



Impact and Acceptance of Public Open Spaces: Enhancing Residents' Wellness Through Urban Parks in Ikeja, Lagos

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization across major African cities has gradually eaten into the amount of public open space available, and this is starting to show in both the environment and in how people feel day to day. In Lagos, the country's most populated and busiest city, the pressure is even more obvious. Population keeps growing, buildings keep expanding, and green spaces are getting harder to come by. This study looks at how public open spaces, especially urban parks in Ikeja, actually affect people's wellness and whether residents really accept and use them. Instead of staying too theoretical, it leans on ideas from environmental psychology and biophilic design, basically trying to understand how being around nature, even in a city, connects to people's physical health, mental state, and social life. By going through existing studies and a few urban examples, it becomes clear that parks do more than just "look nice", they help people relax, interact, and even cope better with the stress of city life. The findings suggest that when parks are properly designed and easy to access, they can genuinely improve quality of life, offering a kind of breathing space within all the chaos. However, issues like poor maintenance, safety concerns, and not having enough of these spaces originally hold things back. The study recommends integrating green infrastructure into urban planning policies and improving management strategies to enhance the functionality and acceptance of public parks in Ikeja.

Keywords: Environmental psychology, Green infrastructure, Public open spaces, Urban parks, Wellness

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization remains one of the most significant global trends shaping contemporary cities. While it drives economic growth, infrastructural development, and improved access to opportunities, it simultaneously generates environmental challenges such as congestion, pollution, and reduced access to green spaces. Across the world, urban areas are experiencing unprecedented expansion, leading to increased demand for land, housing, and infrastructure. This rapid growth often occurs at the expense of green infrastructure and public open spaces, which are essential components of sustainable urban environments (UN-Habitat, 2020; Bolund & Hunhammar, 1999). Public open spaces, particularly urban parks, play a vital role in mitigating the negative impacts of urbanization. These spaces provide environmental, social, and health benefits, serving as areas for recreation, relaxation, and social interaction. In densely populated cities, urban parks function as restorative environments that help counterbalance the physical and psychological stress associated with urban living (Chiesura, 2004; Garvin & Berens, 1997). They also contribute to environmental quality by improving air conditions, moderating urban temperatures, and enhancing overall livability.

In developing megacities such as Lagos, Nigeria, the effects of rapid urbanization are particularly evident. Urban expansion has resulted in spatial congestion, environmental degradation, and limited access to natural spaces. Many urban environments within the city are characterized by noise, overcrowding, and inadequate green infrastructure, all of which negatively impact residents' mental well-

being (David-Mukoro et al., 2025). These conditions contribute to increased stress, fatigue, and a decline in overall quality of life. Research indicates that the physical environment plays a significant role in influencing mental health and emotional stability, particularly in highly urbanized settings. Urban environments dominated by excessive concrete surfaces, high noise levels, and overcrowding have been shown to induce psychological stress and anxiety (Gifford, 2021). The absence of restorative natural environments further exacerbates these effects. In contrast, studies in environmental psychology demonstrate that exposure to natural landscapes, vegetation, and open spaces can significantly improve cognitive functioning and reduce stress levels (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2022; Ulrich, 2020). The integration of nature-based design tactics has therefore become essential in promoting urban wellness. Biophilic design theory emphasizes the inherent human need to connect with nature, suggesting that green environments such as parks and gardens help restore emotional balance and enhance psychological resilience (Browning et al., 2020). Consequently, the incorporation of green infrastructure into urban planning is increasingly recognized as a critical approach to improving quality of life in cities.

Lagos, as Nigeria's largest and most economically active city, exemplifies the challenges associated with rapid urbanization. The city experiences high population density, intense traffic congestion, and limited provision of green spaces, all of which contribute to environmental stress and reduced well-being among residents. Within Lagos, Ikeja serves as a major administrative and commercial hub, hosting government institutions, business districts, and residential areas. Despite its urban density, Ikeja contains several public parks that provide opportunities for recreation and interaction with nature. However, the availability and acceptance of public open spaces in Ikeja remain limited. Factors such as accessibility, safety, and environmental quality significantly influence the extent to which residents utilize these spaces (Adedeji & Fadamiro, 2013; Impact and Acceptance of Public Open Spaces, 2026). Many residents experience long commuting hours and minimal exposure to natural environments, further highlighting the importance of accessible and well-maintained urban parks. This study further explores how these spaces influence physical and psychological well-being and assesses the level of acceptance and utilization among residents, with the aim of contributing to strategies for more sustainable and health-promoting urban environments.

Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the impact and acceptance of public open spaces in enhancing residents' wellness through urban parks in Ikeja, Lagos.

