



ASSESSING ACTIVITIES AND NEEDS OF  
GENERATION Z YOUTH FOR FUNCTIONAL  
CRITERIA OF URBAN RECREATIONAL PARKS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Generation Z's lifestyle and activities are dictated by the use of internet and technology. Generation Z youth (Gen Z) means youths who were born from 1995 to 2001. The use of excessive time for social media and viewing the screen show that they tend to prefer sedentary pursuits than active activities during leisure time. Their participation in sports or physical activities is low. Participation in outdoor activities is important. Designing an appropriate recreational park offers healthy physical and social activities. This research focuses on the leisure time activities of Gen Z youth and their needs of neighbourhood recreational park. It emphasises on the criteria of recreational park for healthy activities that refer to positive physical, leisure and social activities. The needs of Gen Z youth should be taken into consideration to encourage them to use leisure time in the outdoor spaces in a healthy way. Hence, this study aims to determine the criteria of functional space in recreational parks of Kuala Lumpur by identifying the association between leisure time and the needs of Gen Z youth. Kepong Metropolitan Park and Putrajaya Challenge Park were selected as the case study sites after analysing the criteria for site selection. Three objectives are formulated: (i) To investigate the type and places of activities involved by Gen Z youth during leisure time, (ii) To identify the needs of spaces and activities of Gen Z youth in neighbourhood recreational park, and (iii) To propose the criteria of space for the recreational park based on the preferences and needs of the youth. The scope of this study highlights on youths between 15 to 21 years old who live in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. The data collection was carried out in 2016. Accordingly, a mixed-method research design was applied through self-administered questionnaire survey (n=564). Inventory of physical attributes and semi-structured interview of 50 participants were conducted in the two case study sites. The data from self-administered survey was analysed using SPSS tool to obtain descriptive statistics. Inventory of the physical attributes and interviews were content analysed. The finding shows that most of the Gen Z youth frequently visit the recreational park that is within their neighbourhood and because of the parks' characteristics. Unhealthy social activities among park users were found to be the distractions in visiting the recreational parks. They are dissatisfied with outdated facilities and poor maintenance in the parks. In general, Gen Z youth needs additional activities and organisational programmes, up-to-date play facilities, youth's play spaces and good park maintenance. Providing spaces that meet the needs of Gen Z youth could reduce social problems among them. Overall, the criteria of recreational park desirable for Gen Z are innovative (integration of outdoor play with technology and active recreation), attractive (surrounded by natural setting) and functional (well-functioning facilities). These findings provide a foundation for an improved understanding on the needs of Gen Z youth in the recreational parks which can assist in future planning. Insight gained from this study would be useful for researchers, youth organisations and ministry of youth and sport in managing youth's programme, as well as practitioners and authorities that are seeking to improve healthy living lifestyle among future youth generation.

## خلاصة البحث

تملي نمط حياة جيل وأنشطته من خلال استخدام الإنترنت والتكنولوجيا. كان شباب الجيل (Gen Z) (Z) يعني الشباب الذين وُلدوا في الفترة من 1995 إلى 2001. إن استخدام الوقت المفرط لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ومشاهدة الشاشة يظهر أنهم يميلون إلى تفضيل ممارسة التمارين الرياضية المستقرة بدلاً من الأنشطة النشطة خلال أوقات الفراغ ومشاركتهم في الرياضة أو الأنشطة البدنية منخفضة. إن المشاركة في الأنشطة الخارجية مهمة، وتصميم حديقة ترفيهية مناسبة يوفر أنشطة بدنية واجتماعية صحية. يركز هذا البحث على أنشطة أوقات الفراغ لشباب Gen Z واحتياجاتهم من حديقة ترفيهية في الحي السكني. إنه يركز على معايير الحديقة الترفيهية للأنشطة الصحية التي تشير إلى الأنشطة البدنية والجسدية والاجتماعية الإيجابية. ينبغي أن تؤخذ احتياجات شباب Gen Z في الاعتبار لتشجيعهم على استخدام وقت الفراغ في الأماكن الخارجية بطريقة صحية. وبالتالي، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد معايير المكان الوظيفي في المتنزهات الترفيهية في كوالا لامبور من خلال تحديد العلاقة بين وقت الفراغ واحتياجات الشباب. Gen Z تم اختيار Kepong Metropolitan Park و Putrajaya Challenge Park كمواقع لدراسة الحالة بعد تحليل معايير اختيار الموقع. صيغت ثلاثة أهداف: (1) التحقيق في نوع وأماكن الأنشطة التي يشارك فيها شباب Gen Z أثناء وقت الفراغ، (2) تحديد احتياجات المساحات وأنشطة شباب Gen Z في المتنزه الترفيهي الحي، و (3) إلى اقتراح معايير الفضاء للحديقة الترفيهية على أساس تفضيلات واحتياجات الشباب. يسلط الضوء على نطاق هذه الدراسة على الشباب الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 15 إلى 21 سنة الذين يعيشون في كوالالمبور وبوتراجايا. تم إجراء جمع البيانات في عام 2016. وفقاً لذلك، تم تطبيق تصميم بحث مختلط من خلال استبيان استبيان ذاتي (عدد = 564). وأجريت جرد من الصفات الجسدية ومقابلة شبه منظم من 50 مشاركاً في موقعين دراسة الحالة. تم تحليل البيانات من الاستطلاع الذاتي باستخدام أداة SPSS للحصول على إحصائيات وصفية. تم تحليل جرد السمات والمقابلات المادية. يظهر الاكتشاف أن معظم شباب Gen Z يزورون المتنزه الترفيهي الموجود في الجوار بشكل متكرر وبسبب خصائص الحدائق. تم العثور على الأنشطة الاجتماعية غير الصحية بين مستخدمي الحديقة لتكون الانحرافات في زيارة المتنزهات الترفيهية. إنهم غير راضين عن المرافق التي عفا عليها الزمن وسوء الصيانة في الحدائق. بشكل عام، يحتاج شباب Gen Z إلى أنشطة وبرامج تنظيمية إضافية، ومرافق حديثة للعب، ومساحات لعب للشباب وصيانة جيدة للمتنزه. توفير المساحات التي تلبي احتياجات Gen Z youth يمكن أن

