

Social gathering and motivations: understanding what draws young visitors to urban parks

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Urban parks are public infrastructures that support recreation, socialization, and psychological well-being, yet their relevance to younger generations in digital societies remains under-explored. This article addresses this gap by examining the extent to which youngsters engage in social behaviors within parks. Drawing on 97 structured interviews across São Paulo, Salvador, Lima, and Arequipa, it adopts a qualitative, interpretivist design. Findings reveal that relaxation, nature contact, and peer interaction are dominant motivations, while digital connectivity functions as facilitator and distraction. The analysis highlights urban parks as hybrid socio-digital arenas and urges policymakers to design inclusive, safe and multifunctional spaces. The study contributes to bridging environmental psychology, urban sociology, and youth studies, offering a perspective on the evolving functions of public spaces.

Keywords: public spaces, recreational activities, environmental psychology, urban sustainability, SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities

Convivencia social y motivaciones: comprendiendo qué atrae a jóvenes visitantes a los parques urbanos

Los parques urbanos constituyen infraestructuras públicas vitales que sostienen la recreación, la socialización y el bienestar psicológico; sin embargo, su pertinencia para las generaciones más jóvenes en sociedades cada vez más digitalizadas permanece insuficientemente explorada. Este estudio aborda tal vacío examinando hasta qué punto los jóvenes visitantes se mantienen comprometidos en comportamientos sociales dentro de los parques. A partir de 97 entrevistas estructuradas realizadas en São Paulo, Salvador, Lima y Arequipa, se adopta un diseño cualitativo de orientación interpretativista. Los hallazgos revelan que la relajación,

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el contacto con la naturaleza y la interacción con pares son las motivaciones dominantes, mientras que la conectividad digital actúa simultáneamente como facilitadora y distracción. El estudio resalta a los parques urbanos como arenas socio-digitales híbridas y exhorta a los responsables de políticas públicas a diseñar espacios inclusivos, seguros y multifuncionales.

Palabras clave: Espacios públicos, actividades recreativas, psicología ambiental, sostenibilidad urbana, ODS 11 - Ciudades y Comunidades Sostenibles

Convivência social e motivações: compreendendo o que atrai os jovens visitantes aos parques urbanos

Os parques urbanos configuram-se como infraestruturas públicas essenciais para a recreação, a socialização e o bem-estar psicológico; contudo, sua relevância para as gerações mais jovens em sociedades crescentemente digitalizadas permanece pouco investigada. Este estudo enfrenta essa lacuna ao examinar em que medida os jovens visitantes continuam engajados em comportamentos sociais nos parques. Com base em 97 entrevistas estruturadas realizadas em São Paulo, Salvador, Lima e Arequipa, adota-se um desenho qualitativo de orientação interpretativista. Os resultados revelam que o relaxamento, o contato com a natureza e a interação entre pares são as motivações predominantes, enquanto a conectividade digital funciona tanto como facilitadora quanto como distração. O estudo evidencia os parques urbanos como arenas sociodigitais híbridas e conclama os formuladores de políticas a projetarem espaços inclusivos, seguros e multifuncionais.

Palavras-chave: espaços públicos, atividades recreativas, psicologia ambiental, sustentabilidade urbana, ODS 11 - Cidades e Comunidades Sustentáveis

Urban parks are integral components of contemporary cities, providing essential spaces for recreation, relaxation, social interaction, and contact with nature. Beyond their recreational value, these green environments help mitigate some of the adverse effects of urbanization, including stress, pollution, and social isolation, by offering restorative settings that support physical, psychological, and social well-being (Bakhtsiyarava et al., 2024; Russo, 2024). Their relevance has been widely recognized in urban and environmental scholarship, particularly because parks contribute to sustainability, strengthen community bonds, and enhance quality of life in increasingly dense and complex urban landscapes (Marvier et al., 2023). However, although their benefits are well established, their capacity to remain meaningful for younger generations requires closer attention, especially as youth lifestyles, leisure practices, and forms of socialization are increasingly shaped by digital technologies.

Young people, often characterized as digital natives, navigate their everyday lives through hybrid modes that combine physical and digital spaces (Sá de Teles et al., 2025). This generational condition shapes how they organize leisure, interact with peers, perceive safety, and assign value to public spaces. While social interaction, physical activity, nature contact, and cultural diversity continue to motivate park use, digital connectivity and virtual engagement increasingly mediate how these spaces are accessed, experienced, and shared (Halkos et al., 2021; Halley & Maciel, 2023; Kase & Koda, 2024). This transformation is particularly relevant when considering psychological well-being, understood in this study as an integrative state of mental health that involves emotional balance, social connectedness, and the ability to cope effectively with stress (Andersen et al., 2021; Bellón, 2024). From this perspective, gatherings in urban parks, whether spontaneous or digitally mediated, reveal how natural and social infrastructures can

support belonging, identity formation, shared purpose, and quality of life among young people (Haslam et al., 2022).

Yet this transformation also introduces a tension. Digital devices may facilitate coordination, connection, and perceived safety in parks, but they can also reduce the restorative potential of these environments when online interaction displaces face-to-face encounters or weakens direct engagement with nature (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2022). This paradox reveals a central problem: as urban parks become increasingly hybrid spaces, they must preserve their traditional roles in restoration, inclusion, and cultural exchange while also responding to the digital expectations of young visitors. Against this background, the central research question guiding this paper is: To what extent do young visitors remain engaged in performing social behaviors within urban parks? By posing this question, the study shifts attention from the mere use of parks to the underlying motivations and tensions that define contemporary youth engagement with these environments.

The specific aims of this work are threefold: (i) to identify the primary motivations driving young people to visit urban parks; (ii) to analyze how digital connectivity reshapes their experiences of these spaces; and (iii) to assess how safety, inclusivity, and accessibility influence patterns of youth engagement. To address these aims, the study adopts a qualitative and exploratory design, relying on structured interviews with 97 participants across four culturally diverse cities—Salvador and São Paulo in Brazil, and Arequipa and Lima in Peru. This approach ensures a rich, cross-cultural understanding of urban park use among youth.

The significance of this research lies in its timeliness. As cities grapple with intensifying urbanization and generational shifts, urban parks represent contested but indispensable sites for community well-being. Young people, as both current users and future stewards, embody a demographic whose preferences will shape the sustainability of these spaces. Understanding their perspectives is therefore essential for designing inclusive, multifunctional parks capable of bridging environmental, social, and digital divides (Basu & Nagendra, 2021; Polko

& Kimic, 2022). By situating youth engagement at the intersection of physical and digital realms, the study contributes to broader debates on sustainable cities and the future of public space.

