Perceived Contentment of Residents on Recreational Park as Shared Space

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ABSTRACT

As tourism expands into urban areas, recreational parks are increasingly evolving into shared spaces where residents and tourists converge, creating spatial friction. This study examines local residents' perceived contentment at a botanical park in Malaysia across three dimensions; the natural environment, accessibility, and park facilities. Data were collected through an intercept survey of 118 adult resident visitors. Results indicated overall low resident contentment, recording a mean score of 2.95, and notable accessibility disruption with a mean score of 2.56. Pearson correlation analysis showed that perception toward park facilities had the strongest positive relationship with contentment at a coefficient of 0.394, followed by natural environment concerns at 0.301 and accessibility at 0.246. These findings demonstrate that resident discontentment stems primarily from infrastructure overload rather than tourist presence alone. Consequently, municipal authorities should implement adaptive spatial zoning, prioritize facility maintenance, and manage visitor flows to preserve local quality of life.

Keywords: Recreational parks, residents' contentment, tourist-resident shared space, accessibility, park facilities.

INTRODUCTION

Recreational parks play an increasingly critical role in supporting public health, community cohesion, and local tourism. Despite sharing the same physical environment, residents and tourists often navigate these spaces with fundamentally different priorities and expectations. Song & Shim (2021) observe that tourists largely perceive parks as scenic destination attractions tailored for leisure and sightseeing, whereas residents depend on them as routine, daily venues for recreation and social interaction. When these contrasting demands converge with common park challenges such as overcrowding, noise, and declining maintenance, the level of contentment drops across both groups. Understanding these divergent spatial perceptions is essential for sustainable park planning and conflict mitigation. To address this gap, this study examines the distinct park perceptions held by residents.

As tourism expands into traditional urban parks, these shared spaces become sites of both cultural exchange and spatial friction (Liu et al., 2023). Residents depend on parks for daily routine physical workouts and community life, whereas tourists seek scenic features and novel leisure experiences, especially during holidays; their spatial needs frequently diverge. These differing priorities significantly alter user density tolerance, directly affecting perceived crowding and user satisfaction (Dong et al., 2022). Left unmanaged, excessive tourist footprint risks over-saturating park infrastructure and restricting access, thereby compromising residents' quality of life (Zhao et al., 2024). To address these competing demands, this study examines how residents perceive and utilise the recreational park.

Underlying these operational challenges is a fundamental structural issue. Traditional recreational park planning frequently fails to accommodate concurrent multi-user dynamics. While public parks are conceptually intended to serve diverse populations, competing spatial demands between locals and tourists have intensified usage conflict (Li & Wang, 2023; Cheng et al., 2026). As many existing facilities were planned through single-user paradigms, prioritizing either community recreation or tourist attraction, these spaces commonly lack the adaptive design required for dual-purpose environments (Hamzah et al., 2024). This structural mismatch magnifies behavioral friction and spatial competition, which frequently results in the displacement of residents from their daily recreational grounds (Zheng et al., 2023). Left unaddressed, these dynamics undermine the core purpose of recreational parks as shared spatial resources and impede broader goals of inclusive urban development (Zhu, 2025).

This structural friction is further compounded by the fundamental divergence in how residents and tourists interact with public space. While tourists utilize parks for transient leisure, exploration, and entertainment, residents depend on them for essential daily routines, physical exercise, and neighborhood social cohesion. When these distinct functional behaviors converge without adaptive spatial planning, the resulting overlap leads to heightened perceived crowding, reduced satisfaction, and the progressive spatial exclusion of local users. Over time, this unequal access to public amenities degrades the quality of civic life and erodes residents' attachment and sense of spatial ownership. Consequently, managing shared recreational parks transcends mere physical landscape design; it constitutes a critical imperative for social equity, spatial justice, and community well-being.

