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PROBLEMS OF OPEN/RECREATIONAL SPACE DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT IN ONITSHA, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE BEST PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The health of a city, its economy and environment is improved by a properly designed and implemented master plan incorporating green areas. These open spaces and recreation areas have improved health status, maintained low stress level, decreased pollution and generally enhanced the quality of life. Human induced problems have sabotaged the recreational resources resulting in its abuse, losses and change of use. Hence, this paper investigated the problems of open/recreational space delivery and management in Onitsha with a view of proffering sustainable best practices. A survey design was employed in the study and four hundred (400) copies of designed questionnaire were distributed to randomly in selected respondents in the city to gather data. Analyses were made using descriptive statistics and one way analysis of Variance to test the hypotheses. Findings from the study showed that the drawbacks in Onitsha include inadequate number of available open spaces vis-à-vis rate of urbanization, natural population growth; poor spatial planning and land development control mechanism, lack of coherent approach to management; poor site planning and building designs. The study then recommended (i) Formulation of effective policy for recreation development in the State; (ii) Involvement of the public, private and popular sectors in the development of open spaces and recreation on public-private partnership (PPP) arrangement and (iii) promoting recreational tendencies among the youth, the adult and the aged, this will help open recreational space development and management to be highly efficient.

KEYWORDS: *Open spaces, recreation, development, sustainability, management and best practice.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a developing country where serious urban environmental degradation has taken place in recent years. Urban air pollution, carbon emission through energy consumption, surface water pollution, and loss of open space (Akanwa et al. 2016) among others, are challenges facing many cities of developing countries. Green surroundings gradually disappear as villages turn to cities giving rise to displacement of fresh and healthy air by pollution (Rashid, 2010 and Akanwa et al, 2016).

It is true that open public spaces increase the social inclusions among the community especially lower income urban residents who always rely on these spaces for majority of leisure time and recreational activities (Ulrich, 2002) but it has not always been true in most cities in Nigeria especially in Onitsha. It has been observed that, people's demand for public open space has not been met and those who invested in green spaces are not getting the full benefits expected because of low efficiency.

The absence or weakness of organizational structures for the management of urban green spaces has resulted in many deficiencies in both the demand and supply of green spaces. Lack of government guidelines, rules, regulations and lack of conducive environment for individuals or companies to invest in green space facilities development and management has been the major causes of the deterioration of urban green spaces in the study cities.

Onitsha urban area has experienced spontaneous development with haphazard distribution of land uses. This has influenced poor planning of public open space and delivery. This problem has been attributed to lack of stakeholders' participation including the individuals, households, companies, NGOs, health and environmental experts. This makes it difficult for them to understand their roles, needs, rights and responsibilities; which are highly needed in all stages of design, construction and management of green spaces and facilities as well as services throughout their lifetime.

According to the population and housing census in 2010, over 50.9 % of the population of Onitsha residents resides in urban areas (NPC, 2006). Onitsha is experiencing rapid population growth and urbanization causing people to migrate from all over the states towards these major cities of South Eastern Nigeria. This could further lead to rapid depletion of its resources (Akanwa et al. 2017 and Officha et al. 2013). Since 2013, Onitsha State government the 'Greening of the city programme of action, have been ongoing, which among others is targeted at ensuring that 20 % of the built area in the cities are landscaped by 2020, to sensitize people on the benefits of greenery for at least

30 % of its residents by 2016 and to plant 20,000 trees by 2016 (Officha et al. 2013).