Objectives

The specific objectives are to:

1. To examine the availability and accessibility of public open spaces in Ikeja, Lagos.
2. To identify the key features of urban parks that influence residents' usage and satisfaction.
3. To assess the impact of urban parks on residents' physical, mental, and social well-being.
4. To evaluate the level of acceptance and utilization of public open spaces among residents in Ikeja.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of availability and accessibility of public open spaces in Ikeja, Lagos?
2. What features of urban parks influence residents' usage and satisfaction?
3. How do urban parks impact the physical, mental, and social well-being of residents?
4. What is the level of acceptance and utilization of public open spaces among residents in Ikeja?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Public open spaces are essential components of urban environments, providing areas that are accessible to all residents for recreation, relaxation, and social interaction. These spaces include parks,

gardens, plazas, and other green environments that contribute to the overall quality of urban life. According to Francis et al. (1984), public open spaces serve as communal environments that foster social interaction and enhance the livability of cities. Similarly, Garvin and Berens (1997) describe urban parks as critical elements of urban design that support both environmental sustainability and human well-being. Urban parks, as a subset of public open spaces, play a particularly important role in densely populated cities. They provide opportunities for physical activities, leisure, and interaction with nature. Chiesura (2004) emphasizes that urban parks contribute significantly to sustainable urban development by improving environmental quality and promoting psychological restoration. In addition, Bolund and Hunhammar (1999) highlight the role of green spaces in delivering ecosystem services such as air purification, temperature regulation, and noise reduction.

Wellness, in the context of this study, encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being. Physical wellness is supported through opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities, while mental wellness is enhanced through exposure to natural environments that reduce stress and improve cognitive functioning. Social wellness is fostered through interactions that occur within shared public spaces. Kaplan et al. (1998) note that everyday interactions with nature can positively influence individuals' mood, attention, and overall psychological health. Green infrastructure refers to the network of natural and semi-natural elements within urban areas that provide ecological and social benefits. The integration of green infrastructure into urban planning is increasingly recognized as a sustainable approach to addressing environmental challenges (UN-Habitat, 2020). In this context, urban parks serve as vital components of green infrastructure that enhance both environmental performance and human well-being.

Acceptance and utilization of public open spaces are influenced by factors such as accessibility, safety, design quality, and maintenance. Adedeji and Fadamiro (2013) found that residents' perception and usage of urban open spaces are closely linked to how well these spaces meet their needs and expectations. Similarly, Project for Public Spaces (2000) emphasizes that successful public spaces are those that are accessible, comfortable, and actively used by the community.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in environmental psychology and biophilic design theory, both of which provide a framework for understanding the relationship between humans and their physical environment. Environmental psychology focuses on how the built and natural environments influence human behavior, emotions, and well-being. Gifford (2021) explains that environmental conditions such as noise, overcrowding, and lack of green spaces can negatively impact mental health, leading to stress and reduced well-being. Conversely, exposure to natural environments has been shown to promote psychological restoration and improve overall mental health. Kaplan and Kaplan (2022) further argue that natural settings help restore attention and reduce mental fatigue, particularly in urban contexts.

Biophilic design theory builds on this understanding by emphasizing the human need to connect with nature. Browning et al. (2020) identify patterns of biophilic design that integrate natural elements into built environments, enhancing both physical and psychological well-being. These include the use of vegetation, natural light, water features, and open landscapes. Ulrich (2020) supports this perspective by demonstrating that even visual exposure to nature can significantly improve recovery and reduce stress. In addition, social interaction theories highlight the importance of shared spaces in fostering community relationships. Public open spaces provide opportunities for social engagement, which contributes to social cohesion and community well-being. Putnam (2000) notes that communal environments play a critical role in building social capital and strengthening community ties. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how urban parks influence residents' wellness by addressing environmental, psychological, and social dimensions.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of public open spaces in enhancing urban living conditions. Globally, research shows that access to urban parks is associated with improved physical health, reduced stress levels, and increased social interaction. Chiesura (2004) found that urban parks contribute to emotional well-being by providing opportunities for relaxation and escape from urban stressors. In developing countries, the challenges associated with rapid urbanization often limit access to green spaces. Ogu (2002) highlights that poor urban planning and inadequate provision of public

amenities negatively affect residents' satisfaction and quality of life. Similarly, Olalekan and Adeyemi (2020) found that the utilization of urban green spaces in Lagos is influenced by accessibility, safety, and maintenance conditions.

Studies within Lagos further emphasize the relationship between urban environments and mental well-being. David-Mukoro et al. (2025) observed that stress-inducing urban conditions such as overcrowding, noise, and limited green infrastructure contribute to increased anxiety among residents. However, the presence of well-designed green spaces can help mitigate these effects by providing restorative environments.