Theoretical framework

Social gathering and human connection

Human beings are inherently social creatures, and the need for connection is fundamental to psychological well-being. Social gatherings serve as critical platforms for fostering interpersonal relationships, which contribute to mental health by providing emotional support, reducing stress, and promoting a sense of belonging (Haslam et al., 2022). Theoretical frameworks argue that forming and maintaining close relationships is essential for mental health, as these connections satisfy the intrinsic human need for affiliation (Chu et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023). Empirical studies confirm that regular participation in social activities significantly lowers the risk of mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (Nóblega et al., 2024; Andersen et al., 2021). These benefits are amplified in group-based interactions, which not only fulfill individual psychological needs but also reinforce collective identity and support.

The protective role of social connections has been particularly evident in mitigating the effects of loneliness and isolation. Loneliness, often described as a “silent epidemic,” is a significant public health concern linked to a higher prevalence of mental health disorders, such as depression (Bather, 2025). Group-based social connections provide individuals with opportunities for meaningful interaction, enabling them to share experiences and foster mutual understanding. This sense of shared purpose and reciprocity has been shown to alleviate feelings of isolation and improve emotional well-being. Haslam et al. (2022) highlight the unique capacity of social identities derived from group memberships to enhance mental health, emphasizing the role of social gatherings in constructing these identities.

Importantly, the quality of social relationships established during gatherings is a critical determinant of their mental health benefits. Not all social interactions are equally positive; supportive, meaningful connections have a more substantial impact on psychological resilience than superficial or negative interactions (Andersen et al., 2021). High-quality relationships are characterized by trust, empathy, and a mutual sense of validation, all of which contribute to reducing stress and fostering a sense of safety and inclusion. The dynamics of social gatherings—whether they involve shared recreational activities, collaborative projects, or informal conversations—play a pivotal role in shaping these relationships and their associated benefits.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical importance of social gatherings for mental health. As isolation measures disrupted traditional patterns of interaction, the resulting increase in loneliness and psychological distress emphasized the necessity of maintaining social bonds, even in challenging circumstances (Setyorini et al., 2024). Social gatherings, whether virtual or in-person, provide vital opportunities for emotional expression, connection, and support, illustrating their centrality to mental health interventions. These findings reaffirm the importance of fostering environments where social interactions can thrive, ensuring their accessibility to diverse populations to maximize their psychological benefits.

Urban parks as spaces for psychological well-being

Urban parks are widely recognized as crucial spaces for enhancing psychological well-being by offering restorative environments that counteract the mental strain of urban living (Dammert-Guardia & Vilela, 2025). Exposure to green spaces has been associated with reduced levels of stress and anxiety, as well as improved mood and cognitive functioning (Kogan et al., 2021). The restorative potential of urban parks lies in their capacity to provide a sensory escape from urban noise and pollution, offering tranquility and fostering emotional recovery. The “Attention Restoration Theory” posits that natural environments, such as parks, help replenish cognitive resources depleted by prolonged

exposure to urban stimuli (Marvier et al., 2023). These findings underscore the importance of maintaining high-quality green spaces in urban areas to support mental health and psychological resilience.

The therapeutic benefits of urban parks are particularly significant in the context of increasing urbanization and its associated challenges, such as overcrowding, pollution, and social isolation. Studies have demonstrated that regular interaction with park environments correlates with lower incidences of depressive symptoms and greater life satisfaction (Bakhtsiyarava et al., 2024). Importantly, these effects are not limited to direct physical interaction with nature; even indirect exposure, such as viewing greenery from a distance, has been shown to positively influence mental health outcomes. Such insights emphasize the necessity for urban planning policies that prioritize the integration of accessible green spaces into city landscapes (Russo, 2024).

The psychological benefits of urban parks are also linked to their ability to facilitate social cohesion and community well-being. Parks act as communal hubs, fostering social interaction and providing spaces for recreational activities that promote physical and mental health (Chu et al., 2021). Moreover, their design elements—such as seating areas, pathways, and vegetation—play a critical role in shaping user experiences and maximizing the restorative potential of these environments (Lin et al., 2023). Effective park management should therefore focus on enhancing these features to cater to diverse user needs and preferences, ensuring that parks remain inclusive and beneficial for all demographics.

Despite their numerous advantages, the effectiveness of urban parks in promoting psychological well-being depends heavily on their quality and accessibility. Poorly maintained or unsafe parks can deter usage and diminish their restorative capacity, particularly in underserved communities (Li et al., 2023). Addressing disparities in access to high-quality green spaces is essential to maximizing their public health benefits and mitigating urban inequalities. As urbanization continues to intensify globally, fostering resilient and inclusive urban parks should remain a priority for policymakers and urban planners.

Youth behavior and urban parks

Youth behavior in urban parks is shaped by distinctive social, psychological, and recreational needs that diverge significantly from those of older generations. While adults may prioritize leisure or family-oriented activities, young people, particularly adolescents and young adults, value parks as spaces for identity formation, self-expression, and experimentation with autonomy. Studies indicate that they use parks for diverse activities, such as socializing, engaging in sports, or seeking solitude for introspection (Yao et al., 2022). These activities are strongly influenced by environmental aesthetics, accessibility, and the availability of facilities. For youth specifically, features such as water elements, open fields, and vibrant landscapes do not merely provide leisure but serve as symbolic arenas where belonging and independence are negotiated. For instance, spaces with water features and green landscapes tend to attract youths for relaxation and social interaction, highlighting a generational preference for environments that simultaneously enable activity, peer bonding, and mental restoration (Grigoletto et al., 2022).

Social interactions are a significant driver of youth park usage. Parks provide a neutral ground where young people can connect with peers, build networks, and form relationships. These social benefits are often amplified by the presence of recreational amenities, such as playgrounds, sports fields, and open spaces, which serve as focal points for gatherings and group activities (Kase & Koda, 2024). Unlike adults, whose park usage often centers on family or solitary activities, youths engage collectively, transforming parks into microcosms of peer culture where group belonging and identity formation are continuously reinforced. Research suggests that these interactions foster a sense of belonging and community identity, crucial for the psychological development of young people (Hu & Luo, 2025). Moreover, culturally resonant features within parks can enhance their appeal to diverse youth groups, supporting inclusivity and social equity.

Another critical aspect of youth behavior in urban parks is their engagement in physical and recreational activities. Active use of parks, such as jogging, cycling, or team sports, not only addresses physical fitness but also contributes to mental health by reducing stress and promoting well-being (Salleh et al., 2022). Compared to older users, who may favor passive recreational practices such as walking or contemplation, young visitors exhibit a pronounced orientation toward high-energy and interactive activities. However, accessibility and safety remain key concerns. Studies highlight that poorly maintained parks or those perceived as unsafe may deter youth from using these spaces effectively, limiting their potential benefits (Zhang et al., 2022).

