Some Different Meanings Attached to a City Park and Community Gardens

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Abstract: How do people use and value urban open spaces such as city parks and community gardens? Are the values attached to open spaces by different groups such as users and non-users similar or different? Do officials charged with managing urban recreation have the same perceptions of the benefits of open spaces as do city residents who use or pass by them? These questions formed the basis of a comparative study of an adjacent city park and community gardens in Sacramento during 1982–83. The study compares the attitudes of users, non-users, and government officials toward a public park and user-managed community gardens. The historical development, planning and design process, management and maintenance, governmental perceptions, site use, and user and non-user attitudes associated with each site are compared. The different meanings attached by users, non-users, and government officials to both sites are contrasted. In conclusion, a conceptual framework for understanding the social context of parks versus gardens in cities is presented.

Urban open space is an important but still poorly understood part of the landscape of cities. While most cities and towns have open space systems as part of their officially zoned land use, relatively little is yet known about the social and psychological importance of different types of open spaces such as parks, playgrounds, and community gardens (Ulrich and Addoms 1981; Kaplan 1983).

To better understand the different uses of, and user attitudes toward traditional and alternative forms of open space, a comparative study was conducted of an adjacent community open space and public park in the downtown area of Sacramento, California. The purpose of the study was to determine the roles “garden” and “park” play in city life. The results of this research are summarized by discussing the historical development of the two open spaces, their current use, and the differences in the attitudes of users, non-users, and governmental officials toward both spaces. Policy and design implications are discussed for both study sites as well as for future urban open space design. In conclusion, the different conceptual meanings attached by users to “garden” and “park” are examined in order to point out how future urban open space can be designed to accommodate human activities and purposes.

Past Research on Urban Parks and Community Open Spaces

Urban parks and publicly-provided open spaces have come under criticism as sometimes failing to serve their intended purposes and users (Carr et al., forthcoming; Heckscher et al. 1977; Jackson 1981; Hester 1984). Past research has documented the failure of traditional playgrounds (Hayward et al. 1974), the non-use of some neighborhood and downtown parks (Francis 1986; Nager and Wentworth 1976), and the problems of traffic on residential streets (Appleby 1981). At the same time, the importance of nearby or home-based recreation has been recognized by some researchers (Brower and Williamson 1974).

In response to the problems with traditional open spaces, new forms of open spaces have been created by their users (Bassett 1979; Stearn 1981). User-developed and managed parks are now established as an alternative open space system in several cities such as Boston, San Francisco, and New York (Fox et al. 1985). An earlier study of the attitudes of users toward community open spaces found them to be highly valued by their users and neighborhood residents (Francis et al. 1984b).

Past studies of urban open space have focused primarily on particular
Gardening activity such as hoeing was the most observed activity in the gardens as shown in this view of a gardener in Ron Mandella Garden. (Photograph by Jack Spruance). See “Some Different Meanings . . .” on facing page.
settings such as playgrounds and parks or on issues such as economics (Kitch-
Little comparative research has evaluated different open space types such as neighborhood and regional parks, playgrounds, and schoolyards (Francis 1987b).

The present study is an initial attempt to present empirical evidence and theoretical reflection about the role open space plays in everyday urban life. Past research has identified some critical issues in need of further examination. For example, safety has been identified as a barrier to people's use of urban space (Nager and Wentworth 1976; Brower et al. 1983).

Gardening, according to a recent Gallup Poll, is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in the United States. Gardening has been found to produce important psychological benefits such as increased self-esteem (Kaplan 1973; Worthen 1975; Halkett 1978; Lewis 1979), while user control of open space has been identified as important in order for people to gain satisfaction from using a place (Carr and Lynch 1981; Lynch 1981).

A secondary intent of the study is to better understand the values and meanings that different users attach to public open space. Despite much research on urban open space, little is known about how different types of people value places (Francis 1983).

