OPEN SPACE AND IMAGINATION

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Abstract: Open space is a necessary tool in our park system for fostering creativity and allowing for relaxation. In addition, open space areas allow people to exercise, find self-worth, and to use their imagination. This manuscript addresses the issue of what is happening in open space provided in several park settings. Do residents use open space as a place where they can play games, enjoy the grass, play with their dog, build community with one another, and more importantly exercise their imagination? Observational research was conducted to determine how open space was utilized in several communities to determine how the open space provided the public was being utilized.

Often those living in a large city begin to feel the city 'close in' on them. Traffic jams, exhaust, and the lack of a clear view of the sunset or sunrise can all have an effect on the urban dweller. One of the urban dweller's needs is to have and experience what is simply called "open space." Open space is "all areas of the city that are open to the sky and can therefore include parks, private gardens, school grounds, vacant land, parking lots, flat rooftop, streets, and so on" (Lavery, 1974, p.120). An apparent concern in today's society is a generation that lacks imagination in their play. As an example, many parents recognize that young children would rather play with basic household items than with structured apparatus or toys designed specifically for children. Older children are often attracted to simple activities such as climbing dirt piles and trees, playing in the water, and watching animals. The enjoyment children derive from such activities as playing tag or hide-and-seek consume endless hours and do not require a developed facility or structured environment.

The differences between the designs of parks and how they are actually used is significant for both social and economic reasons. Most parks provide an atmosphere that suggests freedom and open spaces, thus fostering creativity and relaxation. This open space context is sometimes limited by what appears in many locations as the planner's and landscape architect's need to provide structure or specific purpose to all park functions - activity zoning so to speak. While many recreation activities require facilities with specifications (i.e., swimming pools, playground equipment, basketball standards etc.) most informal sports and outdoor recreation pursuits need only space, adaptation, and imagination. Economically, many parks contain facilities that get very little use or are used in ways not intended by the structure (softball field used for soccer) suggesting that perhaps our finances are better spent providing space that can be used for a variety of activities by the general public.

The need for open space to encourage creativity and imagination is also recognized as television and computers consume more and more of our children's leisure time. While television and computers are considered a necessity in our contemporary society, they can certainly detract from interaction with others, physical health, and social development. Fortunately, public parks with open space provide an outlet for social interaction and physical health.

To fully understand the purpose of open space it is important to understand the origin of the need for open space. With the growth of cities (due to industrialization) there began to appear in 1845, large Victorian parks on the edge or borders of cities and towns in Great Britain (Lavery, 1974). People realized that the industrialization of cities provided very little open space unless it was demanded and planned for. With the Victorian Era came a desire for improvement in the area of physical and spiritual growth among the urban dwellers (Theobald, 1984). The battle was set for designating large open space in our cities as increasing demands for housing resulted in fewer large parks and more smaller open spaces. (Lavery, 1974).

Open space management has five goals (Shivers & Hjelte, 1971). The first goal is the prevention of overcrowding of the land from congestion and structures. Open space offers breaks, edges, and open areas of different size and shape for the city. One objective would be to have unobstructed space in three directions. This unobstructed space would allow city dwellers an open view of topography in and around the city. Many of our larger cities have this possibility for very scenic views due to their development near oceans, lakes, rivers, or mountains. For example, land adjacent to these expanses of water can provide for open space with unobstructed views and need to be in public ownership. Likewise, the distant view of hills and mountains can play a similar role of open space. Thus, views of the hills and mountains need to remain unobstructed and be provided for urban dwellers to obtain a sense of an open environment and to have a scenic view.

A second goal for open space management was for the conservation of land and water areas to protect the natural environment. Open space, lessens the impact of pollutants so common in an industrial area. Open spaces, in an urban situation, can be used to teach the urban dweller an appreciation and hopefully a respect for the natural environment. One objective of protecting open space is "to preserve geological, horticultural, and historical features of sentimental, educational, and cultural interest" (Shivers et al., 1971, p. 243). It could be argued that many of our cities would have less open space was it not for the legally mandated protection provided for historical features. As an example, our nation's Capitol Washington, D.C., provides many educational, historical, and cultural features that enhance its attractiveness and are magnets for tourists.

The next goal is to provide an aesthetically pleasing area that can be enjoyed by all. The skyline of a city and the view within a city needs to contain breaks and gaps provided for by open space. If all our cities have are continuous' buildings with no areas "to breath" then there will be an increase in psychological stress among the urban dwellers. The need for open space "is based on our biological need to have contact with the natural environment in an urban setting and our psychological need for contrast and change in spatial surroundings and activities that most indoor environments do not provide" (Gold, 1985, p. 110).

The final goal is to provide space for outdoor recreation. Since ninety percent of our national parks are located in rural areas our urban dwellers, which have the greatest need, are limited in their ability to take advantage of them (Gold, 1985). "For the city poor, the nation's outstanding recreation resources - national parks and seashores, scenic rivers and wilderness areas - are light years away, and many state and local recreation areas also are beyond their reach. Many slum children, by the age of thirteen, have never been 800 meters from home" (Collins, Duffield, & Rodgers, 1975, p.99). The result is that the vast majority of those living in an urban area spend their leisure time in those urban areas. Simply stated each individual should be able to utilize the park's natural assets to their personal interests and needs as long as that adaptation does not deteriorate the environment or detract from the enjoyment of others. However, if the national park (and it's open space) is outside the urban dweller's reach then we need to bring open space to them.