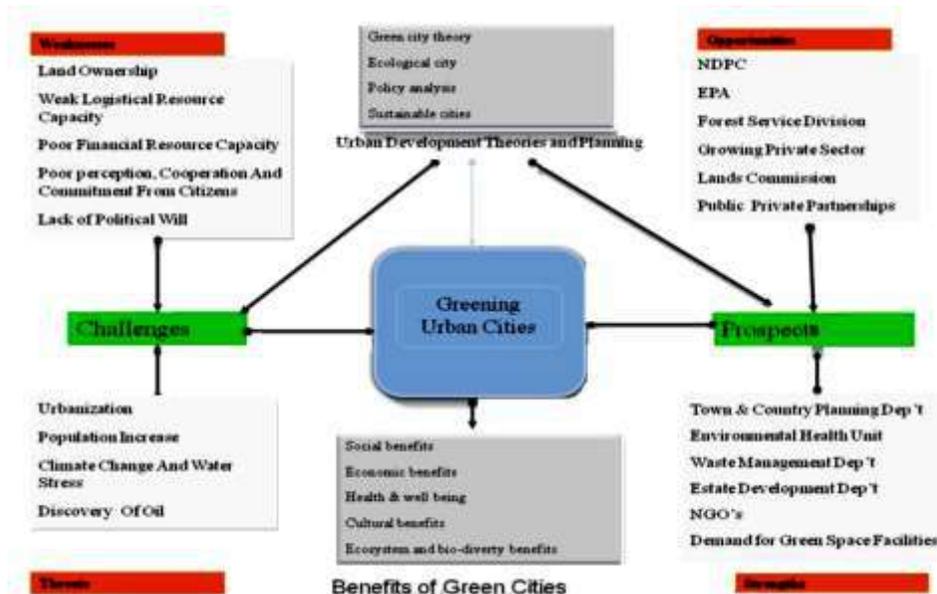
Unfortunately, these attempts have not yielded any impressive and fruitful results as green space belts and wetlands are undergoing destruction which brings negative impacts to the residents. Today, almost all parks, have been converted into commercial centres by the city authorities and the traditional rulers, who are the custodians of the land. For instance, most of the open spaces in Onitsha such as Ojukwu Park, Milky Park and Egboma Park have been turned to dumpsites, shops, markets, churches and public care wash, Premier and foam Industry.

Pursuant to the above, this present study seeks to investigate the unsustainable practices in open and recreational space delivery and management in Onitsha a view of proffering best practices and options

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN OPEN SPACE DEVELOPMENT

This concept was employed in this study and it was developed by Bayram and Ercan, (2006). It summarizes the importance of sustainable development. The study makes particular reference to Poku-Boansi and Inkoom, (2011), they made it clear that rapid urbanization, climate change and water stress, population increase, weak logistical resource capacity, poor perception of people on open spaces, and lack of political will among others is greatly transforming the spatial pattern of urban land use. Consequently, the resulting loss of urban open spaces is continuously altering urban ecosystems.

The study also settles on the well sounding arguments that each city evolves along a certain wave of development, a stage of which is a combination of technology, communication and economic innovation. Hickman et al. (1999) have posited a typology of urban forms balancing integration with regional natural environment, concentrated centres, concentrated-decentralizations and de-concentrated development. The need for balanced integration with natural environment has again arisen from the lessons that the urban development for some time now has annihilated nature rather than accommodated it. Learning from the principles that lie behind the design of organic cities, it becomes possible to see how technology and urban process can relate to open spaces in contemporary development Houghton and Hunter, (1994); Newman and Kenworthy, (1999); McKinney, (2002) and Mensah, (2010). Figure below is a picturesque representation of the conceptual framework for the study. The concept of sustainable urban open space development encompasses, efficient land use; better access; efficient resource use; less pollution and waste; the restoration of natural systems; good housing and living environments; a healthy social ecology; a sustainable economy and community participation and involvement.