Community Open Space Development in Sacramento, California

Like some cities in the United States and Europe, Sacramento has developed an alternative park system of community-built and managed open space projects. In 1982, a total of 23 community garden sites were identified in Sacramento. In comparison, the City of Sacramento has 69 city-owned parks and playgrounds. Currently, there are approximately one-third as many community developed gardens as city parks in Sacramento. Previous research in New York City (Francis et al. 1984b; Fox et al. 1985) and California (Menninger 1977) found similar percentages of community initiated projects.

Methods
The study employed a multiple-method, post occupancy evaluation (POE) approach. The methodology was based on previous research on buildings and residential areas (Cooper 1975; Sommer 1983), streets (Eubank-Ahrens 1985; van Andel 1989), plazas (Joarand and Neill 1978; Whyte 1980), marketplaces (Seamon and Nordin 1980), and community open spaces (Francis et al. 1984b)
Methods utilized included archival research; behavior mapping using an overlay mapping system which noted use of the gardens and the park over a seven-month period in 1983; in-depth interviews with garden organizers and park officials; in-depth, open-ended interviews with users of the park and gardens; a survey of non-users of the park and gardens who live and work in the area; and photo and plan documentation of the sites. The results of the behavior mapping were summarized by total number of users and type of activities. Interviews with users and non-users were content-analyzed and simple percentage summaries were prepared. The discussion and analysis are based on these summaries.

Selection of Study Sites
After site visits to several of the community open space and city-owned park projects in Sacramento, Fremont Park, and Ron Mandella/Southside Gardens in downtown Sacramento were selected as the study sites. Site selection criteria consisted of size, age of project, and access.

Study Sites
Fremont Park: Fremont Park, a one-square block City of Sacramento Park, is located between 15th and 16th and P and Q Streets just south of the downtown and governmental center on the edge of downtown Sacramento (Figure 1). Fremont Park is one of the original Sutter Grant open spaces in the city, dating back to the days of Sutter’s Fort and the California gold rush. The park today appears much as it was when originally developed, with a large lawn area and many shade trees.

Fremont Park has been renovated several times. Fremont Park was redesigned and renovated by the city for $18,000 in 1974; this project included removal of the path system, and the construction of a playground and modern irrigation system. The playground was redesigned once again in 1977 for $22,000. In 1984, due to community requests for minor improvements, the Parks Department added new benches, barbeque facilities, and a drinking fountain at a total cost of $6,000. In 1985, city staff estimated the annual maintenance cost of the park to be $15,000.

Ron Mandella and Southside Gardens: Located on a block of almost equal size to Fremont Park immediately across the street, Ron Mandella and Southside are community gardens developed gradually by users since 1974. Informal gardening on the vacant site initiated the projects. In 1974, members of the Ecology Action Information Center received permission from the landowner—the State of California—to develop a temporary garden on the site. A sign was posted asking people interested in gardening to contact the Ecology Center. In February and March of 1974, CETA workers and neighborhood volunteers cleared the lots of debris and added water lines and soil conditioner. In March 1974, Ecology Action Center signed a two-year lease with the state to formalize the use of the site for community gardening. In 1980, the Ecology Action Center was disbanded and the gardeners voted to incorporate and formalize as a group with a board of directors and a chairperson.

From 1974 to 1985, the two gardens evolved into well-established community open spaces. Plots were laid out. A core group of gardeners returns each year; other plots are transferred to new people from year to year. In 1985, Mandella Garden contained 65 plots and a large community gardening area. The garden group consisted of 60 members. Southside Garden contained 56 plots with 39 gardeners. The two gardens developed separate groups, with each adopting
different management styles. Mandella, the larger of the two, evolved into a highly structured place with a sitting area, compost facilities, and formalized garden plots. Like the garden, the group was well-organized and utilized a hierarchical decision-making structure.

In contrast, Southside Garden developed into an informal garden with a less structured physical layout and open-ended style of decision-making. In 1985, a more formal structure was established and a board of directors was voted into place. Technical assistance and educational training were provided to the gardens by the University of California Master Gardener's program, a group of volunteer gardening experts.