Case-based insights from parks such as Freedom Park and Ndubuisi Kanu Park illustrate the potential of public open spaces to enhance social and cultural engagement within Lagos (BusinessDay NG, 2026; LASPARK, 2025). These spaces not only provide recreational opportunities but also serve as venues for cultural expression and community interaction. However, reports indicate that issues such as poor maintenance and declining infrastructure can reduce their effectiveness and public appeal (TheCable, 2024).

Despite the growing body of research, there remains a gap in understanding the extent to which residents in specific urban districts, such as Ikeja, accept and utilize public open spaces. Many studies focus broadly on urban green spaces without adequately addressing localized perceptions and behavioral patterns. This study therefore seeks to bridge this gap by examining both the impact and acceptance of urban parks within Ikeja, Lagos.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive review methodology, involving the systematic collection, review, and synthesis of existing secondary data relevant to the research topic. The approach emphasizes the analysis of published literature, institutional reports, government documents, and credible media sources that examine public open spaces and urban parks, with particular focus on Ikeja, Lagos.

The descriptive review method is appropriate for this research because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the role and impact of urban parks on residents' wellness without the need for primary data collection. By integrating insights from prior empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and documented case examples, this approach facilitates the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships between urban green spaces and community well-being (Chiesura, 2004; Kaplan & Kaplan, 2022; Olalekan & Adeyemi, 2020).

Data sources for this study consist of a wide range of secondary materials, including academic journals, books, policy and planning documents, and reputable online publications. Special attention is given to documented information on selected urban parks in Ikeja, such as Johnson Jakande Tinubu Park, Ndubuisi Kanu Park, Dr. Oluyomi Abayomi Finnih Recreational Park, and other Lagos State Parks and Gardens Agency-managed parks, to provide practical insights into the management, use, and perception of public open spaces (LASPARK, 2023; Evendo, 2025; TheCable, 2024).

The study employs qualitative content analysis for data interpretation. Relevant information is reviewed, categorized, and analyzed according to key thematic areas, including accessibility, environmental quality, usage patterns, and perceived benefits of urban parks. This thematic approach enables the identification of recurring findings and the derivation of meaningful conclusions regarding the impact and acceptance of public open spaces.

To ensure reliability and validity, only credible and relevant sources are selected, prioritizing peer-reviewed articles, recognized institutional publications, and reputable media platforms. The systematic synthesis of these sources provides a balanced, evidence-based perspective on the contribution of urban parks to residents' physical, mental, and social well-being in Ikeja, Lagos.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Urban Parks in Ikeja

Urban parks in Ikeja serve as vital public open spaces that contribute to the physical, mental, and social well-being of residents. The parks selected for this study Johnson Jakande Tinubu Park, Ndubuisi Kanu Park, Dr. Oluyomi Abayomi Finnih Recreational Park, and other Lagos State Parks and Gardens Agency-managed parks demonstrate diverse design strategies, facilities, and community engagement initiatives. Johnson Jakande Tinubu Park is strategically located in Ikeja to provide easily accessible

recreational areas for residents and workers in the surrounding commercial and residential zones. The park features landscaped gardens, walking paths, and seating areas, promoting both relaxation and social interaction. Its design emphasizes open green spaces that support environmental restoration and encourage outdoor physical activity, aligning with principles of biophilic design and environmental psychology (Browning, Ryan, & Clancy, 2020; Kaplan & Kaplan, 2022).



Ndubuisi Kanu Park, one of Ikeja's most recognized green spaces, offers playgrounds, shaded seating, and landscaped lawns. It has been the focus of public attention due to periodic fluctuations in maintenance and utilization levels. While the park's popularity underscores the value of accessible public open spaces, the decline reported in some periods highlights challenges in sustainable management, including resource allocation and maintenance planning (LASPARK, 2025; TheCable, 2024; Evendo, 2025). Despite these challenges, the park continues to provide opportunities for social interaction, family activities, and community gatherings, demonstrating its significance for residents' well-being (Kuo, Sullivan, Coley, & Brunson, 1998; Leyden, 2003).



Dr. Oluoyomi Abayomi Finnih Recreational Park functions as a multifunctional urban green space, supporting informal sports, cultural events, and outdoor leisure. Its layout emphasizes open lawns, shaded walking paths, and greenery, promoting restorative experiences that reduce urban stress. The park's design and use reflect findings from environmental psychology, which suggest that exposure to natural environments within urban settings enhances cognitive restoration, emotional balance, and social cohesion (Gifford, 2021; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 1998).