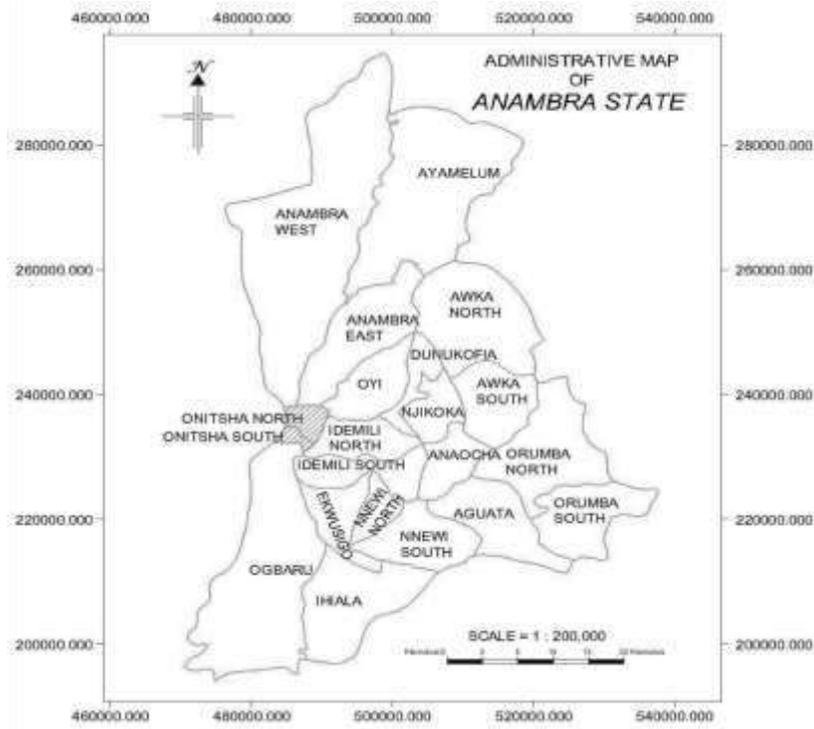
Source: Bayram and Ercan, (2006).

STUDY AREA

Onitsha is located in Anambra State, which is one of Nigeria’s 36 states and one of the 5 States in the country’s south-east geo-political zone. The State is divided into 21 local government areas for

administrative purposes, each with its headquarters. Onitsha, the gateway to eastern Nigeria and economic nerve centre of Anambra state, is located on latitude 6° 12’ 25’’N, Longitude 7° 04’ 04’’E in the Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State (Fig 1.1).

Fig. 1.1: Map of Anambra State showing Onitsha.



Source: Survey and Geoinformatics Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The main concentration of population and industrial activity and the areas showing the greatest potential for growth are situated along this transportation axis. The recent process of urban expansion largely reflects the communication network. Onitsha's location, which combines both road and waterway access points, makes it one of the four main potential industrial and commercial growth areas in Nigeria. The city is split into two local government areas, Onitsha South and Onitsha North. Both areas are bound by Ogbaru local government to the south, Idemili North and Oyi to the East, and Anambra East and west to the North.

The surface geology of Onitsha is essentially the coastal plain sands, which is made up of Ogwashi-Asaba Formation (Miocene to Recent) and the Recent Lutheran Alluvial deposits (Jones and Hockey, 1964). Formation thickness may be up to 200m in some places (Short and Stauble, 1969). Owing to the cementation and compaction of the Formation, particularly because of its texture, which makes for high porosity and permeability, the rate of percolation of pollutants through the rock is quite high. This facilitates high flooding in the area. The sandy unit which constitutes about 95% of the rock in the area is composed of over 96% of quartz (Onyeagocha, 1980). This type of Formation is good for development of open spaces in

an area because the permeability rate is high and the environment geologically consist of mainly sands, sandstone and gravel with clays occurring in lenses.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study primary and secondary sources of data were employed. The survey design which included observations, interview and the distribution of four hundred (400) questionnaires were used in the study. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of relevant respondents basically the open space users and the management of the spaces. Also, accidental sampling was used as the respondents were selected as met randomly during field survey at the locations (Oyeke, 2010). The study sought opinions and perception of the occupants, staff of urban and regional planning, town planners, private developers and the general public in Onitsha (specifically at Omagba, American Quarters, In-land Town and Government Reserved Area (GRA). In Onitsha, Ojukwu Park at Fegge, Rojenny Tourist and Game Inland Town, Milky Park at Woliwo South, and Egboma Park Omagba phase II were selected for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.1 below showed that the greater proportions of the residents are within the working force age ranging from 20 to 59 years in the study area.

Table 1.1: Age Structure of the Respondents in Onitsha

Options on age interval	Frequency
15-19	31
20-24	35
25-29	58
30-34	47
35-39	40
40-44	32
45-49	43
50-54	53
55-59	41
60 and above	20

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.2 shows the number of males and females in the area. The percentage of male and female were also

shown. The values in the Table 1.2 showed high number of males in the sampled population.