The ownership of the land has remained under the control of the State of California. Ownership of the garden sites was transferred to the Capitol Area Development Authority (CADA) in 1978, a private/public redevelopment authority established to guide the revitalization of downtown Sacramento. CADA leases the land to the gardening groups for $1 per year with the groups responsible for maintenance, insurance, and all utility costs.

The permanency of the two gardens has remained a critical issue for the gardeners since 1974. Faced with only two-year renewable leases, gardeners have attempted to arrange a more permanent land use designation for the gardens. When CADA threatened to reclaim the site for housing or parking, a California Assemblyman arranged to have the property changed from residential use to state office building designation.

According to CADA, the site is not a prime location for a new state office building within the next five years, but could be developed for parking or other office-related uses.

Archival research and interviews with group organizers revealed that the development cost for the two sites was approximately $2,200; total annual maintenance costs amounted to approximately $550. Funding for development and maintenance was cov-

Figure 1. Aerial photograph of Fremont Park and Mandella/Southside Gardens in downtown Sacramento showing study sites and surrounding land uses. Photograph by Mark Francis.

Figure 2. Overview of lawn and large trees in Fremont Park. Eating lunch was observed as a popular activity in the park. Photograph by Jack Spruance.
Use of Park and Gardens

Use of the gardens and park reflects the population of the surrounding neighborhood. The blocks containing the park and gardens are on the edge of the redevelopment area of the downtown and include numerous parking lots provided for employees who work in nearby state office buildings. To the east, west, and south is a changing residential neighborhood composed of low-income families, some young professionals, and office and industrial uses.

Use of the park and gardens was behavior-mapped for fifty periods between the months of February, March, April, May, September, and October 1983. An activity mapping technique developed for downtown public spaces was utilized (Francis 1984a). (Figure 5 shows the spatial location of all observed uses for the February to May observation periods, while Table 2 summarizes the activities observed during all the observation times.)

During the fifty observation periods, the behavior mapping identified a total of 996 users for the two open spaces: 790 in the park and 206 in the two gardens. The park was used primarily for children's play, followed by talking, eating or drinking, and walking. After children and parents, the largest user groups included office workers who populated the park during their lunch hours, and a group of elderly and unemployed men who sat and drank near the center of the park. In contrast, the gardens were used primarily for gardening activities such as weeding, bed preparation, watering, harvesting, etc. The next most frequently observed activities were talking and walking.

Activities differed considerably between the two open spaces, with the park having more passive activities such as sitting, eating, sunbathing, etc., as compared to the gardens where active uses—gardening, watering, harvesting, etc.—were observed most frequently.

Almost three-quarters of all park users were under 30 years of age, while a similar ratio of garden users was older than 30 years of age. Most people used the gardens alone, while
TABLE 1.
Comparison of Development, Management, Costs, and Use of Park and Gardens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner of site</td>
<td>City of Sacramento</td>
<td>State of California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of site</td>
<td>City of Sacramento</td>
<td>Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding of Maintenance and Development</td>
<td>City Budget Process</td>
<td>Fees and Donations from Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Costs</td>
<td>$46,000(^{(1)})</td>
<td>$2,200(^{(1)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance Costs</td>
<td>$15,000/yr(^{(2)})</td>
<td>$550/yr.(^{(2)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use (Total Observations)</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Elements Provided</td>
<td>Grass, trees, play-ground, restroom, building, etc.</td>
<td>Garden plots, meeting area, tool storage, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Site</td>
<td>140,000 sq. ft.(^{(3)})</td>
<td>121,300 sq. ft.(^{(3)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people involved in making decisions regarding development and maintenance</td>
<td>4–6(^{(3)})</td>
<td>99(^{(3)})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(1)}\) 1974–84 \(^{(2)}\) 1984 \(^{(3)}\) Approximate
Source: Author’s determinations.

