

WHY DO CITIZENS VISIT URBAN PARKS? THE CASE OF TRITSI IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The benefits of parks are widely recognized and the number of visitors to them has increased in the past years. The services provided by the parks make their presence in the urban environment of major importance. The purpose of this study is to identify the motivations of visitors to the Antonis Tritsis urban park in Greece, which is the largest metropolitan park in the Attica basin. The survey was conducted from August 2018 to March 2019 and the responses of 377 visitors were collected. A principal component factor analysis was used to determine the motives of visitors to the Tritsi Park. The analysis of the results revealed the presence of three components explaining 61.19% of the total variance in the motives. These factors are termed “Relaxation and nature experience”, “Educational and cultural activities” and “Activities for children”. Recognizing the motivations of visitors, policy makers will be able to configure the park infrastructure according to the stated preferences. The services provided by the Tritsi Park when they are based on the preferences of its visitors will maximize their satisfaction and consequently improve the quality of life and contribute to sustainable development.

KEYWORDS

Factor analysis; Motives; Recreation; Tritsi Park; Urban Park

1. INTRODUCTION

Parks offer a variety of activities and purposes for visitors. Some citizens visit urban parks to spend time with their family and have fun ^[1-4], while others engage in sport activities ^[4], such as cycling ^[1,2,5] and walking ^[1,5,6].

Many people visit the parks to enjoy the nature ^[1,4], to breathe fresh air ^[4-6], to enjoy the quietness ^[4,5] as well as the view of the flora and fauna ^[2,3,5].

Visitors seek to reduce their stress ^[2,4] or take a

break ^[5]. Attending cultural activities ^[6] and reading in the park ^[5] are other motivations for visiting urban parks.

As has been proven, the preferences and motivations of visitors differ, even if the product is the same ^[7]. In the case of Greece, literature so far has focused on the motivations for visiting national parks, while the same research for urban parks is limited and concerns mainly public spaces in general.

As a result and given the importance of parks in the urban realm, we focus our research on the

activities of the visitors in the Antonis Tritsis Park.

The Tritsi Park was chosen because it is the largest metropolitan park in Attica and its history dates back to 1833 ^[8]. In this park, water bodies like lakes and streams, as well as flora and fauna are present. Cultural events and educational activities take place in the park, while there is also activity from volunteer organizations such as “the friends of the park”.

2. METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted between August 2018 and March 2019 and the final sample was 377 visitors.

Descriptive statistic was used for the profile of the respondents and the visit characteristics. A comparison is made between the results of our study and previous ones regarding the motivation of visit.

Principal component factor analysis was used for motivation to visit Tritsi Park and the orthogonal rotation of maximum variation was selected.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic characteristics of park visitors

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Women constitute 60.5% of the participants. 12.2% of respondents were 18-25 years old and 32% over 46 years old. The majority of park visitors at 43.2% have a university degree. Regarding marital status, 54.1% were married and 33.7% had children. Most of the interviewees (41.4%) stated to be private employees, followed by state employees with 22.5%. Finally, 30.2% of the sample stated that they are paid 801-1.200 Euros per month, while 23% reported 0-400 Euros as individual monthly earnings.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Demographic characteristics		% of sample
Gender	Men	39.5
	Women	60.5
Age	18-25	12.2
	26-35	26.5
	36-45	29.7
	>46	32
Education	Primary/Secondary	36.9
	University degree	43.2
	Master/PhD	19.9
Marital status	Single	39.3
	Married	54.1
	Divorced/Widow	6.7
Children	Yes	33.7
	No	66.3
Employ	Unemployed	9.3
	Students	8.2
	State employees	22.5
	Private employees	41.4
	Freelancers/Entrepreneurs	13
Income	Retired	5.6
	0-400	23
	401-800	21.5
	801-1.200	30.2
	>1.201	25.2

3.2 Visit characteristics

The majority of interviewees (63.4%) said that they visited the park by car. 18.8% used public transportation and 12.5% went on foot. Only 5.3% stated that their transition to Tritsi Park was done by bicycle.

