Meaningful design in a multicultural community.
A case study on multi-functional urban parks.

by

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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Planning

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2011

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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ABSTRACT

Urban planning is responsible for the arrangement of environments that we are living in as well as for the design of urban parks that allow us to escape from everyday stressors. However, we no longer live in culturally homogenous societies, and people of different backgrounds seem to have different perspectives on urban park aesthetics as well as the range of facilities and features that parks should provide. This study focuses on preferences and perspectives that people of different cultural backgrounds have of urban parks. This research was based on a single-case study of a multi-functional park – Waterloo Park, located in Kitchener-Waterloo (Ontario, Canada), and was focused on investigating urban park preferences of seven ethnic groups: Caucasian Canadians, East and North Asians, South Asians, Middle-Eastern, Arabic, African/Caribbean and African/Zimbabwean or Kenyan.

 The feedback obtained from face-to-face interviews with Waterloo-Park users have been analyzed in order to establish how do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks and what their breadth of needs are when utilizing park space. Demographic information, such as ethnic association, was obtained from the participants on a self-descriptive basis. Findings from this study indicates that there are apparent differences in expectations and needs that culturally diverse users have regarding urban parks, and provides substantial evidence that culture plays an influential role in perception and evaluation of urban parks. Recommendations for professional practice advocate shifting Canadian design practices towards a true comprehensive and multifunctional park design and incorporating the various motives and needs of a culturally diverse Canadian society.

Keywords: ethnicity: culture, urban design, park design

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor John Lewis, whose guidance and support enabled me to develop an understanding of the subject, as well as for all his help and support from the beginning of my graduate undertaking at the University of Waterloo.

I also wish to thank all of the participants of the study who were willing to designate their time, and provided me with meaningful feedback that made the conduction of this research possible, and the findings insightful.

To my family and friends who provided me with encouragement in the tough times, and never stopped believing that I could finish this thesis. Anya! I would never have done it without you! You've been a wonderful friend and showed me so much support since the day that we met. I can't wait for you to come back from the UK!

Also, exceptional thanks to my loving parents for all their wisdom, moral support and years of effort to get me where I am today. I don't know what I would do without you guys!

Finally, thanks to my dear boyfriend Taylor who had to live with my challenging attitude as I wrote these chapters. Thank you for believing in me, being by my side, and giving me the energy I needed to survive the past year.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

We no longer live in culturally homogeneous societies, and even if such communities still exist in the world, surely they are rare. The urge to migrate has existed since the early origins of humanity, with people resettling in search of food, better living conditions, and safer environments for raising offspring. What might be surprising is that most of these needs have not substantially changed today. Migration has become more normal for people all over the world. People can change their habitats with relative ease because of new communication technology and faster means of traversing long distances, such as air travel. Substantial technological advancements and societies' general improvement in the knowledge and integration of foreign languages have created encouraging opportunities for people to emigrate outside of their countries to find better jobs and living conditions. More importantly, it seems that apart from the 'hip' destinations from previous decades – bustling and internationally famous megalopolises like London, New York, and Toronto – people today are more confidently moving to smaller scale cities that provide accommodations for comfortable life without the common disadvantages associated with big cities, such as noise, high crime rates and high population density. As a result, multi-cultural societies are no longer confined to large urban agglomerations but are becoming standard for all well prospering cities and towns.

In this context urban planning cannot ignore the changing demographics of cities, but rather the planning profession has to reassess changing demographic

conditions and address the concepts and strategies that will attempt to meet the needs of all citizens.

Dearden (1984: 293) wrote that, "[Landscape] planning must consider how people think and feel if it is to be successful" and so should urban planning in general if it intends to design prosperous cities that will be healthy, vibrant and appreciated by its citizens. However, a question arises: do people from different cultural backgrounds 'think and feel' the same way about the environments they live in, and do they possess the same vision of a city?

The existing body of literature on influence of culture on environmental perception is somewhat unrefined, but suggests that there are both similarities, as well as differences in the way people of different cultural backgrounds utilize and evaluate urban spaces (Wendling, 1980: Leatherberry, 1984: Kaplan and Talbot, 1988).

 The premise of this thesis is that an understanding of the link between culture and perception can help shed light on the existing discussion regarding the management and evaluation of urban park settings on:

    - What types of urban parks are favored by park users?

    - What urban park settings are considered visually appealing?

    - How do people use park spaces in the city?

    - Should an urban park prioritize aesthetic or functional values?

These are not easy questions to answer and the number of potential answers may be quite large. However, the existing research that will be discussed in subsequent chapters suggests that there are noticeable patterns that can be traced, analyzed, and successfully utilized to enhance the quality of urban park landscapes.

This thesis discusses selected literature on the topic of environmental perception, as well as investigates culture as one of the critical variables that can influence the perception of Canadian urban parks. Results of the research demonstrate that culture can be a strong factor and that it should be taken into account during the design process and future management strategies of urban parks in Canada.

1.2 Research Questions, Objectives and Purpose of Research

Although the prevailing literature in the field of Environmental Perception identifies a number of possible environmental perception predictors, because of widespread and growing multiculturalism in Canada, and worldwide, culture has been acknowledged as the central variable for investigation in this research. Unfortunately, the existing theoretical framework that deals with the influence of culture on environmental perception is inconclusive, and does not provide a sufficient number of empirical studies.

The principal objective's for this research was to provide clarity in the use and understanding of the concept culture, and the other commonly used term, ethnicity, in cross-cultural research. Secondly, to provide a theoretical model that would situate culture within the existing environmental perception framework, and explain its influence on people's attitudes and expectations regarding urban park settings.

An additional objective of the study was to structure the research findings in a manner that could be used by practitioners in the field (landscape architects, architects, and urban planners) for the design and structuring of urban parks.

The two leading research questions that became the foundation of this thesis were:

1) How do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks?

2) What is the breadth of needs among people of different cultural backgrounds?

1.3 Thesis Organization

This thesis was structured into five chapters.

Chapter One is an introductory chapter; it explains the context of the research, its purpose and objectives, as well as research questions.

Chapter Two introduces the current theories and concepts on environmental perception and preference. It discusses their theoretical strengths and weaknesses, and it proposes a theoretical framework for understanding culture as a variable in landscape preference. The chapter goes on to explain the basic mechanisms of human perception, as well as to identify the array of factors that can affect the way people perceive urban spaces.

Chapter Three explains the methodological approach that was undertaken to address the research objectives. The research is exploratory in character and seeks to gather an in-depth understanding of peoples' preferences for urban parks settings, and thus a qualitative approach was used in this study.

A single case study design with face-to-face, semi-structured interviews was found to be a sufficient method to obtain the data for the analysis and to answer the research questions. A comprehensive description of the case study selection

(a municipal Waterloo Park in Waterloo, Ontario) along with a detailed explanation of procedures used to collect and analyze the data is also part of this chapter. The last section of this chapter provides additional information about the quality-measures used to make the research findings more reliable.

Chapter Four introduces a detailed description of the data collected during the interviews, as well as the data obtained from the observations. The responses from the interviews are broken-down and analyzed with the two key research questions in mind. To examine how do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks, four user-derived coding categories were employed: Composition, Amenities, Activities, and Association. To examine the breadth of needs among people of different cultural backgrounds, three additional user-derived coding-categories were developed: Need for Social Interaction, Need to Relieve Stress, and Need to Learn New Things. Afterwards the corresponding set of coding categories was used to analyze the data through direct observations.

Chapter Five reintroduces the research questions and discusses the research results. This chapter also provides a discussion on the implications of the study for professional practice, and also makes recommendations for further investigations.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A street, a public town square, a park, or a downtown plaza; every one of us experiences these different urban environments once in a while, and for many people on a daily basis. What makes some of these places special and enjoyable versus unpleasant and forgettable? What features are most important to a successful urban park? These are just a few questions that engage, and intrigue urban planners and design professionals.

It is evident that the expansion and the level of complexity of our cities today has grown beyond imaginable, and so has the sophistication of urban planning strategies and tools used by planners to structure and organize the city. However, while some of aspects of city management can be solved by systematic mathematical calculations, such as designing transportation systems and communication networks, other aspects associated with aesthetics, as well as people's perception of urban settings in general, seem to extend far beyond the tight boundaries of numbers and statistics. This forces professionals to seek answers in disciplines reaching outside the canons of formal science. Times have changed and the goal of urban planning is no longer limited to designing well functioning cities, but to also consider the enjoyment and appeal to those who live in them.

Most recent environmental perception studies try to expand the scope of urban planning to account for the growing complexity and diversity of cities by

addressing culture as the key variable that influences the human affinity for public spaces.

Nassauer has identified that, "cultural conventions and customs directly affect what people notice, find interesting, and prefer about landscape." In addition, "typically, people believe that a yard, a park, a field, a forest, or a city should look a certain way without questioning the necessity of that appearance" (Nassauer, 1995: 233).

Correspondingly, findings from the growing number of studies report that noticeable differences and similarities are to be expected when analyzing inter-racial, multi-ethnic and international responses regarding environmental perception and preference (Kaplan and Herbert, 1987; Nasar, 1984; Zube and Pitt, 1981). For instance, Kaplan and Talbot (1987) studied the correlation between different racial groups (specifically black and white Americans) preferences for recreational activities in a park setting. Their research indicated that black participants displayed a strong orientation toward 'meeting people' as opposed to 'getting away' during their recreational pursuit, while white participants were more evenly divided in choosing between these options. Additional differences in preference for landscaping style were also indicated among white and black respondents in Anderson's study (1978) which showed that black participants preferred settings characterized by smooth ground texture, and by generally well-kept appearance whereas many of these scenes were among the leased preferred by the white participants. Similarly, a number of other studies have found that people of a common ethnic origin have similar environmental preferences. For example, no substantial differences in preferences were found in

studies conducted on Scots and Americans (Shafer and Toby, 1973), Australians and Americans (Zube & Mills, 1976), and Swedish and Americans (Ulrich, 1977). However, a considerable difference in preference between western and non-western cultures does seem to exist and have been indicated by several studies (Berlyne et al. 1974; Kwok, 1979).

Unfortunately, two underlying problems exist within the research on the influence of culture on environmental perception. The first underlying problem is that there is a lack of consistency in the existing body of literature in the definition and the use of two essential terms: ethnicity and culture, as the difference between the two terms is often overlooked. As a result, it is common for the terms to be used interchangeably, which often creates a bias and reduces the credibility of the research results.

The term ethnicity is derived from the Greek word 'ethnos', which means nation, and is a concept closely associated with:

"a group of people with shared origins or social background, shared culture and traditions that are distinctive, maintained between generations, and lead to a sense of identity" (Senior & Bhopal, 1994: 327).

However many researchers believe that ethnic identification is a multi-layered labeling process frequently based on a subjective belief, and as such it can engage people both within an ethnic group, and outside of an ethnic group (Espritu, 1991). Moreover, some theorist state that individuals may have multiple ethnic identities that operate with different salience at different times (Brewer,1999; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001; Hornsey and Hogg, 2000). For instance, Lewis (2010) states that "although national origin (Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean), is often an important basis for ethnic identification, an

individual may choose to use a larger pan-ethnic identity (e.g."Asian") depending on the perceived utility and appropriateness of the label in different settings and audiences"(:222) and, therefore, ethnicity alone very often cannot be considered as a sufficient tool to predict people's attitudes, behaviors and preferences in a meaningful way (Lewis 2010; Chandra, 2006).

For these reasons, most current investigators engaged in cross-cultural research, tend to recognize culture as a proper research variable and a meaningful factor affecting environmental perception and preference instead of ethnicity and co-related variables (Lewis, 2010; Betancourt and Lopez, 1993, Swindler, 1968).

Lewis states that "beyond shared physical attributes, history and geographic origin, culture is the substance of ethnicity and is the foundation from which ethnic identities are being constructed"(Lewis 2010: 222). Therefore, although ethnicity and culture might be related terms they are two distinct concepts and should be defined separately for the research purposes (Lewis, 2010; Phinney, 1996). From the abundance of definitions presented in the literature this research is based on the definition of culture as:

"…a system of learned or socially transmitted beliefs, behaviors, norms, attitudes and forms of expression that are deemed appropriate for a group or community" (Lewis, 2010: 223)

Researchers have defined culture further and state that it could be characterized as a unique and inter-subjective perceptual filter (shaped by a system of concepts, beliefs and values) through which people experience and appraise both their social as well as physical worlds (Lewis, 2010; Naveh, 1995).

To summarize the distinction between ethnicity and culture, ethnicity can be described as an identity label, and is how we express our belonging to a group or how we differentiate ourselves from other groups of people. Culture, on the other hand, is an active substance in which people are immersed in as they live their life. Through everyday experiences, culture defines people's perception of the world around them, their behavioral patterns and preferences.

For example, a Canadian born and raised child of two Polish parents will likely self-describe himself with a Polish ethnicity. However, after living permanently in Canada for 15 years, a vast majority of his life experiences will be from Canadian culture. Thus, at the age of 15 his ethnic identity will likely still be considered Polish, but as a result of his daily experiences in Canada his perceptions and preferences would be greatly influenced by Canadian culture.

Although culture should be investigated as the meaningful predictor of environmental preferences from an individual's standpoint, culture can be very hard to define and identify. For instance, continuing from the example of the boy with Polish parents, it would be a difficult task for the boy to describe his cultural identity if he had lived in Canada for only five years after growing up in Poland for the first 15 years of his life. During his five years in Canada the boy would have been immersed with Canadian customs, media and cultural experiences. The boy would still likely identify himself with a Polish ethnicity, but defining his cultural association would be more challenging. In a way, culture is very transient, as it can change over time and can be easily influenced by an individual's immediate circumstances. However, it is easier for people to define their ethnicity, which makes it an easier variable to sample in research. If a person has had sufficient exposure to the culture associated with their ethnicity,

then ethnicity could be considered a sufficient link to their perception and preference patterns.

Given these arguments, this research focuses on identifying the influence of culture on environmental perception by using ethnicity as the research tool. Accordingly, this thesis uses ethnicity to sample and categorize participants for the study, however it focuses on investigating people's behaviors, experiences, and expectations regarding urban parks, which are their cultural patterns.

The second problem with addressing culture as a variable for investigation is that the existing environmental perception theories, that present a theoretical framework for understanding the influence of culture in the broader context of other perception factors, remain unclear and have generated a significant amount of controversy.

Initial research advances regarding environmental perception frameworks were very optimistic as Kaplan S. (1987: 4) notes that, "useful knowledge has been acquired and has begun to be applied to a variety of problems." However, more recently Chandra (2006) argues that there is still a disturbing theoretical void of research in this study area. Thus, the main objective of the remaining sections of this chapter is to explain the influence of culture on the perception of urban parks in the broader context of the existing environmental perception theories.

2.2 Theoretical framework

In order to situate how the concept of culture coincides with the existing environmental perception frameworks I will be discussing the most prevalent environmental perception theories:

- Innate Theories of Perception:

    - Biological Theories/Evolutionary Concepts:

      Savanna Hypothesis and 'Prospect- Refuge' Theory

    - Ecological Psychology and Phenomenology

- Inter-subjective Theories of Perception:

    - Information-Processing Theory

    - Social Constructionism

    - Sense of Place Theory

Innate Theories of Perception

Innate theories of perception assume that human perception is objective and that visual data is structured in an optical array immediately prior to any interpretation or selectivity by the perceiver (Gibson, 1950). This means that an individual does not have any biases that affect their interpretation of the visual object, in this context, a place. Given this conception, Innate Theories of Perception do not support the importance of culture on the perception of a space, and posits that perception is a universal construct.

Biological/ Evolutionary Theories; Savanna Hypothesis and 'Prospect- Refuge' Theory

Biological/Evolutionary theories assume that perception is not influenced by external factors e.g. environmental or social factors, but is rather ingrained in our genetic composition. Many landscape preference studies indicate that savanna-like settings are consistently more preferred than other natural environments

(Appleton, 1875; Balling and Falk, 1982; Ulrich 1983). This finding has led researchers to explore the significance of responses to landscapes in relation to the evolutionary origin of humans in African savanna settings. The comprehensive research in this area falls into two approaches. The first approach focuses on the differential response to natural biomes, in particular, it tests hypotheses related to savanna habitat in which people have evolved. The second approach to landscape preferences is based on the notion that people tend to prefer environments in which exploration is easy, which indicates the importance that people place on having the resources necessary for survival present.

Starting with the first approach, there have been numerous studies (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990; Lovejoy, 1981; Orians, 1986) conducted that suggest that millions of years of early human evolution occurred on African savannas, and that a large portion of our biological composition was developed during this time (e.g. bipedalism). This implies that the research results that indicate a high preference for savanna landscape may be directly linked to our genetic heritage (Appleton, 1975; Balling and Falk 1982). Orians (1986) points to a wide range of savanna survival advantages; easy access to nutritious food; long, unimpeded views allowing early visibility of potential predators, and scattered trees providing shelter. Similarly, Orians at el. (1992) argues that it is reasonable to assume that natural selection would favor individuals who were motivated to explore and settle in environments that better provided the necessities of life. In this manner, the savanna might be permanently ingrained into the human genome as a preferred environment. One of the studies conducted to test the validity of the 'Savanna Hypothesis' was conducted by Balling and Falk (1982).

The study examined the preferences of individuals, of different ages for various kinds of environments. Their research, like many other studies in the field, was based on the comparison of pictures that portrayed different landscapes that the participants had to rate based on their preference. This approach is limited to individuals reacting to a photograph and not the environment itself. However, three previously conducted studies (Coughlin and Goldstein, 1970; Anderson et al. 1978) had confirmed that an individual's preference for a photograph is aligned with their preference for the real environmental setting, which validates the methodology of photo-elicitation from the Balling and Falk (1982) tests.

The Balling and Falk study showed a selected group of participants' pictures of five different biomes: desert, rain forest, savanna, mixed hardwoods, and boreal forest. Since familiarity, and hence, experience has shown to be an important factor in preference (Herzog and Kaplan, 1982; Kaplan and Herbert 1988), one would expect that any evolutionary influence will be most visible at a fairly young age, and that familiarity would be more influential in older groups of participants. The results showed that in all age groups the savanna biome was the most preferable environment, but that the proportion of other preferable biomes increased with the age of the participants.

These findings provide compelling evidence that the response to a savanna environment is innately driven; that biology may be a dominant environmental preference factor in early childhood, but diminishes as experience and knowledge about other environments accumulates.

The second evolutionary approach to environmental preference hypothesizes that people innately prefer savanna settings because it satisfies humanities basic

survival motives and needs. Appleton's 'Prospect-Refugee' Theory states that environmental preference is largely based on satisfying our 'inborn' desires to create opportunities for survival. The author identifies opportunity (prospect) and safety (refuge) as the two main desires. Accordingly, the theory predicts that people tend to favor environments that facilitate survival by having broad vistas with visible places for easy refuge, such as a cave or a cope of trees. Appleton argues that the 'Prospect-Refugee' theory is still well supported today. He argues that the ability to see (prospect) but not to be seen (refuge) in early human evolution used to be a paramount survival instinct; used during hunting or to foresee predators. Today, the need to feel safe is still powerful and affects the way that we experience environments.

The evidence that biology is an influential factor in environmental preference is compelling (Appleton, 1975; Ulrich, 1983; Orians and Heerwagen, 1992; Hartig and Staats, 2006). However, studies like the one conducted by Balling and Falk also prove that biology is not the only determinant of preference, and that long-term exposure to different cultural, economic, or other social experiences may give rise to differences in the extent to which people rely on innate or genetically pre-developed frameworks (Hartig and Staats, 2006; Lewis, 2010). Several other arguments provide evidence that biology is not the only preference factor. The argument is that biologically driven mechanisms of human perception cannot explain inter-individual variations in landscape preferences, because the strength of these mechanisms is assumed to be similar across individuals (Lewis, 2010). Additionally, although today's survival circumstances may have substantially changed, Appleton's 'Prospect-Refuge' theory, which traces peoples' archaic motives and needs, seems to remain well supported in today's time. For

example, in more recent studies Wekerle (1992) and Egan (1991) confirm that the perception of safety (refuge) is necessary for feelings of enjoyment and comfort in urban open space. Additionally, water was of upmost importance in our ancestors' day, and the majority of landscape preference studies reports that water remains the most critical element among people evaluating environments today (e.g. Ulrich 1983, 1986). This finding may be directly linked to our archaic survival instincts.

The existing literature suggests that although we may be biologically driven in our perception, our biology works only as a base where other layers of perception are added; perceptions that are shaped from the accumulation of environmental, social and cultural experiences.

Ecological Psychology and Phenomenology

Consistent with biological theories, Ecological Psychology and Phenomenology posits that environmental perception is an innate and instinctive act of interacting with the environment. However, while Ecological Psychology investigates the 'environment' as an influential variable, Phenomenology investigates the concept of a 'body' as a unique and ambiguous perception tool.