TABLE 2.
Summary of Activities Observed in Behavior Mapping and Reported in User Interviews for Park and Gardens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Park Observed % (N)</th>
<th>Park Reported % (N)</th>
<th>Gardens Observed % (N)</th>
<th>Gardens Reported % (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing</td>
<td>33% (257)</td>
<td>38% (19)</td>
<td>1% (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>19% (153)</td>
<td>10% (5)</td>
<td>24% (50)</td>
<td>10% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating/Drinking</td>
<td>12% (93)</td>
<td>18% (9)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>12% (93)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
<td>5% (10)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting</td>
<td>7% (54)</td>
<td>12% (6)</td>
<td>1% (3)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Bathing</td>
<td>4% (28)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing/Watch.</td>
<td>4% (29)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>3% (26)</td>
<td>6% (3)</td>
<td>- (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>2% (16)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>2% (15)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>1% (10)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biking</td>
<td>- (6)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercising</td>
<td>- (5)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>55(^{*}) (112)</td>
<td>69% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13% (27)</td>
<td>15% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>- (5)</td>
<td>6% (3)</td>
<td>- (1)</td>
<td>4% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100% (790) 100% (50) 90% (206) 100% (48)
N = Number of Observed Activities/Interview Responses
* = Observed Gardening Activities Included Weeding, Harvesting and Watering

Source: Author’s observations.

Park users were more evenly split between those using the park in groups of two or more and those using it alone. Most garden users and park users spent more than five minutes in each space. The two places were used by roughly the same proportion of males and females.

Perceptions of the Park and Gardens

To assess perceptions and meanings attached to the park and gardens, three separate groups were interviewed during 1983 and 1984. Indepth interviews were conducted with park and garden users. Non-users of both open spaces were surveyed by using a mail-back survey placed in mailboxes of adjacent residences and on windows of parked cars. Government and park officials also were interviewed. The perceptions of each group are summarized in the following sections:

User Perceptions of the Park and Gardens: Users were interviewed during the spring, summer, and fall of 1983 and 1984. The users first were asked to state their views on the space they were using and then were asked a series of questions about their attitudes toward “the other place.”

When asked to “describe” the park, people most frequently mentioned that it “looks good” or was “attractive,” followed by the fact that it was “good for kids.” Some users mentioned the “bums,” a group of men who frequently hang out near the center of the park. Garden users chose different words to “describe” the gardens. “Friendly people/people caring,” “useful/economic,” “good/excellent,” and “a place that brings people together” were phrases most frequently used to describe the qualities of the gardens.

When asked to state their “feelings about this place,” park users most frequently mentioned that they “like it” and that “it is good for kids”; they also restated their concern that there were “too many bums or wonos.” The next most frequent responses were that the park was “quiet,” followed by “that it looks good/attractive.” Twice as many garden users repeated the words “like it/love it” to describe their feelings toward the gardens. “Liking the people,” “good for people,” and “social” activities also were mentioned by garden users.
When asked what they liked most about the park, the playground was most often mentioned, followed by the "trees" and "quiet." In contrast, garden users most frequently stated that they liked "being able to work," the "people" in the gardens, and the "fresh vegetables" they harvested from their gardens. The two user groups also differed strongly on what they "liked least" about each open space. Park users remarked that they did not like the "wino/bums," "nothing," and the bathrooms. "Nothing" was stated most frequently as being the thing liked least by garden users, followed by weeds, and the problem of people "stealing vegetables."

Non-User Perceptions of the Park and Gardens: To assess differences of attitude between users and non-users of the park and gardens, a second, smaller study of non-users was conducted. The results illustrate how people who used neither of the open spaces perceived their value.

Asked why they did not use either place, the following reasons were given. For the park, "location" was most frequently mentioned, followed by "transients" and by the fact that they use other parks. Quite different reasons were given for non-use of the gardens, including "no interest," "location," "no time," and "not familiar with." Non-users saw the transients as a barrier to their use and enjoyment of the park.

