

Negative Space: Student Voice of Green Space and Joy for Urban Planning in Malang

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ABSTRACT

Public spaces, including green open spaces, play a major role in improving the quality of life of the surrounding community. However, the mismatch between urban planning and actual utilization triggers negative perceptions of such spaces, because it can affect their functionality, aesthetics, and social comfort. Previous studies have documented the benefits of ecology, social, and mental health in humans from green open spaces, but previous observations have paid little attention to the less functional or neglected parts (negative spaces). In addition, students' opinions on green open spaces are less considered. This observation uses a quality method by exploring how students' perspectives and opinions on less functional or neglected green open spaces (negative spaces) and encouraging students towards urban planning. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and visual documentation in green open spaces frequently visited by students in Malang. Thematic analysis revealed diverse student experiences, with common concerns about neglected areas, lack of maintenance, and suboptimal functions, which reduce feelings of joy and comfort. The results of the study provide an answer that negative space indicates a sense of discomfort and lack of social interaction, and is contrary to the purpose of green open space which can provide restorative benefits. These findings provide valuable advice in planning a more inclusive and functional urban spatial plan in the future, ensuring that green open space is used effectively and improves social cohesion and quality in the midst of the urban environment.

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Introduction

Green open space management is important to provide a good experience for visitors. Visitors can gain valuable experience if presented with good management. On the other hand,

poor green open space management can have a negative impact on urban green parks, such as the stigma given to visitors which can worsen the reputation of green open parks. Not only that, the bad stigma for green open parks can polarize the identity of the surrounding population. The role of green open spaces is very important in improving the quality of life of the community, because it can be a channel to improve mental health and a space to establish social relationships.

Several studies that discuss green open spaces such as research by Van den Berg et al. (2010) which states that green open spaces can reduce community stress levels or can improve mental health. Not only that, other studies also show various benefits of green open spaces to improve air quality and create new business opportunities for the surrounding community. However, there are very few studies that discuss the study of negative space perceived by students.

Research related to negative space is still limited when related to green open spaces, especially when related to student perceptions. Negative space represents an area that contains aspects that do not function properly or spaces that have the potential to negatively influence the perceptions of visitors, especially students. This is generally overlooked in the governance of green open spaces. Not only that, negative voices in green open spaces from students can make a positive contribution to the improvement of green open spaces. This research can make a good contribution, especially in building a new perspective related to negative space towards green open spaces. Through the exploration of student voices about green open spaces, this research can fill the gaps or gaps in the existing literature review, and can be good information for planning the development of green open spaces, especially city parks. For this reason, this study aims to understand how student voices relate to negative space in green open spaces in Malang City. In addition, this study aims to explore the implications of perceptions regarding the design of more inclusive green open spaces, as well as preventing negative impacts that can befall green open spaces. Thus, this research is expected to make a major and practical contribution in creating green open spaces that are in accordance with the needs of urban communities, especially the younger generation.

Literature Review

Green open space is often a concern for city/environmental management because of its many benefits for the community, so that appropriate and significant arrangements are needed so that they are useful and well organized. As in previous studies, previous studies have shown

that green space has various benefits, ranging from ecological, social, to mental health benefits (Van den Berg et al., 2010; Hartig et al., 2014) (Hartig et al., 2014). This study aims to provide the use of green recreational space and emphasize the design of green open spaces that have a visitor attraction that is so environmentally friendly and of course comfortable and healthy for the user community. In addition, the existence of green open spaces also facilitates social interaction, environmental sports education media where people can learn about the importance of preserving nature and developing environmental awareness. According to research by Jennnings and Bamkole (2019), green public spaces are well designed to encourage social interaction. However, on the other hand, from the many studies that add to the benefits of green open spaces, there are few that will manage the negative space aspects in green open spaces. Negative space in the world of architecture and urban design is focused on space that looks so empty and is not utilized properly and is not optimally used which has an impact on the aesthetic, functional and comfort aspects of use so that it is often ignored. As in the study by Thompson (2002) showed that the use of empty space can create an impression of being unsafe, unfriendly, and also irrelevant when used by its users. In addition, there is very little about the response of how the younger generation responds to negative space in green open spaces as the younger generation is an agent of change in society, especially students because they have critical thinking, creativity and contribute to the social, environmental and cultural fields. This lack of literature opens up opportunities for channeling aspirations and contributions from students to raise awareness of negative space in open spaces. Previous research also did not explicitly link negative space with the potential for utilization in green open spaces in creating aspects of joy. In fact, as noted by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), public space design that prioritizes the emotional experience of users can have a greater impact on public acceptance. That this shows the urge to explore how green open spaces can be designed and designed by the younger generation in a local context, studies of public spaces in Indonesian cities, especially those in the Malang area, are very limited. This increasingly outlines that this study not only examines the aspects of its benefits but also hears the voices of aspirations and contributions from students as its main users. Thus, this section aims to fill the literature related to students' views on negative space. This study also tries to provide new input and present a more organized and inclusive user-based design for users.

