

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF URBAN OPEN SPACES TO MEET USER NEEDS:
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TWO
NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS IN ABUJA, NIGERIA**

**A report submitted to
the School of Urban and Regional Planning
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning**

**Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada**

April 2013

Copyright © Nnamdi Akubueze, 2013

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to my brother, Late Engineer Obinna Kingsley Michael Akubueze who passed away in a plane crash on the 3rd of June 2012. He was truly a pillar of support and a source of inspiration to me. I thank GOD for the gift of life and the strength to carry on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank my supervisor, Dr. David L. A. Gordon for all the guidance, encouragement and insightful feedback he gave me throughout the duration of this research study. I thank all the professors and staff of the School of Urban and Regional Planning for creating a pleasant and conducive learning environment.

Also, I thank my wife and son for all the support and motivation they gave me throughout the duration of my programme. My profound gratitude goes out to my project reviewer, Mr. Celestine Adigweme. He added a touch of difference to my report through his constructive criticism and excellent reviews.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, siblings, extended family, my classmates, staff of Abuja Geographic Information Systems, the park managers, the questionnaire respondents and everyone who contributed directly or indirectly to this research study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

This report compares two neighbourhood parks in Abuja, Nigeria through an analysis of their use and design characteristics. The comparison was carried out after a detailed assessment of both parks was undertaken. The research study also highlights the importance and benefits of parks and open spaces in our cities, while providing an insight into the way parks and open spaces are used by the residents of Abuja.

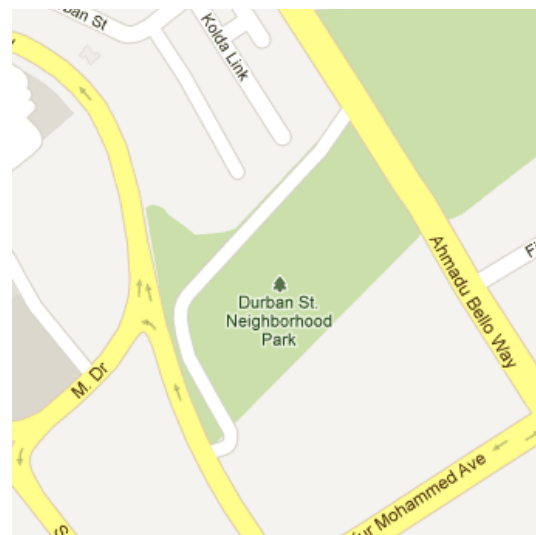
The fundamental research questions to be addressed through this report are:

- Which of the two parks is more attractive to users?
- What planning and design features should be added to both parks to make them even more attractive?

The two parks selected for comparison are the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park and the Maitama Amusement Park. Although both parks have their own unique individual content, layout and format, they were selected due to their similarity in size and close proximity to each other (see the sites outlined in red on satellite imagery attached on page vii).

STUDY LOCATION

The Durban Street Neighborhood Park is located along Ahmadu Bello Way in the Central Area district while the Maitama Amusement Park is located along the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida Way in the Maitama district of Abuja. These two parks are situated within Phase One of the city. Abuja is a new city that was constructed following a 1979 master plan, prepared by International Planning Associates which is a consortium of three American urban design consulting firms. The city officially became Nigeria's new federal capital in 1991.



Map showing the location of both parks in comparison to central Abuja

































RESEARCH METHODOLOGY






The assessment of both parks was carried out using sixteen evaluation criteria formulated through a combination of similar methods developed by Project for Public Spaces Inc. in a handbook for creating successful public spaces (PPS, 2000) and methods developed by the City of Toronto in a study of five inner city parks (Toronto, City 1988). These evaluation criteria are shown in Table ES-1. They are grouped into five main categories, but were analysed individually for proper comparative evaluation of both parks. The data collection methods used in this study include a review of relevant literatures, direct observations, questionnaires, interviews, pictures and maps. Using multiple sources of evidence minimizes researcher bias and re-affirms the validity and reliability of the research study.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analyses of both parks were presented in the form of qualitative tables based on a five point scale system. This point scale system shows instantly the degree to which each park meets the evaluation criteria. The assessment subsequently led to a comparative evaluation of both parks as shown in table ES-1:

Table ES-I: Comparative point scale evaluation of both parks

EVALUATION CRITERIA	MAITAMA AMUSEMENT PARK	DURBAN STREET PARK
CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK		
Surrounding Land Uses		
Natural Environment		
Access & Linkages		
Demographics		
Travel time		
DESIGN FRAMEWORK		
Image & Identity		
Centering		
Comfort & Relaxation		
Intricacy & Coherence		
SOCIAL CONTENT		
Uses & Activities		
Amenities		
SAFETY CONTENT		
Lighting		
Street Views		
ATTRACTIONS		
Food component		
Activity Generators		
Aesthetics & Landscaping		

Legend:  Excellent  Fair
 Very good  Poor
 Good

CONCLUSIONS

Under the contextual framework criteria, the Maitama Amusement Park, which is situated in the midst of a large concentration of residential houses, ranks higher on surrounding land uses because residential developments are known to increase park usage? The Durban Street Neighbourhood Park offers users better accessibility because it is bordered by three arterial roads, compared to the somewhat secluded location of the Maitama Amusement Park. Although both parks possess ample natural environmental attributes, the Maitama Amusement Park's interior space has better interconnectivity due to its clearly delineated and well linked pathways, while the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park has only one clearly delineated pathway.

The two parks fail to address the issue of accessibility for people with mobility concerns. However, this problem is not peculiar to these parks alone, because the Nigerian society has yet to begin to address access needs for people with mobility concerns. The Maitama Amusement Park ranks higher on demographics due to the large concentration of families residing in the various housing estates close to the park, although special events held at the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park at weekends

usually attracts large crowds from various parts of the city.



View of the main entrance into Durban Street Neighbourhood Park



View of the main entrance into Maitama Amusement Park

The design framework criteria indicate that both parks rank equally on image and identity because they make a good first impression on their users. On the other hand, the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park ranks higher on comfort and relaxation with its ample open spaces where users can relax in near seclusion, while the Maitama Amusement Park offers users a more

intricate space which keeps bringing them back to the park. Under the social content criteria, the Maitama Amusement Park clearly ranks higher because it offers users a variety of activities which keeps them active and stimulated while the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park has very few elements that constantly create activities. Also, both parks fail to provide adequate amenities such as washrooms, waste bins and signage.

Under the safety content criteria, the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park evidently has better street views compared to the Maitama Amusement Park which lacks street views, though it enjoys natural surveillance from the housing estates beside it. At night time, both parks are not well illuminated due to insufficient lighting which consequently results in a lot of dark corners within the parks except for the south-west corner of the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park which is always well lit at night.

Finally, the attractions criteria showed that the Maitama Amusement Park has more activity generators while the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park offers users a more interesting food component. Finally, users find both parks to be aesthetically pleasing to them.

Overall, the Maitama Amusement Park was found to be more attractive to users because it ranked higher in most of the evaluation criteria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MAITAMA AMUSEMENT PARK

- Redesign the park entrance for better access and improved traffic flow.
- Improve pedestrian access.
- Create school recreational programmes.
- Provide adequate amenities such as washrooms and waste bins.
- Provide improved maintenance.
- Provide adequate lighting in the park.
- Provide clear views of the park's main entrance from the street.
- Improve the food component.
- Utilize community involvement.

DURBAN STREET NEIGHBOURHOOD PARK

- Provide more activity generators.
- Improve pedestrian access.
- Provide more clearly delineated paved pathways.
- Provide some level of intricacy.
- Provide adequate amenities such as washrooms and waste bins.
- Provide adequate lighting.
- Utilize community involvement.