Despite growing awareness of these socio-spatial challenges, the literature has focused mainly on macro-level measures, such as visitor volume, spatial distribution, and physical infrastructure, while largely overlooking how interactions between residents and tourists affect the equity and inclusivity of shared spaces (Zhu, 2025). Empirical research also remains limited on how different park types accommodate shared use and how spatial conflict varies across urban contexts (Hamzah et al., 2024). This gap is compounded by the lack of specialized tools for measuring shared-space dynamics, limiting park planners' ability to develop targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Addressing these critical gaps is essential to unravelling the mechanisms of spatial conflict and establishing planning frameworks that foster equitable, harmonious, and sustainable recreational parks. To address these empirical and practical gaps, this study investigates the perceptions and contentment levels of residents within the recreational parks, focusing specifically on how key attributes such as accessibility, natural environment, and amenities drive contentment. Ultimately, this study contributes to sustainable, community-centered tourism practices by balancing local well-being and spatial equity with the broader economic benefits of tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spatial Coexistence, Resident Contentment, and Park Dimensions

Recreational parks are public spaces that are shared environments in which both locals and tourists interact, relax, and recreate. While such parks are designed to promote inclusivity and social cohesion, congestion, noise pollution, increased litter, and cultural diversity may affect the degree to which residents experience satisfaction, comfort, and a sense of belonging. If the locals feel that their quality of life is disrupted by the presence of tourists, it could lead to conflict over space, reduced utilization of public facilities, and even negative attitudes towards tourism. Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand how the locals perceive these public spaces. The residents' contentment defines the happiness and affection towards the maintenance, utilisation, and quality of the recreational park. Accessibility, crowding, maintenance, and the intensity in which the tourist activities relate to the local day-to-day engagement with the park are some factors considered in this study. Excessive visiting or environmental challenges could reduce the contentment of residents. According to research, residents are generally happier when they believe their demands are met and when park amenities accommodate both residents and tourists without creating tension (Ko & Park, 2021).

Furthermore, if the harmony between residents' use and visitor presence is preserved, residents' contentment with common areas influences their readiness to encourage tourism growth (Zhang & Guo, 2022).

To evaluate user contentment, this study focuses on three key park dimensions, which are the natural park environment concerns, accessibility to the park and its facilities, and perception towards park facilities. First, the park environment concerns (e.g. green cover and air quality) provide vital psychological restoration, though residents exhibit greater sensitivity than tourists to its environmental degradation (Huang et al., 2021). Second, physical accessibility to park and park facilities via transit and active transport networks promotes usage, yet heavy tourist inflows often generate congestion that disproportionately hinders daily local access (Zhao et al., 2024). Third, perception towards park facilities (e.g. seating, restrooms, and sports facilities) ensures user comfort and safety, but intensive tourist demand frequently leads to rapid facility wear and spatial crowding (Veitch et al., 2021).

Dual-Use Dynamics and the Resident-Tourist Sharing

In urban tourism, resident-tourist space refers to public environments such as parks, waterfronts, and civic plazas where residents and tourists simultaneously engage in recreational activities (Ali et al., 2022). While these contact zones offer opportunities for intercultural exchange, they also introduce inherent behavioural friction. This tension stems from a fundamental divergence in user orientations where residents utilize parks habitually as essential urban infrastructure for daily health routines, relaxation, and neighbourhood social cohesion, while tourists consume these same environments transiently for leisure, sightseeing, and novel experiences (Liu et al., 2023).

When high tourist volumes converge upon local parks, the resulting spatial saturation often manifests as physical crowding, excessive noise, and degraded facilities. As Carmona (2021) notes, the governance, spatial layout, and maintenance quality of public spaces directly dictate how user groups interact and behave within them. In dual-use parks, failure to manage tourist inflows disrupts local behavioural routines and diminishes residents' sense of place attachment and territorial ownership. Consequently, resident contentment becomes contingent upon how effectively park management preserves local utility while accommodating visitor presence.

Natural Environment. The environment of a recreational park encompasses its green open space, tree canopy, air quality, and visual tranquillity, which serves as a primary foundation for psychological restoration and neighbourhood pride among residents. In shared park settings, the ecological and aesthetic integrity of these natural features must be preserved under conditions of dual usage. When tourist foot traffic leads to habitat degradation, littering, or loss of serenity, residents' contentment declines sharply (Wang et al., 2020). Residents depend on these natural assets for routine stress recovery, and maintaining high environmental quality amidst tourist sharing is vital for sustaining their contentment.

Park Accessibility. Accessibility denotes the physical infrastructure, such as transit links, pedestrian paths, bike lanes, and parking facilities, that enables both residents and tourists to access and navigate park grounds. Highly accessible parks foster greater community participation and user contentment, particularly among nearby residents who rely on routine activities (Zhao et al., 2024). However, when tourist volume overburdens these shared access points, localized consequences such as parking deficits, traffic congestion, and overcrowded pathways disproportionately restrict residents from utilizing the space. Effective management of shared entry points and transit flows is therefore crucial to prevent resident displacement.