Table 1.2: Gender Structure of the Respondents

S/N	Study Locations	Male	% Male	Female	% Female
1	Onitsha	207	51.75	193	48.25

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.3 shows the education level of residents' surveyed in the study areas. The information in the

Table indicates that majority of the people are educated.

Table 1.3: Literacy Status of the Respondents

S/No	Literacy Option	Onitsha	
1	No formal education	19	4.75
2	FSLC	94	23.5
3	GCE/WAEC/WASSC	162	40.5
4	OND/NCE	75	18.75
5	HND/DEGREE	33	8.25
6	Higher Degree (M.Sc/Ph.D)	17	4.25
7	Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.4 shows the knowledge of open spaces in Onitsha. The information in the Table indicates that

majority of the people indicated that people are well informed about open spaces.

Table 1.4: Knowledge of Open Spaces in the study area

Option Investigated	Onitsha
There are open spaces in my area	4.84
The open spaces are operational	4.22
The park has been tempered with	4.03

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.5 shows the response on the usage of open spaces in each urban area of the study. It was observed that the average responses show that at Onitsha is less than 3.0 which implies the respondents disagree with the statement. Therefore, it can be concluded that open spaces at Onitsha are not used for recreation.

pools since the average responses for the urban areas are less than 3.0 in Onitsha. Table 1.5 also showed the responses on the use as for strolling. From Table 1.5, the average responses for the use as strolling shows that the spaces are not often used as strolling spaces since the average response is less than 3.0 for the study area.

Also, the average response of the use of open spaces for pools shows that the spaces are not used as

Table 1.5: Usage of Open Spaces

Option Investigated	Onitsha
Recreation	1.28
Pools (gambling)	1.24
Strolling, Playing Games and Playing Football.	1.04

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data on perception of residents on utilization of open space is presented in Table 1.6. Table 1.6 was computed from the weighted-mean of the respondents in the study area. The response from the respondents in Onitsha indicated that the spaces were not often used for such purpose at Onitsha,

especially recreation and pools. In summary, at Onitsha, the spaces are used mainly for strolling, city plaza, marketing and other purposes.

Table 1.6: Frequent Use of Open Space for the Purposes Listed

Activities	Onitsha			
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
Recreation	0.003	0.02	0.08	1.01
Pools	0.001	0.007	0.03	0.36
Strolling	0.20	1.4	5.6	67.2
Playing Ground	3.86	7.02	108.08	1296.96
Religious Activities	3.86	27.02	108.08	1296.96
City plaza	4.03	28.21	112.84	1354.08
Marketing	4.96	34.72	138.88	1666.56
Natural Conservation	2.02	14.14	56.56	678.72
Others	4.01	28.07	112.28	1347.36
Total	22.944	140.607	534.55	7642.01

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data on perception of residents on the challenges militating against the development of open spaces are presented in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7: Problems Facing the Development of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Onitsha
Conflicting goals and objectives between government officials, recreation planners and influential members of the public	4.00
Inadequate resources utilization and provision including human, fiscal and natural types	3.95
High cost of acquiring land for development	4.07
Planning lapses by non-provision of open spaces in the master plans	4.22
Suitable site and location leading to demolition	4.02
Poor management of existing structures	4.24
Encroachment	3.93
Lack of Political will by government	38.6
Insufficient fund to implement plan	34.5
Lack of institutional framework	47.8

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.8 indicated the information on the problems which the users of the open spaces in the area.

Table 1.8: Challenges Facing the Management of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Onitsha
Lack of Site Protection e.g. Lack of Provision of Adequate Facilities	3.27
Lack of Protection of User's Health and Safety	4.06
Poor Site Rehabilitation	1.44
High Fee Collection	2.32
User's Counts (Maintenance of Facilities and Usage)	0.92

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data on perception of residents on the factors inhibiting the government from realizing its full

potential in the provision of open recreational spaces in the area are presented in Tables 1.9.