Ecological Psychology is a perspective developed by James Gibson who has focused primarily on investigating the role of the environment in the perception process. He observed that different environments encourage different behaviors. For example, a church environment encourages a reserved behavior, while a sports arena environment encourages a more energetic and social behavior. Gibson concluded that understanding the way that people regularly interact within different environment s is key to understanding human perception

(Gibson, 1966; 1979). Similarly, Ingold states that, "depending on the kind of activity in which we are engaged, we will be attuned to picking up particular kinds of information. The knowledge obtained through direct perception is thus practical knowledge about what an environment offers for the pursuance of the action in which perceiver is currently engaged"(Ingold, 2000: 166). In other words, an individual's personal biases will result in that individual gathering only the necessary information from the environment to support their intentions. For example, a fit individual may be less deterred by a hilly path, and thus more likely to notice the aesthetic park features beside the path, than a lesser fit individual whose focus is entirely on overcoming the challenging path. He also states that perception is "an active and exploratory process of information pick-up, far from working on sensations already received" and that it "involves the continual movement, adjustment and reorientation of the receptor organ themselves" (Gibson, 1972: 221). This means that the individual's biases and perception may alter with time because of the use and experience of the space.

Phenomenology [of Perception] was developed on the foundations of early Heidegger's works, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and represents another approach to understanding human perception. Unlike Gibson who mainly focused on the "environment" as a key variable, Ponty primarily concentrates on aspects of the "body". He claims that we are embodied subjects involved in existence, and that it is through our bodies that we perceive the world (Ingold, 2000: 169). According to Ponty's perspective, "the human body is an expressive space which contributes to the significance of personalities" and therefore the "bodily experience gives perception a meaning beyond that established by thought"(Ingold, 2000: 168). Ponty suggests that it is the bodily experience of the

world that dominates human existence and that we first perceive the world and then we do the philosophy. Ponty also states that, "bodily experience is an ambiguous mode of existence; in which mind and body each have their own being, and the perceptions of the body influence what is perceived by the mind" (Ingold, 2000: 170). This statement is important because it indicates that Ponty's theory is open to the idea that the "body" is not the only driving force, and accepts that psychological perception can also affect the final output.

Both of these theories contend that it is the interaction of the body and the environment that determines perception. Ecological Psychology highlights the importance of environmental factors, while Phenomenology emphasizes the primacy of stimuli obtained through pure bodily experience on perception. Neither theory supports the influence of culture on environmental perception.

Inter-Subjective Theories of Perception

As opposed to the innate theories of perception inter-subjective theories emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge and experience. They assume that visual perception is not only limited to responses to innate, fixed, or invariant properties of the environment, but that it is mediated by a range of psychological, social and environmental variables (Lewis, 2005). The dominant and overarching theory in this area is the Information-Processing Theory. Other theories that take a more focused approach to certain aspects of Information-Processing Theory are Social Constructionism, including culture as one of the variables, and Sense of Place Theories.

Information-Processing Theory

Information-Processing Theory addresses the weaknesses of the Biological Theories. It suggests, that "Humans are not passive sensory automata" strictly controlled by their biological instincts but that "their functioning in the world depends on the collection and synthesis of information that is continuously collected from all aspects of their life" (Lewis, 2005: 85). In this respect, the human brain resembles a 'computer' that continuously records, analyzes, and stores acquired information from the environment to subsequently use in various ways at any given time in the future. Psychologists refer to this process as cognitive mapping because as new stimuli information is acquired from the environment the brain tries to encompass it with meaning by 'mapping' its relation to other previously collected and stored information. One of Information-Processing Theory's founders, Richard Langton Gregory explains this as: "signals received by the sensory receptors triggers appropriate knowledge that interact with these inputs to enable us to make sense of the world"(Gregory, 1977: 320).

An illustration of this can be demonstrated with the simple drawing below.

Gregory argues that surely to do this we must be using more than just sensory inputs.

How do we know from this stimulus alone that this is a door?
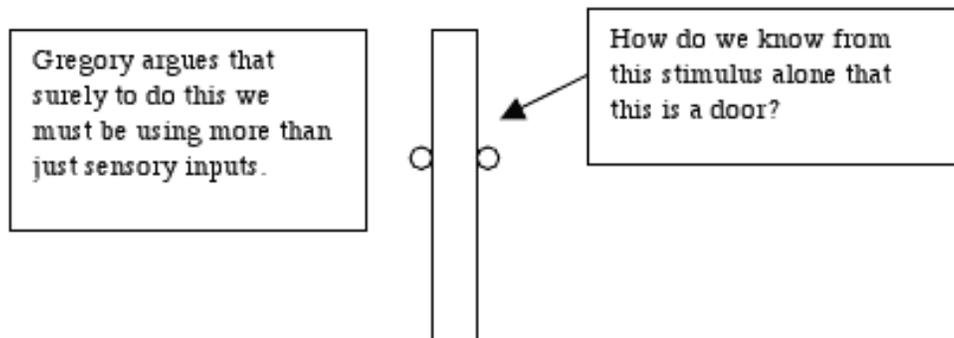
Figure 2.1 Graphic representation of a door (Gregory, 1974: 72)

Drawing upon stored knowledge, many people would interpret this drawing to be a door. It is likely the image of a door from their home that brings people to this conclusion. But, if an individual lived in a hut, they would likely come to a different conclusion. The individual's memory or visualization of the door in their home can be classified as stimuli, and once triggered by the brain it drives the response. With the absence of this stimulus, such as the case of an individual living in a hut, the response would be different. In this respect, the Information-Processing Theory states that an individual's prior knowledge and experiences may affect their perception.

The most recognized framework is the Preference Matrix, which was derived from the Information Processing Theory, and introduced by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan (1989). Both authors shared Gregory's belief that humans are information processors, and that in order to survive successfully they not only need to be able to recognize objects in the environment (e.g. a tree or bear), but also to make predictions about what those elements can offer (e.g. a tree provides shelter, and a bear is a potential hazard). Based on this premise, R. Kaplan and S. Kaplan conducted a series of empirical studies, which were intended to provide more information on what cognitive maps, or schemes, humans use in order to make sense of the environment they are being exposed to.

The groundwork for Kaplan's Preference Matrix was that human functioning depends on information, and that people seem to be extremely facile in their ability to extract information from the environment. Our species ability to process, memorize, and use information to our benefit is possibly our greatest survival advantage. Accordingly, Kaplan's framework hypothesizes that as information processors we are fond of environments that provide rapid,

comprehensible information. Kaplan's Preference Matrix (Presented in Table 2.1) has been built based on two domains representing two critical facts about people's relationship to information.

	Understanding	Exploration
Immediate /	Coherence	Complexity
Inferred / Predicted	Legibility	Mystery

Table 2.1 Kaplan's Preference Matrix (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989: 53)

The first domain on the matrix involves two categories of human needs; understanding and exploration. Authors state that people have a need to make sense of (understand) the environment. When the environment is difficult to comprehend people can become hostile or angry (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989: 51). For example, elderly people often feel anxious when, due to memory loss, they cannot find their way in familiar places. Moreover, Kaplan explains that understanding the environment, like anything else, is at least partially dependent on prior experience. For example, Kaplan and Kaplan argue that the environmental patterns associated with different forest practices may be interpreted differently depending on one's ability to understand them. Buhyoff, Wellman and Daniel (1982) have shown that preference for discolored trees, caused by disease, are higher when people are not knowledgeable about the cause of the coloration. These arguments provide considerable support for the theory that humans have a strong desire to understand their environment, and it seems reasonable to deduct that a person's preference for an environment would improve when comprehension of that environment is facilitated.

The second category on Kaplan's matrix relates to people's need to explore. The authors explain that exploration is an important element in accumulating experience, and that it inclines individuals to expand their knowledge, as well as to increase their capacity to understand previously confusing situations.

Having explained the two main domains creating Kaplan's Preference Matrix, the need to 'Understand' and 'Explore', the framework introduces the four additional terms: 'Coherence and Legibility' and 'Complexity and Mystery'.

Coherence and Legibility refer to how easy it is to understand the environment and helps provide order in the scene and directing the attention. Complexity and Mystery, on the other hand, define the scenes richness and the extent to which the scene is intriguing.

The information processing theory acknowledges the complexities associated with the way people experience the environment. It expands on the basic biological needs by extending the focus to include the need for information collection and comprehension, which we need for day-to-day functioning and survival. Based on this, Kaplan's theory holds true; environments that provide both the most easily extractable information (coherence, legibility), and the availability of new information (complexity, mystery) are more preferable. However, Kaplan's theory does not account for the additional factors of preference that arise when we try to internalize the newly collected information. It is likely that culture will greatly impact the interpretation and assimilation of the information. At the time of extracting the information, individuals will likely have similar preferences, but the final interpretation and overall preference will likely vary due to socio-cultural and other individual biases.

Social Constructionism

Social Constructionism is a more focused approach to Information Processing Theory and looks specifically at the social influences and interactions that affect individuals as members of a larger group. Culture as a concept, and as an influential factor in environmental perception and preference, is a variable within the theoretical approach.

There are two core thoughts that the constructionist approach has been built upon. First, it states that, "it is a part of our human nature to impose structure on the world by thinking of it in a certain way" (Boghossian, 2006: 117). Second, that "what a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see" (Kuhn 2000: 113).

It seems natural for us to use different terms to reference objects and phenomenon that surrounds us e.g. 'a mountain', 'a house'. However, very often we tend to forget that those are just labels, or thought representations, like many others that we have been exposed to. Constructionist's call these representations social constructs, as they have been imposed on us by social norms and knowledge. It is easy to say that money, citizenship, and newspapers are social constructs because they obviously couldn't exist without societies. But a house is a less obvious social construct. An individual's perception of 'a house' is biased by their existing community. A city dweller and an African tribe man's interpretation of a houses image would likely differ. The African man is used to living in a hut made out of straw and clay with rounded shapes (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 House of a tribesman in Africa and a drawing of a house made by a girl from a Canadian kindergarten

His concept of a house would be based on the appearance of other huts in his village, and the general knowledge of how a house should look that has been passed along to him by other tribe members.

An entirely different concept of a house can be observed in a drawing of a 7-year-old girl living in Canada (Figure 2.2). Her concept of a house has a chimney, two windows, and a pair of doors. However, her drawing only partially resembles the block of flats that she actually lives in. Most importantly, her real house is a unit in a larger building and does not have a chimney.

The drawing of a girl is not much different than other drawings of her peers in the same kindergarten class. So, it can be suggested that the two concepts of 'a house', in this case a tribal man and a child in a kindergarten class, has been socially constructed.

The changing perception of landscape beauty in the 19th century is another example of a socially constructed belief. Since ancient Rome and Greece, the perception of nature and landscape beauty across Europe has been strictly

dominated by classic canons of rhythm, proportion and symmetry (Majdecki, 2007; Porteous, 1996). Accordingly, until the end of the Baroque period, gardens (currently considered as a most prominent manifestation of aesthetic sensibilities towards nature until 18th century) were strictly geometrical with vast expanses of short-cut lawns and sculptured topiaries (Majdecki, 2007). However, as Romanticism flourished everything changed. A revolt began against Classicist ideals and scientific rationalization of nature. As a result, the wild landscapes that had been long regarded as hostile and threatening were now being perceived as sublime or a source of 'awe'. This movement led to a new perception, where untamed nature was associated with beauty rather than hostility.

Acknowledging that humans are naturally social beings and that a humans understanding of the world; value systems and beliefs; interest and prejudices are influenced by society is essential in understanding environmental perception. According to the words of Paul A. Boghossian: "Had we been a different kind of society, had we had different needs, values, or interests, we might well have built a different kind of thing, or built this one differently" (2001: 1).

Sense of Place Theory

In recent years various studies have identified that a sense of place is essential to the success of neighborhoods, streets and communities worldwide (Tuan, 1974; Hiss, 1990; Cresswell, 2005). The term 'sense of place' (also referred to as 'topophilia', or 'the spirit of place') is most often used in the literature in relation "to those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as to

those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging"
(Cresswell, 2005).

Yi-Fu Tuan (1974), in his book "Topophilia" writes that "any time a location
is identified or given a name, it is separated from the undefined space that
surrounds it. Some places, however, have been given stronger meanings, names
or definitions by society than others. These are the places that are said to have a
strong "Sense of Place."

Sense of place theory takes a special position within other theories that refer
to the human-environment relations, as it is a social phenomenon that exists
independently of any one individual's perceptions or experiences, yet is
dependent on human engagement for its existence. Such a feeling may be
derived from the natural environment, but is more often made up of a mix of
natural and cultural features in the landscape, and generally includes the people
who occupy a place.

The existing literature on the topic identifies two main aspects of sense of
place. The first one is abstract in nature and focuses on the aspect of 'place
identity', which Proshansky (1975) defines as a cognitive connection between
people and their environment, that is "defined by a complex pattern of conscious
and unconscious ideas, beliefs, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies
and skills relative to the environment"(155).

The second concept relates to a more functional aspect of sense of place –
namely place dependence. Guest and Lee (1984) describes it as the utilitarian
value [of a place] to meet certain basic needs while Jorgensen and Stedman (2001:
236) states "it is how well a setting serves goal achievement given an existing
range of alternatives".

Alderfer (1972) categorizes human needs into existence, relatedness, and growth needs. Existence needs are considered to be the material and physical needs that are necessary for existence, such as the need for food and water. Relatedness needs are those needs that represent goals to interact with groups of friends, community, and family members in an environment. Those needs are usually related feelings of acceptance, confirmation, and reciprocity. Lastly, growth needs are what compel a person to develop his or her capabilities such as learning new things, meditation, or relaxing through recreational activities.

In regards to environmental preference, Sense of Place theory indicates that a public space will be the most successful if it is structured in such a way that it satisfies all three human needs. Addressing all of the potential patrons' needs may nearly be impossible, and this theory does little to address how to meet those needs through urban space design. However, it does highlight the importance of classifying, and focusing on the major needs that the targeted attendants may have.

2.3 Chapter Conclusions

Based on the assessment of the existing literature, culture should be considered an important factor in understanding how people perceive urban parks, and is thus an influential factor in the environmental perception framework, for several reasons.

Starting first with the biological theories, it does seem logical that our perception cannot be entirely detached from our biological needs. Humans, like other animals, have been equipped with natural instincts that allow them to promptly assess environments for potential refuge and hazards. This may

explain why we feel insecure when walking down dark, narrow alleys. Whether it is common sense or a primal instinct to avoid hazards, the majority of people would likely look for an alternative route home rather than venture down the dark alley.

Sense of place theories add an additional layer of understanding of human preference by acknowledging stronger bonds to places through the presence of various needs; existence, relatedness, and growth. Humans have certain needs that must be met in order to survive and be happy, and these have been developed through millions of years of biological evolution. As such, I believe that the sense of place theories encapsulate the biological theories, and are relevant to understanding environmental preference patterns.

Although our biological and need driven instincts may be influential, believing that we are entirely biologically driven in our perception seems to be somewhat naive. Supporting evidence of this can be seen in the diversity of preference patterns. If our perception was entirely biologically driven, all humans should in theory share a uniform scheme of preference for all environments. Reality is more complex, and people tend to appreciate very different environments, which makes it logical to assume that biology is not the only factor effecting peoples preference. The Information Processing Theory supports this theory, and recognizes humans as entities strongly dependent on information pick-up and synthesis. And, although Kaplan and Kaplan discovered that at the initial level of information extraction from the environment, humans share a common preference pattern (favor environments that facilitate easy information pick-up and comprehension). However, the way they process it and encompass it with meaning remains more intricate and

dependent on a complex range of factors. The array of potential preference predictors hasn't been fully developed, however there are some factors that have already been identified in the literature as being influential. These factors of preference are social and cultural influences. Social and cultural conventions are considered to be crucial because they have a powerful influence on our overall knowledge of the world. It is through social interactions, educational systems, and culture that we are taught to see the world in a particular way; to evaluate images and settings according to one system of values rather than another; to believe certain concepts while rejecting others. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is social and cultural conventions that dictate the way we live our lives; the type of activities we engage in, and the types of needs that we have to fulfill.

The following diagram can be used to visually understand the links amongst all of the discussed theories.
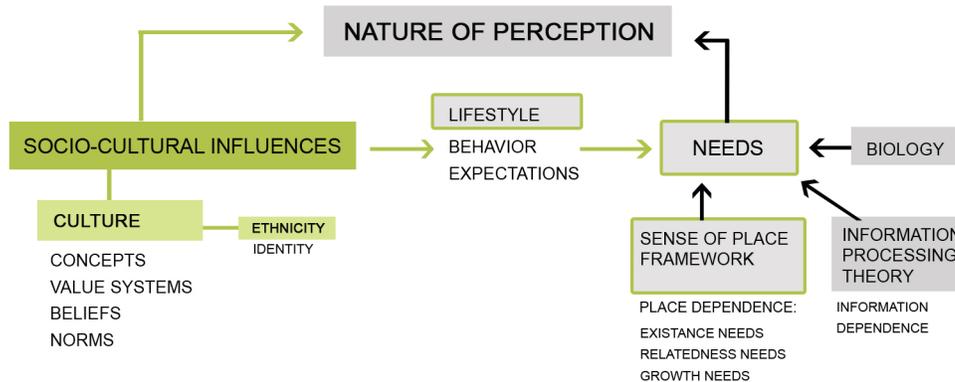
Figure 2.3 Nature of Perception – Proposed Theoretical Framework

The purpose of these theories is to help understand the nature of perception. Each of the theories attempts to explain why an individual perceives their

environment in a certain way. The right side of the diagram shows that biology is the fundamental element that shapes us. It defines our basic human needs. Sense of place expands the basic biological needs to also include existence, relatedness needs and growth needs. The perception of the environment is then dependent on its ability to satisfy, or meet these needs. Simultaneously, Information Processing Theory introduces additional characteristics for our species - the need for information. The left side of the diagram shows the socio-cultural influences. Culture is being situated as a dominating factor. Ethnicity is branched to culture because it is a mean of self-identification derived from shared origins, concepts, and customs, which are essential elements of culture.

Culture includes concepts, value systems, beliefs and norms, which in a direct way affects how people perceive and comprehend the world around them. For this reason, culture not only influences the way we think about environments, but also the way we build them, and the type of expectation that we have, both in terms of aesthetics and functionality. In addition, culture influences people's lifestyle, by impacting such things as how people choose to socialize, and how they spend their free time. Likewise, culture influences people's behaviors and expectations, which also impacts lifestyle.

Shifting attention to the right side of the diagram – the lifestyle that people choose to follow drives certain needs. While some needs are inborn and may not be affected by culture (e.g. need for easy information pick up, and the preference for environments that provides prospect for it), other needs are likely more affected by culture.

Alderfer categorizes human needs into three categories. The first is Existence needs, which encompass the most basic needs that all humans share, such as

material and physical needs (e.g. needs for food, shelter, and safety). However, most people have expectations to satisfy more than just the minimum level of needs. For example, most people want more than just any form of shelter. They tend to have certain expectations for the type of shelter, such as a house with a garden and pool. Another example relates to people's attitudes towards food. All people need food for survival. However, when we have a choice in what we eat, not only inter-individual differences, but also cultural differences influence the type of food that we choose. For example, there are some very distinct food preferences across cultures. While French people enjoy snails (escargot); Chinese people enjoy chicken feet; Polish and German people enjoy sauerkraut, many other cultures would not enjoy eating any of these foods. Thus, once the needs are satisfied beyond a nominal level, culture plays a role in determining the preferences for satisfying those needs.

The second category of Alderfer's needs framework is Relatedness needs, which refers to the need to interact with groups of friends, community, and family members in an environment. It seems logical that these needs would also be influenced by culture, since culture influences the way that people choose to socialize.

The third category of Alderfer's needs framework is Growth needs, which refers to such needs as learning new things, meditation, and relaxing through recreational activities. In this case culture would also play a role in influencing Growth needs. For example, culture may influence the type of recreational activities that an individual would choose to engage in, in order to relax. For instance, Canadians may choose to play baseball, which may not interest Chinese people, who may be more interested in badminton, or tai chi chuan. Similarly,

while it is common to see people jogging alongside busy downtown streets in North America, it is very uncommon in many European cities where people are expected to jog in parks or on special trails.

These are just a few examples of how culture can affect the scope of human needs. This thesis investigates further the links between culture and the breadth of needs amongst urban park users.

In summary, the environmental perception/preference literature suggests that no single theory is able to explain environmental perception on its own, however through integration of these theories we are better able to understand human behavior. As our biology may dictate our physiological needs, it is social and cultural influences that creates our mental dependencies and preferences and "implies multi-dimensional conventions both on the way we build our environments, the way we perceive them, and finally the way we use them."(Lynch, 1971).

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

The data for this thesis was obtained from interviews and observations conducted on a group of multi-ethnic users of Waterloo Park - a large multifunctional urban park, located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Data collection has been structured into two phases. In phase one, an opportunity-sample method was employed and a series of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected Waterloo Park users. In phase two, an additional series of observations was conducted on site in order to verify the validity of the participant's feedback from phase one. A detailed description of the methods employed is presented in the following sections of this chapter.

