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Provision of Public Recreation Space under Urban Intensification Policies: Case Studies from Auckland, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: Public Recreation Space; Urban Intensification; Standard Approach; Quality Approach; Qualitative Measures

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Abstract

Public recreation space has been identified as an essential feature of the urban fabric; it provides opportunities for variety as well as environmental, physical, social and economic benefits. The traditional approach towards the provision of public recreation space is the 'standards' received increasing criticism due to its failure to meet people's recreational needs. Apart from this issue, urban intensification policy is seeking to increase density in existing activity centers. Population growth within the specified areas makes it difficult to apply a standard approach as limited land is available in urban areas, and it is costly. These issues have shifted attention from the 'standards' approach to a 'quality' approach as an alternative method, which instead of considering the amount of such space actually takes people's recreational needs into account and how to meet them in such space. The aim of this research to develop qualitative measures to evaluate public recreation space in intensified urban areas.

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1. Introduction

Urban 'public recreation space' (PRS) is well acknowledged as a contributing factor to the quality of life (Burgess et al., 1988). Urban public recreation space not only provides environmental benefits but also brings social, economic and cultural benefits, and contributes to the physical and psychological health of the population (Ulrich, 1981). Furthermore, public recreation space is important in enhancing the quality of urban areas. There are many studies highlighting the importance of such space in people's lives (e.g., Gold, 1972; Hayward & Weitzer, 1984; Kaplan, 1989; Swanwick et al., 2003; Chiesura, 2004; Dines & Cattell, 2008; Van Den Berg et al., 2010; Van Dillen et al., 2012; Cater & Horwitz, 2014; Jurkovič, 2014). For example, Hayward and Weitzer (1984) mentioned that public recreation space encourages physical exercise where this is ease of access as well as appropriate facilities. From another perspective, Dines and Cattell (2008) note that public recreation space is really a place where people connect with individuals who use

the same place, and a place which provides social benefits. Bishop et al. (2001) recognised that public recreation space helps individuals to relax and get away from the hustle-and-bustle of crowded cities, and use the concept of a 'sense of escape'. Ter (2011) notes that public recreation space provides "natural help" to overcome urban stress and therefore plays a significant role in improving the quality of daily urban life.

This study focus on the provision of PRS within intensified urban areas. Urban intensification policies are the core of urban planning in First World countries include the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The main aim of urban intensification policies is to manage and limit growing urban population within brownfield and greenfield, in order to prevent the disadvantages of spreading out the developments (e.g., infrastructure cost, intense use of natural resources and travel cost). To this effect, more developments will be occurred within existing urban areas. According to the UK urban planning, 60 per cent of developments will be on

brownfield sites and 40 per cent will be on greenfield sites. Therefore, more population will be accommodated within brownfield. For example, in Auckland with population density of 2200 people/km², gross average density in city centers will be 50-200+ and the developments will be in form of apartment with nine stores and more. Accordingly, urban intensification will result in intensified use of land within existing activity city centers.

Different terms have been used to refer to place, where provide variety of services (e.g., provide basis for economic growth, employment, social interaction, investment and where integrate land use and transport and walking), and attract high number of people. For example, Melbourne 2030 planning for sustainable growth use the term 'activity center'. Auckland applies the term 'city centers' to refer to such place. In this study different terms interchangeably have been used which all refer to the urban area subject to intensification; such as city centers, activity city centers, existing urban areas, activity center, central activity district, intensified urban areas. Activity center can be divided into groups based on types and size, such as central activity district and neighborhood activity centers. Central activity district is where offers most variety of services and types of land use (e.g., commercial, office, residential, educational, recreational). This study focus on central activity district, which is known as activity city center.