The question remains: What is happening in Open Space provided in a park setting? During the summer months extensive research was conducted in Indianapolis and Bloomington Indiana area as well as in Angling Lake Ontario, a remote Native American village in the northern part of the Province. The purpose was to observe how the open space in various parks was used. The observations were classified into three categories or representative areas: Angling Lake represents a rural park experience, Bryan Park (Bloomington), Ellenberger (Indianapolis) and Broad Ripple (Indianapolis) represent suburban Parks and three Indianapolis parks (Brookside, Christian and Riverside) represent Urban Parks. The distinction of suburban and urban was based on the number of residents in the Zip Code area of the park. Those under 40,000 were classified as suburban and those over 40,000 were classified as urban. In addition the urban parks represent those parks, which are closer in proximity to the city center of a major metropolitan area. These parks were chosen for comparisons because they were similar in size (medium sized City Park) and were similar in the amount of space provided. There were two users of open space per observation in the rural areas (31 people/ 16 observations), 17 users per observation in suburban parks (422 people/25 observations), and nine users of open space per observation in urban parks (199 people/23 observations).

Open Space activities consisted of fishing, riding bicycles, relaxing on a park bench, relaxing on the lawn, playing games, frisbee, walking, walking the dog, and sun bathing (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparisons of urban, suburban, and rural observations: Total numbers and Gender by activity engaged in.

	Rural			Suburban			Urban		
Activity:	Total #	Male	Female	Total #	Male	Female	Total #	Male	Female
Sun-Bathing				52	17	35			
Walking				67	35	32	52	28	24
Walking the Dog				64	33	31	5	3	2
Biking	14	7	7	6	5	1	14	11	3
Lawn Picnic				2	1	1	2	2	
Frisbee				13	10	3	25	25	
Playing	13	8	5	126	63	63	77	60	17
Relaxing				76	37	39	4	1	3
Park Bench				16	5	11	11	5	6
Fishing	4	4					9	7	2

Additionally, open space users of the urban parks were fifty-five percent (55%) African American, open space users in the suburban park were eighty-nine percent (89%) Euro-American, and open space users in the rural park were all Native American (see Table 2).

Table 2: Comparisons of urban, suburban, and rural observations: Ethnicity (All rural participants were Native American.

Activity:	Suburban			Urban	
	Caucasian	African American	Other	Caucasian	African American
Sun-Bathing	52				
Walking	57	10		14	38
Walking the Dog	58	5	1	2	3
Biking	6			6	8
Lawn Picnic	2				2
Frisbee	13			23	2
Playing	124	2		35	42
Relaxing	53	23		1	3
Park Bench	12	4		7	4
Fishing				1	8

Data was also broken down by age (see table 3) of participants noting the activities that were found to be predominately young people (playing and relaxing in the park), activities that were predominately young adults (sunbathing and frisbee), and those activities that were predominately adults (walking).

Table 3: Comparisons of urban, suburban, and rural observations: Age of participants by activity

Activity:	Rural		Suburban				Urban			
	0-7	7-14	0-7	7-14	15-21	21+	0-7	7-14	15-21	21+
Sun-Bathing					52					
Walking			6	8	16	37	6	10	14	22
Walking the Dog			2	4	20	38	1			4
Biking	7	7			1	5	4	5	5	
Lawn Picnic						2				2
Frisbee					11	2			11	14
Playing	8	5	39	41	23	23	21	32	4	20
Relaxing			29	7	8	32	3			1
Park Bench			1	1	2	12	1			10
Fishing	4						1	3	2	3

Fishing was an activity that was percentage wise (compared to population of park use) more common in the rural area. Many of the parks did not have an area for fishing and the youth of the Native American community grow up accustomed to fishing. Riding bicycles in the Open area seemed to be more common in larger parks where crossing the park to get to the other side or to the pool made riding 'cross country' quickest route. Children in all the areas used their bikes as a transportation mode.

Relaxing on a park bench was a common activity in the suburban and urban parks. This apparently served as a method of relaxation for workers in the mid-afternoon taking a break from work (i.e. UPS drivers). Relaxing on the lawn was an activity most common to the suburban area. Eighteen percent (18%) of open space recreators in suburban parks used the lawn for relaxation compared to two percent (2%) in urban areas. This could be the result of area residents feeling a higher sense of safety in suburban parks.

Playing various games in the open space was an activity common to all the environments of the study. This included youth playing softball, soccer, rugby, or other games with friends, especially when there was a shortage of ball fields during the time they wanted to play. Additionally, users of the suburban parks and urban parks used the park for frisbee, whether in the form of a game or between two individuals for fun. Furthermore, walking around and through the park was common to all park settings. This activity seemed to be for personal time of reflection or socializing for friends. Those seeking walking as a form of exercise appeared to take advantage of the trails available in the parks.

Two activities common to the suburban parks were walking a dog and sunbathing. On a warm summer afternoon, the lawn at suburban parks, especially Bryant Park, was filled with people enjoying the sun. This possibly reflects the ethnic differences of the suburban and urban parks observed. This finding shows the need for suburban parks to provide open sunny areas for use by park residents for sunbathing and possible partitioning off an area for walking the dog as the two activities sometimes do not mix.

Overall the open space in all areas was utilized and apparently valued by the park visitor. It is also important to note that time of day did not seem to play a factor in the utilization of the open space in the parks. While activities (softball leagues) flourished in the evening hours the open space seemed to be used by individuals at all hours of the day. During the day, individuals would stop in the park to enjoy lunch or allow their little children a mid-day break and the evening would see an increase in the number of individual's walking or exercising. Without interviewing the open space user this researcher can only share his opinion that the open space seemed to be a valuable tool in all areas for instilling creativity, relaxation, self-worth, and community building. The outdoors is an amazing tool both at giving a sense of wonder and a sense of peace. This environment of outdoor space can contribute significantly to the welfare of the citizens of a community. The need for open recreation space is a valuable and necessary tool in allowing residents of all areas a place where they can play games, enjoy the grass, play with their dog, build community with one another, but more importantly exercise their imagination.

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