3.2 Methodological Approach

Given that the existing theoretical framework for understanding culture as a research variable, and the theories that discuss environmental perception as a phenomenon are quite unclear, this research is very exploratory in nature. The purpose of this research was, first, to provide a theoretical approach to understanding the influence of culture on people's perception of urban parks. Secondly, its purpose was to identify and discuss some of the existing differences and similarities in preferences for urban park settings among different ethnic groups. It was assumed that by validating that the participants cultural backgrounds were aligned with their ethnic association, that ethnicity would be a sufficient tool to determine the impact that culture has on people's park

preferences. For this reason, the discussion of the research findings in chapter 4 and 5 often reference the findings from the perspective of the ethnic groupings used in this study.

Accordingly, this study has employed qualitative research to address the following two key research questions:

1) How do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks?

2) What is the breadth of needs amongst people of different cultural backgrounds?

The qualitative research is based upon constructivist knowledge claims, which argue that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). Further, Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 77) state that qualitative research is used in exploratory studies "to address research questions that require explanation and understanding of social phenomena and their context", while Densin and Lincoln (1998) notes that qualitative research is "an interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values, etc.) within their social worlds".

The methodological benefit of employing a qualitative approach is that the interviews are not restricted to only specific, close-ended questions, which is the case in quantitative research. With a qualitative approach the interviewees can be guided by the researcher in real time, hence the direction and research framework can quickly be revisited as the new information emerges (Seale and Silverman, 1996).

Thus, flexibility is one of the great advantages of using qualitative research when testing the emerging frameworks and hypothesis, as well as in its capability of providing detailed, and in-depth feedback regarding the motives and needs standing behind people's attitudes and behaviors. Thus, the extensive data based on subtleties and complexities of human experience that is obtained is powerful and sometimes more compelling than quantitative data (Seale and Silverman, 1997).

Qualitative research also has some limitations that should be noted. The assessment of the quality of the qualitative data transcends the standards of conventional quantitative approaches, bringing some question into the extent of the reliability and validity of the findings (Seal and Silverman, 1997; Merriam, 2005). Accordingly, Buchanan (1992) states that the quality of the qualitative research "cannot be determined by following prescribed formulas. Rather, its quality lies in the power of its language to display a picture of the world in which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity" (:119). Nevertheless, most researchers agree that the rigor and validity of qualitative research is important and that a variety of methods can be used to validate the quality of the findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Seal and Silverman, 1997; Merriam, 2005; Maxwell, 2005)

Given the exploratory character of this research, a qualitative approach has been identified as the most suitable method to conduct the study. A set of quality measures has been employed to enhance reliability and validity of the research findings. The list of utilized quality-checks for this research has been provided and discussed in the further sub-section of this chapter.

3.3 Research design

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of culture on people's perception of urban parks. However, due to the difficulties that underlie direct investigation of culture in empirical research (e.g. the fact that it can be difficult for people to self-describe their cultural association), this study has been designed to sample participants based on their ethnic identities. The influence of culture was assumed to be apparent in their behavioral patterns, and the various outlooks and expectations on how an urban park should be designed, what it should look like, and the type of amenities it should offer.

Because of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Kitchener-Waterloo (Ontario) community, Waterloo Park was chosen as a suitable case study to conduct the research. A *single-case* study framework has been recognized as a sufficient method to obtain data since the intended role of the Waterloo Park, as a case study was to facilitate a general discussion on multi-functional urban parks. Additionally, this study focuses on large scale, multi-functional urban parks that are located within the city boundaries; are designated to serve a large population and provide a variety of recreational activities and facilities (e.g. Principal Parks, City Parks, Central Parks).

3.4 Case study selection

Located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Waterloo Park was chosen as a case study for a variety of reasons. First, because it is a large – approximately one hundred and ten acre – multi-functional urban park that could accommodate a variety of recreational uses, that any potential park user might have. Second, the park's facilities and features include a variety of open spaces, four baseball diamonds,

multiple picnic locations and playgrounds, one fast-food venue, an animal farm, a small flower garden, and a lake. A third, and equally important reason, is that Kitchener-Waterloo has been long recognized as both a culturally and ethnically diverse municipality. The percentage of immigrants is nearly 22.3% of the region's total population, and the region intends to continue increasing this rate over the coming years (Census 2006). The presence of two big Universities (University of Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier University) is an additional benefit, as it provides a number of international and exchange students representing a young and culturally diverse set of park users. Waterloo-Park is also in a prime location. It is located a short walking distance (up to 15 min) from Up-Town Waterloo, as well as from the two universities. Many park studies have identified that park accessibility within a short walking distance is a crucial evaluation factor in park studies (Hammer et al., 1974).

Waterloo Park has also been chosen as a case study because, despite being well situated, the park was observed to be somewhat neglected. Although during the weekends the park was utilized for baseball games and family walks across the animal farm, during the week the park was mainly used for commuting to other destinations. A disturbing observation was made that despite close proximity to both universities, students were the most infrequent group among the park users. For these reasons, it was hypothesized that Waterloo Park does not meet its full potential as a multifunctional urban park, and was perceived as a good starting point to engage the park users in a discussion about their conceptions and expectations towards urban park settings.

3.5 Participant sample

Members of the Kitchener-Waterloo community who were familiar with Waterloo Park, and who had diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds were recruited. To eliminate bias the research sample was build upon participants of different age, gender, and social status (parents, students, youth, and retired seniors).

Participants were recruited for interviews in various locations; mainly on site at Waterloo Park, and in community places. The community places used for interviews were local libraries, city hall, shopping malls, and the University of Waterloo's campus, which has a large culturally diverse community of students, faculty and staff. The participants were approached based on an opportunity sample method, meaning that participants were initially selected on the basis that they happen to be at the designated recruitment location. At that time the initial assessment of participant's ethnicity was based on their apparent (visual) ethnic features. However, in order to obtain exact demographic characteristics, participants were asked to self-describe themselves in terms of their ethnic background, and age. Further, questions were asked to align the participant's ethnic association with their cultural background. The age group ranges, as well as initial ethnic groups proposed for the interviews are presented below.

Age group ranges:

- Youth (below 20 years old)
- Adults (20-60 years old)
- Seniors (> 60 years old)

Ethnic groupings:
- Caucasian Canadian
- African

- East Asian / North Asian (e.g. Korean, Japanese, Chinese)
- Middle Eastern
- Arabic
- South Asian / Indian
- Latino/ Hispanic

Unfortunately, partway through the interview screening process it became clear that finding a sufficient number of Latino/ Hispanic participants (an ample number of individuals representing a variety of age groups and gender) would be more difficult than anticipated. By the end of the interview process it was decided that the Latino/Hispanic ethnic group would be excluded from the list of ethnic study groups. Moreover, during the interviewing process it become apparent that the African ethnic grouping would need to be divided into two separate groups:

- African / Caribbean
- African / from Kenya or Zimbabwe

Consequently, after excluding the Latino/ Hispanic group from the research and dividing the African grouping into two separate ethnic groups the final ethnic groups used in the study became as follows:

- Caucasian Canadian
- African / Caribbean
- African / Zimbabwe or Kenya
- East Asian / North Asian (e.g. Korean, Japanese, Chinese)
- Middle Eastern
- Arabic
- South Asian / Indian

Although there is no critical sample size when using qualitative interview techniques it is crucial that an equal number of participants will be represented

in each ethnic group. Additionally, the respondents in every group should exemplify different ages, genders and social status in order to eliminate bias. Consequently it was estimated that for every (out of 7) categorized ethnic groups there will be a minimum number of 8 participants, which in total would give a minimum sample of 56 participants for the research. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a qualitative participant sample is not obtained in order to acquire data for a statistical generalization. Rather, it is used to maximize the prospect of revealing the phenomenon under investigation. It was anticipated that an additional number of participants might have been required. The sufficiency of the sample size was intended to be assessed according to Miles and Huberman's (1994) data saturation criterion that sampling will stop when it is determined that, due to the repetition of information in the interviews, additional interviews will yield little new information to the research. Following that approach, the final sample size of this study consisted of a total number of 62 interview participants.

3.6 Data collection

A combination of different data collection methods has been incorporated into this research in order to adequately address the research questions. To begin with, a comprehensive literature review has been conducted in order to provide a theoretical framework that could be used to interpret the collected data. Second, a series of face-to-face interviews with ethnically diverse park users was conducted to assess how the conception of a "park", as well as the range of "needs" vary between different ethnic groups. In the third step, a series of direct

observations were carried out in the park in order to validate the data previously obtained from the interviews.

All of the interviews have been conducted in a period between May 18 and June 7, 2009. The follow up observation has been carried out on sunny days, both weekdays and weekends, between July 6 and August 2, 2009.

Literature Review Analysis

The goal of the literature review was to assess the existing theory regarding the relation between culture and Environmental Perception. The first step was to assess and summarize the most prevalent existing Environmental Perception Theories. The second step was to find a direct linkage between culture and those theories that seem to be most relevant. Those theories were found to be Information-Processing Theory, Social Constructionism Theory and Sense of Place Theory.

Interviews

The main goal of the interviews was to obtain extensive, first-hand information from multi-ethnic park users regarding their preferences and expectations towards urban parks. As it was previously mentioned an opportunity sample method has been used to recruit participants for the study in various locations of the city. Conduct of the interviews was structured in two phases. The objective of the first phase, the screening phase, was to approach, assess, and recruit potential participants. The second phase, the execution phase, had a form of individually scheduled face-to-face interviews with selected participants.

Screening Phase

During the first encounter (introduction) potential participants were verbally introduced to the researcher and, briefly, to the objectives of the study according to the script (Appendix A-1). Additionally they were asked a few questions to verify their eligibility to participate in the study. Participants were asked questions to clarify their familiarity with Waterloo Park, their previous experiences with parks in general, as well as to verify to what degree their cultural backgrounds were aligned with their ethnic association. For example, if a participant described himself as having a specific ethnicity, follow-up questions would have been asked to understand the cultural exposure that this individual may have had outside of Canada. To qualify, participants had to appear as an expressive individuals, familiar with Waterloo Park, at least on a nominal level (i.e. have been there once or twice), and preferably had previous experiences with other local parks, or parks in general. Once the encountered individuals expressed an interest to participate, and met the requirements of the study, they were asked to provide their contact information: a first name and an email address in order to arrange a suitable time and location for the interview. Since the study didn't provide any remuneration, participants were encouraged to take part in the research based on the importance of the research and its common benefits: to enhance the quality of urban parks, and to improve the quality of life in the communities that they serve. Respondents were asked to participate voluntarily.

Execution Phase

After completing the screening process, a second encounter with selected participants took place in designated locations in town. Two meeting points have been suggested as a location for an interview - the campus of University of Waterloo for UW members - and a second one in the Second Cup Coffee Shop in downtown Waterloo for non-UW members. Additional meeting points have been scheduled according to participant wishes.

At the beginning of every interview participants have been reintroduced to the researcher and the topic in greater depth, have been informed about the potential outcomes of the research, as well as their rights (i.e. to ask questions and to withdraw from the study at any time). Additionally, each participant was given a letter of consent (Appendix A-2) to sign, as a confirmation of participating in the study voluntarily, as well as, to indicate of an approval to record the interview.

After proper introduction, the interview was executed according to the prepared questionnaire (Appendix A-3). The questionnaire had a semi-structured character and consisted of open-ended questions, with supporting follow-up questions to give respondents the opportunity to expand or to clarify their answers. The interviews were recorded with an audio recorder, and written notes.

After the interview each participant was given an appreciation letter (Appendix A-6) with the details including researcher contact information in case of further query or interest in the research progress. If necessary further arrangement of notes was preceded after departure of the participant.

Direct Observations

Direct observations are a useful method to document activities, behaviors and physical aspects of a site without having to rely upon people's responses to questions (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, once all of the interviews had been recorded and transcribed, a series of observations were carried out in Waterloo Park to verify the comments provided by the respondents. The objective of the observations was to determine if the actions of people in the park were consistent with the information collected in the interviews. The theoretical framework for this behavioral phenomenon was described by Jacobs (1987) as patterns of behavior ([actual] behavioral variations or choices) and patterns for behavior (cultural expectations for behavior).

Observations were conducted apart from the interviews and were supported by independent field notes and photographic material. Participants for observations were selected, on site - in Waterloo Park according to an opportunity sample method. The participant's ethnicity was initially assessed based on their apparent (visual) ethnic features. The researcher discretely observed participants and then approached them in order to introduce the objectives of the research as well as to gain the necessary permission to take pictures and/or to use the notes collected during observation. Introductions were conducted according to a script (Appendix A-4), as well as supported by a consent form (Appendix A-5). To help improve the validity of the data, observations were carried out on sunny summer days on both weekdays and weekends. However, due to study time limitations, direct observations were not carried out in the wintertime, and sufficient wintertime data validation was not obtained. For that reason the feedback obtained from the respondents in the

interview phase regarding winter park usage has been transcribed and discussed in chapter 4, but has not been incorporated into the final summary of the research findings.

3.7 Data analysis

Transcription

Every interview was recorded and transcribed at the earliest opportunity. Due to the substantial length of each interview (time varied from the shortest interview that took 35 minutes to the longest that took 64 minutes) all of the records were transcribed, not as a whole, but rather in the form of detailed notes. Exact quotations were noted when participant's statements were identified as of high importance for the research and to be later on referenced in the text of the thesis. Those parts of the audio record were played-back multiple times.

Content Analysis

Harry Wolcott (1988), a noted anthropologist, said that: "the goal of the analysis is to create less data not more" while Patton (1987) noted that analysis should do three things: first, it should bring order to piles of data that has been accumulated, secondly it should turn big piles of raw data into smaller piles of data that is crunched and summarized, finally it should permit the researcher to discover patterns and themes in the data and to link them with other patterns and themes.

In order to limit the amount of raw data obtained from the interviews, as well as to structure it in a logical manner, content analysis was employed. First, all of the transcripts and notes have been gathered and segregated into seven

ethnic groups. Then they were reviewed with the key research questions in mind: 1) How do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks? 2) What is the breadth of needs amongst people of different cultural backgrounds? The text was analyzed in two stages, independently for each research question. In both cases, the same assessment formula was employed. First, text that was related to the selected research question has been highlighted in all transcript materials. With all relevant text selected it was easier to identify the repeating ideas and themes. Secondly, the text of each interview transcript was color coded and assigned a number and letter that corresponded with specific a category, as well as a sub-category. This process allowed for the tracking of patterns found within the data and enabled a comparison of the different ethnic groups attitudes toward urban parks.

3.8 Quality checks

Rigor is a fundamental research requirement for ensuring that the findings are valid and reliable (Merriam, 1995). However, Maxwell (2005) points out that establishing the validity of qualitative research is more difficult than establishing the validity of quantitative research. Furthermore, the measures used in validating qualitative research are different than the measures used in validating quantitative research. Additionally, Maxwell states that validity measures in qualitative research should focus on "how to rule out specific plausible alternatives and threats to research interpretations and conclusions" (:107).

Accordingly, the research threats and appropriate validation measures that have been addressed in this qualitative research are presented below.

Representativeness

In order to ensure that the study is representative, this study was based on an opportunity sample of 62 participants representing different gender, age, ethnic association and social status. Participants were interviewed in face-to-face interviews using open-ended questionnaire. Additionally, to assure that the ethnic identity of each participant was aligned with their cultural background during the interview screening process, a sequence of questions were asked to verify the information regarding the participant's previous residency outside of Canada.

Researcher Effect

Often in case study work, field observations and interviews "outsiders can influence insiders and vice versa" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 265). Within this study both interviews and observations were carried out in the field. Inherent to the interview process is the risk that participants will "craft their responses to be amenable to the researcher" (p. 265). In order to minimize the "researcher effect" every effort was made to ensure 1) that during the interviews the participants knew that there were no "right-or-wrong answers" and that the goal was to obtain their honest opinion, 2) that during the observations the researcher appeared to be a part of the park scene.

Quasi-statistics – External validity in Qualitative Research

Merriam (1995) discusses that, "when dealing with human beings, it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply statistically-based generalizations to

individual persons (…) [and that] the goal of qualitative research, after all, is to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many"(:57).

In this context, one of the most emphasized arguments against qualitative approaches is that the findings derived from qualitative research cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty as those obtained from quantitative analyses (Steal and Silverman, 1996).

Correspondingly, multiple researchers have discussed that the biggest issue in most qualitative studies has been their failure to make explicit the quasi-statistical basis of their conclusions (Becker, 1970; Steal and Silverman, 1996). In that regard, multiple sources inform the use of quasi-statistics (frequency counts) as an essential tool to provide the qualitative research claims and findings with an external validity (Buchanan, 1992; Steal and Silverman, 1996; Maxwell, 2005). Hence, Becker (1970) notes that using frequency counts when coding and analyzing qualitative data provides a sense of importance that is associated with each code, and therefore assesses the amount of evidence present in the data. In that regard, this research has incorporated frequency counts when analyzing the data and discussing research findings to emphasize the strength and importance of particular research findings.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a strategy of using multiple investigators, sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings (Denzin 1970, Mathison 1988). Baxter and Jack (2008) acknowledge, that triangulation "is a primary strategy that can be used and would support the principle in case study research

that the phenomena be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives" (: 556). Within this study a two different approaches has been used in order to obtain a reliable data. Firstly, the data has been collected through series of face-to-face interviews, secondly through an independent series of direct observations that has been conducted in Waterloo Park. In both cases, similar patterns emerged and there was an observable consensus between the data obtained in these two different approaches of data collection.

Audit-trail

Audit trail is a strategy suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981) that operates on the same premise as when an auditor verifies accounts of a business. "In order for an audit to take place, the investigator must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 1995: 55). Additionally Goetz and LeCompte (1984) suggest that the audit trail should be so detailed " that other researchers can use the original report as an operating manual by which to replicate the study" (p.216)

In order to make the study replicable, all of the employed methods, procedures and tools (e.g. interview questionnaire) have been described in detail as well as all necessary materials have been attached in the appendix.

3.9 Chapter Conclusions

To summarize, in order to answer the research questions set out for this thesis, a qualitative, single-case study approach was employed. Data has been collected in two ways; through semi-structured interviews and through direct

observations. In both cases there was a visible consensus between obtained data and observable similarity in emerging patterns and results that were drawn. A variety of quality-check measures: representativeness, frequency counts, triangulation, researcher effect, and audit-trail were addressed in order to make the findings of the study valid and reliable.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS/ ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The content of this chapter presents the research results and the analysis of the data collected during the study. The structure of the analysis has been broken into two distinctive sections, corresponding with the two data collection techniques: one-on-one interviews, and direct observations. The interviews provided direct face-to-face contact with park users, and were used as the primary method of data collection. The direct observations, which followed the interview phase of the research, were used, for the most part, as a validation tool to confirm whether the feedback obtained from the interviews was robust.

4.2 Interviews

The face-to-face interviews were conducted between May 18, and June 7, 2009, and involved people from a variety of cultural backgrounds who used Waterloo Park. The interviews were carried out in order to provide extensive and in-depth feedback regarding their attitudes (opinions, impressions, expectations, etc.) toward urban park settings based on their cultural traditions and past park experiences. Following, the objective of the interviews was, first, to validate that the participants' cultural background was aligned with their ethnicity. Secondly, to investigate how do different ethnic groups conceptualize urban parks, and what is the breadth of needs among different ethnic groups. In order to obtain comparable material from a large number of respondents, all interviews were carried out according to a pre-designed, open-ended questionnaire (Appendix 1).

Before starting the interviews, a number of pre-test interviews were conducted to establish the structure and order of the questions, and also to determine the questions that elicited the most specific answers. The final version of the questionnaire was comprised of approximately sixty open-ended questions and divided into four sections. The purpose of Section-A was to verify the respondents' length of residency in Canada, to verify if, and how long, the respondents had lived abroad, and to assess the respondents' current park experiences. Section-B consisted of a series of detailed questions regarding Waterloo Park, while Section-C dealt with urban park experiences in general. Lastly, Section-D involved demographic information, such as age, sex and ethnic association. In many cases additional follow-up questions were asked to give the respondents an opportunity to clarify their answers.

4.2.1 How do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks?

The main objective of the first research question was to investigate whether culture can affect the way people think about urban park settings. The questions set out to determine how different ethnic groups perceive the function, structure, and appearance of urban parks.

Respondents were asked a variety of questions not only about Waterloo Park, but also more importantly, about their overall opinions and expectations regarding multifunctional urban parks. The analysis of the respondents' feedback was coded and structured into five distinctive categories, as well as some additional sub-categories that were to further organize the data.

The main categories are as follows:

I. Universals - This sub-category contains data that indicates some shared opinions among respondents of different ethnic groups regarding urban parks.

II. Composition - This sub-category analyzes the respondents' opinions regarding basic park composition elements, such as landscaping, terrain form, and walkways.

III. Amenities - This sub-category analyzes the respondents' attitudes towards particular park amenities, such as restaurants, barbequing and picnicking amenities, sports infrastructure, seating arrangements, water features, as well as animal farms and petting zoos.

IV. Activities - This sub-category analyzes the various activities that different ethnic groups usually engage in at urban parks. This takes into consideration the preference for active versus passive activities, sport preferences, winter activities, and differences in barbequing and picnicking tendencies.