In fact the focus of urban intensification policy is to develop and re-develop existing activity city centers to accommodate more population and activities. To achieve this aim, land within urban areas will be intensively used. This situation will impact other types of land use (non-built environments), such as PRS. Recent studies have explored the drawbacks of urban intensification, which reveal challenges that might impact the provision of PRS as follows:

First, a growing population requires more services and facilities. Therefore, by accommodating more population within existing activity city centers more facilities will be needed. The question that might raise is whether and to what extent meeting these requirements are possible. This question is addressed by Searle (2010), he pointed out that more population means more services and more PRS. He also argued that intensification result in losing or reducing private open space such as backyard, so to compensate this lost more PRS is required, to accommodate activities that used to occur in private open spaces. Second, more population will be accommodated with easy access to existing PRS. This is due to the fact that dwellings with easy access to PRS are more expensive, as such space contribute to quality of life (Searle, 2010). Accordingly, developers take advantage of the economic benefits of PRS by building more dwellings around PRS. Consequently, existing PRS will undergo intensive use. This situation will result in conflicts of use and over time might reduce the quality of space so people will lose their interest to use such space. Then, PRS under this circumstance might experience underuse. Therefore, the benefits of PRS can't be delivered fully.

Third, due to profits of new developments within existing urban areas, allocating land for built-up environments is at priority. This result in less available land to allocate for PRS and if any chance, it would be so costly.

According to Auckland's Unitary Plan (2013), "providing suitable land for new public recreation space or expanding the existing ones may not be available, and the cost of acquisition may be prohibitive" (Unitary Plan Issues Paper, 2013, page 3). Consequently, due to availability of land and funding challenges, PRS might fail to win in land use competition. As a result of less opportunity to provide PRS, benefits of PRS would not be fully delivered.

As discussed above, the challenges due to intensification might impact the delivery of the provision of PRS, consequently impact the delivery of the benefits. This situation shed light on the importance of reviewing laws and legislations in respond to these challenges, and councils approach in delivering the benefits of PRS under this circumstance.

The concept of public recreation space first appeared in Britain, and, by the end of nineteenth century, it was established in urban regions (Walker & Duffield, 1983). During the industrialization period in the nineteenth century, due to diseases caused by polluted air, addressed public recreation space as essential for the public as it provides fresh air (Cartwright, 1977; Walker & Duffield, 1983). Throughout the industrialization period, the requirements for public recreation space were increased (Maulan, 2002). In addition, in the nineteenth century in Britain, urban development shifted from low density to high density and caused a reduction in public recreation space. These circumstances highlighted the need to secure public recreation space.

One of the first advocates for such space was Richard Slaney (1883), who emphasis a mean to secure public recreation space. Based on his support of PRS provision, the Britain parliament developed legislation in the 1830s to provide parks and open spaces, and since then, the planning of such spaces has been integrated into the urban planning (Walker and Duffield, 1983). Since the integration of public recreation space laws to urban planning, councils have applied different policy instruments and methods to apply the legislations and provide PRS. Regarding the provision of PRS, three policy instruments have been applied. These instruments include acquisition of land, regulations and incentive-based approaches (Bengston et al., 2004).

First instrument is acquisition policy, which uses public investments in providing green infrastructure such as PRS as much as uses for other public services (Benedict and McMahon, 2002). Under acquisition policy, there is contribution policy, which developments are required to contribute land for public services such as urban PRS or help funding for public interest. For example, financial policies in Auckland allocated a contribution policy which bounded developers to contribute 7.5 per cent of new created subdivided or the value of equivalent of 20 square meters for each developed dwelling (Auckland Council Contributions Policy, 2015). However, a study, reviewing investments of funding in the 21st century in America, by Bebedict & McMahon (2002), found that there is no specific funding for green infrastructure rather it is financed with money that is left over after all other services have been provided.

A question that needs to be asked is how this contribution policy contribute to the provision of PRS within intensified urban areas. This can be illustrated briefly in the case of Portland, where urban intensification has been criticized for failing to deliver associated quality public recreation space in its downtown neighborhoods (Harnik, 2012). This is because Portland provides such space in the suburbs, thus offsetting the loss of public recreation space in the inner city and following standards. However, the aforementioned spaces are underutilized and do not fulfil the residents' requirements in intensified areas at the local level. One of the reasons for the failure of this approach is due to accessibility; as Whyte (1980) observed, easy access is one of the key factors resulting in use of a PRS, so delivering the benefits of PRS. This example reveals that regulations (e.g., contribution policies) and standards approach do not ensure the delivery of benefits of PRS.

