

Investigating the necessary criteria to promote tourism development and social interactions in green spaces (Case study: Urmia Forest Park)

Farnoosh Minooei ^{1*}, Keyvan Asli Mandolkani ²

1- Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran.

2- M.Sc. student, Department of Architecture, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran.

* farnoosh.minooei@iau.ac.ir

Date of submission: 2025/12/10 Revision: 2026/01/26 Acceptance: 2026/01/30

Detailed abstract

Introduction

Parks as public and leisure spaces in the city can create enjoyable spaces that, while providing urban facilities as places for relaxation, entertainment and circulation, improving and creating social interactions, providing a place for socializing, a space for neighborhood meetings, spending leisure time and citizen participation, and improving the social life of the city. In addition to the recreational and environmental aspects of parks, it can be noted that they are a platform for organizing behavioral patterns and a place for the formation of social interactions. In fact, green spaces are among the spaces that instill a sense of social place. One of the most suitable areas for nature tourism activities is forest parks. The recreational value, which is one of the consumption values of forest parks, includes spending leisure time. Spending leisure time includes a set of activities that a person undertakes at his own will, whether for rest, for recreation, or for the expansion of information, personal education, or free social participation, or the expression of creativity, at a time free from job, family, and social obligations. Although factors and events affecting people's culture and social status have caused people to forget about recreation and not pay attention to its problems in the past, an analysis of the forces and factors related to the demand for recreation and leisure in the country shows that this need is increasing rapidly. Urmia is one of the cities in Iran and the capital of West Azerbaijan Province and also the center of Urmia County. This city is considered one of the tourist cities of Iran due to its moderate climate and beautiful scenery. In this regard, the city of Urmia has many tourist places, and one example is Sheikh Tapeh Forest Park. Sheikh Tapeh Forest Park, which is located in Urmia City, is one of the natural attractions of this city and attracts many people and tourists every day. But unfortunately, due to neglect and some incorrect management measures, its social function in meeting leisure, recreational, and welfare needs in the forest park has been diminished. Therefore, this article attempts to examine the necessary criteria for promoting tourism development and social interactions in the green space of Urmia Forest Park using library documents and similar research, and through field observations and measuring tourists' needs for the forest park.

Materials and Methods

This research is of an applied type, conducted with a survey and correlation method, using a questionnaire and documentary studies, and was conducted in the form of field observation and through face-to-face interviews among visitors to the forest park and urban experts. The present interview was conducted in the forest park among people who had a gathering of more than two people and among 50 gathering groups and among men and women of all ages. Also, in the content assessment stage, the opinions of 12 urban experts were asked about the results. In this research, the documentary method was used to develop the theoretical framework. In this way, by referring to relevant sites, books and publications, the desired information was collected by taking notes to express the literature on the subject and the concepts in question, as well as the views and approaches related to the research objectives, and the conceptual framework of the research was set. Then, in order to collect local information in this research, a questionnaire was prepared, as well as behavioral maps and field observations. Using the materials and information collected in the theoretical foundations section, the variables under study were identified and a number of items and questions were developed to measure each of the variables, which together form the structure of the questionnaire. In line with the research objectives, in addition to using the information obtained through the preparation and analysis of the questionnaire, as mentioned, maps and field observations were prepared at different time intervals, especially during peak hours of use of the park. The questionnaire questions were in line with the indicators obtained in the conceptual framework of the research as an evaluation and review of the necessary criteria for promoting tourism development and boosting the tourism industry in the forest park, as well as examining the necessary criteria for promoting social interactions in the forest park in the form of concrete and unambiguous questions from park users. Then, to assess the content of the analyses obtained, the results were also evaluated from the perspective of urban experts.

Findings

In the first stage, in order to examine the criteria of comfort and convenience, access to leisure services and facilities, security and aesthetic qualities, which are among the most important criteria expected from green spaces, first by visiting the forest park and conducting field observations through face-to-face interviews with visitors and then using a questionnaire distributed among visitors who were more than two people in a gathering, the quorum of respondents reached 50 forest park visitors and the respondents were men and women of different ages with educational levels from under-diploma to doctorate and the average of respondents was 28 men and 22 women. Also, the average age (10-30) was 21 people, the average age (31-40) was 23 people, the average age (41-70) was 6 people, and the level of education of the respondents (under-diploma) was 19 people, (bachelor's degree) was 15 people, (master's degree) was 13 people, (doctorate) was 3 people. Using the four questions of comfort and convenience criteria, access to leisure services and facilities, security and aesthetics, the questionnaire questions were examined and the results of each criterion were presented separately.

In the second stage, in order to measure the content of the results, the views of urban experts on the four criteria and also the level of satisfaction with the four criteria were evaluated and examined. Among them, 12 urban experts were surveyed through face-to-face interviews and questionnaire questions.

Conclusion

According to the opinions of experts, today's urban life is being directed in a direction that distances people from nature and green spaces, and this is one of the things that can affect people's mental health. For this reason, people visit and travel to green, cozy and peaceful places with suitable climates such as Urmia Forest Park for comfort and convenience. According to the evaluation and review of the data obtained from the results of the four criteria from the perspective of urban experts, the presence of comfort and convenience in a public space such as Urmia Forest Park, which is one of the tourist attractions of Urmia, attracts tourists. Finally, from the perspective of urban experts, the comfort and convenience criterion was given the first priority, and the criteria of security, access to leisure services and facilities, aesthetics were given the second, third, and fourth priorities.

According to the results, planning and designing the necessary measures to improve the comfort and convenience of tourists, as well as security, access to leisure services and facilities, aesthetics, and the promotion of social interactions can promote the development of tourism and social interactions in Urmia Forest Park. The following are necessary suggestions for advancing practical solutions.

Declarations

In order to ensure security in urban leisure spaces, it is recommended that police stations and security forces be present in these spaces, that sufficient lighting be provided in different parts of the parks, and that surveillance cameras be used to control the spaces and ensure the security of visitors' belongings. Designing and providing sufficient space for different age groups to play, and considering appropriate space for families to sit can play a significant role in improving the comfort and convenience of visitors in parks.

It is also essential to consider the needs of various age groups, including children and the elderly, in the appropriate design and placement of urban furniture.

Providing appropriate access to public transportation, favorable access to main thoroughfares, creating adequate parking, the presence of restrooms, anticipating places to sell food and beverages, and also designing and placing prayer rooms in public parks are among the factors affecting the increase in visitors' access to needed leisure services and facilities.

In order to improve the aesthetic status of urban parks, it is recommended to consider factors such as defined entrance design, providing desirable vegetation cover appropriate to the climate, designing appropriate lighting, paying attention to the quality of urban furniture, using the element of water and

water features, designing and locating symbols and signs (such as statues of national and local celebrities), using diversity and combinations of colors and materials in the architecture of the park space, and designing collective and public spaces for discourse and the performance of local ceremonies to create social interactions.

Keywords: Social interactions, Tourism development, Green space, Urmia Forest Park



Copyright:© 2026 by the authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.