تقلل من المشاكل الاجتماعية بينهم. بشكل عام، تعد معايير المنتزهات الترفيهية المرغوبة في Gen Z مبتكرة (دمج اللعب في الهواء الطلق مع التكنولوجيا والترفيه النشط) وجذابة (محاظة بالمناظر الطبيعية) والوظيفية (مرافق تعمل بشكل جيد). توفر هذه النتائج أساسًا لفهم أفضل لاحتياجات شباب Gen Z في الحدائق الترفيهية التي يمكن أن تساعد في التخطيط المستقبلي. ستكون البصيرة المكتسبة من هذه الدراسة مفيدة للباحثين ومنظمات الشباب ووزارة الشباب والرياضة في إدارة برنامج الشباب، وكذلك الممارسين والسلطات التي تسعى إلى تحسين نمط حياة صحي بين جيل الشباب في المستقبل.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment)

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

This study centres on the criteria of neighbourhood recreational park for youths' healthy activities. The type and places of activities that Generation Z youth (Gen Z) involved in during leisure time are investigated. The first section discusses the background of research, which provides an overview of the major topics that including the background of Gen Z youth, their leisure time needs and needs of recreational spaces. Section 1.3 discusses the common problems of Gen Z youths' leisure time activities that lead to negative effects towards their health. The next section reveals the research questions, aim, and objectives of the study. Then, this chapter elaborates the significance of the study, explains the scope of the study, defines the operational terms and explains the thesis structure in detail.

### **1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

This research focuses on Generation Z youth (Gen Z) as the unit of analysis of the study. Referring to Blakemore and Choudhury (2006), social, emotional, and mental development needs are important development between the ages of 15 to 24 years old. During this stage, youth have their own choice, know about their needs and have the ability to make the decision. The selection of Gen Z youth is mainly due to the changes in their leisure time needs compared to the previous generation.

This study focuses on the leisure time needs of Gen Z youth. Gen Z youths are those born between the years 1995 to 2001, and are the first generation of the 21st century (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2008; Grail Research, 2011; Sladek & Grabinger,



2014). Their character is different from any previous generation in terms of how they act, think and work. Gen Z is characterized as 'Digital Natives' and known as being tech savvy. It means that they always follow the development of information and communications technology (ICT) and learn new things in many ways based on their needs (McCrindle and Wolfinger, 2008). They have been exposed to the widespread use of the Internet and electronic entertainment that is part of their daily activities. In other words, Gen Z has never experienced life without technology.

Participation in leisure activities in public spaces is known to be an important determinant of health and well-being. Leisure activities among youth are diverse and play an important role in forming their self-perceptions. Travlou (2007) suggests that youth need access to the outdoor environment to support their healthy development. Youth who practices outdoor leisure activities could have the opportunities to form their identity, interact with peers, be healthy and have lesser behavioural problems. It shows that the engagement with the public domain such as parks and recreational areas is an important part in the aspect of growth development and offers a key environment for them too.

Many public spaces offer self-identity development and independence among youth. However, it depends on the choice of places among the youth that offer social activities for them. Thompson (2008) states that youth need places to be comfortable with friends and places to 'be oneself', or be by themselves. . In addition, youths describe the outdoor and public spaces that they prefer based on social characteristics such as type of friends they interact and ways to communicate without interference. On the other hand, the places they dislike are places that lack physical attributes such as dirty, smelly, and full of litter and others. Nonetheless, even though physically attractive places are essential; the places that are socially attractive are the most

important places because youth prefers to have an active engagement with the outdoor environment.

A recreational park is an alternative place to promote outdoor leisure activities among Gen Z youth. This type of city public spaces is an ideal place for them. Epstein et al. (2006) highlighted that youth prefer parks that are close to their neighbourhood. According to Duzenli et al. (2010), park in an urban area is one of the preferred places for youth to gather with friends, being alone and learning other than city centre like the shopping mall, school, and home environment. The lifestyle pattern of city residents has changed due to the aggressive development; thus, attention is given to outdoor entertainment and recreation to relieve the stress. Moreover, the desire to enjoy and have fun at the young age is very high. Thus, if a public space does not meet the needs of youth, their presence in the park may be lower. The effects will increase sedentary activities such as playing video games, watching television as well as the use of computer and gadget.

Additionally, research on youth's leisure time needs has evolved over time. Studies of youth and the outdoor leisure activities demonstrate that trend on the type of youths' outdoor environment and their needs, and researches concerning the subject matter have changed over time. The evolutions of studies on the leisure time behaviour and needs of youth can be seen during the 1990s, which is the era of Generation X and followed by studies on Generation Y youth before 2010. Most of the studies were focused on the pattern of spending leisure time, benefits of outdoor leisure and physical activity towards youth's development, as well as influence factors to being outdoors and others.

Besides, the majority of studies on youth that started in the year 2010 referred to Gen Z youth, where the studies on youth leisure time were becoming more specific

and detailed. For example, the influence of recreational facilities towards leisure-time physical activity, public space design that influence community leisure, and demographic characteristics and environmental attributes associated with youth physical activity levels. The research from this period proves that the limitation on youths' outdoor leisure activity convey negative effects towards their health (Drygas et al., 2008; Teo et al., 2014), growth development (Micali et al., 2014) and attitudes (Mohamed, 2015; Sedighi et al., 2016). Hence, this study embarked on identifying the relationship between leisure time and the needs of Gen Z youth.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENTS**

In Malaysia, it is suggested that sedentary behaviour among youth is increasing. According to the Malaysian Youth Index 2015, the sedentary behaviour among youth was higher (93.29%) than physical activity (68.74%). As a result, there is an increasing number of youth classified as being overweight and obese. National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS II) conducted in 2011 reported that 30% of the population who are Malaysians, aged 18 years and older are currently overweight. The Ministry of Health Malaysia (2010) stated that one of the causes of youth becoming overweight and obese is low physical activity or not exercising at all. Various researchers state that environmental changes also promote indoor activities and the use of less energy have an impact on weight gain and obesity (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Janssen et al., 2005; Ozdemir & Yilmaz, 2008; Wolch et al., 2011).

Furthermore, lower participation rates in active activity among youth will lead towards unhealthy development. Several studies indicate that the low level of leisure activities are due to the contribution of modern technologies (Biddle et al., 2009; Mohamad Idham et al., 2014; Thomée et al., 2015), social influences (Wight et al.,

2009), lack of time, lack of access and safety issues in public space (Kaczynski et al., 2008; McCormack et al., 2010; Ries et al., 2009). The electronic entertainments being part of urban life among youth nowadays and most of them prefer to divert and engage themselves in electronic devices rather than enjoying outdoor activities. The decline in leisure activities and practicing sedentary behaviour leads to non-communicable disease (NCD) and also increase the issues of overweight and obesity among teenagers (Gonçalves et al., 2012; Micali et al., 2014).

The recreational park is one of the favourite public space among Malaysian to spend leisure activities where they are able to access without any entrance fee (Danis et al., 2014; Ngesan et al., 2013). However, many do not appreciate and use these facilities properly and wisely. Sadly, youth are among the user group that are involved in unhealthy activities such as loitering culture, illegal racing, vandalism, and graffiti. Dalip (2001) reported that the Kuala Lumpur City Council and other government and private-sector agencies spent RM2.4 million on repairing and replacing facilities damaged by vandals.

Moreover, Sharifudin (2015) also mentioned that the damage of the exercise equipment was caused by an act of vandalism. This indicates the lacking civic culture and poor sense of responsibility among the youths. Lack of appropriate recreational space for youth that meets their needs and preferences will contribute to social problems (Duzenli et al., 2010; Yazid et al., 2015). Therefore, the recreational parks need to be constantly updated to minimize boredom and prevent an increase in the percentage of unhealthy activities. Unhealthy activities that are not addressed will become serious issues and recreational park will be an insecure place. For instance, the recreational park becomes a place for drug addicts, fornicate and many more.

In fact, the recreational behaviour, obesity, and built environment are inter-related. Growing number of research have focused on the criteria of park design and how it influences youth to participate in outdoor recreation (Kaczynski et al., 2008; McCormack et al., 2010; Ries et al., 2009). These studies highlighted that the low level of physical activity and youths' presence in the recreational park was due to the criteria of the park that failed to match and fulfil their needs in terms of features and facilities, safety, accessibility and other. This scenario generates ideas to create outdoor recreation space with the design criteria based on youths' leisure time needs for their satisfaction. Therefore, the authorities, designers, and planners should pay attention to these issues to identify the factors that can make the recreational park become an attractive place and fulfil Gen Z youths' needs.

There are a number of studies on youth research, which relates to the youth's leisure and recreational activity. Most of the current research through many international studies on Gen Z from year 2010 to 2016 focuses on the aspect of workspace (Berkup, 2014; Tulgan, 2015), business (Grail Research, 2011), issues and challenges (Singh, 2014), personality (Sladek and Grabinger, 2014) and physical activity (Biber, 2013). Throughout the past 10 years, the concern of the issues of leisure time needs among youth has been given much attention. However, it is found that very little studies were done in Malaysia specifically focusing on Gen Z youth.

Growing number of Malaysian studies on leisure activities among youth suggest that the preference of youth in the recreational park was influenced by the criteria of the park itself (Abd Latif et al., 2011; Ngesan et al., 2013; Rosilawati Zainol, 2011). For that reason, this study attempts to address this evidence gap, firstly by understanding the leisure time needs of youth and their outdoor space preferences. Secondly, by investigating the needs of youth towards the recreational park, the

current design criteria could be identified. The insight gained from this study would be useful for researchers, parks and recreation practitioner, authority seeking to improve the living quality from the recreational aspects among Gen Z youth in Malaysia.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following are questions posed in the study. They are derived from the concerns raised in the problem statements.

1. What are the needs of youth in relation to their leisure time activities?
2. What are the preferences of outdoor spaces for youth to conduct the leisure time activity?
3. Do they need the recreational parks as leisure space?
4. How does youth utilize the recreational park during their leisure time?
5. What are the criteria of space of recreational park according to needs of youth?

#### **1.5 RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of this research is to determine the criteria of space in the recreational park of Kuala Lumpur by identifying the association between leisure time and the needs of Gen Z youth.

#### **1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To investigate the type and places of activities involved by Gen Z youth during leisure time.

- 2- To identify the needs of spaces and activities of Gen Z youth in neighbourhood recreational park.
- 3- To propose the criteria of space for the recreational park based on the preferences and needs of the youth.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section reviews the theories that were implemented by other researchers in their research to understand the study about the needs of youth and outdoor space preferences. Three theories or models are selected related to this study. The theories are, Gibson's theory of affordances, Everyday Life Information Needs (ELIS) and Quality Neighbourhood Parks Criteria (QNPC).

### **1.7.1 Gibson's theory of affordances**

Gibson's theory (1979) is an approach that commonly used by perceptual and environmental psychologists in their research since 1991. This theory could be used to investigate the functional properties of the environment and the response of an individual's psychological or behavioural towards the environment. The term affordance was used by Gibson as to explain the environment in the context and through the vocabulary of "activities" (Duzenli et al., 2009). Affordance is defined by Gibson (1979) "*as an action possibility formed by the relationship between an agent and its environment*". Fajen and Turvey (2003) stated that among the environmental features considered as "affordance" are those that match the individual's needs and assist them in their duties. In other words, someone may perceive the affordances for something that will give importance and benefit to them. Two main principles of Gibson's theory of affordances are: (i) Individuals and the environment are

inseparable, and (ii) Individuals perceive the environment directly without going through a mental process. According to Duzenli et al. (2009) and Latifiyan and Salavati (2015), Gibson's theory suggests seeking the functional meaning of the environment and environmental affordances that explain the different behaviours exhibited. It means that this method used to explain the functional meaning of youth's environments and describe the relation between the functional features and the use of the environment.

Gibson's theory of affordances is a useful method that could be used in studying functional meanings of environments for youth group. Previously, this theory was used by Duzenli et al. (2009) and Latifiyan and Salavati (2015) in their study which investigates the design of open space for the youth by considering their needs. Study by Duzenli et al. (2009) found that city centre is mainly preferred by youth (shopping, recreation and being with friends), followed by school environment (trying new activities and obtaining new information), home environment (being alone, being with friends) and city parks (being with close friends, being alone and learning). Based on the finding from Latifiyan and Salavati (2015), the result shows that the amphitheatre is the most favourable place as this open space allows youths to provide the affordances of being with friends and meeting new friends.

### **1.7.2 Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS)**

Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) is a model developed by Reijo Savolainen (1995). This model refers to the type of information seeking that "people employ to orient themselves in daily life or to solve problems not directly connected with the performance of occupational tasks" (Savolainen, 1995). In other words, the model explains information behaviour related to people's private lives but excluded the