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INSTITUTE FOR PHYSICAL
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ProjectPARK



ProjectPARK

Understanding park features that optimise visitation, park-based physical activity and social interaction among children, teens and older adults (2017-2020).

Why are park features important?

Neighbourhood parks that are well designed and maintained, and that have diverse facilities, play a critical role in providing opportunities for people of all ages to be active and interact with others – activities that are essential to good health. Unfortunately, many neighbourhood parks are not well-used, especially by particular age groups. For example, our research has shown that older adults and teens are the least frequent visitors to our parks.¹

Modest improvements to parks can result in significant increases in park visits and physical activity,² and can be a cost-effective way of increasing physical activity.³

It is therefore critical to understand which features are most important to include in future park (re)developments to ensure optimal use and health gains by all age groups.

Modest improvements to parks can result in significant increases in park visits and physical activity.

Description of ProjectPARK

This 3-year project (2017-2020) identified the relative importance of park features that attract children (8-12yrs), teens (13-18yrs) and older adults (65+ years) to visit parks, and to be active and social during their time in the park.

The research included:

- Walk-along interviews with children (n=30), teens (n=34) and older adults (n=30) in nine parks of varying size and amenity located in diverse socio-economic status areas of Melbourne, Australia. While walking through one of these parks, participants spoke about features that were important to them and features that could be changed or added to enhance their park visits and increase their active and social park use.^{4,5}
- Two surveys with children, teens and older adults. In the first survey, participants (752 across the 3 age groups) rated about 42 different images of park features according to how much the feature made them want to visit, be active and be social in the park. In the second survey, participants (739 across the 3 age groups) were presented with a series of choices to make between sets of parks with different park features based on which of the parks would encourage them to be active in the park (Adaptive Choice-Based Conjoint tasks). Teens and older adults also completed these tasks in relation to features that would encourage them to visit and be social in the park.
- Interviews with 23 key stakeholders employed in park design, planning and management. The interviews explored factors that contribute to decision-making and design of new parks, and potential strategies for translating evidence regarding important park characteristics into policy and planning practice.⁶

References

1. Veitch, J., et al., How active are people in metropolitan parks? An observational study of park visitation in Australia. *BMC Public Health*, 2015. 15, 610.
2. Veitch, J., et al., The REVAMP natural experiment study: the impact of a play-scape installation on park visitation and park-based physical activity. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 2018. 15(1), 10.
3. Lal, A., et al., The impact of a park refurbishment in a low socioeconomic area on physical activity: a cost-effectiveness study. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 2019. 16(1), 26.
4. Veitch, J., et al., Exploring children's views on important park features: a qualitative study using walk-along interviews. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2020. 7, 4625.
5. Veitch, J., et al., Designing parks for older adults: A qualitative study using walk-along interviews. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*, 2020. 54, 126768.
6. Veitch, J., et al., Increasing translation of research evidence for optimal park design: a qualitative study with stakeholders. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 2020. 17(1), 49.



Overall summary of findings from all studies – park features that encourage parks visits, physical activity and social interaction.

Most important features for:

► CHILDREN

For children, an adventure playground, and physically challenging and fun play equipment such as giant slides, interactive areas (e.g. touch-sensor illuminated statues), obstacle courses and climbing structures were most important.

For physical activity in parks, sports goals and obstacle courses were more important for boys, and swings and water play areas were more important for girls.

Most important features for:

► TEENS

Teens tended to prefer park features that were large, adventurous, and challenging, such as large swings, giant slides, obstacle/parkour area to climb on, outdoor fitness equipment and long flying foxes.

For physical activity in parks, sports goals and large grassy open space were more important for males, and outdoor fitness equipment was more important for females.

Most important features for:

► OLDER ADULTS

For older adults, walking paths, a peaceful and relaxed setting, and shady trees were the top 3 features for encouraging all outcomes – visitation, park-based physical activity and social interaction.

For physical activity in parks, water features were more important for males, and grassy open space and well maintained grass were more important for females.

My perfect park –

‘Slides, monkey bars, flying foxes. Oh, it’s a massive climbing frame, it’s like five sections to get up to, five massive slides that go down, they’re waterslides’

– Female, 9 years

My perfect park –

‘Long slide, it’s got a long slide, because small ones don’t really phase me anymore because I’m bigger now... Big long flying fox because I do remember a park that went to, it has two probably as wide as this here flying fox and went straight across.... Some barbeque picnic areas, you could have one here or something. You could have birthday parties’

– Male, 16 years

My perfect park –

‘Well-developed trees I think is an important thing. I think you need to have interesting spaces to walk around, so you’ve got to have paths and zones leading in different directions. I think you’ve got to have a diversity of things to look at, you know like war memorials and sports paths and so on. And I think probably most of all you’ve got to have reasonable sized spaces where people can just lie out and feel no one’s there’

– Male, 69 years

Study Findings

CHILDREN 8-12 YEARS

A study with children 8-12 years to identify the park features they consider to be most important for their park visitation, park-based physical activity and social interaction.

TOP
10

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO VISIT PARKS¹

- 1 Large adventure playground
- 2 Giant slides (i.e. long curly slide)
- 3 Interactive areas (e.g. touch-sensor illuminated statues)
- 4 Obstacle course or parkour area to climb on
- 5 Long flying fox
- 6 Things to climb (i.e. climbing structures)
- 7 Water play area
- 8 Long slide
- 9 Large swings (i.e. 360° swing)
- 10 Trees for climbing

TOP
10

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE SOCIAL INTERACTION IN PARKS¹

- 1 Large adventure playground
- 2 Interactive areas (e.g. touch-sensor illuminated statues)
- 3 Obstacle course or parkour area to climb on
- 4 Giant slides (i.e. long curly slide)
- 5 Water play area
- 6 Things to climb (i.e. climbing structures)
- 7 Table tennis table
- 8 Café
- 9 Long slide
- 10 Swings you can use in a group (i.e. swings in a circle)

¹Based on photo ratings only ²Particularly for girls ³Particularly for boys

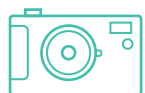
TOP
10

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE IN PARKS

- 1 Long flying fox
- 2 Large adventure playground
- 3 Lots of trees for climbing
- 4 Large round swings²
- 5 Obstacle course or parkour area to climb on³
- 6 Large climbing equipment
- 7 Outdoor fitness equipment
- 8 Giant slides
- 9 Sports goals³
- 10 Water play area²



30 completed a walk-along interview in a park to discuss park features



272 rated 42 photos of different park features



252 completed a survey to identify the relative importance of park features

For all outcomes, children valued a large adventure playground and equipment that provided opportunities for climbing and physically challenging play

'Well I think I'd make the zip climb and the flying foxes a bit longer. Maybe the swings higher up from the ground because they're a bit low' - Girl, 9 years

For further details please see:

Veitch, J., et al., Exploring children's views on important park features: a qualitative study using walk-along interviews. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2020. 7, 4625.

Study Findings

TEENS
13-18 YEARS

A study with teens 13-18 years to identify the park features they consider to be most important for their park visitation, park-based physical activity and social interaction.

**TOP
10**

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE TEENS TO VISIT PARKS

- 1 Large swings (i.e. 360° swing)
- 2 Large grassy open space
- 3 Café²
- 4 Sports goals¹
- 5 Trampolines²
- 6 Quiet, private place to hang out
- 7 Outdoor fitness equipment
- 8 Giant slides²
- 9 Obstacle course or parkour area to climb on¹
- 10 Table tennis tables¹

**TOP
10**

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE SOCIAL INTERACTION IN PARKS

- 1 Café
- 2 BBQ/picnic area
- 3 Sports courts (netball or basketball)
- 4 Traditional swings³
- 5 Large grassy open space
- 6 Sports goals¹
- 7 Long flying fox²
- 8 Interactive areas (e.g. touch-sensor illuminated statues)
- 9 Trampolines
- 10 Giant slides

¹Particularly for males ²Particularly for females ³Swings were more important for females than males, particularly group swings in a circle

**TOP
10**

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE TEENS TO BE ACTIVE IN PARKS

- 1 Sports courts (netball or basketball)
- 2 Large grassy open space¹
- 3 Outdoor fitness equipment²
- 4 Walking/cycling paths
- 5 Long flying fox
- 6 Sports goals¹
- 7 Large swings (i.e. 360° swing)
- 8 Obstacle course or parkour area to climb on
- 9 Trampolines
- 10 Large things to climb (i.e. climbing structures)



34 completed a walk-along interview in a park to discuss park features



222 rated 40 photos of different park features



244 completed a survey to identify the relative importance of park features

In all three phases, teens tended to prefer park features that were large, adventurous, and challenging, such as a long flying fox

'Well there's not like any basketball courts or anything. Like so they could put that there because then a lot of people would come' - Male, 14 years

Study Findings

OLDER ADULTS 65+ YEARS

A study with older adults 65+ years to identify the park features they consider to be most important for their park visitation, park-based physical activity and social interaction.

TOP
10

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE OLDER ADULTS TO VISIT PARKS

- 1 Shady trees
- 2 Peaceful and relaxed setting
- 3 Walking paths
- 4 Birdlife
- 5 Gardens, landscaping and plants
- 6 Water feature like a pond, lake or creek
- 7 Café
- 8 Grassy open space
- 9 BBQ/picnic areas
- 10 Signage, information maps

TOP
10

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE SOCIAL INTERACTION IN PARKS

- 1 Peaceful and relaxed setting²
- 2 Shady trees
- 3 Walking paths¹
- 4 BBQ/picnic areas
- 5 Café
- 6 Birdlife
- 7 Gardens, landscaping and plants
- 8 Water feature like a pond, lake or creek
- 9 Built picnic shelter
- 10 Quiet, secluded seating area

¹Particularly for females ²Particularly for males

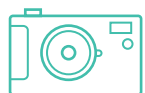
TOP
10

FEATURES THAT ENCOURAGE OLDER ADULTS TO BE ACTIVE IN PARKS

- 1 Walking paths
- 2 Shady trees
- 3 Peaceful and relaxed setting
- 4 Birdlife
- 5 Gardens, landscaping and plants
- 6 Water feature like a pond, lake or creek²
- 7 Grassy open space¹
- 8 Signage, information maps
- 9 Well maintained grass¹
- 10 BBQ/picnic areas



30 completed a walk-along interview in a park to discuss park features



258 rated 42 photos of different park features



243 completed a survey to identify the relative importance of park features

Walking paths, a peaceful and relaxed setting, and shady trees were the top three features for older adults across all outcomes

*'I think paths are important.
As I get older, that's important'*
- Female, 78 years

For further details please see:

Veitch, J., et al., Designing parks for older adults: A qualitative study using walk-along interviews. Urban Forestry and Urban Greening, 2020. 54, 126768.

Stakeholders

Key findings from interviews with 23 stakeholders (65% male), representing companies and government organisations located in urban and regional areas of Victoria and Queensland, Australia are summarised below. Most stakeholders (14) held planning and management roles; 4 were involved in design and 5 held roles that combined planning, management and design. Nine were involved in policy development.

Factors influencing decisions to (re)develop parks and park design:

- Overarching policy and strategic planning documents
- Condition of existing parks
- Availability of land and characteristics of site
- Desire to meet evolving needs of the community

Current use of evidence in policy and planning:

- Evidence currently used includes: academic evidence, evidence collected by their own organisations and evidence distributed by other non-academic organisations

Barriers to using evidence to inform park design:

- Time and cost constraints: exacerbated by deadlines and short time frames
- Difficulties locating and accessing relevant research: exacerbated by lack of skills and knowledge of how to find relevant research and insufficient access to databases/academic literature
- Lack of research relevant to real-world settings

Ways to enhance evidence-based park design:

- Provide more accessible research, communicated in a timely, succinct and informative format. Such as:
 - short executive summary reports
 - infographics
 - regular research updates and dedicated research databases
 - conference presentations and targeted workshops within workplaces
- Develop research partnerships between research academics/institutions and park developers/planners

'So we need to kind of have the relationships first ... not with individuals necessarily, but with, I guess, faculties so that we can then not only share information backwards and forwards a bit better, but we can actually work and plan those sort of research projects more collaboratively. If we've got particular research needs then the universities and the students can be undertaking research that's very targeted to a real-world problem.' – Manager Visitor Plann



For further details please see:

Veitch, J., et al., Increasing translation of research evidence for optimal park design: a qualitative study with stakeholders. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 2020. 17(1), 49.



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