V. Association - This sub-category analyzes the association (e.i. social) patterns that were observed among respondents of a particular ethnic group while at the park.

I. Universals

Undoubtedly, the most consistent response among all respondents, regardless of their ethnic association, was that the most important function of an urban park is to facilitate relaxation and recovery from stress (stated by 79% of all respondents). One of the respondents said, "[a] park is a good place for

relaxing…I mean, it's so refreshing, it's out of the noise and everything that stress you out." Another person stated, "I like the feeling that I cannot see any cars, neither buildings surrounding the park. I mean you want to spend time in an environment that is different from the daily rush, noise and other stresses."

The majority (84%) of all respondents also emphasized the importance of park size, with a consistent response that "the bigger the better." For example, one participant said:

> "When you're in a bigger park you feel more like you are in nature, whereas when you are in a smaller park where you can see everything else, can see beyond the park, you lose part of that feeling."

Another aspect that all participants considered to be just as important as park size was park accessibility, and the park's proximity to the participants' home or place of work. All respondents said that in order to use a park on more than just a weekend basis it would have to be within a 15 minute walk from their home or place of work.

All participants were asked this question at the end of the interview: "In a few sentences can you try to characterize a perfect park"? A substantial number of the respondents (43%) began their answer by saying, "it would be close, within walking distance, and it would be big,"

The next element of a park that all respondents found to be highly important was the water features. Although there was no consensus on the preferred water feature– flowing water such as rivers as opposed to standing water such as ponds or lakes, or manmade structures such as fountains opposed to natural features – among different ethnic groups the overall importance of having water features in a park was absolutely unquestionable, and noted as a 'must' feature in the park (emphasized by 93% of all respondents). Respondents repeatedly

commented on the importance of a water feature in a park. One participant said, "water definitely adds to the character of the park. It is so soothing to sit by the lake or a creek in the hot summer days." And another person said, "water features are critical. [A] park without water is dry and dead."

In the same way, all respondents expressed a fondness for having wild animals in the park. Some of these animals included groundhogs, squirrels, singing birds, swans and ducks, butterflies, and dragonflies. Participants identified water and animals as relaxing and peaceful elements of nature. For example, one person said, "having natural animals like squirrels and swans just give you [the] impression that the park is in a good environmental condition; that it's alive." While another said that animals in a park "gives you a relaxing feeling like you're in nature, not in a city."

Surprisingly, geese did not meet the same approval of the public as other wild animals, and were perceived by most of participants (70% of all respondents) as unfriendly intruders responsible for polluting the lawns.

Finally, the last aspect of park usage that all respondents were equally fond of was an occasional cultural event. Many respondents (89%) was giving a very similar rationale that a cultural festival:

> "Is something that brings community together and keeps people entertained in the open air."

Summary

In general, the findings are well supported in the literature. Urban parks have long been recognized as major contributors to the physical and aesthetic

quality of urban neighborhoods, and multiple researchers (Ulrich, 1981; Herzog, 2002; Bell et al., 2005; Hansmann, 2007) have confirmed that urban parks promote well-being and recovery from stress.

The existing empirical research provides evidence that participants generally preferred natural settings. They rated them much higher than urban settings. In most cases, urban scenes received a higher rating when water, trees and other vegetation were present (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982; Ulrich, 1983; Wohlwill, 1983). This helps to explain why participants found the presence of water features to be such a crucial element of the park. From the perspective of the Environmental Perception Theories, the preference for water features is consistent with the Prospect-Refugee Theory; that humans have an in-born preference for settings where water is a plentiful resource (Appleton, 1975).

Multiple studies have confirmed that the travel distance and time to and from a park are of critical importance, which aligns with this study. Some studies have shown that travel distance substantially impacts how often a park will be used, while other studies have proven that proximity to a park can drastically affect the value of a property (More and Stevenson, 1988; Tips and Savasdisara 2004).

In summary, none of the above findings indicate the influence of culture on the perception of urban park settings, but does indicate some common preference patterns that we all share as humans. Specifically, a park's function, location, size, and the presence of water features strongly affected how often participants used urban parks, and the enjoyment they derive from them.

II. Composition

This section examines three elements of composition that are integral to the experience of urban parks: landscaping, terrain, and walkways. Participants were asked specific questions about these three elements to determine the varying opinions that exist within ethnic groups, with Waterloo Park used as a point for comparison.

Landscaping

After the data was analyzed, it was apparent that the participants' opinions varied greatly when considering landscaping style. The main differences were in regards to the type of landscaping style and plant selection. Most of the Caucasian Canadian (75%) and African respondents from Zimbabwe and Kenya (67%) seemed to be content with the existing style of landscaping in Waterloo Park, consisting of open lawns and shrub areas (currently there is only one small ornamental garden located on the north side of the Silver Lake). For example, one Caucasian Canadian said:

> "I like to have a lot of greenery that is well kept, but not so much that it doesn't look natural. Personally, I think that the ornamental garden that we have by the playground is enough. I like trees and grass better because flowers are so artificial."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 6 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Another participant stated, "I like that in Waterloo Park there is a lot of mature trees, as well as that they have a woodlot natural area that is more wild." This person also agreed that large grass areas are preferable to areas with dense flowers because "you can't really play frisbee when there are flowers around you."

Similar preference for more natural landscaping style were expressed by the majority (67%) of African respondents from Kenya and Zimbabwe:

For example, one individual said:

> "I really like conservation areas here in Canada, they are so beautiful, but you need a membership for it. I like to go to Waterloo Park 'cause it's in a walking distance (…) The parks back in Africa are very beautiful. They are more tropical, leafy and bushy. They have nice tranquil water features [and] lots of birds and animals. They are very quiet. You go there for a reflection, for prayer, or to study. Additionally, we also have entertainment parks, where you go to be active. You can camp or play games like frisbee or soccer. I prefer parks that are quiet for reflection or prayer, but if I come with friends or family I like to have things to do, like to play sports, barbeque, etc."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 5 other participants of the same ethnic group)

When the same individual was asked what he thinks about flowers in a park, his answer was, "I think it's good to have flowers in the park. They are a part of nature's life cycle. They complete the rest of the greenery. However, I prefer when they look more natural".

A completely different perspective was articulated by most participants of Middle Eastern (78%), Arabic (78%) East/North Asian (67%), African /Caribbean (56%) and South Asian (67%) ethnic background, which indicated a greater preference for landscaping with a more maintained and decorative look of landscaping, including a lot of flowers and theme gardens.

One East/North Asian individual stated:

> " I'm all about quality spaces not quantity spaces, so Waterloo Park is just a big open lawn to me. I mean [that] in a negative way because it doesn't introduce anything. It doesn't matter if the park is big if you don't create a space that people want to go to. Parks in China usually charge money for entrancing the park. They are artificially made but look natural. They have a lake, rocks and theme parks with a lot of flowers… they are very beautiful and relaxing…

…You can rent a boat, and they have opened areas for Ti-Chi, or picture studios for wedding photo sessions. They are quality spaces, really nicely designed."

<div align="right">(A similar comment was made by 6 other
participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Another East/North Asian participant commented:

"The problem with Waterloo Park is that it's too plain, too bland, there is too much grass. There should be gardens with flowers or some sort of theme gardens. Right now, I don't know, it just looks too dull and too boring. It's just grass. A lot of people like it because they can play sports like soccer or ultimate frisbee, but to me it's a lot of green space that is just grass. It doesn't do anything and doesn't even look nice. I really like Arboretum at University of Guelph, where they have different plant species. They have different kind of gardens like a Japanese Garden, Italian Garden, etc. They look very nice and you can walk around, sit and talk in a nice scenery. I mean anybody can make a big plain field of grass, but you got to do something to it to make it look nice. I would want to see a variety of plants, or anything in this park."

<div align="right">(A similar comment was given by 5 other
participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

A similar fondness for a better designed and more ordered looking landscaping was expressed by many (78%) Middle Eastern participants. One gentleman noted:

"In Europe, parks are more like gardens with lots of beautiful flowers, colorful shrubs and nice tree species. I like Victoria Park in Kitchener better than Waterloo Park because it's bigger and it's more beautiful. There is a nice lake with nice bridges, the grass is more maintained, the trees are much older than in Waterloo Park, it look like it was designed. There was an idea behind it, not just open fields of grass with random elements."

<div align="right">(Similar comment was made by 5 other
participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Another Middle Eastern individual stated:

"Oh, I love flowers! In Cyprus they have flower gardens with plenty of colorful roses. It's really nice! Theme gardens are a really nice thing in a park. Like this rose garden in [the] park in Cyprus where they only had roses and you could have smelled them everywhere. It was a very nice place to hang out. They had places to drink coffee and to sit in quite

secluded places. Rock garden would be nice too. They also had light at night that made the gardens look even more beautiful."

<div align="right">(Similar comment was made by 4 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

When the same individual was asked, "why do you like the idea of theme gardens?" her response was, "well, for one, they are so beautiful, but they also bring, I don't know, an element of entertainment? I mean you can see interesting plants and sometimes you can see a butterfly or a ladybird on a flower and then you can take a picture of it. It's like a small adventure. It gives you something to do with the time when you're in a park."

Very similar opinions regarding well maintained landscaping and preferences for theme gardens were expressed by many (67%) South Asian origin participants. One girl stated:

> "I really like Victoria Park, the way it was arranged, how it looks, how it was landscaped. It's more aesthetic; more relaxing than Waterloo Park. It's more hilly, and there are more water features. Also, in Waterloo Park there are so many dead, bushy trees that don't look like they are being maintained. When I was there I just felt that I didn't belong there."

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 3 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Another Indian Woman condemned Waterloo Park as "not an attractive place," and went on to talk about a park in India that had "many plant species," which she was very fond of.

Similar comments were also recorded from Arabic respondents. For example, one woman who previously lived in Cairo said:

> "In Egypt there are fewer parks but they are bigger. The main focus of the park is to have variety of theme gardens, flowers, fountains, cafes and restaurants, gyms, tennis courts, outdoor swimming pool, and at night they have movies. It's a bit more artificial scenery than what's in Waterloo Park, but I really like it. I used to go there all the time! I know the artificial park is less environmentally friendly but I still like it.

Waterloo Park is more natural and peaceful but it's pretty boring and less pretty for sure. I mean some of the parts of the park look entirely unmaintained. The water is dirty and I haven't seen there any flowers at all."

<div style="text-align: right">(Similar comments were made by 5 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

These sentiments were reiterated by another woman of Arabic origin, who also said she does not "like Waterloo Park very much." She went on to express her fondness for parks in Saudi Arabia, which she said "are social places," with nice landscaping, and with more entertainment, "like restaurants, café's, sports clubs and boat rentals."

There was less consistency in the responses of African Caribbean origin respondents. The majority (56%) of the participants with Caribbean backgrounds showed very similar preference patterns in landscaping style as the participants with East/North Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern and Arabic backgrounds. One man said:

"Jamaican parks look much different than in Canada. There are more like gardens; they are well maintained with lots of flowers, fish, nice gazebos, fruit trees that you can pick a fruit by yourself and other attractions. I don't go to Waterloo Park because there is nothing there. I mean, it's just [an] open field of grass with a few trees. I like when the park is divided into sections, like when you can have a flower garden with a nice gazebo and it's more of a calm space for contemplation and then you have a more open area for people to picnic and socialize, [with] other areas to walk around. I like if there is a variety, something for everyone."

(Similar comments were made by 4 other Caribbean origin participants)

Another female participant of African-Caribbean origins made similar comments, but also said she finds "it strange that there are train tracks crossing the park." She also said she finds Waterloo Park "dull" and would like to see "more flowers and theme gardens," like the gardens she visited in Trinidad. She

did admit, however, that she liked Waterloo Park's big open fields for playing

sports.

Terrain

Much more consistency was apparent between different ethnic groups when

analyzing preference patterns for the type of terrain form. Nearly all respondents

(81% of all participants) preferred a variety of hilly and flat surfaces as opposed

to uniformly flat terrain. The respondents justified this preference by saying a

park comprised solely of flat terrain is too "boring," "monotonous," and

"uninteresting." When participants were asked to elaborate many (70%) of them

said that a more diversified terrain, including hills, gave them a feeling of

privacy. They also thought the terrain looked more "natural" and "peaceful"

One African origin participant said:

> "I like the variety of terrain. The hills create a sort of privacy, as well as
> when you have winding paths it makes the park appear bigger and you
> don't feel like the park is crowded. It feels like there are fewer people. In
> some ways, it gives you an impression that you have your own space. I
> also find it much more beautiful."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 22 other individuals)

A similar response was given by an East/North Asian participant who said

hilly terrains can create a feeling of privacy, and also said that hills add an

"adventurous" quality to a park.

Another reason many participants said that they preferred parks with some

hilly terrain was that hills can offer nice views of the park. One individual said:

> "Waterloo Park is not flat, and I like that, but it doesn't have any small
> mountains, [or] a land point that is relatively higher that you could climb
> up and have a nice view. It would be great to have this kind of a
> mountain even if it would be build in an artificial manmade way."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 20 other individuals)

One Caucasian Canadian participant also said, "it's so much nicer to sit in an elevated place," also commenting that hills can be used for tobogganing in the winter.

Walkways

There was little disagreement between ethnic groups when it came to the layout of walkways, and the material used in their construction. The winding layout of walkways was consistently preferred (preferred by 77% of all respondents) over the layout of straight pathways. The reasons provided were that winding walkways look more natural, and similarly to the preference for hilly terrain, they help foster a sense of privacy.

One individual said:

"I like when paths are winding between the terrain because it seems to be more natural. Having a long straight alley without any curves just seems so artificial." Another person said:

> "I like when walkways are winding in the terrain because they create atmosphere that you're more secluded."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 35 other individuals)

Some people preferred winding paths because of the excitement of not knowing what they would see next. These people also enjoyed exploring the park in secluded sections rather than grasping the whole scenery at once. One South-Asian woman said:

> "I like a variety of terrain and paths that are winding between the mounds because you can't see far ahead. It gives you an illusion that (…)

(…) you're alone, as well as [it] makes you wonder what you're about to see behind the corner."

(Similar comments were made by 10 other individuals)

A number of participants (30% of all respondents) made the point that winding paths create an enjoyable feeling of "exploration."

The preferences expressed for the material used in the construction of walkways were also fairly consistent. The majority (81%) of all users preferred walkways that were made of natural materials such as woodchips or gravel, rather than hard-paved surfaces. Most participants disapproved of using asphalt and concrete in park settings. For example, one person said, "I really don't like asphalt for a path material 'cause its look like a highway. I'd prefer gravel or woodchip paths 'cause it looks more natural." These comments were expressed by numerous other participants (70% of all participants) who agreed that paved walkways "resemble roads" and create an undesirable "urban" feel.

Despite strong negative attitudes toward asphalt, most of the park users seemed to recognize some exceptions. For instance, most (67%) of participants recognized that some heavy traffic walkways should be paved for accessibility issues, especially for the disabled park user.

 The majority (75%) of participants also perceived walkways constructed of natural materials to be better for the environment, and healthier for the body. One respondent commented that, "natural paths are aesthetically more pleasing. If you jog, they are better for your knees and ankles. I think overall it's just a more natural experience to walk on gravel or woodchips, and I think they're more environmentally friendly as well." Another respondent said hard surfaced pathways would be nice for rollerblading, but he still preferred natural paths

because they "are low maintenance, they look nicer and they add nice ambiance to a park setting." He also said he was undeterred by the potential for mud or dust.

Summary

These findings show that different ethnic groups have different preferences for the way urban parks should be landscaped. There was, however, very little disagreement amongst ethnic groups regarding preferences for terrain form and walkways.

Two common patterns of preference for landscaping styles were revealed. First, Caucasian Canadians and African origin participants from Zimbabwe and Kenya generally indicated a higher preference for more natural looking landscaping containing open-lawn areas and natural looking shrubs. The second preference pattern was for more decorative style of landscaping containing a variety of plant species, flowers and theme gardens. By and large, all other investigated ethnic groups held this preference.

It was apparent that two main factors contributed to the interviewees' opinions on park landscaping. The first factor regarded what the interviewee thought a park should be used for. This finding is consistent with other landscape perception studies, which have found that human purposes and motivations are an essential variable in environmental perception and preference (Alderfer, 1988; Lewis, 2010; Nassauer, 1995). Accordingly while majority of Caucasian Canadians (75%) and African origin respondents from Zimbabwe and Kenya (67%) indicated engagement in active and sport related leisure that requires open spaces, other ethnic groups (Middle-Eastern 88%, East-North

Asian 78%, South Asian 78%, Arabic 78%, African / Caribbean 67%) expressed predominant interest in passive leisure that would require a higher complexity of visual substance and appeal. The second influential factor was the participants' previous experiences with parks, which generally shaped their overall conception of what a park should be, or look like. This factor was heavily impacted by the participant's previous experiences. For this reason, most (78%) non- Caucasian Canadian participants were disappointed with the lack of theme gardens (e.g. South Asians and East/North Asians), flowered areas (e.g. Middle Eastern), and plant species variety (e.g. East/ North Asian) in Waterloo Park. These findings indicate that there is a distinct cultural conception of landscaping style amongst interviewed participants of the study, providing evidence that culture is an influential factor in environmental preference.

When it came to terrain the data revealed no apparent differences in preference among different ethnic groups. The majority (81%) of respondents preferred either hilly, or a mix of both hilly and flat terrains over uniformly flat topography. Thus, these findings may indicate that the preference for terrain form in park settings is not culturally differentiated, and is most likely determined by other non-cultural preference factors that are related to human nature in general, and not culture. This finding is consistent with "legibility" in Kaplan's framework, and how people have preferences for environments with a certain level of complexity.

Secondly, the Existing Sense of Place literature indicated that people have strong preferences for settings that provide a sense of privacy and enclosure (Kaplan; 1989), and more complex terrain is needed to create a topography that meets these preferences.

Lastly, people prefer parks that have areas of higher elevation as discussed in Appleton's Prospect-Refugee Theory. Through evolution, people seem to have developed a preference for elevated areas, as it allows them to assess the surrounding area from a safe distance.

Majority (77%) of interviewed participants preferred walkways with a winding layout over walkways with a linear arrangement, regardless of ethnic background. This is in line with the Place Dependence aspect of Sense of Place Theory, stating that the value of a place is primarily determined by how well it achieves the goals of the people who inhabit it (Guest and Lee, 1984). It's been clearly stated that privacy is often a goal for park users, and winding paths create a feeling of privacy.

Natural construction materials such as woodchips and gravel were more preferred than hard paved surfaces such as asphalt and concrete by majority of all participants (81%). This is because of natural materials look as well as their ability to absorb impact, which helps prevent joint damage to joggers and walkers. The exceptions are for when hard surface was considered more optimal for maintenance vehicle use, wheelchairs, and rollerblading. However, even after consideration of these exceptions, park users still generally preferred the natural materials.

There was very little evidence that cultural influences affected the respondents' preferences for the materials used in the construction of pathways.

III. *Amenities*

This section analyzes the data obtained on park amenities, such as restaurants/cafeterias, barbeque and picnic infrastructure, sports infrastructure,

and seating arrangements. The respondents were asked a series of questions to understand how important these amenities are to people from different ethnic groups, as well as how they use them.

Restaurant/Cafeteria

Data analysis revealed a wide range of preferences and outlooks on the preference for restaurants or cafeterias in urban parks. Among all ethnic groups that were investigated, Caucasian Canadians seemed to be the most opposed to the idea of having a restaurant or a cafeteria in Waterloo Park. Most (75%) of the Caucasian Canadians interviewed did not see a reason for needing a restaurant in the park, and some perceived it as an eyesore that took away from the peacefulness of the greenery.

One woman said:

> "I don't like the idea of having a restaurant or cafeteria in the park. I think it takes away from the idea of a park. I mean if you're planning to stay longer in the park you can always bring your own food with you, or just grab something cheap on the go."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 6 other participants of the same ethnic group)

However, two Caucasian Canadian participants seemed to be more open to the idea. One woman said:

> "I don't know if I need a restaurant in the park. I guess a cafeteria where they sell small snacks and ice-cream could come in handy if you come with family and kids, but I'd like it to be located on the edge of the park so it doesn't disrupt the greenery."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 2 other participants of the same ethnic group)

An entirely different attitude towards having a restaurant in the park was articulated by Middle Eastern and Arabic participants of the study. A vast majority of them (100% of Middle-Eastern and 78% of Arabic respondents)

recognized a restaurant/cafeteria as a necessity and an integral part of the park.

One Middle Eastern respondent commented, "oh, it would be fantastic if there was a really nice restaurant in the middle of Waterloo Park! That would be amusing." Another individual said:

> "Having a restaurant or a cafeteria is mandatory for a park! I would even say that any other attraction is an additional activity to a park. In Iran parks are places to socialize with friends and to spend quality time with family in the afternoon and in the evenings. They are cultural places with restaurants and amphitheatres where you can go for a music concert or to watch a movie screening. They are places where you can socialize. Why we don't go to Waterloo Park is cause we find it boring. Usually we ask ourselves what we suppose to do there, and there is really nothing in Waterloo Park to do. There is no good coffee shop or restaurant so we rather meet up at somebody's house instead of coming to the park."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 6 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Another Middle Eastern woman expressed similar feelings, and commented that she really enjoyed a park in Turkey because it had a restaurant, which she said was a good place for hanging out and socializing. She also pointed out that parks should be used for socializing, and said if people want to exercise they should go to the gym or to a "separate soccer field."