The elements most disliked about the park by non-users included the "transients," surrounding traffic, the "park was "ordinary," and the "neighborhood." For the gardens, the most mentioned dislike was nothing, followed by maintenance, and that it was "too small."

When asked what would make them use the park, people mentioned "fewer transients," more activities, and more time. In order to use the gardens more often, they stated that they would need to be "closer to home," have more available plots, and that they, the respondents, would need more time. (A comparison of user and non-user most-liked items for both spaces is included in Table 3.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank of Most Liked Elements:</th>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Playground</td>
<td>(17%)</td>
<td>1. Being able to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trees</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
<td>2. People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Quiet</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>3. Fresh vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>4. Flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(%) based on total number of responses for each group of respondents)

Source: Author's calculations.

Government and Community Officials' Views of the Park and Gardens: To compare user and non-user perceptions with those of the officials responsible for managing or developing the two open spaces, in-depth interviews were conducted with government officials, site owners, and garden organizers. Much of the historical and management data discussed earlier was drawn from these interviews. The officials' perception of the benefits and problems of the two open spaces adds additional perspectives to the value of these types of open spaces.

Park officials reported their experience in developing and managing Fremont Park. They viewed the park as "a valuable piece of open space downtown" that was "underutilized" except at lunch time when the park was frequented by office workers. They attributed underuse to an "image problem" created by transient users who "scared average citizens by laying under trees" and to the "older community" which surrounds the park. However, park officials remarked that the transient problem was reduced following minor design changes made in 1977. They also reported few vandalism problems in the park and considered it safe due to the "high visibility and busy streets" surrounding it on four sides. The officials described increased participation by adjacent residents in the management and care of the park, part of a larger movement taking place in Sacramento parks since 1978.

Garden organizers projected similar views of the park. The "wino" were seen as "a bother" to people using the park. They saw the park as a "bad place," which they "wouldn't want to walk through." They reported that the park attracts "a different kind of person than we do." Garden organizers felt the park needed more facilities such as barbecue facilities, lights, and play equipment to overcome its image problem.

Contrasting views of the gardens were presented by the officials interviewed. Governmental officials saw the chief benefit of the gardens as being "the property is maintained versus leaving it vacant." One perceived limit of the gardens expressed by staff of the agency owning the sites is that it is "like a private club" since it is fenced and that it looks like "someone else's private park." One official commented that the fence "keeps people from using it." Yet they went on to remark that the fence made it feel "safe inside
the gardens." One official remarked that he felt "the neighborhood's reaction to the gardens was mostly negative." Another viewed the park as a better "visual focus" for the neighborhood than the gardens.

When asked to express their own personal views, officials presented more positive attitudes toward the gardens. One official stated that "people really need and want to garden" and spoke about his own gardening interest and lack of use of public parks. Other garden benefits mentioned included: "the gardens are like a piece of rural landscape in the city," "a place for neighbors to help each other," and "a home away from home."

The value of the gardens as permanent open space was discounted by all officials who were interviewed. Several officials remarked: "I do not see state authorities going for permanent gardens; it is a highly valuable piece of property." Several stated that "the moment can still happen when the space will have to be developed" as a result of rising real estate values and increasing demands for parking, office buildings, and housing in downtown Sacramento. The gardens were referred to by one official as "a loose bar of soap," since control of the site has been an ongoing issue for the redevelopment authority.

Garden organizers expressed stronger positive views on the value of their open space for the city and the public. They saw the property as being used and improving land values for adjacent residents. It "is a place for people to go," "gives people a sense of pride," provides a place for "people working with people," and "is a place where people can touch the earth." With regard to the role of the fence, the organizers saw it as essential to "keep transients from sleeping on the site," as well as to keep "people from taking things and throwing things in." All garden organizers agreed that the gardens were successful since "all people need and want to garden," "it provides food for people they otherwise would not have," and "people can take home a handful of something fresh." They also saw the gardens as serving different purposes than the park: "it functions like a park but is used and set up differently; the gardens are more of a social place."

**Analysis and Discussion**

Analysis of observational and interview data yields some initial findings about the different meanings people attach to these two types of open space. Below are discussed use and user differences; perceptions of beauty, maintenance, safety, access, and control; and ideal images people have of open spaces.

**User Differences:** Park users were younger than garden users. Children and teenagers made up over one-third of all observed park users but only four percent of garden users. The few children using the gardens is consistent with other studies of gardening behavior (Kaplan 1973) that found gardening to be a slow paced activity in which adults often did not attempt to involve their children. The lack of garden use by young people may also be explained by the large number of older people with grown-up children who were users of the gardens.

Almost three-quarters of the garden users were over 30 years of age, while only one quarter of park users were over 30. Similar age differences were identified in the composition of the user interview sample. Very few garden and park users were elderly. This may help to explain the effect of perceived safety on the lack of elderly city residents' use of urban open space (Brower et al. 1983).

While park users utilize other parks in the city, garden users typically are not park users. Of those interviewed, almost all park users reported using other parks in the city, while more than three quarters of the garden users did not use city parks. This finding points to the unique role gardens play in providing recreational opportunities not afforded by traditional open spaces such as parks and playgrounds.

Garden users traveled farther to come to the open space than park users. Of those interviewed, half of the garden users traveled more than one mile to get to the gardens, as compared to one out of ten park users. About one-third of all the gardeners interviewed lived within six blocks of the site as compared to half of the park users. Most gardeners reported having their own back yards but preferred to garden at Mandella or Southside Gardens.

Garden users spent more time using their open space than did park users. More than half of park users stated that they spent less than an hour in the park as compared to only one-fifth of the garden users. A majority of gardens users spent more than one hour in the garden, with one-third spending more than two hours.

**Use Differences:** As expected, the activities taking place in the two open spaces were dissimilar. Major park activities, as mentioned earlier, included children's play, relaxing, and eating or drinking. In contrast, the gardens were used primarily for gardening activity and talking. User reports of what they did in the place closely matched the activities identified in the observations. (A comparison of the activities observed versus reported is included in Table 2.)

**Perception of Friendliness and Sociability:** The gardens were rated higher for friendliness by users than was the park. Asked how users feel about the people who come to the open space, almost twice as many of the garden users described the people as "friendly" than did park users. Two-thirds of all garden users interviewed described positive social contact taking place in the gardens, including "friendly," "helpful," "learn from them," and "talk with them," compared to only one-third of the park users who made positive descriptions.

On the negative dimensions, half of the park users described other people using the park with phrases such as "I do not like them" and "I leave them alone," with only one-sixth of garden users using negative terms to describe people using the gardens.

**Perceptions of Visual Quality and Beauty:** A common concern of city officials and designers with regard to community open spaces is that they
do not look good. This was largely found not to be the case in both the user and non-user samples. When park users were asked to "describe" the garden, "beauty" was the most frequently mentioned quality of the space. Half as many of the garden users who were interviewed chose the same words to describe the park. Non-users also rated the gardens higher on the dimension of beauty/visual quality than the park, with half of the non-users placing the gardens in the excellent or good category while only one-third placed the park in the same categories.

Perceptions of Maintenance/Caring: "Who cares for this place" was clearly perceived by users of the two open spaces. Most park users mentioned that "the City" was responsible for maintenance of the park. For the gardens, most people mentioned that it was maintained by "the users" and by "the organizers/managers." Non-users rated the two places almost equally when evaluating levels of maintenance. When asked to score each space on the quality of facilities provided, non-users valued the gardens slightly higher than the park.

Perceptions of Access and Control: As expected, non-users rated access to the park higher than for the gardens. While most non-users rated the park in the "excellent" or "good" categories on accessibility, a majority of the same non-users rated the gardens in "excellent" or "good" categories for accessibility. This finding runs counter to expressed official concerns over the fence and the perceived private nature of the gardens.

Perceptions of Safety: Park and garden users gave similar ratings to each place on safety dimensions, with one-third of park and garden users rating the places as "quite safe" during the day. Some park users rated the park "unsafe," while none of the garden users categorized the gardens as "unsafe." More striking differences were found in non-user ratings of the two places with regard to safety (Table 4). Of all five dimensions, the garden was rated the highest for safety. More than two-thirds of non-users rated the gardens as "excellent" or "good" for safety while only one-third placed the park in the same categories.

Ideal Images of Open Space: Differences in how people view the two study sites may be based in part on the expectations that they bring to open space. Both users and non-users were asked to discuss what their ideal open space would be like in order to explore environmental values that may influence their attitudes toward each space. One striking finding of the garden user sample was that about one quarter said their ideal open space "would be similar to this place," while very few park users said it would be similar to the park.
TABLE 4.
Non-User Mean Ratings of Park and Garden for Visual Quality, Maintenance, Safety, Access, and Quality of Facilities (N = 34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beauty/V</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maintenance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety for Users</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access for Users</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Facilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G = Gardens
P = Park

The listing of ideal images reveals some of the common elements people consider important in open space. Park users included a lake, a swimming pool, a playground with clean sand, and "grass/trees." After wanting a similar place, garden users most frequently mentioned "flowers," "spacious and open," and "more involvement and awareness." Non-users mentioned similar ideal open space elements with "trees and shade," "clean facilities," "a water feature," "flowers," "a place to garden," and "no transients."

**Policy and Design Implications**

The present study illustrates some of the design and policy implications of people's views of gardens and parks. One policy implication of the present study is the strong preference among non-users and users for the gardens to become permanent. When asked who should own the place, three-quarters of the garden users stated that the garden should be owned by "the users," while only one-quarter felt "the city" or "the state" should own it. Park users also stated a strong preference for user or neighborhood ownership of the park. Almost half of park users stated that "the city" should own Fremont Park, followed by "the people," and the "neighborhood." On the policy question of permanency for the gardens, almost two-thirds of the non-users interviewed supported the idea of the gardens becoming permanent with another third expressing no opinion. The reasons why the gardens should become permanent included "provides benefits for users," "provides an opportunity for urban dwellers," and provides "an opportunity to grow fresh food."

Both users and non-users expressed clear views on changes needed to improve the two open spaces. Their views highlight claims (Laurie 1978) of the importance of minor incremental changes in improving the image of existing open spaces. For the park, the two most frequently mentioned improvements were the adding of recreational equipment (such as better play equipment) and cleaner bathrooms. The most mentioned change for the gardens was "none," followed by the desire for better maintenance, and the adding of a wash basin, and a children's play area.

The problem of "undesirables" such as the homeless is a concern in many urban parks. Earlier studies of downtown Sacramento open spaces, including K Street Mall (Becker 1973) and Plaza Park (Sommer and Becker 1969), found "undesirables" to be a central concern of park officials and merchants. For the study sites, the problem of "undesirables" was perceived differently by users and non-users. Only one user interviewed stated that they would like to "get rid of the bums" in the park. Users tended to notice but tolerate the bums, while non-users saw them as a barrier to their use of the park.

The Sacramento research raises some policy and design issues that may be important to other cities that are experiencing park problems, as well as increased interest in community.

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![Figure 6. One third of all park activity took place in the playground, an area which comprised only a small area of Fremont Park. Photograph by Jack Spruance.](image-url)
gardening. There is a need for city officials and designers to recognize gardening as an important part of urban life and to see gardens as a popular form of urban open space (Kaplan 1977; Francis 1987c). With gardening being the most popular outdoor recreation activity, more open space needs to be made permanently available for gardening. Policies need to be devised to promote either actual or symbolic ownership of gardening sites. The permanency issue continues to be one of the major threats facing garden sites in Sacramento and elsewhere.

Conclusions

This initial study points to some of the different meanings that people attach to urban parks and gardens. Conceptual issues that this present study raises and their implications for further research are briefly discussed.

One finding of the study is the difference between the perceptions of officials charged with providing open space and that of city residents who use or pass by it. A gap exists between what city officials and users consider to be the value of open space. Both park and garden users and non-users placed value on the importance of the gardens, while city officials saw them primarily as a temporary solution to the problem of vacant land. For example, both users and non-users saw the fence around the gardens as necessary to their success but did not see it as restricting their access, while city officials saw the fence as a barrier to public use.

One possible explanation for these differences is that the image of a place shapes peoples' interpretation and perception of it. As Appleyard (1979) has pointed out, the environment serves as a social symbol that communicates important meanings which users and non-users read and interpret. In the case of the gardens, a sense of caring, productivity, and stewardship for the landscape was communicated, a form of symbolic meaning which went largely unnoticed in the park. The value people place on the gardens may be based largely on these proprietary messages gardens communicate to outsiders. The gardens read as being "owned" due to their personalized and productive qualities.

The findings of this study also call into questions the need for strict unity, harmony, and formal aesthetics applied to most urban open spaces and still taught in design schools. People clearly valued the beauty of the gardens even though they did not include formal principles of park design. Gardens are visually diverse yet unified by the ordering of plots and similarities of plant material grown. Parks tend to be much more unified but visually less diverse, and thus are read as "boring" by some users and passersby.

This study also points to the need to plan open space systems based on the way people spend their time rather than patterning open spaces only on traditional design models. The finding that most gardeners are not city parks users points out that gardens draw a population seeking recreation who would not otherwise use traditional city parks. By providing

gardens, cities do not reduce the use of parks but expand the overall recreational opportunities available to city residents.

One broad conclusion to be drawn from the present study is that the concept of "garden" offers urban residents different meanings than does "park." While the behavioral differences observed in this study are similar to previous findings from studies of both parks and gardens (Nager and Wentworth 1976; Robinson 1980), strong conceptual differences exist in the meanings attached to each place by city residents (Nohl 1984). Parks are passive, publicly-controlled places which people often use alone and "like." The other hand, gardens are active places that people make themselves, use for work and socializing, and can "love." (Table 5 summarizes some of the conceptual differences that may exist between park and garden.)

An important ingredient of meaning may be the expectations that people bring to a place. In the case of the gardens, non-users attached meaning to them although they were not active users. This finding challenges the

<p>| TABLE 5. |
| Some Conceptual Differences Between &quot;Park&quot; and &quot;Garden&quot; in the City |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Garden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet/Relax</td>
<td>Activity/Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be alone</td>
<td>Get together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean/Neat</td>
<td>Messy but cared for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look at</td>
<td>To participate in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built/Designed</td>
<td>Natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly-controlled/managed</td>
<td>User-controlled/managed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>Renewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green attracts people</td>
<td>People attract people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked</td>
<td>Loved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's determinations.
commonly held belief that use is the most important ingredient to open space success. Non-users reported an understanding and appreciation that the gardens were cared for and attached value to them even though they were not users.

The present study clarifies some of the common public perceptions associated with urban parks and community gardens. Findings from this study do not discount the well documented value of city parks in urban life. Parks are a highly valued land use in cities, even though many are not being heavily used. Parks provide for many activities that cannot be engaged in a community garden and vice versa. In order for the future planning of urban park systems to be better connected to the values of city residents, continued work on the differences in meaning attached to various open space types needs to be undertaken.

Postscript

Southside Gardens was demolished in early 1987 and paved for a state parking lot. Ron Mandella Garden, after intense lobbying by gardeners, was granted a one year extension of its lease but members report serious doubts if the site will remain green for much longer.

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Francis 111


