

## Perceived Safety in Community Parks: The Case of Erbil

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### Abstract

Parks play a crucial role in cities, offering opportunities for nature experiences, physical activity, and relaxation. This study used a case study methodology to evaluate park conditions in Erbil's residential neighborhoods through observations, interviews, and surveys. Conducted in ten community parks (Sami Abdulrahman, Shanadar 1, Peshmerga, Manar, Runaki, Kanyaw, Shanadar 2, Shanader 3, Gilkand, and Khanzad), the research found that these parks generally fail to meet standards and lack essential recreational amenities like sports fields and playgrounds. Most parks currently provide only resting, strolling, and seating areas. Survey results indicate a strong interest among Erbil residents to share their opinions about park improvements. The majority of park visitors (82%) are local residents who prefer visiting in the afternoons. However, only 8% feel the existing playgrounds and exercise equipment meet their needs. There is a clear demand for additional features, including seating areas, family picnic spots, gathering spaces for the elderly, play areas for children, reading areas for students, and walking paths.

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## INTRODUCTION

For everyone, safety is the most crucial consideration in every situation (Maruthaveeran & Van Den Bosch, 2014) (Jansson et al., 2013). However, more frequently, scientists highlight how plant life negatively affects people's perceptions of danger and is the subject of numerous studies. Numerous studies have found an association between greenery and decreased crime rates or perceived threats (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001). Safety, appeal, and facilities are crucial for promoting park use (McCormack GR et al., 2010). Residents may be discouraged from accessing parks due to safety issues like fear of crime and harassment (Francesca B et al., 2018). For women and children, safety is especially vital (Ferré MB et al., 2006).

Perceived privacy, one of man's most fundamental, biologically conditioned demands, is a significant external aspect associated with space (Altman, 1975) (Westin, 1967). The satisfaction of needs related to privacy considerably impacts the effective operation of social groups and individuals (Altman, 1975) (Altman and Chemers, 1980). On the other hand, the provision of too little or too much privacy has negative implications (Al-Homoud and Tassinary, 2004) (Pedersen, 1999). However, the privacy issue in parks has yet to be touched upon (Gharaei et al., 2012) (Lis, 2021) (Lis and Anwajler, 2014).

Parks and other green spaces in towns are essential to their inhabitants for several reasons. Such areas may constitute healthy environments, boosting one's well-being, reducing stress (Herzog et al., 1997) (Kaplan, 1995) (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) (Ulrich et al., 1991) and aggression (Cackowski and Nasar, 2003) or improving mood (Bowler et al., 2010). The regenerative influence of nature in parks is often associated with peaceful, sheltered, isolated spots, which satisfy the need

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for privacy of an individual or a group. On the other hand, places with such characteristics may evoke a sense of danger since they may constitute a potential hiding place for aggressive individuals. To date, the simultaneous impact of perceived privacy and perceived danger on preferences has not been tested, although one may suspect there exists a strong correlation between the two feelings (safety and privacy).

They afford places for individuals to walk or jog and play, seating, and many have specific facilities for sports, exercise, and other dynamic activities. The goal of a community park is to facilitate informal recreational activities, encourage social interaction among neighborhood residents, preserve usable open space, create identifying neighborhood characteristics, create shared responsibility and a sense of pride among the neighborhood residents, and improve the overall quality of life for residents (Azmi and Karim, 2012). Physical components park (The industrial physical and architectural components of the garden), which increase the aesthetic garden's value and its functional efficiency. These components include walkways, benches, fountains, lighting, waste containers, and a signboard. The successful design of the garden should consider the type, size, color, scale, location, and material of the physical components as well as their durability and resistance to climate conditions, ease of use, and maintenance (Crowe, 1994) (Hannebaum, 1998). According to the recent statistics obtained from the Director of Engineering Parks and Gardens, in the city of Erbil, implemented and non-implemented neighborhoods parks are about 250 gardens in all parts of Erbil city; for this reason, this research decided to research and study to investigate the privacy with safety components and other various recreational activities for several community parks by taking sample randomly.