Arabic participants seemed to share a similar outlook as Middle Eastern participants. One man from Saudi Arabia stated:

> "There should definitely be a permanent restaurant/cafeteria in the park with snacks and coffee. If you come to a park you're getting hungry and there [in Waterloo Park] is nothing there. In Saudi Arabia we have plenty of restaurants and cafeterias where people can socialize."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 6 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Another Arabic respondent agreed that Waterloo Park should have a "cafeteria or a restaurant," and went on to speak highly about the parks he used to visit in Cairo that had restaurants and offered better settings for socializing.

A more moderate attitude toward having a restaurant in the park was expressed by most East/North Asian (67%), South Asian (67%), African/Caribbean (67%) and African origin participants from Zimbabwe and Kenya (56%). All of these three ethnic groups expressed a fondness for the idea of having a small, more intimate place in the park, like a cozy cafeteria or a teahouse, and preferably with an open patio for summer months. However, most of the participants (78% of all participants with the mentioned ethnic backgrounds) expressed a strong concern for the quality and style of the architecture, as well as the type and quality of the food and beverages served. One Chinese origin participant said:

> "It would be nice to have a cafeteria in the park but only if it would be a very nice one; high class where they serve really good ice-cream, or quality tea or coffee, and there would need to be comfy seats that you can relax there too."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 5 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Another East/North Asian participant noted, "a cafeteria or a restaurant could be a good idea." She went on to say:

> "In China we don't have restaurants in the parks, but in some parks there are really nice teahouses. They are very peaceful and really beautiful and have a lot of character."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 2 other participants of the same ethnic group)

South Asian participants had similar responses. One person said, "yeah, a cafeteria would be a neat idea; like a nice and cute place with open patio where you can sit comfortably and have a tea or a small snack with a friend." These feelings were shared by another South Asian participant, who added, "back in India I used to go to the park with my parents, but we would rather grab food

there in a restaurant then bring our own." A different South Asian man agreed with these comments, but additionally condemned the existing snack-bar that is currently located at Waterloo Park as "not impressive or nice at all." He compared it to a fast food restaurant, and then said, "who would like to hang out or eat a place like that?"

African respondents also expressed their concern about the aesthetics of restaurants, as well as the quality of the food served. Their attitude seemed to be well captured in the following comment made by a participant from Kenya:

> "Having a cafeteria in a park would be nice, but it depends what kind of food they would be selling or how it would be designed. I wouldn't want them to sell junk food, [but] rather quality food like sandwiches and fruits. Also, it shouldn't be built on asphalt, like on a parking lot, but rather in a nice place between greenery, perhaps with a nice view."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 5 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Barbeque and Picnic related Infrastructure

The feedback obtained from the respondents indicates that only two ethnic groups, Arabic and African participants from Kenya and Zimbabwe, were looking for opportunities to barbeque in a park setting. The majority (89%) of African origin participants from Zimbabwe and Kenya indicated that they like to barbeque in urban parks however seemed not to be bothered by the lack of barbeque equipment in Waterloo Park. Most (78%) Arabic participants expressed interest in barbequing in the park. However, the lack of amenities such as, barbeques, shelters, and coal available on site, was problematic and prevented most (71%) of them from barbequing at Waterloo Park. In their home countries, this type of amenities was commonplace. Further, all of the investigated ethnic

groups admitted occasionally to coming to parks to picnic with friends or family. When asked what characteristics they were looking for in a perfect picnic/barbequing location, most (80%) participants answered that they would like it to be a secluded, partially shaded space with a nice view of the surroundings. African participants (77%) preferred settings with a close proximity to an open field that would provide an opportunity to play soccer. Surprisingly, Arabic people were the only group (67% of respondents indicated that preference) that desired an actual build-up shelter, while all other ethnic groups seemed to prefer more natural enclosures in the form of a tree-canopy.

A more extensive analysis of attitudes towards barbequing and picnicking in a park setting for particular ethnic groups is part of "Activities – Barbequing and Picnicking" appearing in a later section of this chapter.

To summarize, only Arabic and African origin participants from Kenya and Zimbabwe indicated interest in barbequing in the park, while other investigated groups didn't perceive it as culturally appropriate, and chose alternative locations for barbequing outside of the park setting. All in all, the feedback obtained from the respondents indicates that the attitude toward barbequing in the park is culturally driven.

Sport Infrastructure

There were apparent differences in opinion regarding sports infrastructure (buildings, courts, fencing, etc.) among the different ethnic groups that were investigated. Opinions varied greatly between Caucasian Canadians and the rest of the ethnic groups. In essence, Caucasian Canadians were identified as the only ethnic group that did not articulate any complaints regarding the sport related

infrastructure in Waterloo Park, while most (78%) of other participants generally showed a strong disapproval for both the presence, as well as condition, of the existing sport infrastructure.

Majority (75%) of Caucasian Canadians seemed to be content with the existing selection of sport amenities, such as the baseball diamond and the tennis club. At the same time, other ethnic groups had many objections regarding the existing sport amenities.

Seating Arrangement

For the most part it was found that, regardless of ethnic association, most participants shared the same feelings when it came to seating arrangements in urban parks.

In general, most of participants (90%) said they prefer seating areas that are secluded and provide a sense of enclosure. Many people also said they had a greater preference for seating areas that are located by the water (94%), or that are elevated to provide a nice view of the surroundings (90%).

Having said that, some differences were noted regarding preference for seating on benches and pergolas as opposed to some natural elements such as grass and rocks. Many East/North Asian (56%) and African (67%) origin respondents showed a preference for sitting directly on the grass, or on a rock under a tree canopy, because it provided a better feeling of being close to nature. One Chinese individual said, "I rather sit on a grass, under a tree or, on a big sunny rock then on the bench. I think it just gives you a better feeling, that you're closer to nature, and being close to nature has a calming effect." An African

respondent made an almost identical comment, but added, "but [a] bench is better if it was raining and you just can't sit on the grass."

On the contrary, many Caucasian Canadian (75%), Middle Eastern (78%), South Asians (67%) and Arabic (78%) participants preferred to sit on benches and repeatedly complained about the lack of benches in Waterloo Park.

Multiple (67%) Arabic origin respondents said they did not like the idea of gazebos as sitting places. They felt that gazebos do not provide enough intimacy, and if there was already a person sitting in a gazebo then they would not sit there, even if there were many seats available.

Water Features

There was no disagreement among the participants' responses regarding the importance of having water features in the park. All participants agreed that water features were, above all other features and amenities, the most essential element in the park setting. Many participants agreed with the following statement made by one individual: "a park without water is dead!" Another person noted that water increases the beauty of a park, while another person said, "I think if Waterloo Park didn't have that small lake I wouldn't go there at all!"

There were noticeable differences in opinion on which water features were considered most desirable. Participants were asked a sequence of questions to establish what water features were perceived as the most desirable: flowing water as opposed to standing water, and natural looking water (a lake or a creek) as opposed to man-made structures (a fountain or a pond). A variety of opinions were recorded.

Many people found it very difficult to answer whether they liked flowing or standing water better. Most people liked them both for different reasons. A lot of people (55% of all respondents) preferred standing water features for their serenity, and for providing nice vistas, as well as for opportunities for additional activities such as boating and ice-skating. Others (45% of all respondents) preferred and appreciated flowing water, mainly for its cooling effect and engaging sound. They perceived it as more "fresh" and soothing then standing water. One Chinese man said, "I like water features because they are very relaxing, especially flowing water. I like the trickling sound it makes; it's very calming and soothing." A Caucasian Canadian shared these feelings, and also pointed out that with flowing water "you also don't have to deal with mosquitoes."

Additionally, many participants (67% of all respondents) found creeks and streams as a helpful navigating tool, as well as an intriguing element that encourages exploration. One South Asian girl said that she really likes streams because they inspire a sense of exploration, and went on to say that she likes to follow streams to discover where they lead (a similar comment was stated by 3 other participants).

That being said, there was no observable preference pattern among participants for either flowing or standing water since both of these features provided different benefits. However, there was a noticeable difference in preference patterns among the investigated ethnic groups regarding man-made structures, such as fountains.

Most of the Caucasian Canadian (75%), African (78%), and South Asian (78%) respondents indicated a high preference for natural looking water features

(such as lakes, ponds, creeks, even if they were man-made) while showing a fairly negative attitude toward water fountains.

One African-Caribbean origin woman said, "because I'm from an island, seeing those things [water fountains], glazed up and stuff, that's just doesn't seem to look natural." These feelings were shared by a Caucasian Canadian, who also commented that fountains "get rusty and there is no use of them in the winter time." A South Indian participant also agreed that natural looking water features are better and condemned fountains because "they are so fake." Lastly, one African individual from Zimbabwe said, "I don't think fountains are necessary in the park. They are man-made and don't even try to resemble, like, something natural, and a park should be a place where you are surrounded by nature, right?"

Caucasian Canadians participants were not found to have a cultural connection with water fountains, as they are uncommon in Canada. This ethnic group also perceived fountains to be 'unattractive' or 'ugly' when they did not contain water (during colder seasons), and thus, not surprisingly, this ethnic group showed a low preference (22%) for water fountains. However, Middle Eastern (89%), Arabic (78%) and East/North Asians (67%) had, in general, high preferences for water fountains and thought that they should be a common element in parks. Majority of Middle Eastern (78%) and Arabic (67%) respondents were found to associate fountains with special gathering places, usually located in an important focal point of the park making it an ideal place to socialize. For example, a Middle Eastern respondent said:

> "I like all sorts of water features; with standstill or flowing water. The more the better! In Saudi Arabia we have lot of fountains that I really

like. They are nice looking and people tend to gather around them. It would be nice if Waterloo Park had a fountain too."

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 7 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

A similar opinion was expressed by a Middle Eastern participant, who said:

"It would be nice if there was a water fountain in Waterloo Park; something romantic where you can take a girl. In Cyprus we have many beautiful water fountains with seating around them. They are one of the best places to sit and relax in the park but also in the city in general."

While, another Middle Eastern respondent said:

"In Iran fountains are very special places. They are in public squares and in parks. They are places with nice and soothing atmosphere where people gather. Sometimes they are in focal points like gates to the park. Other times they are small and more intimate."

While an East/North Asian participant said, "I like natural water features like a lake or a waterfall, but having a few water fountains would be nice too; like a small fountain in a secluded place so you can relax, watch the birds, listen to the flowing water." Finally, one Japanese participant said:

"I like water fountains. In Japanese parks there are many water features: lakes, creaks, rock water fountains and others. They are all very beautiful and very relaxing. It would be great if there was a nice water fountain in Waterloo Park."

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 5 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Animal Farm/Petting Zoo

Overall there was very little (12%) opposition to animal farms in parks. Parents were happy to have an activity they could share with their kids, while other adult park users had no qualms with animal farms. Petting zoos garnered the greatest enthusiasm from respondents. There were a few people who were morally opposed to having captive animals in cages, but there was no correlation between these feelings and their ethnic association.

The biggest objection from most (71%) of all respondents was regarding the condition of the sheds and fences that contained the animals. One South Asian respondent said, "I really like to spend time with animals, to play and to pet them. It would be great if Waterloo Park had a petting Zoo." A Caucasian Canadian agreed that, "animal farms are okay," but he said it would be better "if they had a petting zoo." An African origin participant said, "I like the idea of [an] animal farm in the park, but the one we have in Waterloo Park looks really bad. The cages are small and ugly; they are made of silver metal with barbwire on top." An Arabic man agreed with this sentiment: "my kids love the animal farm but the fences and animals shelters could look better." Many other respondents said that they disliked like appearance of Waterloo Park's animal farm, calling the cages "hideous" and the fencing "ghetto looking."

Summary

The findings show that there is a clear divide in how ethnic groups felt about the presence of a restaurant in a park. There were also differences in opinion regarding the type and layout of sports infrastructure at Waterloo Park. It was also clear that certain ethnic groups liked water fountains in parks, while other ethnic groups were either opposed to, or ambivalent towards water fountains. Overall, there was no ethnic divide when it came to other water features, seating arrangements, animal farms, and petting zoos at the park.

In regards to having a restaurant or cafeteria in the park, the two most contrasting responses where recorded from Caucasian Canadians, whom perceived restaurants as an "eyesore", and Middle-Eastern and Arabic participants whom recognized it as a "mandatory" feature in the park. Similarly

to landscaping preference patterns, this difference in preference can be better understood by taking a closer look at the expectations and motives of the three ethnic groups mentioned. The feedback obtained from the Caucasian Canadians respondents indicated that they were looking for a predominantly natural park experience, similar to the peaceful wilderness getaway experience preferred by white American participants in Kaplan and Talbot's study (1988). Middle-Eastern and Arabic participants showed quite a contrasting preference pattern. This ethnic group was mostly looking for opportunities to socialize, and on the contrary to Caucasian Canadians, were quite fond of cultural and urban elements of the park, such as amphitheatres, restaurants and fountains. In both cases it seemed that the expectations expressed by the participants were related to their previous park experiences in their home countries. Other ethnic groups had views that were somewhat aligned with Middle-Eastern and Arabic respondents. They perceived restaurants and cafeterias as a positive addition to the park for as long as the architectural structure was appealing. Most participants also expressed concerns about the quality of the food served at park restaurants. Without food meeting a certain level of quality, higher than a typical hot-dog stand, the food establishment would be perceived unfavorably.

When it came to the perception of sports infrastructure, the most striking difference observed was between Caucasians Canadians and all other ethnic groups investigated. Caucasian Canadians were found to be the only ethnic group that had a predominant interest in being active and playing sports in the park while all other ethnic groups were coming to the park mostly to socialize, and to engage in more passive relaxation. As a result, while Caucasian Canadians were fond of the existing sport infrastructure in Waterloo Park, all

other non-Caucasian participants thought that sport infrastructure was at odds with the other aesthetic qualities of the park, and should have been removed or hidden in some sort of way. Despite the fact that other non-Caucasian ethnic groups also expressed some interest in playing sports in the park, these were sports (soccer, frisbee, beach volleyball) that mostly did not need any infrastructure that would interfere with the greenery of the park. Soccer and frisbee could be played on a reinforced lawn, while a beach volleyball court, or even multiple courts, could be discretely hidden amongst the landscaping, such as shrubs and trees. Once again, it became clear that due to different preferences for activity patterns in the park, two distinctive attitudes towards sport infrastructure were found.

When considering seating arrangements, the participants preferred areas near water. The existing research helps to explain this with its compelling evidence demonstrating the benefits provided by the presence of water in landscapes. Water features have been found to provide both psychological and potentially restorative health capabilities (Burmil at.el., 1999; Yamashita, 2002).

Burmil (1999) states that water is one of the most important and attractive elements of landscape, and states that:

> "…the range of water sounds is almost endless. They are the very subtle sounds of single drops falling and hitting the water surface, the rushing sounds of rapids, or the thundering roar of a waterfall. Water can reveal itself in sound even when it is hidden form sight."(100)

Water is essential for survival for both humans and the whole ecosystem, but it has also been proven to play a vital role in the perception of space. Moreover, it has a well-documented soothing effect.

It has been found that sitting in an enclosed space is preferred over seating arrangements located in open areas that can make people feel exposed. Enclosed spaces can remove the distractions of the outside world, allowing the park user to focus on the immediate surroundings. Also, enclosed spaces offer a sense of privacy, and they can provide subtle feelings of safety and protection, allowing the park user to observe the area beyond without feeling exposed. From a survival perspective, the idea of being able to observe without being observed relates to the Prospect-Refuge Theory mentioned previously in this chapter.

It was also documented that people prefer seating areas that are elevated. This is likely related to the Information Processing Theory, which states that humans are strongly dependent on being able to quickly take in information about their environment and process it. Sitting in an elevated area allows people to take in more information about their surrounding area, because being elevated affords a greater view of the landscape.

Kaplan's Preference Matrix can also be used to explain why people prefer sitting in elevated areas, and this has to do with the desire for exploration. Views enhance understanding and promote exploration, even if one cannot get to the viewed setting (due to far distance or physical obstacles, like a fence), because it offers opportunity for mental exploration (Kaplan et al., 1998). The research posits that a great deal of our contact with nature is from a distance, and that "even though one is not being a part of the landscape one is viewing, one can get a great deal of satisfaction from views and vistas" (Kaplan et al., 1998: 99).

When it came to water features there was no cultural impact on the participants' preference patterns regarding standing water as opposed to flowing water, but culture did affect attitudes toward water fountains in the park. The

feedback obtained from the respondents showed that Caucasian Canadians, African and South Asian respondents held a negative preference toward the presence of water fountains. Contrastingly, Middle Eastern, Arabic and East/North Asian participants perceived water fountains as an integral park element and an element of cultural significance, symbolizing a place for gathering and socializing. To the East/North Asian respondents, fountains symbolize "life".

Regarding animal farms, there was no evidence in the data that would indicate cultural influence on the participants' attitudes toward having an animal farm in a park setting. Feedback from the respondents also indicated that a petting zoo would be a welcome addition to a park setting and even more preferred than an animal farm. The existing studies indicate that simply observing live animals can result in reduced physiological and psychological stress levels, and can help foster a positive mood. Other studies indicate that there are even greater benefits from physical contact between people and animals. (Beck and Meyers, 1996; Fawcett and Gullone, 2001)

IV. Activities

Passive versus Active

Respondents' feedback indicated that people from different ethnic backgrounds have very different activity patterns when using urban parks.

Ethnic group	Active Relaxation e.g. playing sports, exercising	Passive relaxation e.g. socializing, talking walks
	Results show % of participants that indicated particular activity pattern	
Caucasian Canadian	75	50
African/ Zimbabwe, Kenya	67	44
African/ Caribbean	33	67
Arabic	44	78
East/ North Asian	33	78
South Asian	22	78
Middle/Eastern	22	89

Table 4.1 Activity Pattern

Among the different ethnic groups that were investigated, Caucasian Canadians appeared to be the most active, sport-oriented group. The overwhelming majority (75%) of the Caucasian Canadian park users stated that the most frequent reason they go to the park is to jog or run, play sports, and to be active in the open air.

African origin participants from Zimbabwe and Kenya showed a propensity for two different activity patterns. During solitary visits to the park, African origin participants were mostly engaged in passive activities, such as passive relaxation; meditation, and wandering through the park. During group visits, when accompanied by family and friends, they would become involved in more active engagements, such as playing sports, similarly to Caucasian Canadian participants.

Conversely, participants of other ethnic groups that took part in the study, such as East/North Asian, South Asian, Arabic, African-Caribbean and Middle

Eastern, were found to come to the park predominantly for passive leisure. They indicated only a secondary interest in exercising, or playing sports in the park. Thus, most respondents with the ethnic associations mentioned above confessed that they only rarely visited the park with the sole intention of playing sports. Most of these respondents seemed to perceive sports as an additional activity and not the primary purpose for a park setting. These ethnic groups generally perceived exercising in the gym as more appropriate than exercising in the park (this belief was shared by 67% of participants with mentioned ethnic association). East/North Asians, South Asians and Arabic respondents most often went to the park to relax; to wander and observe nature. Many Arabic people would go to the park to barbeque with family. Lastly, Middle Eastern and African-Caribbean participants were found predominantly to go to the park for socializing in a relaxing setting.

Sport Preferences

Although the analysis of the activity patterns of the park users showed that Caucasian Canadians and African origin respondents from Kenya and Zimbabwe were the only ethnic groups to put great value on a park settings ability to facilitate sports and active forms of relaxation, other ethnic groups also displayed some level of interest in playing sports at the park.

The following table shows the preferred sports as indicated by the particular ethnic groups.

Ethnic Association	Sport Preference
Caucasian Canadians	Running, Frisbee, Baseball, 'Social' Football, Hokey/Ice Skating, Beach Volley
African / Kenya and Zimbabwe	Soccer, Frisbee, Beach Volley
African/ Caribbean	Soccer, Frisbee, Beach Volley
East/ North Asians	Badminton, Basketball, Beach Volley
Middle Eastern	Soccer, Tennis, Beach Volley
Arabic	Soccer, Frisbee, Basketball, Beach Volley
South Asian	Soccer, Frisbee, Beach Volley

Table 4.2 Sport Preferences

Caucasian Canadians used park settings most often for running and playing frisbee, and to a lesser degree they used the park for playing baseball and "social" football.

African, South Asian and Arabic respondents seemed the fondest of playing soccer and frisbee, while male Arabic respondents expressed an interest in playing basketball.

Some East/North Asians said they played badminton, though not very often, and the male East/North Asians participants said they occasionally played basketball.

Some of the Middle Eastern participants expressed interest in playing soccer and tennis, however, they emphasized that not having an opportunity to play these sports in the park would not bother them. Many of them agreed with the following statement, made by one Middle Eastern respondent, "[a] park is a good place for relaxing, not for playing sports." Another Middle Eastern respondent said, "For sports, I'd rather go to the gym or to a wilderness park where you can hike, climb, or canoe. Parks in the city should be for relaxing. They should be places to socialize and hang out with your friends."