Second fundamental policy instrument is the regulations' respond to the provision of public recreation space. Regulations are classified into two phases – before and after the First World War (West, 1973). Before the war, it was based on historical incidents instead of planning policies (West, 1973). However, during the time following the war, two main changes were made to how much such space was provided, the extent of the public recreation space required, considering equality in providing space and taking into account the location of space (Walker and Duffield, 1983). Since the integration of public recreation space regulation to urban planning, councils have applied different methods to apply the legislation (e.g., opportunistic models, system methods and standards method).

Land use policies apply opportunistic and space standards models as the most common methods for allocation land for public recreation space. Opportunistic model refers to land that become available by opportunities (Maruani & Amit-Cohen, 2007). For example, donated land by wealthy people for public use (e.g., Park Hanadiv in Zichron Yaakov and first major parks in London during the 19th century) (Maruani & Amit-Cohen, 2007). Also, left over planning land (such land is usually small and not suited for public recreation space), and demolition of slum areas provide opportunities for creating public recreation space (e.g., the Al-Azhar Park project in Cairo, and boulevards in Paris) (Maruani & Amit-Cohen, 2007). A fundamental question that is raised is whether there will be any such opportunities for provision of PRS within intensified urban areas. However, too little attention have been paid in this concern.

In 1925, standards appeared in urban planning for allocating land for use of public recreation space. Since then, standards approach have been used widely in different contexts and most studies have focused on how much land and where

should be provided for such space. Standard method refers to land units per person and is based only quantitative data. Standards approach specifies the amount of such space. However, the standards approach has received increasing criticism due to its perceived failure to provide quality spaces and to meet people's recreational needs (Byrne & Sipe, 2010; Jurkovič, 2014). Gold (1972) argues that the failure of the standards approach is evident in underutilized neighbourhood public recreation spaces as they are created based on standards and ignorance of peoples' actual recreational needs. This is supported by Harnik (2010), who discussed the importance of recognizing people's recreational needs rather than specifying standards to motivate the use of such space.

Standards approach have received criticisms not just due to ignorance of people's recreational needs, but also its application in urban intensification contexts. As discussed early urban intensification will result in less available and costly land, therefore, to attempt to meet the recreational needs of increasing populations by applying standards in these contexts would be very difficult. One question that need to be asked is how by facing this difficulties, PRS is provided. An international review reveal that different strategies have been applied to compromise these challenges. For example, in 2006, New York converted central railroad to High Line Park; another example is converting road to PRS such as Oxford Street Park. Therefore, one strategy would be to convert under use space to PRS. Nevertheless, it is not clear that how and to what extend such strategy is applicable in other intensified cities. Another strategy would be to create roof garden, however, the main aim of this is to deliver ecological benefits rather than social benefits. These examples show that applying standards approach in urban intensification is not well applicable, so resulted in different ad-hoc strategies. However, far too little attention

has been paid on how to deliver social benefits within intensified urban areas.

Third policy instrument is incentive-based approach. Over the past thirty years incentives followed political priorities, aim to centralized developments within existing activity city centers. Accordingly, existing activity city centers considered as an economic growth site. Therefore, incentives are used to attract investments and to orient development within existing urban areas. These incentives include subsidized land costs, tax exemptions or reductions, improvements to infrastructure, reduction of development fees, low-interest loans, assistance in securing zoning changes, and others (Nelson and Duncan, 1995; Porter, 1997). For example, in Texas, developers are exempted to pay for development fee.

Therefore, on one hand, contribution policy charges developments to contribute to public services and result in providing PRS outside the intensified sites, due to lack of available and costly land. On the other hand, incentives policy, which is based on political priorities, motivates more investments and developments within existing activity city centers. This situation results in contradictions between regulations and political process. This study draws on these contradictions to identify how social benefits of PRS is delivered within intensified urban areas, to this effect, this study will identify how urban intensification might impact the provision of PRS.

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