In addition, the integration of environmental education and sustainable practices in park design can influence youth behaviors positively. Initiatives that promote environmental stewardship, such as recycling and ecological conservation, resonate with the values of many young users and encourage them to adopt pro-environmental behaviors (Wang et al., 2022). These practices not only enhance the utility of parks but also instill a sense of responsibility toward the environment. This is particularly evident among youths, who show a greater willingness than adults to translate environmental knowledge into collective action, such as campaigns and peer-led sustainability programs (Marrivier et al., 2023). Understanding these behavioral patterns is essential for policymakers and urban planners aiming to design inclusive, multi-functional parks that cater to the evolving needs of young populations.

Cultural and contextual influences

Cultural and contextual factors play a pivotal role in shaping the perception and utilization of urban parks, as these spaces are deeply intertwined with local traditions, values, and societal norms (Da Costa, 2024). Research has demonstrated that the cultural background of park users significantly influences how they interact with and perceive green spaces. For instance, Eastern cultures often prioritize collective activities such as family gatherings and communal recreation in parks,

whereas Western cultures may emphasize individualistic pursuits like solitude and reflection (Haslam et al., 2022; Shao & Chung, 2024). In Latin America, however, the use of parks frequently blends collectivist and festive traditions, with public spaces serving not only for leisure but also for cultural events, music, and community celebrations (Santos et al., 2023). This dichotomy reflects broader societal norms where collectivist cultures value shared experiences, while individualistic cultures encourage personal well-being through independent activities.

The socio-demographic composition of a region further determines nature and park usage patterns (Gudynas & García-Quero, 2025). Studies comparing park use in diverse cultural settings, such as Chengdu, China, and Perth, Australia, reveal that factors like age, income, and gender influence both the frequency and diversity of park activities (Hasan Swapan et al., 2022; Lozano-Blasco et al., 2022). In Latin American contexts, recent research indicates that socio-demographic variables are similarly decisive yet mediated by issues of inequality and access (Sancho-Pivoto et al., 2025). For example, in São Paulo, Brazil, younger populations frequently use urban parks such as Ibirapuera, Villa-Lobos, and the recently transformed Parque Minhocão for physical and leisure activities. Evidence shows that users of Parque Minhocão are predominantly young and middle-aged adults, often from nearby neighborhoods, who access the park on foot and engage primarily in walking and running (Nogueira et al., 2022). This pattern differs from more traditional parks, where older adults and families may predominate, highlighting how linear parks emerging from requalified urban infrastructures cater to a more active, youthful, and diverse demographic. Such differences underscore how urban parks in Brazil function simultaneously as spaces for health promotion, leisure, and social inclusion, reflecting the interplay between cultural traditions, urban design, and the demographic profile of surrounding communities.

Historical and environmental context also significantly affect park usage. Urban parks with a rich cultural heritage, such as Persian gardens, provide long-term residents with a sense of identity and continuity, fostering stronger place attachment compared to modern parks

(Bazrafshan et al., 2021). In Brazil, historical spaces like the gardens of Rio de Janeiro's Quinta da Boa Vista or São Paulo's Independence Park function as sites of cultural memory and national identity, blending leisure with heritage preservation (Sampaio et al., 2021). In Peru, plazas and urban parks within historic centers—such as Arequipa's Plaza de Armas or the parks surrounding Lima's colonial core—also reflect this dual role, serving simultaneously as recreational spaces and as symbols of civic pride and historical continuity. Conversely, modern parks often attract migrants and younger populations by offering spaces for diverse recreational activities and fostering cross-cultural interactions. This highlights the dual role of urban parks as repositories of cultural memory and as adaptive spaces for contemporary urban needs.

Technology and social gathering

technology has significantly transformed the dynamics of social gathering, especially in urban parks, where it influences the behavior and interactions of visitors. Digital platforms, such as social media, facilitate the publication of user-generated content (UGC) that shapes public perceptions of parks and their amenities. Studies have demonstrated that UGC, particularly those emphasizing scenic beauty and recreational opportunities, encourages park visitation and fosters social engagement (Wei et al., 2024). This phenomenon, described as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), provides prospective visitors with credible insights into others' experiences, thereby enhancing their intentions to use these green spaces.

The integration of smart technologies into urban parks has further amplified their role as hubs for social gathering. Smart park systems, equipped with Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and data analytics, not only monitor park usage but also enhance visitor experiences by providing real-time information on crowd density, weather conditions, and available activities (Liu, 2023). Such technologies can also support equitable access by reducing overcrowding and distributing visitors more evenly across available spaces, ensuring that enjoyment of park amenities is not restricted to those who arrive first or live nearby.

Although Peru has not yet implemented comparable initiatives, Brazil offers illustrative cases. For example, Ibirapuera, Villa-Lobos, and Aclimação parks in São Paulo are equipped with real-time information points that display temperature, climate, and other environmental data gathered through sensors, enhancing both visitor comfort and safety. In addition, the Meu Ibira mobile application, launched several years ago for Ibirapuera Park, provided users with updated information on events, attractions, and an interactive map—an early attempt to employ digital platforms to enhance inclusivity and visitor orientation. While this app is no longer active, both the sensor-based systems and this historical initiative underscore the potential of technology to facilitate equitable and informed access to urban green spaces (Jakstis & Fischer, 2024).

Moreover, location-based social media and mobile applications have revolutionized how individuals interact within these spaces. By leveraging geospatial data, park management can identify popular gathering spots and tailor services to meet the needs of diverse user groups (Karki et al., 2021). For visitors, such applications enhance connectivity and community engagement, allowing users to coordinate activities, share experiences, and foster collective participation. This digital connectivity not only augments the quality of social interactions but also aligns with broader urban planning goals of creating inclusive and vibrant public spaces.

However, the influence of technology on social gathering is not without challenges. While it promotes inclusivity and access, it also risks diluting direct human interactions by encouraging digital over physical engagement. Studies highlight that excessive reliance on technology in park settings can diminish the restorative benefits of nature and the authenticity of human connections (Bakhtsiyarava et al., 2024). Thus, the successful integration of technology in urban parks requires a thoughtful balance—leveraging its potential to enhance social connectivity while preserving the essence of natural and face-to-face interactions. This equilibrium is crucial for ensuring that parks remain spaces of genuine human connection in an increasingly digitized world.