Interestingly, all participants, regardless of their ethnic association, expressed interest in playing beach volleyball. Most of respondents seemed to perceive beach volleyball as a form of socializing rather than a disciplined sport associated with exercising or working out. One participant stated, "I'm not into sports, but playing beach volleyball with friends is super fun… you don't really need special skills. It's one of those sports that everybody can play." Another respondent made similar comments regarding beach volleyball, but added, "it would be great if there was a beach volleyball court in Waterloo Park."

Lastly, it was noted that, with the exception of Caucasian Canadians, none of the ethnic groups showed any interest in winter sports. Moreover, most of the respondents that came from hot climate countries (often not having a winter season) did not even want to consider going to the park in the wintertime.

Barbecuing and Picnicking

Different attitudes toward barbequing [cooking] and picnicking [bringing pre-cooked food] in a park setting were identified between the investigated ethnic groups. Although all participants seemed to be very accepting of other people barbequing in the park, only two ethnic groups, Arabic (78%) and African origin participants from Kenya and Zimbabwe (89%), expressed interest in barbequing in the park.

African origin respondents from Kenya and Zimbabwe were found to barbeque in Waterloo Park quite often, and predominantly on weekends.

One participant said:

> "Oh, barbequing in the park is great, we do it all the time! I mean we barbeque in our own backyards too, but it's so much more fun to go to the park, there is so much more to do there. We always come with family

and friends. We love to cook our traditional foods, to sing, walk around, play games, see the greenery, cook some more food, joy!"

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 4 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Another participant noted:

"[A] park is a place where people want to go and socialize, especially when the weather is nice, instead of going to a restaurant or stay at somebody's house. When you're in the park, it's all in the open air. There is a nice scenery, lot of space to play sports. I mean, African people love soccer: adults, elders and kids! We all play together! And then we sit down, chat, eat some more food and then do something fun again. I mean you can spend a whole day in the park and not get bored of it!"

Lastly, one individual said, "sometimes you just want to [go] barbequing someplace bigger then your own back-yard."

Majority (78%) of Arabic participants also expressed interest in barbequing in the park, however; only few of them (43%) confirmed actually barbequing in Canadian urban parks. Most (78%) of Arabic participants noted a lack of appropriate facilities on site as the main reason discouraging them from barbequing in Canadian urban parks.

One participant stated:

"I never went to barbeque in Waterloo Park because there is not enough amenities. [There are] no barbeque machines to begin with, and scrappy shelters! I mean, you have to drag everything with you, and it's a park; it all should be there!"

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 2 other participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Another individual said:

"Yeah, we used to go barbeque in Cairo with my family and friends all the time, but it was an entirely different set up. They had nice shelters with washrooms nearby, barbeque stands on site so you just needed to bring your own coal or even that you were able to buy on site. They also had a lot of attractions so you could stay in the park for whole day. In Canada, it's too much of a fuss to organize everything by yourself (…)

(…) and drag it to the park. We rather barbeque in somebody's backyard or we go to the beach."

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 4 other
participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

There were also some Arabic participants that confessed to occasionally barbequing in the park despite the lack of facilities. These were usually families with kids. One of these participants said:

> "We don't come [to Waterloo Park] very often. If we do, we always come with family and friends on the weekends. We usually sit, talk, and cook, and kids play. We try to pick picnic places that are close to playground so we can watch kids playing in a safe distance. It would be nice if there were at least bins for coal disposal, 'cause it's hard to take hot coal back home with you once you're done cooking. Other than that, it's ok. It's really close to where we live so it makes it convenient to come for a short half-day, or a day long trips instead of organizing long drive to the countryside."

South Asian participants also said they organized larger family gatherings at the park. However, it was noted that they would rather bring a selection of pre-cooked dishes from home, as opposed to cooking at the park.

Caucasian Canadians generally did not display an interest in barbequing at the park.

One Caucasian said:

> "Barbeque in the park? No. We don't do that. We usually barbeque in our backyard or go to the cottage."

<div align="right">(Similar comments were made by 6 other
participants of the same ethnic group)</div>

Another person stated, "I went a few times for a barbeque event organized by the University of Waterloo, but other than that I have never been barbequing in a public park. It just feels weird, no? We would always barbeque at home." A Caucasian Canadian woman (and in a similar fashion 6 other participants of Caucasian Canadian background) said that she had never barbequed in a park,

because "barbequing is something you do at the cottage or in your own backyard."

East/North Asian participants shared similar feelings to Caucasian Canadians about barbequing. One East/North Asian said, "I have never barbequed in a public park here in Canada but I went for a picnic with a few of my friends a few times. We played some card games, badminton. It was a fun time. But most of the time we would just hang out at somebody's house that have a grill instead of going to the park."

Most African-Caribbean respondents showed a similar reluctance towards barbequing at the park. One of them said:

> "Back in Trinidad we would barbeque in somebody's house or we would plan a trip to the beach. I mean in Trinidad everyone hangs out at the beach all the time... There is nothing in Waterloo Park that would justify the trouble of dragging all the equipment to the park."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 4 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Winter Activities

It came as no surprise that; regardless of the ethnic association the majority of respondents expressed a fairly low interest in going to the park during the winter season. Caucasian Canadians were identified as the ethnic group that showed the most enthusiasm towards winter activities in the park. Most (75%) participants of this ethnic group expressed not only interest in cultural winter festivals, but also in playing hokey, ice-skating, tobogganing and even running. In general, Caucasian Canadians were very willing to attend any organized community event at the park during the winter season.

The other ethnic groups were much more reluctant to participate in any winter activity taking place at a park. Although most of them (80%) expressed interest in occasional cultural events, hardly anyone (17%) showed interest in other winter activities. Most people explained that "it's too cold," or that "there is nothing to do in the park in a winter time." One African origin participant said in a humorous way, "going to a park in a winter time? No. African people don't like winter and cold temperatures as much as they love soccer!" An Arabic person added, "oh, no. [The] park is no place to be in a wintertime!" Additionally, most people outside of the Caucasian Canadian ethnic group confessed that they did not know how to skate, or said that it wasn't their "thing."

Summary

Analyses of the participants' activity patterns indicate that people from different ethnic groups have different reasons for going to the park. The most critical difference was observed between Caucasian Canadians, who were most frequently going to the park to be active, while other ethnic groups were primarily visiting parks for passive relaxation. According to the Sense of Place Theory, it can be expected that if the perception of a space is dependent on how well it can serve an individual's needs, then people with different activity patterns will most likely also differ in their breadth of needs and expectations, which will affect their evaluation of the park setting. On these grounds, it can be demonstrated that culture can affect the perception of urban park settings.

The analysis of sport preference patterns indicates that there is a correlation between ethnic groups and sport preference. The feedback obtained from

respondents implies that, although many ethnic groups expressed only a secondary interest in playing sports at the park, the current structure of Waterloo Park does not create equal opportunities for all ethnic groups to engage in sport leisure. The three sports that were found to be most popular among the majority of the participants were soccer, frisbee, and beach volleyball. Currently there are no beach volleyball courts at Waterloo Park, and the existing condition of the soccer field could be improved. Winter sports (hockey and skating) and baseball were found to engage only Caucasian Canadians, which may raise questions as to whether baseball and winter sport infrastructure is necessary to park settings, considering that they only appeal to one demographic. At the very least, the amount of space designated for these structures needs to be questioned.

After analyzing the data regarding barbecuing and picnicking, it became clear that the only ethnic groups that had a desire to barbeque in the park were Arabic and African origin respondents from Kenya and Zimbabwe who barbequed in parks in their home countries. Other ethnic groups didn't have such previous experiences and didn't perceive public urban park as an appropriate location for such activity.

Regarding park picnicking, nearly all of the ethnic groups that were investigated admitted to occasionally organizing small picnic gatherings, with two to four people.

Caucasian Canadians were the only group to show interest in winter activities, aside from occasional cultural events. Most other non-Caucasian Canadian participants did not have a cultural association with parks in a winter setting, which is not surprising when you consider that many participants come from countries without a winter season (e.g. Zimbabwe, Trinidad, etc.).

The Caucasian Canadians were likely interested in going to the park in the winter because of their learned cultural behavior, namely, that they were exposed to winter activities at an early stage of life. For many of the interviewed Caucasian Canadians, winter activity was a normal cultural behavior.

After considering the data, there are solid grounds to conclude that attitudes toward park usage in winter are, at least to some extent, culturally driven.

V. Association Patterns

Some noticeable differences were identified when analyzing association patterns between the participants of different ethnic groups when they visited park settings.

Ethnic Groups	Association Pattern		
	Results show % of participants that indicated particular activity pattern		
	Alone	+1 Companion	Group
Caucasian Canadians	66	87	37
African / Kenya and Zimbabwe	33	44	67
African/ Caribbean	-	44	67
East/ North Asians	33	78	22
Middle Eastern	10%	22	78
Arabic	10%	44	56
South Asian	-	56	33

Table 4.3 Association Patterns

Caucasian Canadian participants were found to go to the park most often alone for running, or accompanied by others when playing sports. On other occasions, when they participated in more passive activities, they usually went to the park with one or two accompanying peers. The most frequently observed group pattern involved two people going for a walk, or families going for a walk (usually a 2+1 or 2+2 model was implied. For example, parents with kids, or

grandparents with grandchildren, going to see the animal farm or to feed the ducks on Silver Lake).

East/North Asians participants had very similar association patters to Caucasian Canadian participants, and were usually found to go to the park alone (for solitary walks, or to read a book) or accompanied by a friend or a spouse. Sometimes, much like Caucasian Canadians' family patterns, a 2+1 or 2+2 model was indicated.

Unlike the previous two ethnic groups, South Asian participants were found to not visit the park alone, but usually with friends, or a spouse for a relaxing stroll though the park. Additionally, many South Asian participants said they participate in occasional picnics that involved more people than just immediate family members.

African origin respondents from Kenya and Zimbabwe showed two distinct patterns of association when going to the park. In the first, they were found to go to the park alone to contemplate and experience nature. In the second, they were found to go to the park for barbeques that involved more people than just their immediate family members.

African-Caribbean participants were found to often visit the park in small groups of two or three to socialize, and most often with friends. On a side note, many Caribbean origin participants made reference to organizing destination family picnics at the beach outside of the city, as opposed to gathering for picnics in the park.

Arabic participants generally indicated a family association pattern when going to the park. The most common pattern was that Arabic participants would go to the park accompanied by family to relax and to go for walks. On the other

occasions, families would go to the park to barbeque, and sometimes the men would play soccer or basketball.

Finally, Middle Eastern participants were most often found to go to the park accompanied by few friends, and the less often with their families.

Summary

Analysis of the feedback obtained from the interviewed participants indicated that there are some distinctive similarities, as well as differences between the investigated ethnic groups regarding their association pattern when visiting urban park settings. African, Middle-Eastern and Arabic participants were found to visit the park primarily to socialize in larger groups of friends and family. Caucasian Canadians, East/ North Asians and South Asians were found to predominantly visit parks alone, or with more intimate companionship; with another friend or a spouse. With this group, an association pattern was only indicated when parents or grandparents were coming to the parks with young kids or grandchildren.

In the light of above findings from Alderfer's "needs framework", it would be reasonable to conclude that while Caucasian Canadians East/ North and South Asians were showing a low level of relatedness needs, African, Middle-Eastern and Arabic respondents showed an opposite tendency, or a very high level of relatedness needs in the park setting. Analysis of the respondent's feedback on amenities preferences and their activity patterns seems to show a correlation between these two very different levels of relatedness needs, and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.2.2. What is the breadth of needs among people of different cultural backgrounds?

The second research question was addressed in order to investigate whether there is any association between an individual's cultural background (tested through ethnicity) and the breadth of needs that he or she might have in an urban park setting. The same data that was used in the analysis of the first research question was used to investigate this particular matter. However, this time the data relating to the participants needs has been highlighted from the rest of the transcribed text. After the feedback was obtained from the respondents, it was initially coded based on repeating themes and ideas. However, during the final analysis it become clear that some elements of Alderfer's "Needs Framework," namely, the section that identifies the three groups of basic human needs; Existence Needs, Relatedness Needs and Growth Needs, would need to be incorporated into the final analysis.

Thus, the three types of needs were extracted from the collected data and became a subject for investigation:

I. Need to Relax and Relieve Stresses – (falls under Alderfer's
 Existential Needs)

II. Need to Socialize – (falls under Alderfer's Relatedness Needs)

III. Need for Learning New Things – (fall under Alderfer's Growth Needs)

I. Need to Relax and Relieve Stresses

As mentioned earlier, all participants of the study stated that the primary function of a park is to facilitate relaxation. A park provides an escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life, and can be a place to get away from the noise and

stress of everyday life. The need to relax at parks has been well documented (Ulrich, 1979; Herzog, 2002; Bell et. al., 2005; Hansmann, 2007).

It was observed that people from different ethnic groups showed different inclinations for the ways in which they choose to relax and relieve stress at parks. The two main activity patters that were observer were: 1) a preference for passive relaxation, which was demonstrated by majority of East/North Asian, South Asians, Middle Eastern and Arabic origin park users, and 2) a preference for active relaxation, which was demonstrated by majority of Caucasian Canadian and African origin park users from Zimbabwe and Kenya (See Table 4.1 on page 81 for exact results). Due to the two different ways in which the ethnic groups chose to relax, completely different perceptions of the overall function and composition of a park were observed by the different ethnic groups.

II. Need to Socialize (Relatedness Need)

Considering Alderfer's Needs Framework (Alderfer, 1972), various levels of relatedness needs were demonstrated by the different ethnic groups studied. The need to interact with groups of friends, community, and family members in a park setting, at least at some level, was shown by all the respondents that participated in the study.

According to the collected data, all participants wanted a park setting, to varying degrees, to be a lively place that offers the feeling of being part of a community. Even the ethnic groups that saw parks mostly as a serene place to spend quality time with nature (East/ North Asians, South Asians), and respondents that saw parks as a place for active relaxation (Caucasian

Canadians) admitted they would not want a park to be a completely quiet and empty.

The majority (89%) of the respondents said that they preferred being able to see, at least some, other park users in their surrounding, so that the park doesn't look "abandoned" and "spooky." Furthermore, all respondents, regardless of their ethnic background, expressed interest in the occasional cultural festival at the park.

It is important to note that the extent, to which park settings should be lively, vibrant places, differed greatly among respondents from different ethnic groups. It is therefore important to determine the optimal number of people in a park so that it does not become too crowded or too empty.

First consider Middle-Eastern and African origin participants (both from Kenya and Zimbabwe as well as from the Caribbean); these groups were found to be coming to parks predominantly to socialize. Using Alderfer's framework, these groups were found to have very strong relatedness needs. One Middle-Eastern participant said:

> "For me, [a] park should definitely be considered as a socializing place. You can compare it to a shopping mall. There are people with different ties, doing their own things – meeting with friends, watching interesting things, chatting – the only difference is that park provides a more soothing and natural atmosphere that you can never find in a shopping mall (…) The most important thing about being in a park is the feeling that you're a part of a community and Waterloo Park is not giving you that feeling. It has barely any people going there, it's a socially dead park."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 4 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Another Middle Eastern respondent said, "parks in Iran are more crowded and most people do like that." He also said parks are meant to be social places

where people go "to spend quality time with their friends and family" and this opinion seemed to be shared across majority (89%) of respondents from that ethnic group.

African origin respondents displayed similar sentiments to Middle Eastern respondents. When one African origin respondent was asked if he considered a park to be a place for socializing, he said:

> "oh, definitely! That's what the park is all about! Spending quality time with your family and friends and being surrounded by beautiful scenery! It's also nice to meet other people from your community"
>
> (Similar comment was made by 7 other participants of that ethnic group)

Asked the same question, another African respondent agreed with the previous statement, and while she noted that she sometimes likes to go the park alone, she said "most of the time I come to the park to hang out with my friends."

This shows that both Middle Eastern and African origin respondents were found to have strong needs for socializing with their friends and families in a park setting, but they also wanted to feel a sense of community while at the park. This may be explained by the fact that, with both ethnic groups, many of the interviewed participants emphasized how important the socializing element is in their own culture.

Many (78%) of the Arabic participants' answers also indicated that they viewed the park as a place to fulfill their socializing needs. One woman said, "yes, I think I would consider [a] park as a socializing place. I mean, we usually come to spend quality time with the family, but it's always nice to have other

people in the park and to feel that the park is a lively scene." Another male

participant stated:

> "Yes definitely. In Saudi Arabia parks are filled with people. You go
> there mostly with family but your friends go with you and their family
> too, so when there is a nice day everybody is in the park."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 4 other
> participants of the same ethnic group)

A few participants, however, were more reserved when comparing their

previous cultural experiences with parks in their home countries to their current

experiences with Canadian parks. For example, one woman said:

> "In Cairo we used to go to the park with my husband and kids and our
> friends would come with their families too, but here in Canada families
> don't go to the park to socialize like in Egypt. We still come [to the parks
> in Canada] and do our own thing but it's very different than at home."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 3 other
> participants of the same ethnic group)

Another female respondent from Saudi Arabia made very similar comments.

She noted that, "in Canada the atmosphere is very different," with less

opportunity for socializing, whereas, "in Saudi Arabia we used to go to the park

quite often because other families were going there too and we would all spend a

whole day in the park socializing." She also noted that families in Canada don't

go to the park to barbeque, and mentioned that there is not sufficient barbequing

equipment at Canadian parks.

Similar to Middle-Eastern and African participants, Arabic origin

respondents also indicated a fairly strong need to socialize in the park.

Unlike Middle Eastern and African origin participants, interviews with East-

North Asian and South Asian participants revealed a relatively low level of

relatedness needs. East/North Asians and South Asians expressed a minimal

interest in socializing opportunities. When asked whether they perceived parks

as a place for socializing, a South Asian woman said:

> "I don't know if I perceive park as a socializing place. I mean I feel safer when there are other people in the park, but I prefer the park to be a calm and peaceful place, than filled with people socializing. I usually come to the park for passive relaxation. [I] like to come for a walk with my boyfriend or to meet up with a friend to chat. It's more private when there are no crowds around you."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 6 other participants of the same ethnic group)

Another South Asian participant agreed that parks are not primarily places

for socializing, and added, "I think it should be a relaxing place where you can

rest, read a book, come with a friend for a walk." A few South Asian participants

also said they go to the park for family picnics, but not very often, and their visits

were characterized as being more passive and relaxing.

East/North Asian participants also indicated an inclination for passive

relaxation, with only a faint desire to socialize in the park. One male participant

said:

> "I find park as a space to go on my own or to met with people I already know. I wouldn't consider it a socializing space. (…) I usually go on my own to read a book, to see something nice, to get piece of mind."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 5 other participants of the same ethnic group)

While a female respondent of Chinese origin said "I think a park is a place

where people come to when they want to relax. They come on their own or with

a friend. I feel shy to go to a park on my own. I usually go with a girlfriend, but

my brother very often goes to the park to study."

In both cases South Indian and East/North Asian participants didn't

mention the need to feel part of a community, or to socialize in larger groups in

the park. This is most likely because, despite different ethnic associations, both

groups of participants expressed a culturally unified interpretation of a park as a serene setting, where one goes to be at peace with nature, rather than a social scene.

Finally, the level of relatedness needs of Caucasian Canadian participants were found to be somewhere near the average when compared to the other ethnic groups that were studied. Even though Caucasian Canadians displayed a fairly regular pattern of going to parks alone (indicated by 66% of respondents), the majority of Caucasian Canadian respondents also indicated to often visit the park with an additional companion (87%) as well as to socialize with friends and family members (indicated by 37% of participants). On those occasions most Caucasian Canadians went to the park with a friend or a spouse (or parents with their kids), and were there for passive relaxation. Occasionally they would go to parks with bigger groups of people and play group sports.

At the same time, not many (only 37%) Caucasian Canadian respondents emphasized the need to feel like they are part of a larger community. On a daily basis, most participants (75%) expressed that they would not want a park setting to have too many people. For example, one participant said, " I like when there are people here and there in the park, but not too many so the park is still peaceful and quite." These sentiments were echoed by another individual, who said:

> "I don't like when there are to many people in the park – I don't like overcrowded parks – I like when it's more peaceful and calm."
>
> (Similar comments were made by 6 other participants of the same ethnic group)

On the other hand, many (75%) of Caucasian Canadian participants indicated that they would like to participate in occasional community events and cultural festivals on weekends or on a monthly basis.

III. Need for Learning New Things

Alderfer acknowledges and categorizes the need to learn new things under Growth Needs in his framework, and refers to it as an individual's intrinsic desire for personal development. He states that in order to be happy, people do not only need to fulfill basic existential needs (e.g. needs related to staying alive and safe, which include the need for shelter, the need to satisfy hunger, etc.) but that there are two additional levels of needs that people must satisfy in order to fully reach their potential. The first is the need to engage in social interaction with others. The second need is the need for personal growth, or the need to become more than what one already is.