Table 1.9: Factors Inhibiting the Government from Realizing its Full Potential of Provision of Open Recreational Space in the Study Area

Option Investigated	Onitsha
Culture	4.31
Economic Activities	4.22
Urbanization	4.32
Help to Reduce Climate Change and Ozone Depletion and Lack of Plans for Development in Master Plan	4.01

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data of constraints and challenges of development of open space in the study area was presented in table 1.10, 1.11 and 1.12. These set of data was utilized to establish objectives number 3 and 4 of the study. Table 1.10 indicated that majority of the respondent in Onitsha strongly agree that there are some constraints that prevent them from visiting open spaces and public parks in their localities. Their

responses were shown below. From Table 1.10, majority agree that the major reason why they did not usually visit open spaces include the following, poor equipment, crime, too crowded, limited working hours, lack of facilities in the open spaces, poor maintenance of the existing equipment and lack of information on the existing open recreational spaces

Table 1.10: Constraints that Prevent People from Using Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Onitsha
Fear of Crime	59
Too Crowded	15
No one to go the Park With	19
Staff is Unfriendly	14
Poor Program	10
Poor Equipment/Facilities	13
Poor Health	15
Location Too Far	25
Working Hours are Limited	24
Lack of Activities and Program	23
Lack of Facilities and Equipment	17
Poor Maintenance of Equipment	23
Negative Perception of Other Users	26
No Way to go the Facilities	27
Lack of Time for Leisure	34
Lack of Information on Existing Open Space in my Area	34
Utilization Cost is too High	22

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.11 shows the response on effectiveness of the law guiding the use of open space in Onitsha. From Table 1.11, respondents strongly agreed that the law guiding the use of open spaces in

their locality was effective.. This shows that there is strong law guiding the use of open space for different activities and that the law is strong to guide the activities.

1.11: Law Guiding the Use of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Onitsha
How Effective is the Law Guiding Open Space	4.07

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.12 shows the information on the Environmental Effects of Open Spaces in the area. From Table 1.12, there are so many environmental effects of open spaces identified from the study which

include damage and loss of ecosystem, loss of ecosystem services, loss of reserves, reduced photosynthesis, increases synthetic surface and traffic congestion.

Table 1.12: Environmental Effects of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Onitsha
High Biological Diversity	1.24
Damage and Loss of Ecosystem	3.76
Loss of Ecosystem Services	3.87
Loss of Reserves	3.01
Reduced Photosynthesis	3.91
Reduces the Risk of Flooding and Erosion	1.04
Increases Synthetic Surfaces	3.87
Traffic Congestion	3.91

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The gender and age distribution among respondents in the study areas revealed that 51.75% of the respondents' male and 48.25% female for Onitsha. The age bracket of 15-19%, 31% and 21% for Onitsha while those in age group 40 and above constitutes more than 45%. Consequently, the literacy status of the respondents revealed that majority of the respondents in the area are educated and hence, knowledgeable enough to the concept of the study. This shows that there is no wide disparity in both gender and age representations of the sample used as such the entire scenario offers a good guide for the area recreational open space planning and development.

An evaluation of the knowledge of the existence of open space revealed that the city has some functional open recreational spaces while majority has been converted to other uses. An evaluation of the usage of open recreational spaces also revealed that there are different views of the usage of the open recreational spaces in Onitsha. Results from the respondents' perception of the problems facing the development of recreational open spaces revealed that seven perceived variables of conflicting goals, inadequate resources utilization, and high cost of acquiring lands, planning lapses, site location, encroachment and poor management were among the major problems facing development of recreational open spaces in Onitsha.