Therefore, assessing the people's perceptions is one way to see the level of satisfaction with the park. This assessment is done to (assess privacy and safety) and evaluate the level of satisfaction. The purpose of this study is to reveal the visitor's perception of the satisfaction level at ten Parks and visitors' need for ten Parks in the future. This research aims to describe the components of the park and to indicate the privacy and safety of that environment in Erbil city.

Community parks are regarded as the most significant green space in terms of area and are well-known to all locals. All services are in community open spaces, which belong to all age groups and offer a wide range of opportunities to a diverse cross-section of citizens. The study was shown in several Erbil city parks in residential neighborhoods chosen randomly from various directions, including the north, south, east, and west, as well as the city center. They use three methods for collecting data: personal observation, official interviews, and resident surveys.

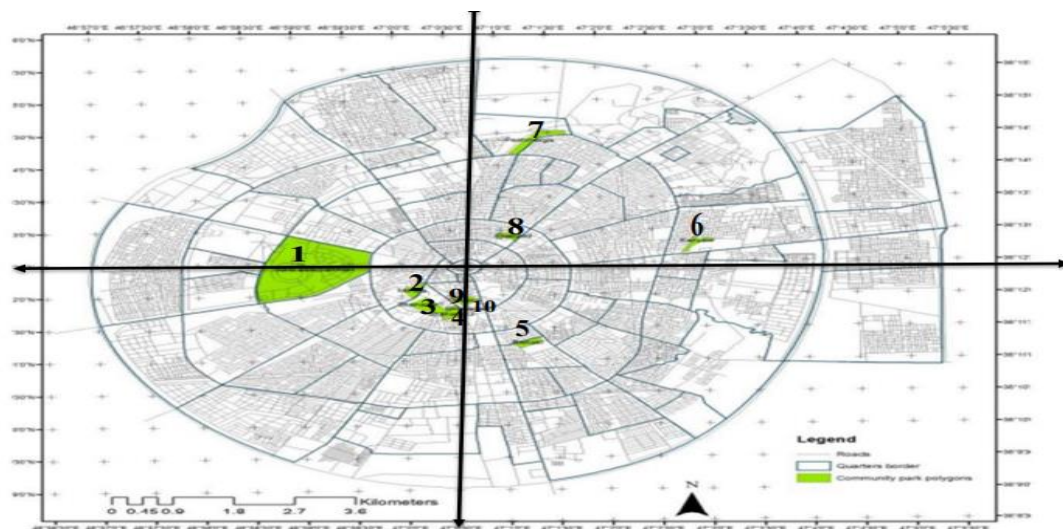


Figure 1: Community parks of Erbil city

Table 1. Community Parks of Erbil City with Areas, Quarters Located, and Directions

NO.	Name	Area (m2)	Quarters located	directions
1.	<b>Sami Abdulrahman</b>	2,068,955	Sami Abdulrahman	West side
2.	<b>Shanadar1</b>	114,293	Zanyari	Central side
7.	<b>Shanadar 2</b>	67,776	Zanyari	Central side
8.	<b>Shanader 3</b>	53,340	Zanyari	Central side
3.	<b>Peshmrga</b>	131,116	Salahddin2	North side
4.	<b>Mnara</b>	93,856	Minara	Central side
5.	<b>Runaki</b>	54,895	Runaki	South side
6.	<b>Kanyaw</b>	58,500	Gulan	East side
9.	<b>Gilkand</b>	73,000	Taajeel	Central side
10.	<b>khanzad</b>	46,000	Tayrawa	North side

## METHOD

This study gathered accurate information from ten selected samples by visiting each location. Data collection involved three main steps: observation, personal interviews, and questionnaires.