Similarly, Kaplan's Preference Matrix also acknowledges that all people tend to favor environments that allow for learning and exploration. Both of these theories rely on the assumption that all people as humans tend to have an inborn need to experiment and grow and learn new things. In the context of this study, analysis of the feedback obtained from the respondents seems to imply that people of Middle Eastern, East/North Asian and South Asian backgrounds tend to put more stress on this particular need in a park setting than the other ethnic groups studied. In accordance with these findings, one Middle Eastern individual stated:

> "I like terrain with variety of forms, [like] hills and mounds, because its more exciting than just flat terrain. I also like parks that have some secret

places that you should explore, and that there are not that many people that go there."

Another Middle-Eastern person said, "what I like about parks in Europe is that they are more interesting then here. Like in Italy, they have those amusing mazes made out of shrubs that you can't see where they are leading. You get inside and you want to explore where it's going take you. It would be nice if Waterloo Park had [an] element like that!"

At the same time one South Asian woman brought up learning and exploration as an important element to the children's' playground area at Waterloo Park:

> " I think that kids' playgrounds shouldn't be located in one peripheral place. I think there should be few play areas in the park and that parents should be able to take their kids from one playground to another, then take them for a walk, explore the park and it's surrounding".

Another South Indian man said, " I like large park that gives you opportunity to see new interesting things," while another added, "It would be great to have a green house garden, butterfly conservatory, [or] some element of interest that would make you want to explore something. There is nothing exploratory in Waterloo Park." Finally, one girl said:

> "Waterloo is not attractive. There is nothing to do for people like me. There are only stuff for parents and their kids. I would like to see more elements that would be engaging both for kids and adults; something educational or exploratory."

While talking about the water features at Waterloo Park, the same girl said:

> "I think I like idea of a stream the most because I think it's more engaging. I like that you can walk along it, see the frogs, fish etc., whereas, for example, a water fountain or a pond is a closed circulation.

It doesn't take you anywhere. You can maybe take a wedding picture 'cause it looks niece and that's it."

In a similar fashion East/North Asian participants emphasized the need to explore. One young man said, "when I was younger my dad used to take me to the woods and it was so nice just to walk around between the trees and it was so interesting to find bugs or a small animals or squirrels." Another East/North Asian man made a similar statement:

> "what I like about some big parks in China is that you can go there and explore things. You have walls, gates and bridges that link different areas in the park. In some parks in China they have these bamboo forests with a narrow path in the middle that you can't see what's ahead of you. It's an interesting experience. It's like a maze that sometimes you don't know where you're going. It's kind of a cool feeling"
>
> (Similar comment was made by 5 other participants with same ethnic background)

Finally, one Japanese man speaking about theme gardens in the park said, "I like parks to be quiet and relaxing, because you want to run away from the city. You also want to see something new, so that's why I think theme gardens would be a nice idea to the park"

These findings are somewhat difficult to synthesize. The fact that some of the ethnic groups studied expressed the need for exploration at parks does not mean that the other ethnic groups do not share the same feelings. It might just be that their past cultural experiences with parks have conditioned them to expect or desire certain exploratory features of parks, while the other ethnic groups have not had these experiences at parks, and therefore have no frame of references. For example, if a Caucasian Canadian has never experienced a classical Italian garden, or a Japanese bamboo maze, he or she may never consider that these elements would be appealing components of a park, or that parks can better

fulfill their need for exploration. This finding implies that cultural experience can affect peoples' perception of space, and may affect peoples' needs in a park setting.

4.3 Observations

The observations that were made at Waterloo Park took place on sunny days, both weekdays and weekends, between July 6 and August 2, 2009. The purpose of conducting the observations was to verify whether respondents feedback regarding their patterns of behavior in park settings - indicated in the interview phase, was truthful and whether it was aligned with the behavior of other multi-ethnic park users in an actual park setting. Unfortunately, due to study time limitations the observations were not conducted in the wintertime, which weakens the liability of the research findings regarding winter activities indicated by the interviewed participants. Accordingly, interview feedback regarding winter activities was not included in the final discussion of the research findings.

The data collected in the interviews was broken down into three main areas, which were analyzed further. Those three areas were Association pattern, Activity pattern (Active versus Passive, Barbequing and Picnicking, Seating Arrangement preferences) and Sport Engagement pattern.

Caucasian Canadian Park Users

The observations conducted at Waterloo Park verified that the actions of Caucasian Canadians were accurate representations of the feeling and views expressed in the interviews. Many Caucasian Canadians seemed to visit Waterloo Park and engage in various activities that were indicated in the interviews. On weekdays, the overwhelming majority of park users were noted to come to work out, to run or jog, and to play frisbee. Some people were also found to come with peers for a walk, or to sit down and chat.
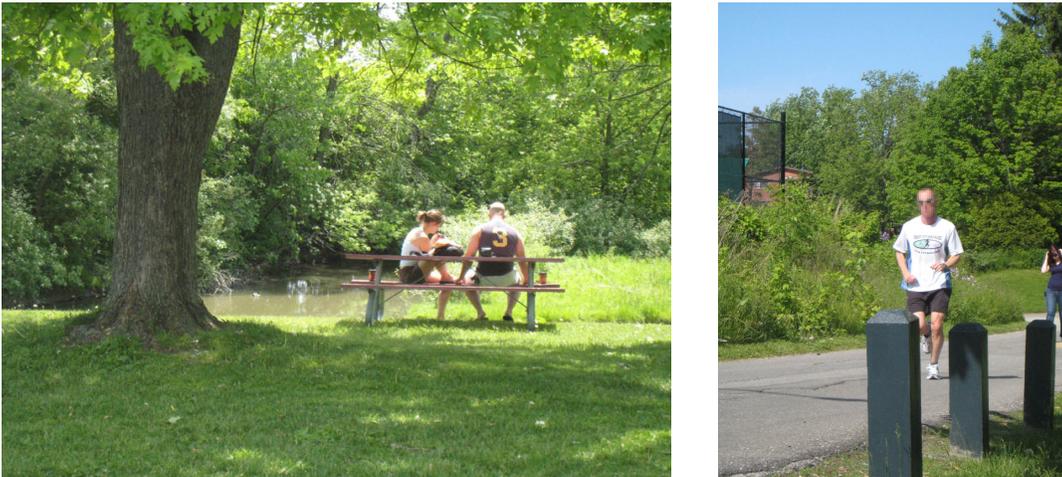
Figure 4.3.1 Caucasian Canadian park users socializing and jogging in Waterloo Park

On the other hand, on the weekends, the park was mainly occupied by families with children. The parents often took the children to the animal farm or to feed the ducks. Parents would also take their children to observe the occasional passing train, and some other children were observed riding bicycles. Some families were found to relax with small children on blankets, and some families were coming to watch their children play baseball.

Figure 4.3.2 Caucasian Canadian park users biking and watching kids playing baseball in Waterloo Park

Overall the impression from observing Caucasian Canadian participants at the park was that they seemed fairly content with the park design, they used the park facilities quite often and got engaged in various activities. None of the Caucasian Canadian park users were observed barbequing in the park.

All in all, Association, Activity, and Sport Engagement Pattern accurately reflected the data obtained from the interview phase of the research.

African Park Users

During weekdays a small representation of African origin park users were observed visiting the park. They mostly engaged in solitary, passive relaxation, like walking or sitting on the boardwalk by the water and reading. On the weekends, most of the African individuals were engaged in large barbeques with lots of socializing with family and friends. At these times they were observed to cook, listen to music, play soccer, badminton, and frisbee. They usually choose to barbeque under a partially shaded, secluded tree canopy.

Other teenaged African individuals were observed socializing in groups of friends, walking by the animal farm and swings. In both cases the behavior observed was very similar to what was indicated in the interviews.

Figure 4.3.3 African park users playing soccer and socializing in Waterloo Park

East/North and South Asian Park Users

On the weekdays, East/North and South Asian park users were observed in pairs, and their activities were either walking or sitting and chatting.

On the weekend some families were observed taking their kids for a walk in the park, or taking their kids to the playground. A few times some young East/North Asian individuals were observed playing badminton and basketball.

The observations confirmed that East/North and South Asian park users tend to engage mostly in passive relaxation in a park setting. Additionally, a few young East/North Asian individuals confirmed the sport preference patterns that were indicated in the interview. The interviews indicated that both East/North and South Asian participants were not content with the overall design composition and landscaping of Waterloo Park—complaining that the

park lacks visual stimulation and that it is "dull" and "boring,"—and this may explain why none of the East/North Asian park users were observed to go to the park alone for contemplation.

Additionally, neither East/North Asian nor South Asian participants were observed to barbeque in the park. Also, only two South Asian families were observed to have a small picnic (with immediate family member) over the whole two-week observation period. The observations indicated that the interview findings seemed to truthfully reflect the behavior of East/North and South Asian individuals in the urban park settings.

Arabic Park Users

Arabic individuals were observed visiting the park with their family, which is an accurate reflection of the information gathered in the interviews. Over the weekends, Arabic families were observed engaging in mostly passive leisure; walking around the park, feeding the ducks and visiting the animal farm. Additionally, on a few occasions, some Arabic families were observed to barbeque in the park, and at that time the women were usually engaged in cooking and watching the kids, while men were engaged in talking or playing basketball.

Also, none of the Arabic individuals were ever observed to come to the park alone, and women were never observed at the park without the company of family.

Finally, on only a few occasions', male Arabic individuals were observed to visit the park as a group to play basketball, soccer or just simply to chat.

Figure 4.3.5 Arabic park users socializing and playing soccer in
Waterloo Park

Overall, observations conducted at Waterloo Park seem to confirm most of the feedback obtained from the respondents in the interview phase. Arabic respondents were most frequently observed visiting the park in groups with family members, and their activity patterns tended to be for passive leisure. Finally, the observed sport preference patterns confirmed that male Arabic park users did occasionally play basketball and soccer. One thing that was not confirmed during the observations was the inclination for Arabic park users to socialize in restaurants or cafeterias, which was a desire indicated during interviews, due to fact that there is no restaurant or cafeteria at Waterloo Park, but just a small snack store.

Middle Eastern Park Users

It was difficult to confirm the validity of the information gained from interviewing Middle Eastern participants because so few Middle Eastern park users were observed visiting Waterloo Park during the observation period. Only on two occasions were Middle Eastern participants observed at the park. On the first occasion a group of five Middle Eastern individuals were observed at the park walking around the grounds and chatting. On the second occasion there

was a male and a female, who appeared to be a couple, sitting in a gazebo by the lake.

To summarize, the observations conducted at Waterloo Park on Middle-Eastern park users could not completely validate the feedback obtained in the interview phase, but there were some indications that Middle Eastern park user seem to show an inclination for passive rather than active leisure. The observations also supported some statements made by some Middle Eastern respondents that they do see a reason, or feel a need to visit Waterloo Park.

4.4 Chapter Conclusions

Analysis of the collected data identified noticeable park preference similarities and differences between the investigated ethnic groups. There seemed to be a visible correlation between the participant's previous cultural experiences and their indicated park preferences. The identified similarities and differences show that culture influences people's perception, pattern of behavior, and preference pattern for urban park settings. Further, the findings of the study show that ethnicity can be considered a viable predictor of environmental preference, but only to the extent that it is also associated with a deeper level of culturally based behavior and experience. A summary of the research results and recommendations for professional practice are being provided as a part of chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This study was carried out for the purpose of examining the influence of culture on the perception of multifunctional urban parks. As a starting point, a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature was made to identify how the concept of culture fits into the existing Environmental Perception framework, and what might be its influence on the perception of urban parks. The goal of this qualitative research was to provide documentation of in-depth feedback from multi-ethnic urban park users regarding their culturally derived expectations and preferences for urban park settings. Accordingly, the research questions focused on how do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize multifunctional urban parks (e.g. it's function and design composition), and what breadth of needs exist amongst park users of different cultural backgrounds. The assumption was made that, by verifying that the participants ethnic association was aligned with their cultural background, ethnicity could be used as the tool for determining how culture impacts park preference. This research attempts to minimize the knowledge gap in the existing Environmental Perception framework by addressing culture as an influential factor that should be taken into consideration when designing urban parks and urban spaces.

5.2 Research Questions and Findings

This study has been focused on two specific research questions:

1) How do people of different cultural backgrounds conceptualize urban parks, and

2) What is the breadth of needs among people of different cultural backgrounds?

The ethnic association of the study's participants was verified to align with their cultural background, and ethnic groupings were used to represent the attitudes and preferences of people with different cultural backgrounds towards urban park settings. Analysis of the collected data indicated that there are some noticeable similarities and differences in the way the investigated ethnic groups conceptualize urban parks, as well as the breadth of needs they seek to fulfill in the park setting. The assessment of the similarities between ethnic groups indicated that the majority of all participants shared a similar outlook; that parks should provide relief from stress; that the presence of water features in the park is critical, that hilly terrain with a winding walkway layout is generally preferred over flat topography and that people like to seat in elevated and enclosed locations.

These universal preferences seem to be well supported by the existing theory and the theoretical framework incorporated into this research. Biological/ Evolutionary Theories, as well as Information-Processing Theory, and Kaplan's framework point out that people, universally, have a higher preference for environments that allow easy information pick-up and assessment of hazards, as well as provide enough visual stimulation to be considered interesting and engaging. This explains why the majority of all participants had a preference for

varying topography as it provides visual interest and vistas allowing assessment of the parks surrounding. The Sense of Place framework provides an additional explanation for why people prefer varying topography as it provides a sense of enclosure and privacy.

Alderfer's framework (Alderfer, 1972) highlights some general categories of needs that people have to fulfill in order to be happy. He finds that growth needs encompass a need to relax and relieve stress.

Although, the above preferences do not indicate the influence of culture on environmental preference patterns they do prove that on some initial level, relating to human biology, all humans share some universal preference patterns for environments. However, this study shows that there are also some apparent differences in the way different ethnic groups conceptualize urban parks. Two distinct park preference patterns were observed; the *Naturalistic-Active preference pattern*, and the *Decorative-Passive preference pattern*.

The *Naturalistic-Active preference pattern* was expressed by the majority of Caucasian Canadians and African respondents from Zimbabwe and Kenya. These ethnic groups preferred parks that were peaceful, and landscaped to mimic natural conditions. Landscapes that contain a mix of open-lawn areas that don't contain overly manicured planting were also preferred. These groups showed a strong interest towards active relaxation and were the most sport oriented from amongst all investigated groups. Accordingly, this group would need amenities that provide opportunities for being active e.g. running trails, baseball diamonds, and soccer fields. Lastly, this group did not perceive a restaurant as an element that belonged in a park setting.

The *Decorative-Passive preference pattern* was observed from the majority of the other investigated ethnic groups (Middle-Eastern, East/North Asians, South Asians, African/ Caribbean, Arabic). These ethnic groups generally held a preference pattern for a more decorative style of landscaping, providing visual substance in the form of theme gardens and a variety of flowers and plant species. They also showed a common interest for using the park for passive relaxation (i.e. taking walks, socializing, contemplating and meditating). Furthermore, these ethnic groups preferred parks that contain a wider range of amenities that facilitate socializing, such as restaurants, cafeterias, kiosks, and amphitheatres.

The *Decorative-Passive preference pattern* group was fond of the idea of having a restaurant in the park. Some ethnic groups, such as Middle-Eastern and Arabic participants, were accustomed to having restaurants in the park from their native countries and, accordingly, recognized it as a mandatory park feature. East-North Asians, South Asians and African/Caribbean respondents were also fond of the idea of having a restaurant in the park, as it was common in their home country to have smaller scale features such as tea-houses or cafeterias within the park.

In the case of both groups discussed above, the park experiences from their home countries seemed to shape their expectation as to what features should exist in a park setting, and was evoking a preference for particular park design elements. Additionally, they were seeking different activity opportunities based on their culturally developed patterns of behavior.

In addition to attitudes towards having restaurants in a park setting, sports preferences, attitudes for water-fountains, theme gardens, and barbequing in the

park seemed to also be affected by the previous park experiences of the study participants.

Accordingly, although it was found that some ethnic groups showed a stronger interest towards playing sports in the park than others, it should be noted that all ethnic groups showed some level of interest in playing sports in the park. However, their sports preferences appeared to be very different and closely related to the participant's various cultural backgrounds. These differences in preferences are illustrated in Table 4.2 on page 83.

Regarding water fountains, Caucasian Canadians, African and South Asian respondents generally had a negative attitude toward having water fountains in a park. They shared a common belief that man-made structures, such as water fountains, don't belong in a park, and that they are especially unappealing in the cold winter months, when they don't contain water. However, Middle-Eastern, Arabic and East-North Asian participants had a positive experience with water fountains in their home countries and perceived them as vibrant gathering places, and an element of art.

Past experiences also seemed to explain Middle-Eastern, Arabic, East-North Asian, South Asian and African/Caribbean respondent's fondness for such park design elements as theme gardens, ornamental gardens, labyrinths and mazes. Similarly, past experiences were a reason why Arabic and African respondents from Zimbabwe and Kenya expressed interest in barbequing in the park while other investigated ethnic groups generally didn't associate the park as an appropriate setting to barbeque.

From the perspective of Alderfer's Needs Framework (Alderfer, 1972), additional differences between the investigated ethnic groups were identified.

For example, all participants identified a need to use parks as a way to relieve stress. However, different ethnic groups used parks in different ways to relieve stress. For example, Caucasian-Canadians and African/ Zimbabwe and Kenya were predominantly relieving stress through being active and playing sports, while other investigated ethnic groups were relieving stress through passive relaxation and socializing.

Further it was indicated that ethnic groups varied greatly when it came to their level of relatedness needs. Middle-Eastern, African and Arabic participants showed a great need for socializing in larger groups in the park setting. Whereas, other investigated ethnic groups showed a more moderate socializing pattern and were fond of visiting the park alone, on in groups of two.

These findings discussed above seem to support the constructed theoretical framework for this study. The universal preferences among ethnic groups indicate that at some level our preferences are being conditioned by biological factors, and common needs that we all have as humans. However, through daily experiences, social interactions and culture we become accustomed to seeing things in a particular way, and expect things to look a certain way. Finally, depending on the culture that we have been exposed to we tend to encounter environments with different motives and expectations that directly impacts the way that we perceive and evaluate various environments.

The research findings also support the suggested explanation and understanding of the difference between ethnicity and culture, and the fact that it is culture that is the influential variable in environmental perception and preference as opposed to ethnicity. For example, the initial ethnic label 'African' was not found to be a useful preference determinant because amongst the

participants that self-describe themselves as African, there were observed two distinct patterns of preference. African respondents with a Caribbean background exhibited a different preference pattern than respondents originating from Kenya/Zimbabwe. Based on this finding the African ethnic grouping needed to be divided into more specific groupings based on their cultural behavioral patterns and additional background information. In contrast, respondents of the South Asian and East North Asian descent were divided into separate ethnic groups. However, the research findings showed that because of the cultural similarities that these ethnic groups share; they often exhibit very similar preferences, which indicates culture as being the influential preference determinant.

Even though a minor adjustment was made to the initial 'African' ethnic grouping, in general, this study's findings showed that ethnicity can be considered a viable determinant of environmental preference when it is associated with a deeper level of culturally based behavior and experience. The research findings indicated that culture considerably influences people's perception of urban parks and influences their preference patterns.

To help foster the design of successful urban parks it is essential to recognize the diversity of thought, perspectives, and attitudes among members of the community and future park users. This study proves that people from different social and cultural backgrounds encounter environments with different motives and level of expectations that directly impacts their perception of the environment.

"Within each physical setting there is a social, cultural world that is saturated with environmental references by which people form distinct mental constructs that allow them to understand their environments"(Lewis, 2005: 87).

Moreover, culture will impact the way that the user interacts with the environment. "The knowledge that is obtained through experiential learning affect where the observer looks and what properties of objects or features he sought" (Lewis, 2005: 87). Thus, it is important for park designs to account for the different ways that users from different cultural backgrounds will perceive the park environment and the different types of uses they will desire a park to facilitate.

5.3 Implications and Recommendation for Professional Practice

This study provides evidence that culture can influence the park user's perception of urban parks, and that people under the influence of different cultures conceptualize and use the urban park space in different ways. Practitioners should acknowledge this influence and accommodate for the corresponding similarities and differences in attitudes between different ethnic groups toward urban spaces.

At present, the majority of large-scale, Canadian multifunctional urban parks are being designed according to one open-space naturalistic convention that often fails to represent the diverse interests of its communities. Like Waterloo Park, Canadian parks are mainly designed for active relaxation, as that seems to be the dominant activity pattern among Caucasian Canadians. However, Canadian demographics are shifting and becoming ethnically complex. This study has found that different ethnic groups do not necessarily share the same

leisure patterns, and correspondingly have different motives, needs, and seek different opportunities in park settings. For this reason, it is important that practitioners plan, and accommodate for these different attitudes and expectations towards urban parks, that are being influenced by cultural differences. Thus, for urban parks that are being designated as "multi-functional" to be the most successful, they need to accommodate a wide array of needs held by the different Canadian citizens.

