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PHILOSOPHY OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

EVALUATION OF PUBLIC SPACE AS A PLACE FOR FREE TIME ACCESSIBLE TO ALL: IN THE CASE OF SANTAKA PARK

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Abstract

In the areas of urban public space planning and community engagement, the accessibility of public spaces is an important and relevant topic. These spaces serve as community facilities where people from various walks of life gather for leisure activities (Zhang, & He, 2020). But ensuring that the space is fully accessible to everyone, regardless of their age, ability or education, is a multifaceted challenge. Scholars Leclercq and Pojani (2023) argue that one of the most significant concepts of public spaces is their ability to promote social cohesion and community building for everyone. According to Leclercq and Pojani, (2023), the purpose of these spaces is to become a servant and help all local people to gather, communicate and engage in various activities. And here, according to Zhang and He (2020), the concept of public space means that everyone should have a common space where they can choose and connect, and it helps to create a wider community. At its core, the concept of public space is about the creation and maintenance of space that is open and accessible to all members of the community (Charmaz, 2020). Deepening how people communicate and what they expect from the construction of a public place, where they visit and what activities they would like to be carried out, this is precisely what affects its physical design, the devices that appear (Habermas, 2022; Thomas, et al., 2022). Looking at the importance of public spaces for the individual and their possibilities for leisure time, today's society is a relevant and important question. It is the case of Santakas Park, which is located in the heart of the Kaunas city center, that is relevant from this point of view and allows us to better understand how urban leisure spaces accessible to all can change and satisfy the needs of residents and quality of life indicators. It is also very important that the quality indicators of public spaces directly affect people's psychological and physical state (Azhar, Hardilla, & Kurniawan, 2021). This research will also shed light on the issues surrounding the ever-emerging lack of knowledge and provide insights and understanding of the current concept of public spaces. *The aim of the article* is to analyze public space as a place for free time accessible to everyone in the case of Santaka Park. *To achieve the goal, the following problematic questions are raised:* how are the public spaces of Santaka Park, as places of free time accessible to all, evaluated and experienced? How can we ensure that public spaces are adapted to people of different ages, abilities and needs? How can different cultural and social groups be taken into account to create public spaces that are welcoming and inviting to diverse communities? *Research methods.* In order to understand the dynamics, ways of use, social interaction and overall impact on communities, the theoretical analysis method examines public space, scientific literature, conditions of importance of dialogue, methods and other multidisciplinary approaches needed for the analysis of public spaces, including various research methods.

Key words: public space, leisure, park, place accessible to all.

Theoretical contextualization of public space

The purpose of public spaces is to become a servant and help all local people to come together, communicate and engage in various activities (Leclercq, & Pojani, 2023). The concept of public space is about creating and maintaining a space that is open and accessible to all members of the community.

This space is designed to foster social connections and encourage community engagement. Public places are spaces where people can connect to create ideas, perspective experiences and where they can create relationships that help strengthen the bond of society.

Public space can take many different forms, from parks and squares, sidewalks, libraries, community clubs to public buildings. These spaces are carefully designed to accommodate a wide range of activities, from sports and recreation to art or music (de Jong, & Lu, 2022). One of the most significant concepts of public space is their ability to promote social cohesion and community building (Skarzauskiene,

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Maciuliene, & Ivanova-Radovanova, 2019). This provides opportunities for people to connect and act together. Public space helps create a sense of shared ownership and responsibility. Public space also plays an essential role in matters of municipal participation and democratic engagement (Lee, 2021). Often used as a gathering place for public events, cultural events and political demonstrations, providing opportunities for people to express their opinions and participate in the democratic process. This space is especially important in societies where freedom of speech and expression is valued. Parks, green spaces and other natural places help to improve air quality, reduce external noise and promote biodiversity. These places support the natural environment, fauna and flora and contribute to overall health and well-being. Nevertheless, public space is not always given the attention and resources it deserves. Although insufficient attention is also paid to the cultivation of personal security (Navarrete-Hernandez, & Kousha, 2023). In some cases, public space can be ignored or even harmed by purchasers or civil servants who privatize private interests over public benefits. This can lead to a decline in social cohesion, municipal commitment and environmental medicine.