Method

Research Design

This study is epistemologically grounded in interpretivism, privileging participants' lived experiences and meanings as the foundation for analysis. The qualitative and exploratory design adopted is consistent with this orientation, as interpretivism holds that social reality is constructed through subjective perceptions and interactions (González-Damián, 2022). Accordingly, the study employed an inductive logic, prioritizing the emergence of patterns and insights over the testing of predefined hypotheses. This approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how young people engage with urban parks, capturing the diversity of their motivations, behaviors, and perceptions (Munaretto et al., 2013). The research was conducted with 97 respondents from two Peruvian and Brazilian cities: Arequipa (28), Lima (8), Salvador (25), and São Paulo (34). All participants met the inclusion criteria regarding age, between 18 and 27, and visitation to urban parks. Participants were recruited using an adhesion technique to ensure voluntary participation in alignment with ethical guidelines.

Participants

The research corpus for this study comprises 97 participants from four cities: Salvador, Arequipa, São Paulo, and Lima. This diverse sample reflects a broad spectrum of demographic and educational backgrounds, enabling a comprehensive analysis of young people's engagement with urban parks. The participants were stratified based on age, gender, urban-rural residency, frequency of park visits, and academic disciplines, ensuring that various perspectives and experiences were captured. This heterogeneity provides valuable insights into how factors such as geography, socio-demographics, and educational fields influence perceptions of urban parks as spaces for social gathering.

Table 1 below presents the detailed demographic breakdown of the research corpus, illustrating the distribution of participants across age groups, gender, origin, residence, visitation frequency, and academic fields.

Table 1

Demographic and educational profile of the research corpus

Variable	Participants
Age	
25-27	30
22-24	36
18-21	31
Gender	
Female	59
Male	37
Other	1
Origin City	
Urban	84
Semi-rural/urban	5
Rural	8
Residence City	
Urban	80
Semi-rural/urban	10
Rural	7
Urban Parks Visitation Frequency	
Daily	7
Weekly	15
Monthly	35
Less than once per month	40
Never	0
Last Urban Parks Visitation	
Before than one month	18
Last month	32
Last week	33
Last day	9
Today	5
Social Sciences	24
Formation Field	
Natural Sciences	7
Applied Sciences	8
Health Sciences	4
Interdisciplinary Studies	52
No formation	2

The table highlights the nuanced composition of the participants, including their engagement with urban parks. Notably, most participants resided in urban areas, visited parks less than once per month, and reported their last park visit within the past month or week. In terms of academic backgrounds, interdisciplinary studies, such as tourism and hospitality, were the most represented field, followed by social sciences. These data illustrate the diversity within the sample, which is vital for examining the interplay between demographic factors and urban park usage. This characterization provides a solid foundation for analyzing the multifaceted role of urban parks in fostering social connections and individual well-being.

Data Collection

Data were collected through structured interviews designed with a standardized script (Batista et al., 2017), which ensured consistency and comparability across participants. The script was divided into three main sections: (i) informed consent, which guaranteed ethical compliance and voluntary participation; (ii) demographic profiling questions, including age, gender, city of origin and residence, urban–rural classification, educational background, and employment status; and (iii) a set of twenty-five open-ended questions that explored motivations, barriers, safety perceptions, environmental awareness, and patterns of use regarding urban parks. The complete script is included as an appendix to this study to enhance transparency and replicability.

Interviews were conducted in person between September 21 and November 21, 2024, across the four participating cities. Responses were manually recorded with interviewer assistance to ensure accuracy, and clarifying questions were posed when necessary to preserve depth of meaning. On average, participants provided 41 words per response, with the longest answer containing 93 words. This richness of narrative detail allowed for an in-depth understanding of cross-cultural and contextual dimensions of urban park usage, reflecting both individual experiences and shared generational perspectives.

Data Analysis

The analytical process was guided by thematic analysis, focusing on identifying patterns and relationships within the data while also paying attention to contextual contrasts between the four cities. This decision responds to the cross-cultural scope of the study, which explicitly included two countries and four different cities to allow for comparative insights. Coding was applied systematically to relevant text segments, allowing for a clear understanding of recurring themes that aligned with the study's objectives. Themes such as the dual role of internet connectivity as a facilitator and distraction, the impact of park maintenance on safety perceptions, and the significance of social interactions in urban green spaces were consistently observed.

The use of DELVE qualitative analysis software supported the systematic organization and coding of the interview transcripts, allowing themes to be identified, grouped, and compared across participants. This tool also facilitated the triangulation of participant responses with theoretical frameworks, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. By employing DELVE, the research team ensured that themes emerged inductively from the data, while also maintaining transparency and consistency in the analytical process. This approach allowed participants' experiences and viewpoints to be reflected authentically, without imposing preconceived categorizations, and enabled a deeper understanding of the broad spectrum of motivations, behaviors, and perceptions regarding urban parks as spaces for social gathering among young people.

By ensuring a context-sensitive and participant-driven approach to data analysis, the study offers robust insights into the interplay of safety, connectivity, and community dynamics within urban parks, as articulated by the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Motivations for visiting urban parks

Urban parks serve as multifaceted spaces that meet diverse human needs, including relaxation, socialization, and physical well-being. Participants in this study overwhelmingly expressed motivations aligned with these functions. For example, Participant 12 described visiting parks as “a way to breathe amidst the urban chaos,” highlighting the need for mental rejuvenation. Similarly, Participant 27 emphasized the importance of connecting with nature, stating that “green spaces are my sanctuary from screens and noise”. These findings align with Halkos et al. (2021), who identified relaxation and social interaction as primary drivers for park visitation.

Intrinsic motivations, such as the pursuit of tranquility and self-reflection, were significant for many participants. Participant 15 noted, “Walking alone in the park gives me clarity,” underscoring the therapeutic value of such environments. This reflects broader research indicating that urban parks are vital for psychological recovery and stress reduction (Hu & Luo, 2025). Urban planners could consider enhancing natural aesthetics and quiet zones to maximize these benefits.

Social motivations were also prominent. Participant 34 explained, “Meeting friends at the park is a regular thing, it’s free, and we can be ourselves”. This aligns with Bazrafshan et al. (2021), who reported that parks facilitate meaningful social connections across cultural contexts. Notably, younger participants often viewed parks as inclusive spaces for group activities, ranging from casual gatherings to sports. This mirrors findings by Vasiljević et al. (2023), which indicate that parks’ socializing functions resonate strongly with diverse demographic groups.

Recreational opportunities further emerged as a compelling draw. Participant 9 shared, “I come here to jog every morning, it’s my fitness zone”. Such statements echo the functional benefits of parks in promoting physical health, as discussed by González-Insua et al. (2024), who highlighted how physical and recreational activities contribute

to sustained well-being. The availability of sports facilities and open spaces was crucial for participants seeking such outlets.