Park Facilities. Park amenities, including seating, public restrooms, athletic fields, play structures, and walking tracks, provide the functional backbone for park utility, safety, and physical comfort. In dual-use parks, high-intensity visitor traffic often leads to rapid wear-and-tear, queuing, or temporary facility closures, which directly conflict with residents' expectations of convenience and cleanliness (Wang et al., 2020). When residents perceive that tourist demands monopolize or degrade these shared assets, their overall contentment with the public space diminishes. Conversely, well-maintained and adequately sized facilities mitigate spatial competition and preserve local utility.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine user contentment and tourists-residents sharing dynamics. The empirical investigation was conducted at s local botanical garden in the state of Melaka (Malaysia) a premier municipal park where residents engage daily in routine exercise and recreation. Tourists seek sightseeing and nature-based leisure at this park too. The target respondents comprised adult park visitors aged 18 years of age who are residents. Data were gathered on-site using a face-to-face intercept survey method across four consecutive weekends to capture peak operational traffic and ensure sample diversity. Surveyors sampled participants across key functional zones within the park, including entrance plazas, active walking trails, and communal resting areas.

The survey instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire divided into two sections. The first part consists of demographic attributes (e.g., age, gender, residency status) and visit profiles, and the second part evaluated the primary constructs of the study using a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, three independent variables were assessed; the natural environment (7 items), park accessibility (6 items), and park facilities (9 items), alongside the dependent variable, level of contentment (5 items). Prior to full deployment, a pilot study was conducted to verify item legibility and evaluate scale reliability using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1 Cronbach Alpha

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Natural Environment	7	0.790
Park Accessibility	6	0.892
Park Facilities	9	0.708
Level of Contentment	5	0.908

The data were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) through a four-stage analytical pipeline designed to address the research objectives. First, descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated to profile respondent demographics, visit profiles, and baseline satisfaction ratings. Further, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the direction and strength of linear relationships between the three shared space dimensions and overall user contentment.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

The sample demographic reveals notable patterns regarding gender, age, and socioeconomic status that directly inform user expectations and park perceptions. Females represented a clear majority of respondents of 63.6%, compared to 36.4% males. This gender distribution aligns with established urban leisure literature, which indicates that women engage more frequently in park-based health and recreational activities while exhibiting greater sensitivity toward park safety, cleanliness, and upkeep (Kabisch et al., 2022). In terms of age, the sample was heavily dominated by young and middle-aged adults, with 54.2% aged 18–29 and 30.5% aged 30–44. Together, these two cohorts comprise 84.7% of the total respondents. This concentration reflects highly active engagement in outdoor physical leisure and heightened awareness of spatial changes and visitor crowding within public recreational sites.

Conversely, older adults aged 60 years and above accounted for a minimal proportion of the sample. This underrepresentation highlights potential structural barriers, such as physical mobility constraints, inadequate age-friendly infrastructure, or reduced access to digital/on-site survey participation among senior citizens (Zhang et al., 2022). Socioeconomically, the sample demonstrated high educational attainment, of 61% holds undergraduate degrees, 26.3% possessed diplomas, and 0.8% holds postgraduate qualifications. A well-educated demographic typically correlates with higher expectations regarding environmental governance, structural maintenance, and space quality in public amenities (Thinh et al., 2020). Occupational profiles further contextualize park usage as private sector employees constituted the largest representation, followed by students and the public sector. For these active students and working populations, recreational parks serve

as essential restorative environments to recover from work- or study-related stress. Consequently, uncontrolled tourist crowding threatens to disrupt the psychological recovery and leisure value these users seek from park spaces (Ali et al., 2022).

Park Visitation Patterns, Mobility, and Functional Motivations

Behavioural profiles demonstrate strong habitual reliance on the park facilities. A significant majority of respondents visit the park daily or weekly (89.8%), with only 1.7% reporting rare visits. This high frequency indicates strong place attachment and routine integration of the park into residents' daily lives. However, habitual visitors are also more likely to notice subtle quality declines, infrastructure wear, and spatial crowding caused by heavy tourist traffic (Liu et al., 2023).