First, for observation, the sample locations were visited multiple times to study the reality of the parks and gardens, their features, and their impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Observations focused on several key elements: the location of the parks within the city, areas designated for greenery and entertainment, road and pathway structures, and man-made features such as benches, fountains, pools, kiosks, trash bins, and traffic signs. The most significant problems faced by these parks were also noted during the visits.

Second, personal interviews were conducted with specialists, directors, engineers, and supervisors from Erbil's municipality, along with the directors responsible for the parks. These interviews provided valuable insights and detailed information about each park's management and maintenance.

Third, questionnaires were used to collect direct feedback from park visitors. The surveys included a range of questions that helped the researchers understand the key issues outlined in the study. Questionnaires played a vital role in communicating directly with the participants and allowed the surveyors to tailor their inquiries based on the educational status of the respondents (Qindilgi, 1993). A total of 150 survey forms were distributed across ten parks (Sami Abdulrahman, Shanadar 1, Peshmrga, Manar, Runaki, Kanyaw, Shanadar 2, Shanader 3, Gilkand, and Khanzad), with participants chosen randomly, representing both genders and different educational backgrounds. Approximately 10-15% of each park's visitors participated.

After collecting and analyzing the data from these surveys, and combining it with the visual observations and interviews, the researchers compared the results, analyzed statistics, and calculated percentages based on visitor preferences, climate factors, and local and international standards. The findings highlighted visitors' needs and preferences for the parks, helping shape recommendations for their future design and improvement.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the neighborhood parks' components were few in the kiosks, and they were old and empty, or perhaps they needed to be more critical to the administration, as shown in figures (2,3). Also, children's games are present in miniature, and the parks built in the past do not contain children's games, as well as a fitness area, but as a result of the lack of continuity of their maintenance periodically, they became a section One of these games is out of work, where the presence of such recreation activities attracts residential neighborhoods to use of these parks more by young people and the elderly, as well as children, as shown in figures(3,4). The presence of roses and grass in a group of neighbourhood gardens was few due to the need for more service operations for the garden. Seating places and garbage bin walkways in most parks are available, but they differ from what is required. Some of them need maintenance and lighting, and some need their own. Some of them do not have fountains and statues inside the residential park signs, as it is

considered an essential aesthetic component of the gardens. However, it also needs special care, incredibly a few fountains, and waterfalls, In addition, to the irrigation and watering of the grass and trees, most of the neighbourhood parks are irrigated by hand, especially the old ones. As for newly built gardens, vast areas have a sprinkler system where they are successful and economical for water, and they are uniformly irrigated for all large and small gardens. In terms of designing residential neighbourhood gardens, more designs were designed by designers and did not refer to consulting and taking the opinions of residents without knowing the culture and the social life of the residents only.

According to the findings from Q1 (Gender and Education Level), the results of the questionnaire show strong similarities across respondents in the residential neighborhood parks under study. Therefore, it is appropriate to combine the analysis and discussion of the responses based on the type of questions asked.

In terms of gender participation in recreational activities, Table 3 reveals that participation rates varied, with males representing a higher percentage (59%) than females. This disparity may be attributed to the cultural and traditional values of the city and region. Regarding education level, the data shows that spending leisure time in parks is highly valued, particularly by those who have undergone changes in their cultural, social, and economic perspectives. Notably, individuals with a university degree made up the majority of the sample (54%), followed by those with a preparatory certificate (22%). These findings suggest that higher education is directly linked to a greater demand for parks and gardens, indicating that parks tend to attract the more educated population. This conclusion aligns with similar findings from Jasim (2004).

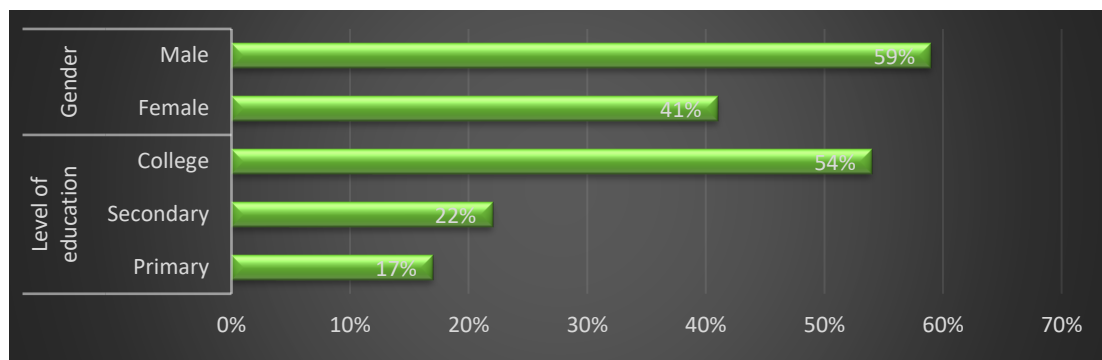


Figure 2. Gender and Level of Education

According to the responses to Q2 and Q3, the average number of visits to neighborhood parks is six times per month, with the average duration of each visit being 1.64 hours. Regarding the means of transportation, as shown in Figure 2, 81% of respondents reported walking to the parks, given that these parks are located within or near residential areas. Only 24% used private cars, indicating that there is little need for large parking areas. Instead, it would be more beneficial to expand park spaces and recreational activities. The visits were predominantly communal, with 63% of respondents visiting with friends and 47% with family, while individual visits were the least common at 29%.

These results highlight the importance of providing safe seating areas for groups and families, especially near children's play zones, as many families visit the parks with their children. The success of park design, especially green spaces, lies in its ability to foster social interaction, which is essential for fulfilling people's needs for companionship and belonging. As Laurie (1975) suggests, park designs should encourage social gatherings by offering quiet places for rest, away from busy movement areas.

In terms of preferred visiting times, the evening was the most popular, with 82% of respondents favoring it, followed by the morning (27%), and lastly the night (15%), likely due to more available free time in the evening.

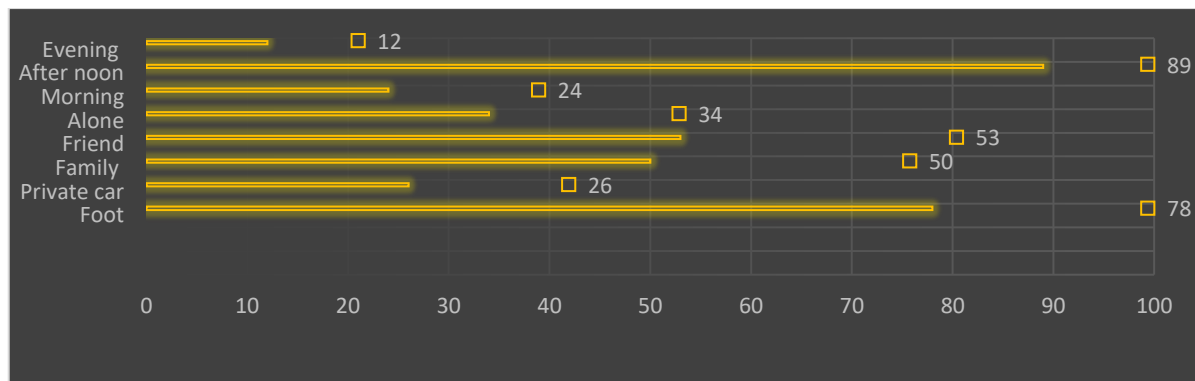


Figure 3. Time Spent in the Neighbourhood Parks

According to Q4, the questionnaire results (Figure 4) reveal that most individuals visit gardens and parks for recreation and relaxation, seeking a sense of freedom in the green spaces while enjoying the views of flowers, plants, and fountains. Activities such as sitting, resting, and walking through the gardens while admiring the scenery are the top priorities, with 85%, 80%, and 34% of respondents indicating these preferences, respectively. These environments provide comfort, especially for calming the nerves, as visual and acoustic isolation, along with guiding elements like plants, pathways, and lighting, play a crucial role in creating a peaceful atmosphere (Falyeh, 1990).

The frequency of park usage is strongly influenced by the quality and relevance of the activities offered, which must align with the preferences of visitors across different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and social levels. The efficiency of park use depends not on the number of activities available but on how well these activities meet the desires of the visitors (Tandy, 2013).



Figure 4. Time Spent with the Parks' Components

According to the results of Question 5 (Figure 5), 64% of respondents rated the aesthetics of the gardens as good, while only 5% described them as terrible. Regarding garden design, 49% rated it as good, and 45% as reasonably good. In terms of safety, 70% of respondents felt that the gardens were secure and well-controlled by the safety and administrative authorities, emphasizing the importance of safety in creating a family-friendly atmosphere that attracts visitors.

Half of the respondents found the garden areas suitable for the number of visitors, though 19% believed the spaces were too small. The variety of flowers, trees, and plants differs from one garden to another, depending on the environment and available resources, with only 31% of visitors stating that the plants were well-maintained.

Parks and gardens are important for beautifying the city, providing residents with a sense of comfort and privacy. According to park managers, the lack of skilled gardeners and the large number of visitors, many of whom lack cultural awareness of how to preserve the parks, pose challenges to maintaining these spaces. As vital public areas frequented by various social groups, it is crucial to provide services that maintain the parks' environmental integrity, protect plants from pests caused by visitor waste, and ensure the availability of drinking water and restrooms. However, only 19% of respondents rated the available services as good.

In evaluating specific services, only 8% of respondents rated the children's play areas and sports facilities as good, 11% said the kiosks were good, and 10% gave positive feedback on the fountains, sculptures, and statues. The design of the walkways and paths largely follows the natural layout of the site, with paths shaped organically around plants, lakes, and water channels.



Walkways are a critical part of the overall garden design, impacting the arrangement of landscapes, events, green spaces, and services (Weddle, 1975). However, only 34% of visitors rated the walkways as good.

Lighting, essential for evening and nighttime use of parks, is another area of concern. Many parts of the parks and surrounding residential areas lack sufficient lighting, which diminishes both the aesthetic experience and the sense of security. Only 7% of visitors felt the lighting was adequate, highlighting a key area for improvement.

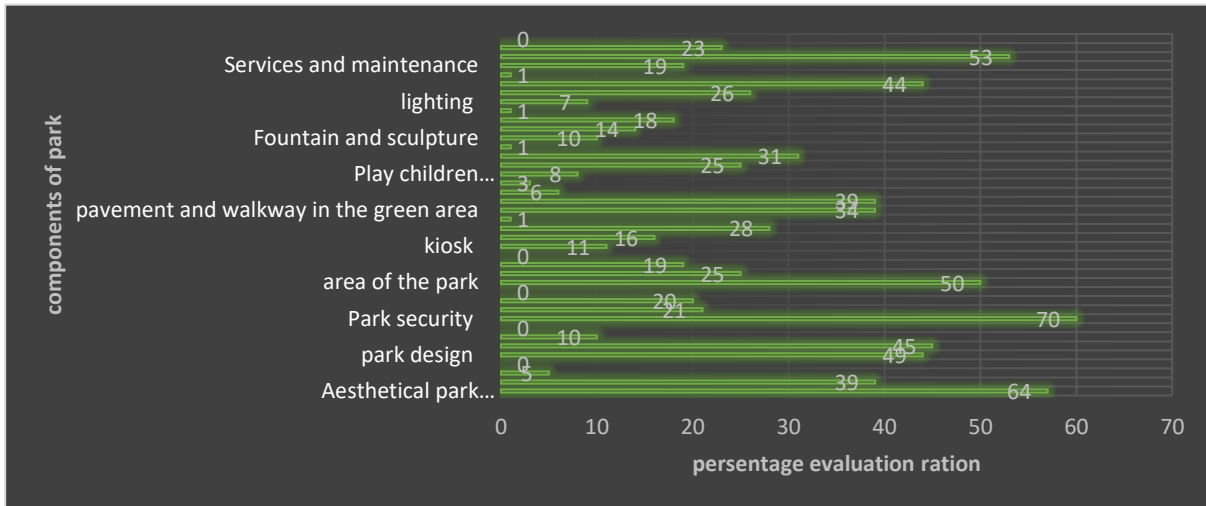


Figure 5. The Evaluation of the Existing Components of Parks

Many visitors expressed a preference for providing feedback through questionnaires in the neighborhood parks studied in Erbil, specifically offering opinions and suggestions on activities and features to include in the designs of future parks in residential neighborhoods (as shown in Figure 6).

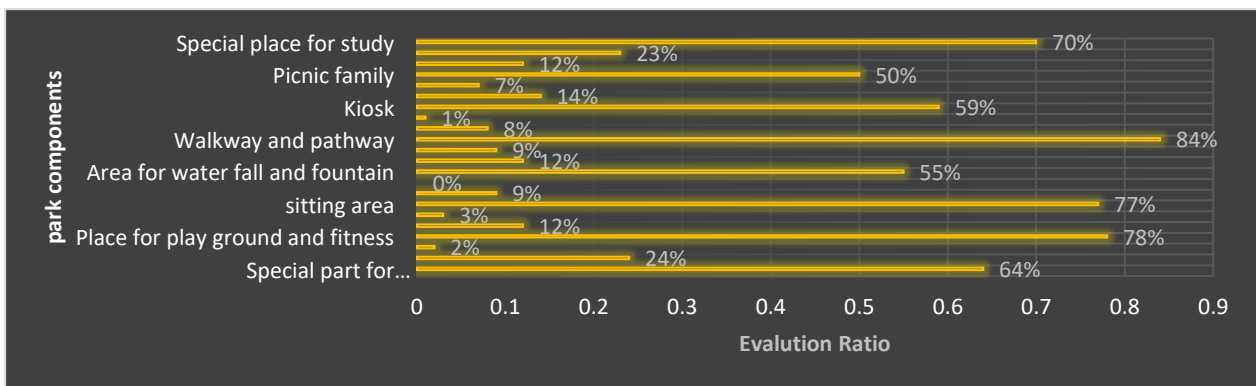


Figure 6. Residents' Desires for The Parks' Components

There is a strong desire to enhance both current and future parks by adding specific elements and activities. The top preferences, in order, are as follows: walking paths (84%), children's play areas and fitness spaces (78%), resting and seating areas (77%), reading and study spaces for students (70%), and private family areas (63%). Additionally, 59% of respondents want kiosks for purchasing simple items, 55% favor the inclusion of water features such as fountains and waterfalls, 50% support picnic areas for families, and 29% expressed interest in spaces for hosting high-level events, such as birthday parties.

**CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that most of the neighborhood parks in Erbil fall short of meeting standard requirements, with a mix of modern, natural, and eclectic design styles. These parks lack

essential features such as children's play areas, fitness spaces, and study zones for students. The presence of generators and communication towers creates noise pollution, driving residents away from these areas. Additionally, fountains and statues are rare, and there is a noticeable absence of activities that attract diverse age groups, particularly young adults and the educated population. Maintenance and services are insufficient, limiting the parks' functionality. Survey results indicate that residents have a strong desire to engage in the development of these parks, visiting mainly in the afternoons with family or friends, and prefer spaces that cater to children's entertainment, exercise, and relaxation. Respondents also express a need for better designs that include family-friendly areas, seating, reading spaces, and health stalls.

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