36.9% said that it took them 15-30 minutes to

get to the park. 37.4% of the sample visited Tritsi Park for the first time. In terms of traffic, the results are as follows: 34.2% visit Tritsi Park less than once a month, 12.7% monthly, 9.8% on a weekly basis, 4.5% 2-6 times a week and 1.3% at least once a day.

The duration of the visit ranges from 2 to 3 hours for 49.9% of the interviewees. The vast majority of the sample at 89.7% prefers to visit the park on weekends. Participants were asked if they prefer to visit the park in the morning/afternoon, evening or both. It is interesting that 92.6% prefer to visit the park usually in the morning or in the afternoon, while 34.5% in the evening.

Regarding the motivations of the visit, the most important are contact with nature, the enjoyment of a cool environment and fresh air offered in the park. 65.8% of the sample stated that they visit the park “much” or “very much” in order to enjoy the cool environment, while the same answers gave 64.4% for contact with nature and 63.9% for the fresh air and the stress reduction.

The importance of fresh air and the reduction of stress levels through visiting parks were identified by the Sreetheran ^[4]. Specifically, in this case study, 74.7% of the respondents that visit the five urban parks which were examined in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, stated they did so to breath fresh air and 69.7% claimed to visit the parks to reduce stress and relax.

The second most important motive for visiting Hawassa was found to be contact with nature and specifically the fresh air and appreciation of beautiful scenery ^[6].

On the other hand, Chiesura ^[9] and Gashu et al. ^[6] stressed the importance of relaxation thought visiting the parks. This factor proved to be the most important in these studies.

3.3 Factor analysis

As shown in Table 2, *Principal Component Analysis* revealed the presence of three components explaining 61.19% of the total variance.

The first factor termed “Relaxation and nature

experience” includes the following variables: “Meeting room-Fun with family/friends-coffee-relaxation”, “Walk/exercise”, “To breathe fresh air”, “To enjoy the cool environment”, “Enjoy the peace”, “Enjoy green/lake/canal”, “Reduce stress” and “To get close to nature”. This factor explains 37.26% of the total variance.

The second factor termed “Educational and cultural activities” includes four variables related to motivation for park visit: “Attending cultural activities”, “Reading”, “Break-Located near my home/office” and “School trip”. 12.61% of the total variance is explained by this factor.

Finally, the third factor “Activities for children” explains 11.31% of the total variance. It includes the following motives: “Activities for children (e.g. playground)” and “Cycling”.

Policy makers will be able to configure the park infrastructure according to the preferences of visitors as researched here. It seems that the environmental benefits of the park are of particular importance to visitors. Consequently, emphasis could be given to the preservation of the natural and man-made environment of the park. The preservation of the artificial lakes and the canal, but also the care of the flora and fauna seem to be considered fundamental based on the preferences of the visitors.

Table 2. Factor loads and communalities for the motives of visiting Tritsi Park.

Variables	Main Components			
	F1	F2	F3	Communalities
Attending cultural activities		0.612		0.403
Activities for children (e.g. playground)			0.904	0.828
Cycling			0.779	0.640

Meeting room-Fun with family/friends-coffee/relaxation	0.595		0.393
Walk/exercise	0.709		0.542
To breathe fresh air	0.855		0.737
To enjoy the cool environment	0.894		0.804
Enjoy the peace	0.856		0.734
Enjoy green/lake/canal	0.819		0.671
Reduce stress	0.809		0.666
Reading		0.651	0.490
Break- Located near my home/office		0.688	0.504
School trip		0.638	0.495
To get close to nature	0.811		0.660
Cronbach's a	0.918	0.565	0.669

4. CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of parks are in line with the principles of sustainability. Citizens seek contact with nature, attending cultural and educational activities and the provision play areas for their children. Special mention is made of environmental benefits. When the services provided by the Tritsi Park are based on the preferences of its visitors it will maximize their satisfaction and consequently improve the quality of life.

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