Methodology

Our observations were conducted by interviewing several students who had visited several open spaces, several students shared their experiences and opinions on poor or

inadequate management in terms of functionality and aesthetics in green open spaces around the city of Malang. We chose this method in order to better understand from the perspective of student experiences, student perspectives, to students' feelings and expressions when they were at the green open space location. We focused our observation objects on green open spaces that are often visited by students in the city of Malang, for example city parks and green open spaces in the campus area. We chose this location because generally students often visit and there is a lot of negative speech at the location.

The students we interviewed were active students and lived in the city of Malang and its surroundings as well as students who had visited green open spaces to carry out some of their activities. We interviewed directly several students who had visited green open spaces and were willing to share their experiences and feelings when visiting the place. In this observation we interviewed around 10 people, with various considerations of information as data for benchmarks in our observations.

The collection of information was carried out using three main methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews using semi-structured methods to understand the various experiences, opinions and perspectives of students towards green open spaces, especially regarding parts that are rarely used and unpleasant to look at. For observations, we carried out directly at the locations we observed to record various visitor activities, interactions between users and several parts of the space that support or reduce the sense of happiness of users. Furthermore, for visual documentation we used several photos and notes from our direct observations at the location to support the results of the interviews and observations that we had carried out.

The data we obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process involves collecting some information, as well as keywords to identify the main themes and a deep understanding of the theme. We did the final results using triangulation techniques, namely by comparing several pieces of information from various sources, such as interviews, conducting observations and using documentation to prove some data. Data accuracy was also carried out by involving several informants to ensure that the analysis results were in accordance with their experiences.

This observation was carried out without ignoring the principles of research ethics, starting from the informant's permission before conducting the interview, the privacy of the informant's identity was carried out using a pseudonym, and the informant was free to withdraw

at any time without any consequences. With this method, we hope that the observation can better understand the object of observation in depth and produce a real contribution to the understanding of the concept of negative space in the context of green open space in Malang City.

Result and Discussion

This study shows that students' views on green open spaces, especially those related to the concept of negative space, are very diverse. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the existing public spaces, with the main focus on the aesthetic and functional aspects that were considered not to meet expectations. Green open spaces, which ideally function as places to relax, interact socially, or do physical activities, are often considered less than optimal in their utilization. One of the causes is the presence of negative space, namely empty or unused areas that reduce the effectiveness of the space. This is reflected in the opinions of Informant 1 and Informant 2.

According to Informant 1 (December 2, 2024), there are areas in the green open space that have minimal lighting, so they feel dark and uncomfortable. In addition, the area is filled with wild grass that is not maintained, such as not being trimmed or watered regularly, giving the impression of being unkempt. Informants emphasized the importance of routine maintenance to maintain the quality of green open spaces, which have great potential to help reduce stress and fatigue.

Informant 2 (December 5, 2024) said that the sports facilities in the green open space need to be renovated, because some of the equipment is damaged and unsuitable for use. He suggested that improvements and innovations be made to the facilities in the park, so that it not only becomes a green open space, but can also be used as an adequate sports venue for visitors.

According to information submitted on December 2, 2024, the lack of lighting in the green open space creates a dark and uncomfortable atmosphere. This condition is exacerbated by areas filled with unmaintained weeds, which reduces the appeal and comfort of users. Informants assessed that the lack of maintenance in the area can give a negative impression of the overall quality of the green open space.

This phenomenon can be explained through the Environmental Design Theory, which states that the physical design of a space greatly affects the comfort and perception of its users. In this case, poor lighting in the green open space creates discomfort, in accordance with the

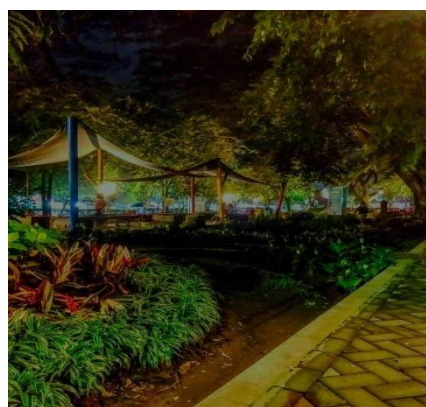
principles of the theory which emphasizes the importance of lighting in creating a comfortable environment.