In addition, **other LASPARK-managed parks in Ikeja** collectively contribute to public health and community engagement by offering accessible green spaces for leisure, exercise, and cultural programming. These parks reinforce the broader role of urban green infrastructure in providing ecosystem services, including air purification, microclimate regulation, and opportunities for social interaction (Bolund & Hunhammar, 1999; Chiesura, 2004).

Discussion: Contribution to Residents' Wellness

The analysis of Ikeja's parks indicates that well-maintained public open spaces contribute to residents' physical health by supporting walking, jogging, and recreational activities, which are essential

for mitigating lifestyle-related health issues. Furthermore, access to greenery and nature-rich environments facilitates mental restoration, reducing stress and anxiety often associated with dense urban settings (David-Mukoro, Chukwuka, Ibitoye, & Babamboni, 2025; Kaplan & Kaplan, 2022). Socially, these parks foster community cohesion by providing venues for interactions across diverse demographic groups. Activities ranging from informal gatherings to organized cultural events promote social capital and strengthen communal bonds, consistent with Arnstein’s (1969) citizen participation framework and Putnam’s (2000) insights on community networks. Parks such as Johnson Jakande Tinubu Park and Ndubuisi Kanu Park exemplify spaces where residents can engage meaningfully, thereby enhancing social inclusion and civic participation (Francis, Cashdan, & Paxson, 1984; Kuo et al., 1998).

However, the findings also highlight persistent challenges. Variations in maintenance quality, uneven accessibility, and limited public awareness can reduce park utilization and diminish the potential wellness benefits. These issues underscore the need for sustainable management strategies, including community involvement, regular maintenance programs, and design enhancements that align with residents’ needs (LASPARK, 2023; Project for Public Spaces, 2000).

In summary, Ikeja’s urban parks demonstrate that public open spaces are essential components of urban wellness. When adequately designed, maintained, and promoted, these parks provide ecological, social, and psychological benefits, reinforcing the value of urban green infrastructure in rapidly urbanizing cities like Lagos.

Comparative Analysis of Community Engagement Strategies at Ikeja Urban Parks

Dimension	Johnson Jakande Tinubu Park	Ndubuisi Kanu Park	Dr. Oluyomi Abayomi Finnih Recreational Park
Location	Ikeja, Lagos	Ikeja, Lagos	Ikeja, Lagos
Year Established	2012	2014	2015
Managing Authority	LASPARK	LASPARK	LASPARK
Primary Engagement Type	Recreational activities, walking paths	Environmental education & recreation	Informal sports, cultural events, leisure
Youth Programmes	Outdoor games, jogging & walking	Eco Explorers Bootcamp, tree planting	Sports clinics, cultural workshops
Cultural Activities	Seasonal community events	Tree planting ceremonies	Open-air cultural performances
Corporate Engagement	Limited local partnerships	Public-private tree planting	CSR events, event hosting
Entry Fee	Free	₦1,000	Free
Key Challenges	Limited awareness & maintenance gaps	Physical decline & maintenance gaps	Balancing accessibility and programming

CONCLUSION

Urban parks and public open spaces play a crucial role in enhancing the wellness of city residents, particularly in densely populated areas like Ikeja, Lagos. This study has shown that access to green spaces contributes significantly to physical, psychological, and social well-being, fostering relaxation, social interaction, and a sense of community. The findings highlight that well-planned and maintained urban parks are not only valued for recreation but also for their role in mitigating the stresses of urban life. Residents’ acceptance and usage of these spaces are influenced by accessibility, safety, amenities, and aesthetic appeal. Therefore, policymakers, urban planners, and local authorities should prioritize the creation, maintenance, and promotion of public open spaces. Investing in urban parks not only improves residents’ quality of life but also contributes to the sustainable development of Lagos, ensuring that green infrastructure remains an integral part of the urban environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study on urban parks in Ikeja, Lagos, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the impact and acceptance of public open spaces:

1. Improved Accessibility – Ensure parks are easily accessible to all residents, including provisions for pedestrian pathways, bicycle lanes, and proximity to residential areas.
2. Enhanced Safety and Security – Implement adequate lighting, surveillance, and regular patrols to encourage frequent use and ensure residents feel safe.
3. Provision of Amenities – Include seating, recreational facilities, playgrounds, exercise areas, and water features to cater to diverse age groups and encourage longer visits.
4. Regular Maintenance – Maintain cleanliness, landscaping, and infrastructure to preserve aesthetic appeal and functionality.
5. Community Engagement – Involve local communities in park design, activities, and decision-making to promote a sense of ownership and increase usage.
6. Promotion of Green Spaces – Raise awareness about the benefits of urban parks through campaigns, events, and educational programs.
7. Integration into Urban Planning – Incorporate green spaces into urban development plans as essential infrastructure rather than optional amenities.

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