The design of public space is one of the main factors that determine how this space is perceived. How people interact and what they expect from a public place and what activities can take place can influence its physical design, construction or facilities (Habermas, 2022; Thomas, et al., 2022). For example, a square with a concrete base and no plants can feel cold and unattractive, even though it is sunny, but a park with lots of seating but little sun and more shade can be seen as a comfortable and attractive place to relax. Also provided and accessible amenities, such as – basketball courts, other playgrounds or the opportunity to express themselves for public perception of art, can promote social interaction and community development much more easily and comfortably (Mygind, Kjeldsted, Hartmeyer, Mygind, Stevenson, Quintana, & Bentsen, 2021). Public spaces must also be accessible and inclusive to be effective, and good design alone is not enough. This means that it is necessary to take into account the various needs and preferences of various users, such as those with disabilities, families with small children, and senior citizens (Švagždiene and Vaseris, 2020). For example, a public area that is only accessible by stairs may not be accessible to people with mobility issues, and the lack of accessibility may be difficult for families with young children. Creating spaces that are inviting and accommodating to all is an essential goal of architecture and acknowledges these difficulties (Latham, & Layton, 2019).

Public spaces that are dirty, poorly lit or considered dangerous are unlikely to be fully utilised, while areas that regularly host events and activities can become thriving hubs of community life (Holy-Hasted, & Burchell, 2022). A collaborative strategy is essential for the effective management of public spaces, involving local authorities, community organizations and other stakeholders.

However, other aspects are discovered in public spaces that provide opportunities for rest and recovery. Parks, beaches and other natural spaces can offer respite from the stresses of everyday life, allowing people to relax (Mygind, et all., 2021). Promoting mental health and well-being can be achieved by engaging in reading, meditation, or outdoor activities (Jian, Luo, & Chan, 2020). However, it is essential to ensure that they are well-planned, accessible and safe in order to fully exploit the potential of public spaces for leisure. Public spaces must be planned with the community's wants and preferences in mind, including amenities that meet their unique recreational needs. In order to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to enjoy these spaces, Syaodih and Aprilesti (2020) emphasized that spaces must be accessible to people of all abilities, including those with disabilities or mobility problems. In addition, public spaces must be well-maintained, safe and hazard-free, with lighting provided (Beccali, et all., 2019). This necessitates routine maintenance and repairs, as well as community participation in the administration and maintenance of these areas. After finding out that public space is significant for every person and analyzing the concept of public space, we move on to the next step – to find out what is the organization of leisure time and what are the possibilities of its application in public space, from a theoretical point of view.

Possibilities of application of leisure organization in public space in theoretical aspect

According to the original idea of public spaces, everyone should have access to public spaces where they can meet together, engage or participate in larger communities and otherwise spend their free time and create impressions of the implementation of their leisure plans (Carmona, 2019). A frequently researched and described form of leisure activity is sports and outdoor activities, which are the primary recreational uses of public spaces (Aquino, et al., 2022). These recreational areas, which often offer

amenities such as basketball courts, soccer fields, and running tracks, create a wealth of opportunities for people to engage in active activities and thus maintain their health.

Social gatherings and cultural events also apply to organizing leisure time (McGillivray, Guillard, & McPherson, 2022). For example, parks and squares can be used for outdoor performances, festivals or fairs, giving visitors the opportunity to appreciate music, art and food in a cozy environment. These gatherings can unite people of all generations, social backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds, fostering social cohesion and a sense of community (Avin, & Pilarczyk-Palaitis, 2023). In addition, learning and education can be promoted in public spaces. Libraries, museums, and other spaces can not only provide opportunities for lifelong learning and development, but also provide educational activities and resources for individuals of all ages and thus help organize leisure plans (Li, Dang, & Song, 2022). In order to develop intellectual curiosity or simply to expand one's personal knowledge base, these spaces can be used for conducting seminars, lectures and other educational events.

An important aspect is that the opportunities for organizing leisure time in the public space must be broad-spectrum, diverse and reveal the interests of different people (Vårheim, Skare, & Lenstra, 2019). When examining the possible possibilities of adapting methods of leisure organization in public space, an important step is to assess possible challenges and take into account social, cultural and economic factors that may affect the effectiveness of these leisure organization models.

First of all, one of the factors can be social trends, that is, changes in the behavior of the population, demographic changes, or social instability itself, all of which can have an impact on the organization of leisure time (Brown, & Stokes, 2021). As events organized in an accessible space must meet the needs of different age groups, this may require differentiated leisure offers.

