 3.71          |
| 17      | Fountains                                              | 85  | -             |
| 18      | Cement pots for plants                                 | 4778| -             |
| 19      | Native trees for Urban Landscape                       | 127 | -             |

Source: GHMC

A total of 266.91 acres of land is under major parks which are acting as the lung space for the city residents. Apart from major parks we find that colony park, three parks and traffic parks. These parks are divided according to municipality zone wise and category wise. Table 2 shows types of parks such as Major park, City level park, Theme park and Reserved Forest.

Figure 2. (a) Satellite imagery of zones. (b) City zones of Hyderabad.
Table 2. Selected parks for the field study.

| S.No. | Zone Name | Circle No. | Name of the Park               | Category         | Area In Acres |
|-------|-----------|------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| 1     | East      | 1          | Dr. A. S. Rao Nagar Park      | Major Park       | 2.00          |
| 2     | East      | 1          | Sainikpuri ‘E’ Park           | Major Park       | 2.00          |
| 3     | South     | 5          | Imliban Park                  | City Level Park  | 9.00          |
| 4     | South     | 5          | Musi Landscape Garden         | Major Park       | 3.50          |
| 5     | Central   | 7          | Cha Cha Nehru Park            | City Level Park  | 12.75         |
| 6     | Central   | 8          | Feroz Gandhi Park             | Major Park       | 0.60          |
| 7     | Central   | 9          | Indira Park                   | City Level Park  | 69.40         |
| 8     | West      | 11         | Gulmohar Park                 | Major Park       | 3.20          |
| 9     | West      | 14         | Kukatpally Phase – VII Park   | Major Park       | 2.10          |
| 10    | West      | 10         | KBR Park                      | Reserve Forest   | 360.0         |

Source: GHMC

Figure 3. Types of parks in Hyderabad.

3. Results & discussion

All 10 parks were public, urban, parks, and each had a building with an office. All had, Park staff, Garden with flowers walking path and play area. Seven had Tracks, 4 had skate courts, and 6 had picnic areas. Two parks had running tracks, but only one (KBR Park) was accessible. Some parks provided programming, such as health related, religious programmes.

The variables from Table 3 shows that 65 percent of people come to park daily and alone with less than 1km of distance. Whereas 32 percent of people have said that they come with others. These others comprise mainly, children and friends. Only 3 percent have stated that they come only once in a week and the distance travelled is more than 5 km. About 97 percent of people are daily users.
Table 3. Details on visitors to the park.

| You come alone or with others | Distance to park | How often you use this park | Total |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| Alone                         |                  | Daily | Weekly |       |
|                               | 0-1/2 km         | 16   | 0      | 16   |
|                               | 1/2 - 1 km       | 22   | 0      | 22   |
|                               | More than 1 km   | 21   | 0      | 21   |
|                               | More than 5 km   | 6    | 1      | 7    |
|                               | Total            | 65   | 1      | 66   |
| With Others                   |                  | Daily | Weekly |       |
|                               | 0-1/2 km         | 8    | 0      | 8    |
|                               | 1/2 - 1 km       | 9    | 0      | 9    |
|                               | More than 1 km   | 12   | 0      | 12   |
|                               | More than 5 km   | 3    | 2      | 5    |
|                               | Total            | 32   | 2      | 34   |

The utility of parks is mostly for health upkeeping. A total of 39 percent of people have said that they visit the park for walking as a daily routine, similarly 30 percent of people have agreed that they come daily to park as part of exercise or jogging. About 12 percent have people come to do yoga, while 11 percent of people just come to relax in the park.

Table 4. Purpose of visit to the park.

|                          | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Bike                     | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 2.0                |
| Bring Children           | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 4.0                |
| Skating                  | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 8.0                |
| Exercise/jog             | 30        | 30.0    | 30.0          | 38.0               |
| Relax                    | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 50.0               |
| Walking                  | 39        | 39.0    | 39.0          | 89.0               |
| Yoga                     | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 100.0              |
| Total                    | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Table 5. Space particulars in the park.

|                          | Count | Percent |
|--------------------------|-------|---------|
| Enough Space in the park | 55    | 55%     |
| Too Crowded              | 45    | 45%     |
| Overall Excluded         | 100   | 100%    |
| Total                    | 100   |         |
When asked about the space for their activities, about 55 percent of people have agreed that there is enough space, while 45 percent of people have said that they do not much space and it is too crowded. Table 5 explains the peoples perception towards the space. This clearly shows that the urban spaces are congested and need for more parks with enough space is required.

Any person visiting a particular place means he has a choice of his own. When asked about the priorities for a visit to a particular park, 46 percent of people have said that they come to park due to availability of Paths(walking), which correlates with their purpose of visit. About 25 percent of people have stated that the cleanliness is their priority and that’s why they visit the those parks.

Table 6. Priorities for visit to the park.

| Valid       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Available Park Staff | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 2.0                |
| Benches     | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 4.0                |
| Cleaning/Litter Removal | 25     | 25.0    | 25.0          | 29.0               |
| Gardens and Flowers | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 30.0               |
| Paths       | 46        | 46.0    | 46.0          | 76.0               |
| Lighting    | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 77.0               |
| Recreation  | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 83.0               |
| Security    | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 87.0               |
| Track       | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 90.0               |
| 14          | 8         | 8.0     | 8.0           | 98.0               |
| 15          | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 100.0              |
| Total       | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                     |

4. Conclusion
The city of Hyderabad, though growing at a faster rate compared to the other cities in India, it has its own urban space problems. The findings suggest that urban spaces should be designed such a way, that all people have a park within at least 1 km of their residence. Data shows that more people used specific areas when they were provided organized activities, suggesting that increasing the availability of structured, supervised activities will also likely to increase park use; however, only 9 percent of all observations found areas supervised, suggesting that greater attention should be paid to staffing. Perceptions of safety may affect the use of recreational areas, but they did not predict park use in this study. Our analysis, however, was restricted to 8 parks, mostly in low-income, minority neighborhoods. A larger sample of parks with greater variation might provide different results. The primary finding that residential proximity to a park was the most robust predictor of both park use and self-reported leisure exercise in urban, minority communities should be noted by urban planners and officials responsible for ensuring safe and healthy neighborhoods. Facilitating larger numbers of people being physically active is critical for improving overall population health.
5. References

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