The existence of negative space in the green open space was also a concern in interviews with students, who assessed that open spaces that are not utilized properly tend to give an empty, unattractive, and uncomfortable impression. This is contrary to the purpose of green spaces, which should have a positive impact on the mood and mental well-being of their users. Several students also expressed that this green space has not been able to create an environment that supports social activities, such as exercising, interacting with friends, or simply relaxing.

Figure 1. Negative Space in Merjosari Park with space that is obstructed from the view of other visitors, thus causing misuse of the place.



Figure 2. Negative Space in Trunojoyo Park is the lack of lighting which causes an uncomfortable situation for visitors and the lack of adequate shade facilities for shelter



Several green open spaces in urban areas often do not consider the functional needs of students as the main users in their designs. The presence of negative space that is not optimally utilized has an impact on the aesthetic aspect, as well as the social and psychological quality of the space. Many students feel that the existing green open spaces have not been able to create

a sense of comfort and attachment, even though this should be an important part of the experience of using public spaces.

I hope there are more facilities that support learning activities such as tables and chairs in shaded areas to create a sense of comfort in learning for students (informant 3: December 3, 2024)

This study emphasizes the importance of designing and managing green open spaces that are more in line with the needs and expectations of users, especially students who are a large part of the urban community. One of the main findings in this study is that negative space can give the impression that the space is not optimal, even reducing its function as a place that offers social, ecological, and psychological benefits. As explained by Van den Berg et al. (2010), green open spaces should have a positive impact on mental health, such as reducing stress and increasing well-being. However, if the space has negative space that is not utilized properly, these positive impacts will not be fully realized. Neglected or poorly maintained green open spaces can create a boring and unpleasant atmosphere, even triggering negative perceptions of the space.

Yes, the pedestrian paths in some parts of the park look cracked and slippery, making them uncomfortable to walk on, especially when it rains. (Informant 4: December 1, 2024)

This study also revealed that students, as a group of public space users, have a critical view of the design and use of green open spaces. They prioritize the functionality and comfort of the space, as well as how the space can meet their needs to interact, study, or rest. Well-designed spaces that avoid unused negative spaces can create a more pleasant and productive atmosphere, which ultimately supports their quality of life. In addition, this study shows that students value green open spaces that offer opportunities for social interaction, physical activity, and enjoying the beauty of nature, according to informant 5.

Yes, negative areas can be filled with art installations, ornamental flower gardens, or community areas for sports classes, and meditation areas.

A previous study by Jennings and Bamkole (2019) emphasized that well-designed green public spaces can encourage social interaction, build a sense of community, and create an inclusive environment. The presence of supporting facilities, such as comfortable seating, easy access, and well-maintained green areas, are important factors in improving the quality of the space in the eyes of students, as also noted by Chiesura (2004), who stated that appropriate

green space design can provide recreational experiences and improve community well-being. In this context, the concept of negative space is very important for public space designers to understand. Kowalik (2012) explains that areas that are not utilized effectively or are poorly designed can create a negative impression of the space, reduce comfort, and limit the function of the space. This emphasizes the importance of a more comprehensive design approach in the planning and management of green open spaces, so that the space can be utilized optimally and provide social, ecological, and psychological benefits to the surrounding community.

Implications for the Design and Management of Green Open Spaces

This observation provides suggestions for the planning and management of green open spaces in urban environments, especially around campuses or student residential areas. In designing public spaces, several aspects must be prioritized, namely functional and aesthetic aspects, by reducing unused negative space. Green space managers need to involve users in the design and evaluation process to ensure that the space meets the social, recreational, and health needs of users.

Well-designed green open spaces can be utilized efficiently and create a pleasant experience, helping to improve the quality of life of users, especially students who are often the main users. Therefore, it is important for space managers to pay more attention to feedback and experiences from users, in order to create inclusive and relevant public spaces. This study contributes to the understanding of the importance of designing green open spaces that are not only visually beautiful, but also functional and pleasant for their users. Thus, it is hoped that public spaces, especially green open spaces, can function more optimally and provide social and psychological benefits for urban communities, including students.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is the lack of optimal utilization of functions in green open spaces such as lack of lighting, irregular spatial arrangement, and lack of maintenance of plants around the park, thus reducing the appeal and comfort for visitors, especially students. This can cause a negative impression on the area, which reduces its function as a happy place to socialize and be environmentally friendly, the lack of exploration of the space should be able to provide psychological and social impacts, therefore it is important to provide more design and maintenance to green open spaces so that they are well maintained and optimal for use by visitors.

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