In addition, the aesthetic and restorative qualities of parks, including their flora, fauna, and overall ambiance, were frequently cited. Participant 23 remarked, “The flowers and trees here are an art gallery—every visit inspires me”. This aligns with Basu & Nagendra (2021) y Moyano-Díaz et al. (2021), who argue that the aesthetic experience in natural environments enhances both short-term happiness and long-term satisfaction, the influence of environment with well-being. Such motivations underline the need for park designs that balance functional utility with natural beauty.

The following table synthesizes the categories of motivations identified across the four cities studied, Arequipa and Lima in Peru, and Salvador and São Paulo in Brazil. It presents both the variety and frequency of responses, illustrating how youngsters’ engagement with urban parks is shaped by different cultural, environmental, and infrastructural contexts. This overview provides a structured lens through which to compare individual drivers of visitation, highlighting both commonalities and distinctive patterns across cities.

As Table 2 shows, relaxation and mental well-being emerges as the most prominent motivation, particularly in São Paulo (12) and Salvador (11), but also significantly present in Arequipa (7) and Lima (4). This finding underscores the restorative function of urban parks, aligning with previous research that highlights their role in stress reduction and psychological recovery (Sancho-Pivoto et al., 2025). Contact with nature and aesthetics represents another dominant theme, with high frequencies in São Paulo (11) and Salvador (9), while also being relevant in Arequipa (5). These results suggest that urban greenery retains symbolic and functional value as an antidote to urban chaos. Interestingly, Arequipa also exhibits a notable presence of family-related and pet-related motivations, suggesting that urban parks there may operate more strongly as intergenerational and domestic spaces.

Table 2
Young adults’ motivation for visiting urban parks in four South American cities

Categories	Peru		Brazil		Total
	Arequipa	Lima	Salvador	São Paulo	
Contact with Nature & Aesthetics	5	-	9	11	25
Solitude & Personal Space	1	-	-	1	2
Family-related Motivations	4	-	-	-	4
Pet-related Motivations	4	2	-	-	6
Physical & Recreational Activities	1	2	2	-	5
Art and Events	1	-	-	-	1
Relaxation & Mental Well-being	7	4	11	12	34
Socialization & Belonging	-	-	2	3	5
Nostalgic Experiences	-	-	1	-	1
Digital & Connectivity	-	-	-	-	-
Tech-Enhanced Experiences	-	-	-	-	-
Geographical Proximity	2	-	-	-	2
Quality & Infrastructure of Parks	3	-	-	3	6
Total of Respondents	28	8	25	35	97

Other categories, although less frequent, shed light on emerging or context-specific dynamics. For instance, socialization and belonging is more visible in Brazil (São Paulo with 3, Salvador with 2), indicating that Brazilian parks may be perceived as social arenas, while Peruvian respondents in Lima and Arequipa tended to highlight more individualized or restorative motivations, in line with social interaction and leisure explanation of Aranibar & Olarte (2025). Additionally, art and events, nostalgic experiences, and geographical proximity, though minor in frequency, point to the multiplicity of roles that urban parks can play in shaping urban youth cultures. The near absence of explicit references to digital connectivity or tech-enhanced experiences, despite their growing importance in contemporary leisure, reveals a potential gap between digitalized lifestyles and the traditional, embodied functions of parks as pointed by Sá de Teles et al. (2025).

Social dynamics in urban parks

social dynamics in urban parks emerge as a multifaceted interplay of individual behaviors, group interactions, and environmental cues that foster diverse social experiences. From the interviews conducted, it was clear that participants valued urban parks as spaces that facilitated both spontaneous and planned social interactions, reflecting broader patterns highlighted in the literature. Participant 17, for example, emphasized that parks were “a neutral ground” where diverse social groups could converge without the constraints of formal settings. This aligns with findings from Yang et al. (2024), which argue that community parks promote social interaction through well-designed spaces such as picnic areas and sports facilities, thereby enhancing social cohesion.

The heterogeneity of park visitors enriches the social landscape, creating opportunities for interactions across age groups, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Participant 24 noted, “Seeing people from different walks of life engaging in activities like yoga or cycling is inspiring; it makes me feel connected to the larger community”. This observation is consistent with the attachment that is often the effect of casual interactions in public spaces, which contributes to a sense of belonging and community identity (Bazrafshan et al., 2021). Moreover, Lu et al. (2023) highlighted that the spatial and temporal dynamics of park use often reflect underlying sociodemographic patterns, reinforcing the role of parks as microcosms of urban life.

The interviews also revealed the challenges posed by crowding, which sometimes undermines the positive social experiences parks aim to offer. Participant 8 expressed frustration: “I avoid going to the park on weekends because it’s just too crowded; there’s no space to relax”. This sentiment is supported by Xiao et al. (2023), who found that high visitation levels in urban parks could lead to perceived crowding, diminishing the quality of social interactions. However, effective park management strategies, such as designated quiet zones or staggered activity scheduling, could mitigate these issues, as evidenced by studies on social carrying capacity in urban parks during peak usage periods.

Technology has also transformed the way social interactions unfold in urban parks. Several participants highlighted the prevalence of digitally mediated interactions, such as group chats coordinating park visits or augmented reality games like Pokémon GO fostering collective engagements. Participant 11 stated, “I initially came to the park to play a game, but I ended up meeting people who are now my friends”. This reflects the findings of Fang et al. (2021), who argued that digital tools could complement physical spaces in creating interactive, community-oriented experiences.

Parks also serve as platforms for cultural exchange and community-building events. Participant 76 shared an anecdote about attending a multicultural food festival in the park, stating, “It was incredible to see how the park became a hub for cultural exchange; it brought people together in ways I hadn’t seen before”. This is consistent with Yang et al. (2024), who identified parks as pivotal venues for fostering social sustainability in diverse urban communities. These events not only enhance the cultural vibrancy of parks but also strengthen social networks within and across communities.

Additionally, safety perceptions significantly influence the social dynamics of urban parks. While most participants described parks as generally safe, some expressed concerns about visiting during late hours. Participant 13 remarked, “The park is great during the day, but after sunset, it feels less welcoming”. This concern aligns with findings from Biernacka et al. (2022), which underscore the importance of adequate lighting and visible security measures in maintaining the social utility of parks. Ensuring safety, therefore, remains a critical factor in fostering inclusive and dynamic social environments in urban parks.

The following table summarizes the social dynamics of visitation across the four cities studied, distinguishing whether young participants visited parks alone, with family, friends, partners, or pets. By categorizing responses in this way, the table illustrates how patterns of companionship differ between Peru (Arequipa and Lima) and Brazil (Salvador and São Paulo), thereby offering a comparative perspective on the relational dimensions of park use.

Table 3

Youngs adults' patterns of park visitation: Accompanied and solo

Categories	Peru		Brazil		Total
	Arequipa	Lima	Salvador	São Paulo	
Couple / Partner Interactions	-	1	6	9	16
Family-oriented Interactions	5	2	9	3	19
Friendship & Peer Groups	1	-	4	13	18
Pet-related Interactions	2	-	-	1	3
Solo Visits	9	2	4	7	22
Accompanied, not specified with who	11	3	2	2	18
Total of Respondents	28	8	24	35	97

As Table 3 indicates, the most frequent category is solo visits, with 22 occurrences across the sample, highlighting that young people often value parks as spaces of individual restoration and autonomy. This trend is particularly notable in Arequipa, where solo visitation (9) represents the most common form of engagement. Conversely, couple/partner interactions are dominant in São Paulo (9) and present in Salvador (6), suggesting that Brazilian urban parks may function more strongly as spaces for intimate companionship than their Peruvian counterparts. Family-oriented motivations also remain significant (19 in total), especially in Arequipa (5) and Salvador (9), reinforcing the role of parks as intergenerational and collective environments.

Another noteworthy pattern is the relatively high frequency of friendship and peer groups in Brazil, particularly São Paulo (13), compared to minimal occurrences in Peru. This suggests that Brazilian parks are more actively integrated into peer leisure cultures, possibly due to better infrastructure for group activities. Meanwhile, pet-related interactions, although rare (3 in total), appear mainly in Peru (Arequipa with 2), pointing to localized practices of incorporating domestic life into urban leisure. The category of “accompanied, not specified with who” (18) further demonstrates the ambiguity in how youth

articulate companionship, yet still confirms that being accompanied—whether explicitly mentioned or not—remains a dominant pattern of engagement.

When compared with the motivational patterns displayed in Table 2, the visitation dynamics presented in Table 3 offer a complementary perspective on how reasons for going to urban parks translate into actual social behaviors. For example, the high prevalence of relaxation and mental well-being as a motivation (34 responses) corresponds with the notable proportion of solo visits (22 responses), confirming that parks are frequently sought as individual restorative environments. Likewise, the importance of contact with nature and aesthetics (25 responses) resonates with family- and partner-oriented interactions (16 responses), suggesting that such motivations are often fulfilled in relational and shared contexts. On the other hand, the relatively low visibility of categories like digital connectivity or tech-enhanced experiences in Table 2 parallels the absence of explicitly digital-mediated companionships in Table 3, pointing to a disjuncture between youth's digital lifestyles and their embodied practices of park visitation. Taken together, the two tables highlight that motivations and visit dynamics are intertwined yet shaped differently across cultural and urban contexts.

Activities and preferences of young visitors

Urban parks serve as dynamic spaces where young visitors engage in a range of recreational, social, and solitary activities. Participants highlighted preferences for sports, relaxation, and digital engagement. For instance, Participant 23 emphasized their routine of jogging in the mornings, citing the “open air and greenery as motivating factors”. Studies have corroborated that diverse facilities like playgrounds and sports fields increase young visitors' engagement (Van Vliet et al., 2021). Meanwhile, others like Participant 38 noted a preference for tranquil activities, such as reading or meditating, echoing findings on the restorative benefits of urban green spaces (Dinda et al., 2021).

The integration of technology with park activities emerged as a significant trend among young visitors. Participant 45 mentioned

using public Wi-Fi for streaming and social media during visits. This aligns with the analysis of Wan et al. (2021) that links digital engagement to prolonged park stays and enhanced satisfaction with urban parks. While some participants viewed technology as a complement to their outdoor experience, others, such as Participant 44, expressed concerns about “missing the connection with nature due to constant digital engagement”.

The role of gender in shaping park activities was also apparent. Female participants, like 27, often mentioned enjoying group activities like yoga or picnics, while males, as noted by Participant 32, favored sports or high-energy activities. Such distinctions are consistent with findings by Rosa et al. (2023) and Riccetti et al. (2021), who observed that women typically engage more in nature-based recreation but less in physically demanding activities compared to men.

Seasonality and time of day significantly influenced activity preferences. Participant 49 stated that “evenings are best for group hangouts,” while 53 preferred midday visits for sunbathing or lounging. Research indicates that temporal factors, such as park lighting and temperature regulation, can impact attendance and activity diversity (Fang et al., 2021).

Well-maintained infrastructure plays a crucial role in determining activities and preferences. Participants frequently mentioned the value of seating areas, clean paths, and shaded zones. Participant 12 remarked, “I only come here because of the shaded benches; otherwise, it gets too hot”. Studies underscore that amenities like benches, restrooms, and water features enhance the user experience, promoting longer visits and higher satisfaction (Van Vliet et al., 2021).

Cultural backgrounds also shaped activity choices among young visitors. Participant 39, an international student in São Paulo, noted, “I appreciate parks here because they are safe for solo walking, unlike in my home city”. This reflects the broader trend of urban parks being perceived as culturally adaptive spaces that accommodate diverse recreational needs (Wan et al., 2021).

The findings suggest that urban parks should cater to a mix of preferences, balancing active and passive recreational spaces. Incorporating technology, such as augmented reality trails, could engage tech-savvy youth without detracting from the natural ambiance. Additionally, culturally inclusive designs, such as multilingual signage and activity-specific zones, could further enhance the attractiveness of parks to young visitors (Rosa et al., 2023).

The following table provides a comparative overview of the activities and preferences expressed by young visitors in the four cities under study. It highlights the range of recreational, social, and digital practices that urban parks enable, as well as the cultural and infrastructural factors shaping engagement. By organizing responses into categories, the table reveals how park use varies not only by activity type but also by national and urban context.

Table 4
Activities and preferences of young visitors in urban parks

Categories	Peru		Brazil		Total
	Arequipa	Lima	Salvador	São Paulo	
Sports & Physical Activities	12	1	8	6	27
Relaxation & Tranquil Activities	10	5	7	20	32
Pet-related Activities	2	2	-	-	4
Art & Photography-oriented Activities	2	-	1	2	5
Social & Talking Activities	2	-	5	5	12
Digital Engagement & Technology Use	-	-	4	2	7
Total of Respondents	28	8	25	35	97

As Table 4 shows, relaxation and tranquil activities emerge as the most common preference (32), with particularly high representation in São Paulo (20). This underscores the restorative role of urban parks, affirming their capacity to provide refuge from urban stressors while

supporting mental well-being. Sports and physical activities also stand out (27), especially in Arequipa (12), reflecting the value placed on parks as fitness and recreation spaces. Meanwhile, pet-related activities appear only in Peruvian responses, indicating localized cultural practices of incorporating pets into leisure. The presence of art and photography-oriented activities (5) further illustrates that parks are not only functional but also aesthetic and creative environments.

Equally noteworthy is the role of digital engagement and technology use (7), which appears exclusively in Brazilian cities, with Salvador (4) and São Paulo (2). This finding highlights the technological integration of leisure in Brazil, where connectivity complements traditional recreational practices. In contrast, Arequipa and Lima show no reported digital use, reinforcing a more traditional orientation toward nature-based or physical activities. The inclusion of social and talking activities (12), especially in Brazilian cities, further reveals that parks are crucial for fostering peer connections and collective experiences. Overall, the table confirms that while universal needs such as rest and exercise dominate, local cultural, infrastructural, and technological differences strongly influence how young people engage with urban parks.

When considered alongside Tables 2 and 3, the results of Table 4 reveal important intersections between motivations, companionship dynamics, and activity preferences. The prominence of relaxation and tranquil activities (32) directly reflects the central motivational category of relaxation and mental well-being (34), while also resonating with the high frequency of solo visits (22). Similarly, the significance of sports and physical activities (27) mirrors the motivational drivers of physical and recreational engagement (5 in Table 2) and indicates that these preferences are frequently pursued in groups, as reflected in the companionship patterns of friendship and peer groups (18 in Table 3). The relatively modest presence of digital engagement and technology use (7) underscores the gap observed in Table 2, where digital connectivity was almost absent, suggesting that although digital practices exist, they are not yet a dominant dimension of park life. Overall, the

three tables together provide a layered understanding: Table 2 explains why young people are drawn to parks, Table 3 shows with whom they go, and Table 4 details what they do once there.

Public internet and connectivity in parks

Public internet and connectivity in urban parks have become central to young people's experiences in such spaces, as highlighted by Participant 12, who remarked, "Access to the internet in parks has changed how I interact with these spaces; it's not just a place to unwind but also a place to stay connected to the digital world". This reflects a broader trend where connectivity is not only a utility but a component of the modern park experience, aligning with research that notes a rise in the demand for Wi-Fi and cellular network services within parks to enhance visitor satisfaction and engagement (Peterson et al., 2021).

From a social perspective, Participant 7 emphasized, "Public internet in parks creates a mix of solitude and community. I can connect with friends digitally even while enjoying nature". This dual nature is significant, as it fosters a blend of physical presence in nature with digital interactions, enabling individuals to balance the benefits of outdoor experiences and virtual connectivity. Similar findings in a meta-analysis reveal that technology in parks promotes inclusive usage, particularly among youth, by bridging gaps between recreational and communicative needs (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2022).

However, concerns about the potential for excessive internet use to disrupt the restorative benefits of nature were raised. Participant 19 noted, "Sometimes, I feel the internet distracts me from fully engaging with the park's tranquility". This sentiment is echoed in studies that caution against over-reliance on connectivity, which may dilute the psychological benefits of natural settings by creating a cognitive dissonance between digital engagement and the intended leisure goals of park visits (Araújo Rodrigues et al., 2022; Karki et al., 2021).

Participants also highlighted the critical role of public internet in fostering safety and accessibility. Participant 3 shared, "Having internet access in parks makes me feel safer, as I can easily contact someone

if needed”. This aligns with arguments in literature that connectivity in parks not only supports user convenience but also enhances their perception of security, making these spaces more attractive to a broader demographic (Notara et al., 2021).

From a managerial perspective, Participant 15 expressed, “The internet can guide park-goers about crowd levels and environmental updates”. This aligns with studies emphasizing how digital infrastructure, such as IoT-based systems, can optimize user experiences by providing real-time data, helping in conservation efforts and improving crowd management in parks (Gallacher et al., 2021).

Finally, concerns about “nomophobia,” or anxiety related to disconnection, were noted. Participant 10 stated, “I sometimes worry about losing internet connectivity while in the park, which takes away from the relaxation I seek”. This highlights a paradox where digital dependency may counteract the very relaxation that parks are meant to provide, a phenomenon corroborated in reviews of internet-related anxieties among adolescents (Bickham, 2021).

Safety and attractiveness for young visitors

Urban parks offer critical spaces for recreation and socialization yet concerns about safety and the perceived attractiveness of these areas profoundly influence their utility among young visitors. Data from interviews revealed that perceptions of safety and infrastructure quality are pivotal to understanding why some youth frequent parks while others avoid them. Participant 20, highlighted that poorly lit areas and overgrown vegetation often deter their visits, aligning with findings from Polko and Kimic (2022), which emphasize the role of visibility and maintenance in perceived safety.

Participants consistently noted that effective lighting and open visibility are fundamental to fostering a sense of security. For example, Participant 27, stressed that parks with high-density vegetation can feel isolating and potentially unsafe. This aligns with the observations of Biernacka et al. (2022), who argued that both accessibility and maintenance of greenery are critical factors in ensuring inclusivity and

attractiveness. Young visitors gravitate toward spaces where they can see and be seen, highlighting the importance of visibility in reducing fear of crime and promoting social interactions.

Moreover, gender plays a significant role in safety perceptions. Participant 19 expressed hesitation to visit parks alone due to safety concerns, particularly after dusk. Research corroborates these experiences, as women frequently report heightened fear of crime in less monitored urban spaces (Polko & Kimic, 2022). Addressing these concerns through improved surveillance and community engagement initiatives could make parks more welcoming for young women.

Attractiveness also hinges on the aesthetic and functional qualities of urban parks. Participants 44 and 65, both avid parkgoers, cited well-maintained trails, clean facilities, and modern amenities as primary factors influencing their choice of recreational areas. As noted in Basu & Nagendra (2021), parks with enhanced infrastructure and diverse recreational options are more likely to attract a broader demographic, including youth. Participants emphasized that access to safe, clean restrooms and functional sports equipment enhances their experience, fostering repeat visits.

Safety concerns also intersect with broader socio-environmental dynamics. Participant 66 pointed out the challenges of navigating parks located in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, where a lack of security measures and visible neglect deter engagement. This observation reflects the findings of Biernacka et al.'s (2022) on how socioeconomic inequalities exacerbate disparities in urban park quality and accessibility.

Ultimately, promoting safety and attractiveness requires holistic park management approaches. Participants suggested that community involvement in park maintenance, alongside the integration of technology, such as emergency alert systems, could bridge the gap between user expectations and current provisions. Research by Wang et al. (2021) supports this notion, advocating for participatory urban planning to create safer and more appealing public spaces for all.

The following diagram visually synthesizes the core findings of this study by illustrating the interconnections between key factors influencing social gathering in urban parks among young visitors. This framework integrates elements related to safety, accessibility, and aesthetic consistency, alongside youth engagement, digital dynamics, and social gathering patterns. By organizing these components, the diagram highlights the multidimensional nature of urban park utilization and provides a structured understanding of how motivations, cultural contexts, and environmental factors interact to shape park experiences. The visualization serves as a conceptual guide for interpreting the complex relationship between urban park attributes and the social behaviors of young visitors.