Geographically, 50.8% of respondents reside within 1–10 km of the park, and 40.7% live within 11–20 km. This broad distribution establishes that the park operates as a regional destination rather than merely a neighbourhood park. The heavy reliance on personal motor vehicles creates significant vulnerability to local traffic bottlenecks and parking shortages, particularly during peak visitation periods, thereby amplifying resident frustration (Tan et al., 2021). Lastly, the primary motivations for visiting the park centred on physical exercise and fitness (49.2%), mental relaxation (28.8%), and family bonding (8.5%). These functional goals underscore the park's role as a critical health and social infrastructure. Because these activities require personal space, visual tranquillity, and functional equipment, user experiences are particularly vulnerable to negative externalities such as tourist-induced noise, spatial crowding, and commercial encroachment (Lyu et al., 2020).

Table 2 Demographic Profile (n=118)

Demographic	**Categories**	**Frequency**	**%**
Gender	Male	43	36.4
	Female	75	63.6
Age	18 – 29	64	54.2
	30 – 44	36	30.5
	45 – 59	15	12.7
	60 and above	3	2.5
Education	High School	13	11
	Diploma	31	26.3
	Undergraduate	72	61
	Postgraduate	1	0.8
	Others	1	0.8
Employment	Public Sector	26	22
	Corporate Sector	35	29.7
	Own Business	21	17.8
	Unemployed	5	4.2

Demographic	Categories	Frequency	%
	Retired	0	0
	Student	30	25.4
	Others	1	0.8
Frequency of Park Visit	Rarely	2	1.7
	Daily	87	73.7
	Weekly	19	16.1
	Others	10	8.5
Distance from Home	< 1 km	5	4.2
	1 km – 10 km	60	50.8
	11 km – 20 km	48	40.7
	> 20 km	5	4.2
Transport to Park	By foot	4	3.4
	By bicycle	1	0.8
	By motorcycle	30	25.4
	By car	83	70.3
	Public transport	0	0
Reasons for Park Visit	Recreation / Relaxation	34	28.8
	Exercise / Fitness	58	49.2
	Family / Social Interaction	10	8.5
	Enjoying nature	8	6.8
	Sightseeing / Hangout	7	5.9
	Others	1	0.8

Shared Recreational Space and Resident Contentment

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted in SPSS to evaluate respondents' perceptions across the three park dimensions; the natural environment, accessibility, and park amenities, alongside resident contentment. Variables were measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale. Overall construct means and standard deviations are summarized alongside item-level descriptors.

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std Dev

Natural Environment	3.01	0.623
Park Accessibility	2.56	0.862
Park Facilities	3.20	0.439
Resident Contentment	2.95	0.488

The natural environment construct yielded a moderate overall mean score of 3.01, hovering around the scale midpoint. This indicates a balanced, cautious perspective among residents. On one hand, respondents acknowledged the fundamental ecological appeal and cleanliness of the park. On the other hand, items evaluating tourist-induced ecological disruption, increased traffic, and scenic disturbance drew moderate agreement, reflecting emerging environmental friction. While the natural landscape remains a primary draw, residents perceive that expanding tourist foot traffic presents a gradual threat to visual tranquillity and environmental preservation.

All items under the park accessibility construct are phrased to capture tourist-induced disruption (e.g., parking deficits, excessive noise, and spatial congestion). The lower overall mean of 2.56 indicates that, on average, respondents opined that tourist presence severely compromises accessibility to park and park facilities. However, this construct exhibited the highest standard deviation across all variables, revealing substantial dispersion in user experiences. While off-peak visitors encounter minimal access hurdles, habitual or peak-hour users experience acute friction regarding parking availability and localized congestion. Accessibility is a key factor that fluctuates based on visitation timing and traffic volume.

Park facilities received strong positive evaluation, accompanied by the lowest standard deviation among the independent constructs. This high consensus demonstrates that residents broadly agree that park infrastructure is well-maintained, functional, and effectively planned for exercise, social interaction, and relaxation. While minor concerns exist regarding potential space competition during peak periods, users overwhelmingly endorse the park's physical design.

Overall, local resident contentment recorded a low mean score of 2.95, reflecting low visitor contentment. Statements measuring intent to return, facility enjoyment, site recommendation, and overall visit satisfaction achieved low scores. This low contentment score demonstrates that localized friction regarding crowding or parking during peak tourist periods, creates discontentment among residents.