A second factor may be cultural diversity. For example, different values put forward by the population can create great challenges, but also unique opportunities can arise from it (Carretero, et al., 2022). Leisure activities should reflect the culture of the area. This point is important because it requires evaluating and promoting the interaction of various cultures and thus achieving a unique model of the leisure space.

The third and no less important challenge is financial opportunities and the availability of the necessary space. These challenges can affect organizational effectiveness levels (Colding, Gren, & Barthel, 2020). The lack of financial resources can cause problems when organizing large events or maintaining the ongoing maintenance of a certain public space. As a result, these challenges are essential indicators that are important to consider and think about when creating large-scale plans for the organization of leisure in public space.

The organization of leisure time in public spaces has a special impetus, the potential to improve the quality of life of each individual or communities (Simões Aelbrecht, et al., 2022). When deepening the concept of public space for leisure, it can be understood that it is an important place for leisure because it is and must be accessible to all residents and offer various activities (Kamalipour, 2023). By strategically improving, creating and designing and managing public spaces, conditions are created for a variety of leisure activities, as urban planners and policy makers promote social cohesion, physical and mental well-being, and contribute to active and sustainable urban development steps (Russo, & Andreucci, 2023). It is also important that such opportunities are provided to everyone, in an effort to provide everything to a person and this is done not only in cities of high economic level, but also in those with average income and opportunities (Le Gouais, et al., 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, the organization of leisure in public spaces draws on a range of disciplines, including urban planning, sociology, psychology and recreation management. These domains provide a framework for understanding the relationship between leisure, public space, and individual and collective well-being (Smith, 2023). For example, ecological psychology's concept of privilege emphasizes how public spaces can be designed to encourage physical activity, social interaction, and creative expression (Backman, et al., 2023). In practice, the organization of leisure time in public spaces can manifest itself in various forms: from the creation of passive amenities such as parks and squares to the creation of active recreation facilities, such as playgrounds, sports fields, various community gardens for recreation (Ziakas, 2023; Broitman, 2023). In addition, outdoor events can be organized to enliven public spaces and attract diverse visitors (Quinn, et al., 021). These initiatives can cater to a range of interests and abilities, promoting inclusion and a sense of fulfillment among community members.

The effective organization of leisure in public spaces requires a comprehensive approach and involvement of all, which takes into account the needs of various user groups, the context of the surrounding neighborhood and the common goals of the communities (Nelischer, & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2023). By appealing to the principles of accessibility and sustainability, public spaces can become thriving hubs of activity, fostering a positive sense of leisure time, promoting physical and mental health and contributing to the overall vibrancy of cities. After clarifying the connections and concept of public space and leisure opportunities, we move on to the next question – how to achieve the best results for the adaptation of public space. Because of this, it is important to find out how the dialogue between the city and the public works on public space issues.

Public space-social construct – the object of consumption is the dialogue between the city and society

Historically, public spaces have often been considered inert constructs of thought and behavior (Charmaz, 2020). However, over time it has become more and more open to cultural and social dialogue. One significant expression of social and cultural dialogue in public spaces is street art (Diniz, & Stafford, 2021). Street artists use these spaces as canvases for self-expression, encourage conversations about societal issues, or simply add beauty to the urban landscape. Their work plays a transformative role in fostering cultural understanding and fostering unity among artists, consumers who can be called viewers, and the wider public.

Theater is another reflection of public dialogues in consumer society. This raises the question of whether it functions merely as a wish-fulfillment tool or becomes an object of desire itself. Theater reflects society's values by challenging norms or reinforcing them with narrative techniques (Yilmaz, 2023). The use of artistic objects and services in public spaces further engages diverse individuals in deficit societies by providing access to artistic expressions that are often exclusive or unavailable elsewhere. However, this topic is subject to debate (Vicherat Mattar, 2020). Those who oppose the prioritization of public space emphasize the maintenance of order rather than freedom. The balance of competing interests, such as the cleaning of graffiti often seen in public spaces, can be conflicting between preservation and erasure. However, it can be said that the concept of public space as an object of social design and consumption plays an important role in the ideal dialogue between the city and society (Maselskytė, 2019).

It seems clear that public space is created and developed according to the needs of city residents. Through ongoing dialogue, public space can continue to be shaped to reflect our shared values and the changing needs of society. Parks are of special importance to society as a whole because they provide various opportunities for people. First of all, in the parks we can break away from the routine, city noise or fight the stress.

Another important aspect is that parks promote physical activity and a healthy lifestyle (Hunter, et all., 2019). Parks also have educational value, spending time in nature provides opportunities to learn about the plants and animals found there. Therefore, spaces accessible to all are not only physical places, but also an important social element that plays a decisive role in the communication between the city and the society.

A social construct is a concept that defines how people create and perceive meanings, ideas, and understandings of the world. According to Hewitt (2020), it is the process by which people, through collaboration and communication, shape and categorize their perceptions and experiences according to social, cultural and linguistic factors. These constructs are related to the formation of human identity and the understanding of communication. For example, gender is a social construct because it is not only a biological factor but also the result of various societal norms, values and perceptions about how men and women should behave (Hewitt, 2020). Social constructs are very important in research in social sciences, psychology, sociology and anthropology because they help to understand how societal norms and values influence people's perception and behavior (Nalivaike, 2020).

Public space, as a social construct, is an exclusive object of consumption in the city, which perfectly reveals the dialogue and communication of the society. It is more than just a physical place – it is a space where different interests, cultural contexts and human interaction intertwine. This space becomes important not only in an architectural sense, but also in a social sense. Public spaces reflect society's opinions and values, the needs of various groups and differences in worldly perception. The transformation of public space is a continuous process (Boeri, et al., 2020). Its architecture and design can influence how people use and communicate with it. Finally, public space is more than a physical place – it is a living social construct where the dialogue between the city and society takes place.

The objects of public space consumption in urban dialogue are essential components of community life,

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which provide an opportunity for residents to interact. These can be parks, squares, libraries or sports fields, which become places where residents of a certain area can meet, exchange ideas and communicate. These facilities promote social diversity and integration as people from different social, ethnic and economic groups can meet and interact in natural settings. Dialogue in the city's public spaces helps to create tolerance and understanding, encourages discussions about local issues and different points of view (Kent, & Lane, 2021). The perception of the quality of the urban environment is an important factor in determining local sustainable development and environmental planning policy issues (Gražulevičienė, et al., 2020). The objects of public space consumption in urban dialogue are not only physical elements, but also spaces of social and cultural interaction where people meet, share ideas and contribute to the well-being of their community. The dialogue between the city and society about public space is an essential factor towards a productive public space (Robinson, 2022). This is for several reasons: starting with democratic decision-making, as dialogue promotes an open decision-making process.

By involving residents in discussions about the use and development of public space, city authorities can make decisions that meet the needs and interests of the community. Also community participation: dialogue promotes the participation of residents and their active involvement in the decision of local affairs (Kent, & Lane, 2021). Dialogue with residents to promote new ideas, innovations and creativity in public space planning. Residents can offer unique and impeccable ideas that can improve public space and increase its appeal. And a very important thing is transparency and trust: the dialogue between the city government and the residents promotes transparency and trust. When residents are informed about plans, projects and decisions about public space, it increases trust in the authorities and reduces the possibility of disagreements, and cultural and social values: public spaces reflect the cultural and social identity of the city. Dialogue helps to ensure that public space is designed as a place of communication that meets the values and needs of the city's residents. Dialogue with residents can lead to better decisions based on diverse perspectives and experiences. City dwellers can get an understanding of the benefits and rules of using public space.

Conclusions

1. Public spaces can be understood as open and common spaces intended for the public, where everyone has the opportunity to express themselves, communicate, share experiences, implement desired activities or simply spend free time. The organization of leisure in public spaces includes various forms of activity that meet various interests and demographics. Public spaces offer a variety of activities, entertainment, events, cultural programs and community gatherings. Public spaces are indeed suitable for organizing leisure activities, are accessible and open to all persons. Public spaces have great potential to contribute to the well-being and community integration of city residents and guests. However, in order to maintain and improve the situation, it is important to properly plan and preserve these spaces, taking into account the different security needs of the spaces, the possibilities of the city and the wishes of the public.

2. One of the factors of effective management of the formation of public spaces is the fostering of dialogue between society and the city. This communication channel is a way of feedback, cooperation and shared responsibility in shaping the city's public spaces. By fostering an environment of mutual understanding and collaboration, stakeholders can more easily solve problems, implement needed improvements, and ensure that spaces continue to respond to the changing needs and desires of a growing user base. The established dialogue between the city and society regarding public spaces creates a living environment that meets the needs of city residents, their values and the overall identity of the city. As a result, it can be seen that through continuous dialogue and cooperation, it is possible to achieve the successful development of public spaces, its attractiveness and better accessibility, where all city residents feel that they are creating their own city spaces, contributing, being included and listened to.

3. Santaka Park is an important public space of the city, which is accessible to every resident without any restrictions or fees. It is a place where people can easily meet, socialize and spend their free time. The park's attraction for visitors is its infrastructure, which is carefully executed and designed to meet the wide range of visitor needs. Park accessibility is an important and positive aspect for every visitor, regardless of social status or available resources. The park is in a convenient location, in the city center, surrounded by nature. It is also important that the park is accessible by different means of transport. And the park itself is adapted to different activities and satisfaction of needs, which is why playgrounds

and sports grounds, sports equipment, recreation areas, and the beach were specially distinguished. Santaka Park contributes to the well-being, health, community and city development goals of the city residents by providing affordable opportunities to come and spend free time in Santaka Park spaces.

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ОЦІНКА ПУБЛІЧНОГО ПРОСТОРУ ЯК ДОСТУПНОГО ДЛЯ ВСІХ МІСЦЯ ПРОВЕДЕННЯ ВІЛЬНОГО ЧАСУ: НА ПРИКЛАДІ SANTAKA PARK

Анотація

У сферах планування міського громадського простору та залучення громади доступність громадських просторів є важливою та актуальною темою. Ці простори служать громадськими закладами, де люди з різних верств суспільства збираються для дозвілля (Zhang, & He, 2020). Але забезпечення того, щоб простір був повністю доступним для всіх, незалежно від їхнього віку, здібностей чи освіти, є багатогранним викликом. Вчені Леклерк і Поджані (2023) стверджують, що однією з найважливіших концепцій громадських місць є їх здатність сприяти соціальній згуртованості та розбудові спільноти для всіх. Згідно з Leclercq і Pojani, (2023), мета цих просторів полягає в тому, щоб стати слугою та допомогти всім місцевим людям збиратися, спілкуватися та брати участь у різноманітних заходах. І тут, за словами Чжана та Хе (2020), концепція громадського простору означає, що кожен повинен мати спільний простір, де він може вибирати та об'єднуватися, і це допомагає створити ширшу спільноту. За своєю суттю концепція громадського простору полягає у створенні та підтримці простору, який є відкритим і доступним для всіх членів спільноти (Charmaz, 2020). Поглиблення того, як люди спілкуються та чого вони очікують від будівництва громадського місця, де вони відвідують і які дії вони хотіли б здійснювати, це саме те, що впливає на його фізичний дизайн, пристрої, які з'являються (Habermas, 2022; Thomas, та ін., 2022). Розглядаючи важливість громадських місць для людини та її можливості для дозвілля, сучасне суспільство є актуальним і важливим питанням. Саме випадок парку Сантакас, який розташований у самому центрі міста Каунас, є актуальним з цієї точки зору та дозволяє нам краще зрозуміти, як доступні для всіх міські простори дозвілля можуть змінюватися та задовольняти потреби мешканців та показники якості життя. Також дуже важливо, що показники якості публічних просторів безпосередньо впливають на психологічний та фізичний стан людей (Azhar, Hardilla, & Kurniawan, 2021). Це дослідження також проллє світло на проблеми, пов'язані з постійно виникаючою нестачею знань, і забезпечить уявлення та розуміння поточної концепції громадських місць. Метою статті є аналіз громадського простору як доступного для кожного місця проведення вільного часу на прикладі парку Сантака. Для досягнення мети порушуються наступні проблемні питання: як оцінюються та переживаються громадські простори парку Сантака як доступні для всіх місця вільного часу? Як ми можемо забезпечити, щоб громадські місця були адаптовані до людей різного віку, здібностей і потреб? Як можна врахувати різні культурні та соціальні групи, щоб створити громадські простори, які вітають і запрошують різноманітні громади? Методи дослідження. Щоб зрозуміти динаміку, способи використання, соціальну взаємодію та загальний вплив на спільноти, метод теоретичного аналізу вивчає публічний простір, наукову літературу, умови важливості діалогу, методи та інші мультидисциплінарні підходи, необхідні для аналізу публічних просторів, у тому числі різні методи дослідження.

Ключові слова: публічний простір, дозвілля, парк, доступне для всіх місце.