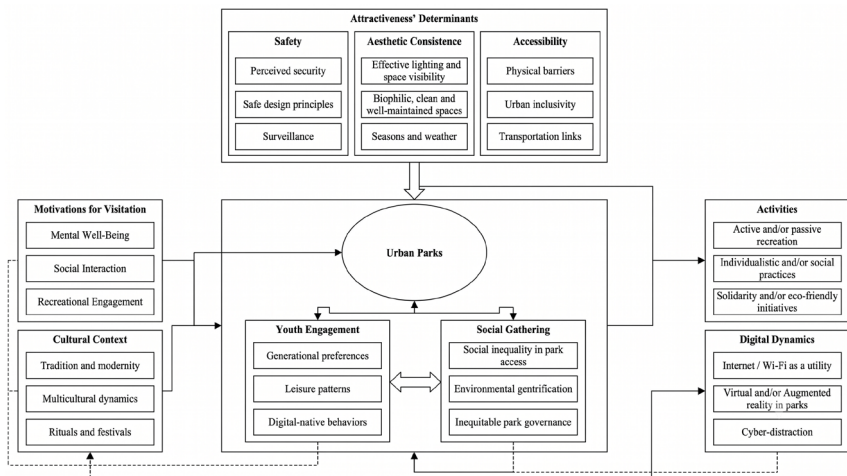


Figure 1. Social gathering in urban parks among youngsters

At the center of the diagram, urban parks function as dynamic public spaces where various determinants shape their attractiveness and usability. Motivations for visitation—mental well-being, social interaction, and recreational engagement—play a fundamental role in drawing young visitors. These motivations are further influenced by

cultural context, incorporating aspects such as traditions, multicultural interactions, and community rituals. The engagement of young people in urban parks is framed by generational preferences, leisure patterns, and digital-native behaviors, reflecting how contemporary park usage is intertwined with evolving technological and social trends. Additionally, the diagram highlights challenges in social gathering, such as social inequality in park access, environmental gentrification, and inequitable governance, which impact inclusivity and equitable use. Safety, accessibility, and aesthetic consistency emerge as primary attractiveness determinants, shaping perceptions and influencing whether young visitors feel comfortable in these environments. Finally, digital dynamics, including public internet availability, virtual and augmented reality experiences, and cyber-distraction, illustrate how technology can simultaneously enhance and disrupt park-based social interactions. This structured representation underscores the complexity of modern urban park experiences, reinforcing the necessity for well-informed urban planning to ensure these spaces remain inclusive, accessible, and socially engaging for younger generations.

Despite the contributions of this study, some limitations should be acknowledged. Although the research included four case studies across Brazil and Peru, direct comparison between cities was not the main objective of the paper, which focused instead on identifying youth motivations, activities, and perceptions of social gathering in urban parks. Nevertheless, this choice limited the extent to which cross-cultural differences could be explored in depth. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data through structured interviews, while valuable for capturing subjective perspectives, may have introduced biases such as social desirability or selective recall. Finally, the findings have reduced generalization, as they are specific to a particular age group and to the urban contexts examined, and therefore may not fully represent youth behaviors in other demographic or geographic settings. These limitations open important avenues for future research, such as comparative designs across regions, methodological triangulation, and broader sampling strategies to strengthen the external validity of the results.

Final considerations

The findings of this study highlight that urban parks remain vital social and recreational infrastructures for young people, even in an era defined by digital connectivity. Across the four cities analyzed—São Paulo, Salvador, Lima, and Arequipa—youth consistently expressed that relaxation, contact with nature, and socialization are the main motivations driving their engagement with these green environments. These motivations intersect with cultural and contextual differences but converge on the recognition of parks as essential sites for psychological well-being, identity construction, and collective interaction. In doing so, the study demonstrates that young visitors do not merely consume parks as leisure facilities but invest them with meaning as spaces where social bonds and individual restoration co-exist.

In directly addressing the research question—to what extent do young visitors remain engaged in performing social behaviors within urban parks—the evidence indicates that young people are not only engaged but actively transform parks into arenas of relational and cultural practice. While solo visits were common, particularly in Peruvian cities, group-based activities with friends, partners, and families dominated in Brazilian contexts, suggesting a diverse range of social behaviors embedded in park life. These findings confirm that urban parks are not passive backdrops but dynamic spaces where young people negotiate belonging, independence, and connectivity. The extent of engagement is therefore substantial, though it varies according to local culture, infrastructure, and safety perceptions.

This study contributes to the literature by foregrounding the hybrid nature of contemporary park use among youth. Digital connectivity was found to operate as both an enabler and a distraction: it enhances safety, facilitates coordination, and extends social interactions, yet simultaneously risks undermining the restorative qualities of nature. The ambivalence of connectivity underscores the paradox faced by urban planners—how to integrate technological demands without eroding the embodied, face-to-face encounters that define parks' social value. By situating this tension at the center of analysis, the study advances debates on the evolving role of

public spaces in digital societies, offering a perspective that bridges environmental psychology, urban studies, and youth cultures.

Practical suggestions emerge from these insights. Policymakers and urban designers should prioritize multi-functional parks that respond to the generational needs of young people. Investments in safety—through lighting, visibility, and community involvement—are critical to fostering inclusivity, particularly for women and marginalized groups. Likewise, infrastructure such as shaded seating, sports facilities, and accessible Wi-Fi can accommodate diverse motivations while ensuring equity of use. Importantly, participatory planning processes that engage youth directly in decision-making will help align urban park policies with the aspirations of their most active users, thereby enhancing the sustainability and legitimacy of interventions.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations that should be acknowledged. Although the research encompassed four culturally distinct cities, cross-comparison was not the primary objective, which constrained the depth of comparative insights. The reliance on self-reported data through structured interviews introduces potential biases of recall and desirability, while the focus on a specific age range (18–27) restricts the generalizability of findings to other demographics. Furthermore, the qualitative orientation, while rich in narrative depth, precludes broad statistical inferences. These limitations, however, open avenues for future research involving mixed methods, larger samples, and expanded geographic coverage to refine and extend the conclusions presented here.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms the enduring yet evolving importance of urban parks for young people. They are spaces of refuge and recreation, but equally of community and cultural expression, where social behaviors remain central despite the encroachment of digital lifestyles. By illuminating the motivations and practices of youth in Brazil and Peru, the paper underscores the need for urban policies that protect and enhance these spaces as pillars of sustainable, inclusive cities. In aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 11, the research points to a future in which urban parks are not only preserved as green infrastructures but re-imagined as vital arenas for the flourishing of younger generations.

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