This study identified the problems facing the management of recreational open spaces in Onitsha. The study revealed that lack of site protection, user's safety, poor site rehabilitation, high fee collection and poor maintenance of facilities were among the factors that challenged the management of recreational open spaces. Percentage responses of the respondents showed that 4.21% were of the opinion that lack of site protection remained a setback to the management of recreational open spaces. While 3.95% of the respondents testified that lack of protection of the user's health and safety guide remains a challenge to

the management of the recreational open spaces in the city. The study also revealed that poor site rehabilitation presents a big problem in the management of open recreational space in the city. Moreover, 2.08% of the respondents were of the opinion that high fee collection and poor maintenance of the existing facilities constitute a setback to the management of open recreational spaces in the city. It was further revealed by observation that the use of the existing open recreational facilities is not predicated on the individual desire but rather on the affordability and accessibility which are the most significant driving factors in the choice of recreational facilities among the respondents. From the above, there is need for provision of strong security in each open recreational space in the cities to ensure adequate management. The user's health and safety should also be included in the management plan to ensure the safety of the workers and users of the open recreational spaces. In line with the above, regular check and maintenance of the existing structures should be encouraged as it will help to upgrade the open recreational space for the benefit of the users and the managers.

The study further revealed that in Onitsha, 4.31% of the respondents strongly support the fact that culture is a hindrance to development and management of open recreational space. This was in line with the findings of Simon (2012) at Ibadan. It was also revealed from the study that traditional and cultural affinity such as cultural dance show/party or entertainment dominated the life styles of an average Onitsha Ado. This according to the respondent, the traditional recreational value and some cultural lifestyles of Onitsha Ado are being threatened by the city high urbanization rate. It also showed that economic activities amongst other factors inhibit the government from the provision of adequate open recreational spaces in the cities. This was greatly observed with 4.32% in Onitsha being the highest in percentage.

The study further identified that urbanization in Onitsha city inhibit the government from realizing the full potential of provision of open recreational spaces. The issue of such urbanization could be attributed to the city market that attracts people from all parts of the country as one of the biggest market in the country.

The study further revealed some constraints and challenges prevent people from using open recreational spaces in the city. The constraints amongst others were poor equipment, crime, too crowded, limited working hours, lack of facilities in the open spaces, poor maintenance of the existing facilities and cost of utilization of the spaces. Many respondents affirmed impenetrability of recreational centres in their area because most of the open recreational spaces are situated in obscured locations like in Onitsha. The low patronage or recreational usage observed in these cities showed that the open recreational system has not yet developed to entrepreneurship level.

The study revealed some strategic measures to sustainable development and management of open recreational spaces. The result showed that adequate provision of appropriate facilities would enhance the management of the space. It showed that maintenance of existing facilities, provision of qualified personnel for the management of the spaces, appropriate channeling of funds to its intension, reduction of the taxes and dues by the recreational providers and provision of open recreational spaces in the master plan of each state is vital. This will help in achieving the full potential of the goal of providing open recreation spaces in each state. As demand for open recreational facilities continue to grow, choices of how to enjoy the spaces will expand, hence, recreation management budgets should be increased. There is need for budgets, personnel, programs, facilities, and public lands allocation to be within the reach of the general public for better services and certain recreation opportunities.

The need for public perception of the kind of enforcement action of the local council on the cities has proven extremely popular. From the results, the issue of poorly served environmental services such as high biological diversity, loss of ecosystem, loss of reserves, reduced photosynthesis, flooding and erosion, increased synthetic surfaces and traffic congestion are among the environmental factors confronting the problem head on using the physical development control tools for effective management of open recreational space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The State Local Planning Authority could combat the many poor infrastructural challenges with a comprehensive remedial action including (i) Formulation of effective policy for recreation

development in the State; (ii) Effective enforcement of extant physical planning laws, spatial standards and regulations as it affects open space/recreation development; (iii) embarking on public awareness/sensitization on need for recreational development in rural and urban areas; (iv) Involvement of the public, private and popular sectors in the development of open spaces and recreation on public-private partnership (PPP) arrangement and (v) promoting recreational tendencies among the youth, the adult and the aged, open recreational space development and management would be highly efficient.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is very clear that, open recreational spaces are an essential part of any urban development and it serves server functions that are expedient for basic living. Continuous growth of urban areas without effective management and monitoring of open recreation spaces has led to many problems such as dilapidated parks, illegal structures, lack of adequate recreation facilities, shortage of landscape and health challenges of not using recreational spaces. Based on the findings, recreation plan and other accompanying policies should be drafted in ways that encourage flexibility, innovation, and change within a framework of high standards and compatibility with the best practice.

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