Correlation Analysis

To evaluate the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the linear relationships between the shared space dimensions and overall resident contentment, a Pearson correlation analysis was executed (n = 118). All variables demonstrated statistically significant positive relationships at the $p<0.01$ level, confirming that enhancements in natural environment concerns (NE), park accessibility (ACC) and park facilities (PF) correspond with higher overall park contentment (PC).

Table 4 Pearson Correlation (n=118)

	NE	**Acc**	**PF**	**C**
NE	1	0.861	0.715**	0.301**
ACC		1	0.555**	0.246**
PF			1	0.394**
PC				1

** Significant at $p<0.01$

Predictor Relationships with Resident Contentment

Among the three independent variables, park facilities exhibited the strongest association with overall contentment, displaying a statistically significant, low and positive correlation ($r = 0.394$, $p<0.01$). This finding indicates that how residents perceive functional, well-maintained physical infrastructure such as fitness equipment, seating, restrooms, and recreational zones serves as the primary operational determinant of residents' contentment. Ensuring facility availability and upkeep directly mitigates spatial friction when parks are shared with tourists.

The natural environment aspect demonstrated a statistically significant, low and positive correlation with contentment ($r = 0.301$, $p<0.01$). Cleanliness, green space coverage, and landscape aesthetics contribute meaningfully to positive visitor experiences. While essential for psychological restoration, the scenic quality alone cannot fully offset operational or infrastructure deficiencies. Park accessibility showed a statistically significant, weak and positive correlation with satisfaction ($r = 0.246$, $p<0.01$). Although convenient entry, parking, and transit connections contribute positively to residents' experience, accessibility has a lower strength of association with overall contentment compared to the other two independent variables.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated resident contentment within tourist-resident shared recreational parks, focusing specifically on how core environmental, structural, and operational dimensions of the natural environment, accessibility, and park facilities shapes residents' experiences amidst tourist sharing at the park. The empirical findings reveal that residents demonstrated overall low contentment, despite strong place attachment and continued reliance on the park for daily physical exercise, mental relaxation, and family socialization. Synthesizing these results within broader socio-spatial theory indicates that natural beauty and physical accessibility function as baseline prerequisites rather than the primary drivers of elevated contentment. Instead, spatial friction between residents and tourists is most acutely felt around physical infrastructure touchpoints such as seating, restrooms, fitness zones, and active pathways. Consequently, perception towards park facilities demonstrated the strongest positive association with resident contentment, highlighting that physical infrastructure maintenance plays a vital role in buffering against user conflict. Spatial conflict is therefore not an inevitable consequence of tourist presence itself, but rather an operational symptom of infrastructure overload and unmanaged spatial capacity.

Based on these empirical insights, park management authorities, municipal planners, and tourism policymakers should implement targeted interventions to preserve resident utility while sustaining destination appeal. First, municipal authorities should establish adaptive spatial zoning within shared parks, designating high-density visitor hubs for photo opportunities and tourism services away from quiet community nodes reserved for local exercise and quiet relaxation. Second, given that park facilities serve as the strongest driver of resident contentment, park administrators must prioritize capital investment and regular maintenance for park infrastructure. Expanding seating capacity, upgrading public restrooms, and maintaining athletic facilities directly increases spatial carrying capacity and buffers against user conflict during peak visitation. Additionally, destination management organizations should enforce visitor flow controls during peak weekend hours such as managing tour bus arrivals and install clear multi-lingual code-of-conduct signage to mitigate tourist-induced noise, litter, and spatial encroachment.

Finally, integrating residents into park planning and decision-making frameworks ensures that neighbourhood recreation needs are safeguarded, mitigating spatial displacement and fostering long-term community support for park-based tourism. Despite providing critical insights into shared space dynamics, several research limitations point to fruitful avenues for future investigation. A primary constraint was the final sample size of 118, potentially limiting statistical power and the generalizability of the findings across broader regional contexts.

Additionally, because data collection occurred across four consecutive weekends in a single season, the cross-sectional design could not capture seasonal fluctuations in visitor volume, weather, or perceived crowding.

Future research should deploy larger, probability-based sampling strategies across multiple geographic destinations and adopt longitudinal or multi-seasonal frameworks to track temporal shifts in park usage. Methodologically, subsequent inquiries should combine self-reported survey data with qualitative approaches, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, alongside advanced spatial analytics like GIS tracking and heat-mapping. This integrated approach would offer deeper objective insights into real-time spatial competition and behavioural interactions between residents and tourists in shared destination settings.

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