As previously discussed, two common preference patterns emerged from the findings:

- *Naturalistic-Active preference pattern*, held by both Caucasian Canadians and African origin individuals from Kenya and Zimbabwe
- *Decorative-Passive preference pattern* shared by the remaining ethnic groups investigated: East/ North Asians, South Asians, African/ Caribbean, Arabic and Middle-Eastern park users

Looking at these two contradictory park preference patterns it seems that from the standpoint of culture the following approach should be taken under consideration when designing urban parks:

Identifying primary park users – At the initial level of design it is essential to assess local community dynamics, including its social and ethnic profile, and to identify who is expected to be the primary park users. Further, to assess the variety of needs and motives that all of potential park users may have.

Comprehensive design – Researchers and practitioners agree that a successful urban park must not only have a pleasant look, and contain quality natural resources, but most importantly must offer users the ability to engage in a breadth of recreational activities. The infrastructure developed to facilitate the

recreational activities must also be perceived as being of a high quality, both in appearance, and functional use (Whyte, 1980; Jacobs, 1961; Houston, 2001; Francis, 2006). Successful and meaningful urban park design therefore depends upon whether the park provides a comprehensive design program that can provide for a variety of users needs, and that can be altered over time to adjust to changing community dynamics.

Sectional Design – when designing a park for a variety of potentially conflicting user needs, attempts should be made to incorporate a variety of theme sections that will be designated for particular activities. For example, sports areas, tranquil areas, and entertainment areas. Moreover:

Natural *Buffer Areas* in form of landscaping should be provided in order to create transparent, rather than true physical boundaries between different sections. It is also advised that conflicting theme sections (e.g. tranquil and sport areas) be located further apart.

When possible, design *Multi-functional Areas* that can be used in various ways depending on the user group, on the time of the day, week, or season to help provide the public with the largest variety of uses for the given park space. For example, open lawn areas could serve as soccer or frisbee fields in addition to being used as an area for screening movies, or holding cultural events. A pond could be used as a central cooling and relaxing area in the summer but also as an ice-skating rink in the winter. Finally, an onsite restaurant or cafeteria could become a location for general park use as well as for larger community events.

Create *Tranquil Areas* designated for passive relaxation with more decorative landscaping styles. There should be emphasis towards incorporating theme

gardens that can accommodate seasonal change. There are various types of theme gardens (e.g. rose and flower gardens, ornamental gardens, rock gardens, 'wild style' gardens) that can create enclosure, and provide visual substance and enhance the overall relaxing experience.

Furthermore, researchers and practitioners suggest introducing innovative elements, such as public and community gardens. This park attribute helps to not only reduce the maintenance workload on park staff, but also to engage local residents; to facilitate the development of stronger social ties, and as a result build stronger and healthier communities (Houston, 2001; Francis, 2006). Introducing different types of theme gardens can therefore help to create more diverse urban parks, not only for their physical appearance, but also because of the additional recreational activity that they can provide.

Create *Sport Areas* that provide opportunities to match diverse cultural sport preferences. Refer to Figure 4.1 in the fourth chapter for sport preferences indicated by the investigated seven ethnic groups. More interestingly this study indicates that sports such as frisbee, beach volleyball and soccer, are amongst the most highly preferred sports. Additionally, they are sports that with appropriate landscape design can be easily blended into the landscape without disturbing the visual appeal.

Create *Entertainment Areas* that provide opportunities for social interaction. According to place-making objectives, the successful urban spaces are environments that attract a wide variety of people and provide an experience that draws them back to the park. Thus, when parks are being treated as aesthetic objects, the result is often a space that is pleasant to look at, but that few people use. People might visit once, but without opportunities to engage in a

preferred activity they are unlikely to return (PPS, 2011). The park users will feel as though they have seen all that there is to see, and will often seek other parks to fulfill their needs. Correspondingly, parks that are currently being recognized as the most successful provide not only a pleasant green space where people can escape the city turmoil, but more importantly provide an abounding selection of recreational opportunities and amenities. These recreational opportunities and amenities make them popular and vibrant destinations to go to on a regular basis. Depending on the size of the park and the identified primary group of users the amenities may include the following composition elements:

- restaurants and cafeterias

- barbequing and picnicking facilities

- carrousels and swings

- water fountains, ponds/skating rings

- chess tables

- ping pong tables

- interactive art elements

- specialty kiosks

- cultural and community events

- movie screenings

- concerts and workshops

Park as a Transforming Organism – finally, designing a park that will be considered successful today is one challenge, but designing a park that will remain vibrant and current with the passing of time is the greater challenge. Park user motives and needs change with time, as does the demographics of its users. Thus, designing a park is not just a onetime challenge, but rather a continuous

undertaking. A successful park will maintain its user base. Over time, a diminished user base would suggest that the park has lost some of its initial relevancy, and should undertake a revitalizing design change.

Many more general rules and guidelines in addition to those just mentioned exist, many of which are under current debate, on how to design successful urban parks and public spaces. However, from the consideration of addressing the role that culture plays on an urban park, the findings of this study suggests that the above rules are most relevant.

Concerns could be raised about whether trying to address too many design elements into limited park acreage would eventually result in diminishing park experiences and perceived park design quality. Certain park features could conflict and reduce the net benefit that they bring to the park. Certainly the park designer would have to be aware of this risk, and use strategies (proposed in the design guidelines above) that minimize park feature conflicts. By use of logic, and some creativity many parks have very successfully integrated an impressive number of park features into relatively limited park spaces. Two examples of parks that are considered successful will be discussed. These parks provide evidence that with the proper design program and park management, facilitating multiple interests and various design elements is not an impossible challenge.

For example, Vondelpark, the main city park of Amsterdam, which is approximately the same acreage as Waterloo Park (110 acres), provides a design program that is saturated with a variety of activities. It is because of the number of different needs that the park caters it is considered one of the most successful parks in the Netherlands. Its landscape structure consists of a combination of large, grassy fields; landscaped gardens (including a formal rose garden); ponds

and canals, and miles of paved paths and wooded trails. Additionally, the park

provides a rich selection of amenities such as restaurants and cafes, each with

large summer patios. It has a movie museum/theatre, an outdoor amphitheatre,

a pond used for skating in the winter, and multiple children's playgrounds.

Further, the park caters to a full range of passive and active opportunities. The

passive activities include, for example, picnicking, strolling, and duck-feeding

features. Some of the more active features that the park facilitates include

skating, biking, running, rollerblading, frisbee, soccer, and bocce ball. This list is

not exhaustive as the park provides many other types of leisure prospects as well

as a wide range of community and cultural events. The success of this park is

exemplified by the 10 million visitors that the park receives each year, of many

different cultural and educational backgrounds, ages, and economic status.

Bryant Park in New York provides an illustration of a park that has very

successfully created a multifunctional park in only 8 acres. Bryant Park's fame

has spread to local New Yorkers, tourists, and professionals in the field. Despite

its small size, Bryant Park provides both a relaxing atmosphere as well as a

vibrant social and cultural experience. Its structure is divided into

multifunctional areas designed to serve various functions. The biggest and most

dominant composition element of the park consists of a three-acre open lawn,

surrounded by tall, arching trees. The lawn is used for a variety of different

functions. It is used as an arena for cultural festivals, movie screenings,

picnicking, and sunbathing. During the winter the area is used as an ice-skating

rink. The perimeter area - surrounding the open green space – contains a variety

of amenities, such as kiosks that offer coffee and light meals, Bryant Park Grill

that offers roof-deck dinning, and over 1000 lightweight chairs that can be

moved throughout the park during good weather. There is a designated area for chess and backgammon, where pieces for the games can be rented from the New York Chess and Backgammon Club. Other attractions include flower gardens, a fountain at the west end of the park, and a variety of unique vantage points designed for user to observe the park splendors; to relax and socialize.

Both examples show that it is possible to design parks for a variety of uses and activities. Vondelpark is a perfect example of a park that has design elements that make it simultaneously socially vibrant, beautiful, and peaceful, by providing quality spaces for both passive and active relaxation. Bryant Park, on the other hand, is evidence that with careful planning and proper management, even a small park, considerably smaller that Waterloo Park, can successfully incorporate multifunctional designs.

5.4 Future Research

This exploratory research provides tangible evidence that culture plays an important role in the perception of urban parks, and that its influence deserves further attention and refinement from both researchers as well as practitioners in the field.

One of the most fundamental aspects that needs further refinement and unification amongst the research is the understanding of the phenomenon of culture and acknowledging that "Culture as a conditioning agent of human perceptions and values does not function as a static capacity (…) it is crafted within an inter-subjective and 'embodied' history of multiple engagements within practical domains of human activity" (Lewis, 2005: 86). Accordingly, the

use of other related terms, such as 'ethnicity', 'race' or 'nation', has to be used sensibly and with the right frame of reference.

Unfortunately, although this study helps to minimize the knowledge gap in the overall Environmental Perception Framework it also exposes many areas requiring further investigation.

This study was based on artificial ethnic groupings, and didn't provide any information regarding Latino - Hispanic preferences due to an insufficient number of participants, and thus an insufficient sample size to provide reliable feedback. Additionally, during the study, some substantial differences in feedback were noted between participants that initially would have been categorized within the same ethnic group. Correspondingly, an additional ethnic group needed to be created as African origin respondents from Zimbabwe/Kenya were found to have noticeably different preference patterns to participants with a Caribbean background. Thus, it is recommended, that a larger and more detailed comparison of ethnic groups should follow, and further refinement of the investigated study groups should be undertaken.

This study was unable to confirm the interview feedback regarding the participant's winter activities. Analysis of the feedback from the interviews indicated that differences between ethnic groups regarding winter park usage exist. Unfortunately, due to time restriction, this study wasn't able to validate these findings through direct observations. Thus, although these observations were briefly discussed in chapter 4, they were left out of the final discussion of the research findings in chapter 5, and require further investigation, and validation.

Further, it is important to remember that we no longer live in homogenous societies, and the fusion of cultures is a constant occurrence. People are continuously being exposed to new cultures through the wide variety of local restaurants, new travel focused television programming, the increased affordability of traveling, and the increase in multi-cultural relationships and marriages. Therefore, the effect that these new trends will have on the definition, and understanding of culture, as well as how it effects our perceptions and preferences requires further investigation.

5.5 Thesis Conclusion

A key insight generated from this research was that with the growing ethnic diversity of Canadian communities, there has been a corresponding increase in the variety of motives, needs and expectations that people of different cultural backgrounds have of public spaces. As such, current design conventions need to adapt to this trend, and attempt to develop urban spaces with more depth and variety to appeal to the ethnic mosaic.

Incorporating design elements into urban parks from a variety of different cultures not only benefits communities with parks that appeal to a greater number of users, but also by enhancing parks in ways previously unimagined by many of its users. Different cultures stand to benefit by learning new ways to use and enjoy parks from each other, which will result in more vibrant and integrated communities.

Through the series of interviews conducted, as part of the Waterloo Park study, it was found that there are differences in the way that people of different cultures conceptualize urban parks. Cultural norms drive the differentiation in

needs and socialization, and thus distinct groups have different expectations and preferences for what a park should look like, and what types of amenities it should have.

As society becomes more complex it will become increasingly difficult to identify, or design for a single ethnic group. Therefore, some design recommendations have been presented on how to incorporate multiple interests of various park users when designing urban parks.

The findings of this thesis, coupled with general population trends imply that the current design conventions used to plan and build multi-functional Canadian urban parks are unsuccessful. They do not equally satisfy the preferences and needs of people with different cultures. The research findings reveal the importance for further research to re-evaluate, and better understand the impact that culture is having on how the people in our Canadian communities interact with urban parks.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A-1. Information Letter Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF
Waterloo

School of Planning
Faculty of
Environmental Studies

Information Letter

Dear Ms./Mrs.

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study. As a Masters student in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of Waterloo, I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor John Lewis on *"Meaningful design in a multicultural community. A case study of multifunctional urban parks"* and I'm seeking for participants.

Study Overview

Urban planning is responsible for the arrangement of environments that we are living in as well as for the design of urban parks that allow us to escape from the city turmoil. However, do we share the same vision of a park: the way it looks, the range of facilities and features it has to offer? The purpose of this study is to create a set of guidelines that will improve the design of multifunctional urban parks as well as to investigate the expectations and needs of ethnically diverse park users. The study examines indicators influencing human perception and preference in relation to ethnic background and previous park experience of research respondents. The study will investigate questions: How do conceptions of meaningful open space design vary between different cultural groups, as well as, what kind of principles can be used to create meaningful open space design in a cross-cultural context?
In order to the meet the study goals and gain accurate insight to the investigated subject matter a series of interviews will be conducted with the multicultural users of Waterloo Park. To eliminate bias other recruitment criteria like; age and gender will be taken into account.

Your Involvement

To be eligible to participate in this research you need to be an expressive individual, familiar with Waterloo Park at least on a nominal level (i.e. have been there once or twice) as well as have previous experiences with other local parks or parks in general

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview and you'll be asked to answer a series of approximately 30 questions relating to your previous experiences with urban parks in general and with Waterloo Park in particular. In the last section of the survey you will also be asked to self-describe yourself in matter of demographic characteristics like: ethnicity, age group and gender.

The interview will last about 40 minutes and will be arranged at a time convenient to your schedule. To ensure the accuracy of your input, I would ask your permission to audio record the interview.

Participation in the survey and interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. You may decline to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, simply by letting me know your decision. All information you provide will be considered confidential unless otherwise agreed to, and the data collected will be kept in a secure location and confidentially disposed of in five years time.

The interview will be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous and any names or personal information's will remain strictly confidential.
After the data have been analyzed, you will receive a copy of the executive summary. If you would be interested in greater detail, an electronic copy (e.g., PDF) of the entire thesis can be made available to you.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information about participation, please contact me at 5197297892 or by email martunczyk@gmail.com You can also contact my supervisor Professor John Lewis by telephone at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 33185 or by email at j7lewis@uwaterloo.ca

I assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision to participate is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from you participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research.

Yours very truly,

Marta Sitek
Master Candidate

Appendix A-2. Consent Form Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF Waterloo

School of Planning
Faculty of
Environmental Studies

University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
N2L 3G1

I have read the information letter for the study "Meaningful design in a multicultural community. A case study of multifunctional urban parks" conducted by Marta Sitek of the Department of Planning at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professors John Lewis. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I am aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time by notifying the researcher of this decision.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics Dr.. Susan Sykes at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or via email ssykes@uwaterloo.ca

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.
YES   NO
I agree to have my interview audio recorded.
YES   NO
I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.
YES   NO

_____

Print Name: Signature of Participant:

_____

Witness Name: Signature of Witness:

_____ Dated at Waterloo, Ontario

UNIVERSITY OF
Waterloo

Questionnaire

Meaningful design in a multicultural community: A case study on multifunctional urban parks, Waterloo Park, Ontario, Canada.

Introduction of a Consent Form

1. How long have you been living in Kitchener-Waterloo?
2. Have you lived in any other cities inside or outside of Canada? If so, could you estimate for how long have you been living there?
3. Are you familiar with Waterloo Park?
4. Are you familiar with other parks in your city or neighborhood you're living?
5. How far is it located from your home?
6. Do you visit that park often? (If not) Why?

Section A – Waterloo Park

7. Do you go to Waterloo Park?
   - If **yes**, how often do you visit the park?
   - If **no**, why don't you go there?
   - Is there anything that could attract you to go there more often?

8. What do you like best about Waterloo Park?
9. What (if anything) do you dislike about the park?
10. What other park do you visit?
    - Why do you go there?
    - Do you like it better or less than Waterloo Park? Explain why?
11. What changes would you like to see in Waterloo Park? Would you then come more often?
12. If you could do anything in Waterloo Park, what kinds of activities would you do?
13. Would you consider going there in wintertime?
    - If **yes**, what do you do in the park during the winter?
    - If **no**, why not?
    - What could attract you to go there in a winter?
    - What kind of winter facilities would you look for?
14. Can you identify some of the existing features/facilities in the park (i.e. picnic area amenities, animal farm, game courts, amphitheatre, playground for children) Have you ever used any of them? Yes/No
    - (If no) Why not? H: Distance? Safety? Condition? Lack of interest?
15. Do you feel safe visiting Waterloo Park?
    - Would you allow your kids to play there unattended?

Section B – Parks in general

16. Do you travel abroad?
    - Where do you usually go?
    - Have you seen/experienced any interesting parks during your travels?
    - What features of those parks did you enjoy the most?

17. Do you remember any parks from your home country?

    - Can you try to describe them?
    - What differences do you notice between parks in your home country and those in Canada?
    - What do you miss most about the parks in your home country?
    - What do you like about parks in Canada better?
    - What park-related activities were you able to enjoy in your home country that you can't in Canadian parks?

18. Do you come to the park on your own or with companion? /friend/family/

19. If you come with companion what do you usually do?

20. Do you ever come alone to a park?

21. If you come alone, what do you usually do?

22. Have you ever been barbequing or picnicking in the park in Canada?
    - What about other parks that you have experienced?
    - (if no) Why not?

23. In general, what activities do you enjoy in parks?
    - Active (playing sports)?
    - What sports/games would you like to be able to play in a park?
    - Passive (walking, reading, contemplating, etc.)

24. Do you perceive park as a more calm and quite place or as a vivid lively space?

25. Would you approve an idea of a cafeteria or a small restaurant in the park?

26. Would you like the opportunity to gather in bigger groups in the park?
    - With who would that be? Family/ friends / club members/
    - What kinds of activities would you do with those groups?

27. Is there anything you dislike about parks? (e.g. trash, noise, lack of intimacy)
    - Does other users ever bother you?

28. How important are water features in the park for you? And why?
    - Do prefer stand still (a lake, a pond) or floating water (a creak, a fountain)

29. What is your opinion on having animals in the park? Animal farm /dogs / birds/ ducks/ squirrels)

30. Do you know any park that you really like or might really like (to far from your home, from magazines, from your travels)

31. What is your opinion on having sculptures and art features in the park?

32. What is your opinion on pathways in the park?
    - Do you like when they are whining that you can't see far ahead or do you like when they are leading you straight that you can see far ahead?
    - Do have any sort of preference on the cover material of the pathways? /asphalt, gravel, wood chips, other/

33. What is your opinion on the shape of the terrain?
    - Like when it's flat or more hilly?

34. If I could design a *'perfect park'* within a walking distance from the place where you're living what would be it's 7 key features/elements?

Section C - Socio-demographic questions

Age group
Would you consider yourself:

- Youth (under 20 years old)
- Adult (20-60 years old)
- Senior (60 and more)

Sex: male/ female

How would you describe your ethnicity?
- Caucasian Canadian / European Canadian
- African/ Caribbean
- African/ from Kenya or Zimbabwe
- East Asian/ North Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Arabic
- South Asia / India
- Latino / Hispanic*
- None of the above / own suggestion/

Observations Introduction Script

Hello, my name is *Marta Sitek* and I am a graduate student in the Department of *Urban Planning at the University of Waterloo*. I am currently working on my Masters thesis: *"Meaningful design in a multicultural community. A case study of multi-functional urban parks"* under *supervision of Professor John Lewis* and I am conducting a series of observations in the park in order to assess how ethnically diverse users are approaching and using urban parks space.

This research will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the design of urban parks in a multicultural context, as well as, it will improve the quality of existing and build in the future urban parks.

I apologize that I have been observing you and took some notes and few pictures without your permission. If you agree, I'd like to use them as a reference in my thesis, if not I'll erase them straight away according to your wish.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics. However, the final decision about participation in the study is yours.

Thank you,

Appendix A-5. Observations Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF
Waterloo

School of Planning
Faculty of
Environmental Studies

University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
N2L 3G1

I have been introduced to the study conducted by Marta Sitek "Meaningful design in a multicultural community. A case study on multi-functional urban parks" of the Department of Planning at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professors John Lewis. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that the materials collected during the observation process: field notes, photographs may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that they will remain anonymous.

I am aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time by notifying the researcher of this decision.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES   NO

I agree for the use of all taken photographs

YES   NO

I agree to the use of other materials collected during observation process

YES   NO

_____

Print Name: Signature of Participant:
_____

Witness Name: Signature of Witness:

_____
Dated at Waterloo, Ontario

Appendix A-6. Appreciation Letter

UNIVERSITY OF Waterloo

School of Planning
Faculty of
Environmental Studies

University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
N2L 3G1

Dear Participant,

I would like to express my appreciation for your participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this research is to create a set of guiding principles that will help to improve the design of urban parks by meeting the needs of diverse range of users.

The data collected during the interviews, as well as, series of observations conducted in the park will contribute to a better understanding of park users expectations and needs as well as will help to not only improve the structure and management of already existing parks but will consent to the design of new more successful parks in the future.

Be assured that any data pertaining to yourself as a participant in this study will be securely stored and kept strictly confidential. The results of this study will be distributed within the research community via seminars, conferences and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the study results upon completion of the project, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address below. This study is expected to be completed by January of 2010.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

Marta Sitek

University of Waterloo

School of Planning

519-729-7892

martunczyk@gmail.com

UNIVERSITY OF Waterloo FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT