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PLA2018-2543**

**The Urban Park: Nature and Democracy as
Components of a Planning Strategy**

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Aguilar Dubose, C. (2018). "The Urban Park: Nature and Democracy as Components of a Planning Strategy", Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: PLA2018-2543.

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www.atiner.gr
URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm
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ISSN: 2241-2891
24/09/2018

The Urban Park: Nature and Democracy as Components of a Planning Strategy

Carolyn Aguilar Dubose

Abstract

The park is a space imbued with a duality which is constituted by a long-lived and constant ingredient, when one talks of NATURE, and a much more recent one, but no less powerful ingredient, when one talks of DEMOCRACY. It brings the ideas of paradise, country in the city and landscape to the fore, as well as health, repose and community. Parks, invaluable components of public space, can be forceful advocates for building collective memory, as well as for conforming an identifiable and significant urban structure. This research demonstrates that parks continue to represent a moral space, a space of ‘goodness’, through layers of commonplaces found in survey testimonials and drawings, through books about parks and about the city, as well as through newspapers, films, television series and paintings. Not all professionals responsible for the design and care of parks understand this duality, or the wealth of diverse meaning parks convey to all types of users. Designers, Planners and Managers see the park as an ‘object’, a passive space whose success is centered on rearranging physical attributes. Users consider the park to be a ‘subject’, an active element of the city, an event. The park can lose its power and become fragile when projects do not meet users’ expectations. Parks and park systems are a reliable planning strategy. In the present discussion on the ‘spaciality’ of social problems, the urban park can contribute to promote a healthy, legible, just, beautiful and liveable city.

Keywords: Community, Democracy, Health, Nature, Park, Structure.

Acknowledgments: I wish to express my thanks to my friend and mentor Perla Chinchilla, who through her critical analysis and insightful comments gave fruit for thought in the development of this research. To Paula Ávalos and Miguel Ángel Lira, my indebtedness to their help as research assistants. To the various interns assigned to me at Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, who through their interest helped in acquiring details on the present findings, my thanks. To my son-in-law, Daniel Derzavich, for his invaluable help in the reading of the Torah. To my daughter-in-law, Karín Cerpa for her work on the design of the presentation and the figures in this article, my sincere appreciation. My gratitude and love to my dear husband Armando Báez, and my wonderful daughter, Carola, and son, Benito.

Introduction

“Let the design of our parks serve as the plan for our towns.”

Abbé Laugier, 1755

(Spiro Kostof. *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History*, Canada, Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1999, p. 226.

The urban park is not just a mere public facility. The urban park is a cultural phenomenon. It is a GOOD element of the modern city, inserted as a service to the public during the second half of the 19th Century.

Not all disciplines concerned with the urban question, including architects, engineers, landscape architects, urban designers, planners, developers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, geographers, historians, are aware of the real beneficial potential of parks and park systems. For this reason, I have deemed it important to broach the theme about the park, from a different point of view; the point of view of cultural history, searching for an identity of the park through discovering commonplaces of the park in different sources.

The definition of commonplaces used here is “words that explain key ideas that carry heavy moral significance.” They also imply ‘singularity’ of an object, animal or person that distinguishes them from others. In particular, the park carries in its identity meaning from the past, connected with NATURE, and since the 19th Century, the integration of the more modern concept of DEMOCRACY, when the park became a formally institutionalized service for the community.

Literature Review and Methodology

The sources utilized to define the identity of the park are:

- a. Authors who write about the park;
- b. Authors who refer to the park through their study of the city;
- c. Survey of professionals dedicated to the design, construction and management of urban parks;
- d. Survey of park users, of different ages, economic levels, genders and occupations.

The park experience encountered in these different sources is very revealing of the qualitative capacity of this important urban space.

To understand the moral bearing of the park, it is necessary to understand its potential for GOOD. The lack of concurrence between the users’ idea of a park and what designers and managers have in their heads about the park, this powerful and beneficial element of the city may become a fragile and dangerous one.

Findings/Results

Through the different sources reviewed, this study has come to derive a genealogy of the GOODNESS of the urban park, as well as the identity through diverse commonplaces in literature, surveys and other sources.

Genealogy of Goodness of the Urban Park

The urban park is an expression of the values of Western society. The different understandings of Nature convey historical perspective to the park. On the other hand, the park is a place for ‘socialization’, a space of Democracy where equality, mixture of different income levels, search for the balance in class struggle, and free access to all, are paramount. The ‘spaciality’ of social life is materialized in what Edward Soja has come to call the ‘right to the city.’¹

Along the road in the transformation of the park from ‘object’, ‘product’, ‘space’, and realization of a yearning, two impulses have confronted each other in bringing the park to fruition: the aesthetic and the ethical. The aesthetic refers to the image of the city (beauty, harmony, greenness) and the ethical refers to the values of urban culture (security, order, health and community). In the search for beauty, harmony and greenness, the park is linked to NATURE. In the search for security, order, health and community, the park is linked to the notion of DEMOCRACY. In identifying the park of the modern city, we shall find commonplaces that are moral in character and recall one or both of these two notions.

NATURE and DEMOCRACY are a virtuous and attractive coupling. According to the sources analysed, the notion of NATURE comes from Antiquity, through the ideas of ‘paradise’, ‘landscape’ and ‘*rus in urbe*’ or ‘country in the city’. It is in the 19th Century where we encounter the urban park that we are acquainted with today, a democratic legacy of the search for progress, quality of life and better distribution of urban values in the modern city.

¹Edward W. Soja. *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Globalization and Community Series, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, *Kindle Edition*, pos. 982.

located in the periphery and as part of the large private country estates. In the 17th Century the Tuilleries Gardens in Paris were open to the public¹ and King Charles II of England opened St. James Park to the public,² as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Painting Depicting 'Park Time' in St. James Park, during Charles II Reign in England*³



Source: Nickolls, 1745.

The Enlightenment extolled the goodness of the country through the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau⁴ and in the 19th Century, with the sinister growth of cities, the park became the antidote to the venom of industrialized society.⁵

The park begins to be seen as part of the urban structure and a pattern for growth, as well as a political instrument used by the government in a city no longer built by heroes and conquerors, but by bureaucrats and administrators.⁶ To build a city became a science.

¹A.E.J. Morris. *History of Urban Form, Before the Industrial Revolutions*, Third Edition, England, Pearson Education Limited, 1994, p. 163.

²Karen R. Jones & John Wills. *The Invention of the Park: recreational landscapes from the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005, p. 6 and 29.

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._James%27s_Park.

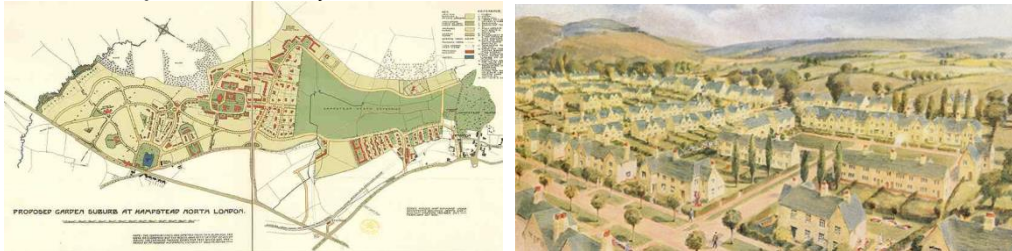
⁴Spiro Kostof, *The City Assembled*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1999, p. 51.

⁵Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995, p. 7.

⁶David P. Jordan. *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann*, New York, The Free Press, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1995, p. 8.

The ‘Garden City Movement’ was an attempt to take the city to the country (*urbe in hortus*) in order to obtain the benefit of both worlds through this merger.¹ New neighbourhoods were to be close to Nature in the form of open space, public parks, communal and private gardens. The low density of these developments encouraged suburbanization. Figures 3 and 4 show an example of this process.

Figures 3 and 4. *Hampstead Garden Suburb Project by Sir Raymond Unwin² and View of ‘Garden City’ Environment³*



Source: Unwin, 1905.

During the Modern Movement, the park was considered a necessary facility and the site for the construction of monumental housing high-rises, substituting the city for the building, ridding the urban tissue of its very essence, doing without ‘street activity’, ‘neighborhood solidarity’, ‘around the corner’, ‘next door’, and all sense of community.⁴

During the 1960’s, the urban morphologists attempted to return to the advantages of the traditional urban form and analysed the city through the dialectics between street layout (infrastructure), plot subdivision (structure of private property) and buildings (the architecture of the private and public domains).⁵ Parks were somehow undermined in this analysis, with no proper and defined classification. Are they streets? Or plots? Or buildings?

In the 1990’s, the Charter for the New Urbanism endeavored to counter the rampant suburbanization underway in American cities, that influenced as well urban growth in Latin America. The Charter promoted a compact, connected and complex city, where the park is recognised as part of formative public space, promoting a return to a dense urban tissue.⁶

¹Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1981; originally published in 1898 as “*To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*”, and reissued in 1902 under its present title, p. 45 and 46.

²<http://architectureandurbanism.blogspot.mx/2011/11/raymond-unwin-town-planning-in-practice.html>.

³<http://livingmags.co.uk/the-garden-village-a-city-in-the-country/>.

⁴Philippe Panerai, Jean Castex, Jean-Charles Depaule. *Formes Urbaines, de l’îlot à la barre* (Urban Forms: the Death and Life of the Urban Block), Marseille, Éditions Parenthèses, 2001, p. 134.

⁵Aldo Rossi. *La Architettura de la Ciudad* (The Architecture of the City), Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, Colección Punto y Línea, 2000, p. 85-87.

⁶Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (Coord.). *Towns and Town-making Principles*, New York, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1991, p. 15.

Currently, the ‘country in the city’ notion has achieved globally recognised significance, through efforts to preserve natural resources, the insertion of urban agriculture, and the forthcoming new aesthetic in the design of parks with the use of productive and medicinal plants.¹

We inherited *rus in urbe* from Antiquity, and it became the notion of urban ‘open space’. To bring the country into the city conveys a meaning of goodness, connected to the Roman myth of ‘Arcadia’, the pastoral village that so inspired ancient poets.²

Paradise

Figure 5. *Bas-relief, Ancient Persian Gardens*



Source: British Museum, 7th Century.

The graphic and literary representation of ‘paradise’ is, in fact, a garden, as shown in the Mesopotamian bas-relief depicted in Figure 5. The word ‘park’ has common roots with ancient words that, through time, derived in the word park. In Sumer mythology of the third millenium B.C, the idea of Paradise was a divine and immortal garden situated in ancient Mesopotamia,³ called ‘*pairi-daeza*’, that also meant walled or enclosed. This term passes on to the Greek in

¹International Living Future Institute, *Living Community Challenge Program*, <https://living-future.org/lcc/> [consulted April 3rd, 2018].

²Grimal. *Les Jardins...*, p. 166.

³Maureen Carroll, *Earthly Paradises: Ancient Gardens in History and Archaeology*, London: The British Museum Press, 2003, p. 128.

the form of *paradeisos*, which signifies ‘enclosed plot or field’. The late Latin version becomes *paradisus*.¹

The Greek translators of the Hebrew texts utilised the Greek term *paradeisos* to name the Garden of Eden or Gan Eden, which meant ‘land of delight’.² Figure 5 is a bas-relief of the 7th Century B.C., depicting an artist in the gardens of King Sennacherib’s palace in Nineveh, Mesopotamia (Iraq).³

Connected to *pairi-daêza* is the Greek *peri* or ‘surrounding’, and *teichos* or ‘wall’. Combined we find the Latin word *pertica* or stick, tool for measuring an animal pen. The word park derives from the Late Latin *parricus* believed to be a possible derivation of *pertica*.⁴ The notion of enclosure is a commonplace among the words designated to mean the exclusive garden of Eden, whose idea is also contained in ‘paradise’. One can perceive an historical and etymological relationship between ‘paradise’ and ‘park’. It is a beguiling notion that the idea of enclosed, protected, walled could foster the idea of exclusive, sacred, only for the few, and that these ancient open spaces called paradises could have derived in what we now call ‘park’: *pairi-daêza*, *paradeisos*, *periteichos*, *parricus*, *parc*, **park**.

In the Torah, texts in the Genesis or *Bereshit* section, paradise or garden includes descriptions of elements of nature, rivers, vegetation, and it defines a location in the East of the World. The presence of rivers and their names “...allows the location of an ample oasis in Mesopotamia.”⁵ It is possible to think that the idea of a delightful garden might have come from ancient Persia, understood by the Hebrew people during the Babylonian captivity, transferred to the Old Testament, translated by the Greeks and then incorporated into the New Testament as ‘paradise’, a word that also has a link to ‘park’.

During the Middle Ages, the *hortus conclusus* or enclosed monastic orchard or garden, offered a space for contemplation and peace. Figure 6 demonstrates a ‘Delightful Garden’ from the Egerton Manuscript of 1069.⁶

In the 13th Century, secular gardens appeared, associated to courtesan culture.⁷ These gardens inspired the ephemeral theatre performances of Court Society, where plants and animals portrayed virtues and ways of interpreting nature.⁸

¹Henry Bosley Woolf (Ed.). *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield, Mass., EEUU, G. & C. Merriam Company, 1977, p. 830.

²Carroll. *Earthly Paradises...*, p. 125.

³<http://www.lessingimages.com/viewimage.asp?i=08020547+&cr=63&cl=1#>.

⁴*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged*, Volume II, H-R, USA, G.&C. Merriam Co., 1971, p. 1642.

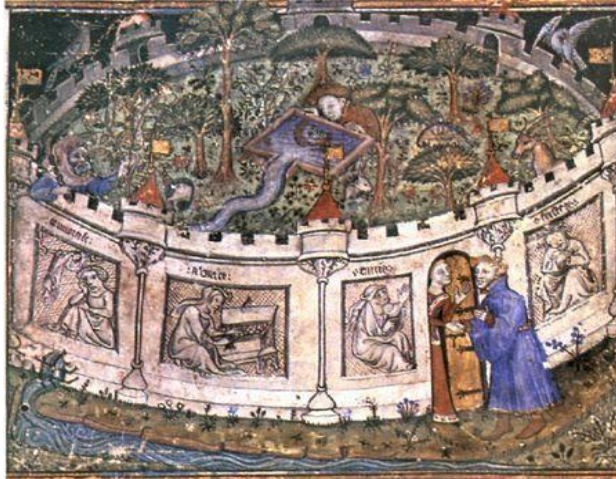
⁵Alain Roger. *Breve tratado del paisaje* (Brief Treatise on Landscape), Traducción de Maysi Veuthey, Edición de Javier Maderuelo, Madrid, Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, S.L., 2014, (versión Kindle), p. 252.

⁶Le Verger de déduit Le Roman de la Rose, manuscrit Egerton 1069 (The Pleasure Orchard, Romance Novel), <https://bit.ly/2I9RGtn>.

⁷Carroll. *Earthly Paradises...*, p. 132.

⁸Consuelo Gómez López, “El Gran Teatro de la Corte: Naturaleza y artificio en las fiestas de los siglos XVI y XVII” (The Great Court Theatre: nature and artifice in 16th and 17th Century festivities), *Revista Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, Serie VII, H^a del Arte, t. 12, 1999, p. 214.

Figure 6. *Bas-relief, Ancient Persian Gardens*¹



Source: Egerton, 1069.

The idea of **paradise** is connected to the notion of **utopia**. Thomas Moore proposed an ideal society where inhabitants would cultivate gardening as a productive pastime, growing fruit trees, plants and flowers and holding contests to prize the most beautiful neighborhood designs and best maintenance.²

In the Renaissance, the idea of an earthy Paradise was always linked to a more divine and primordial garden. The design of gardens became an extension of the palace and soon to become a feat in technique, artistry and power: the country and nature, together with their virtues and wealth, conquered and submitted.

The paradise paradigm, together with the utopian paradigm, maintained a connection to nature during the Enlightenment, and would soon prove true the criticism against the city when industrialization provoked the sinister and terrifying urban growth in European cities in the second half of the 19th Century. The metropolitan phenomenon became global. Social reformers came up with possible solutions, although burdened with the already obsolete urban forms.

The paradise of universal peace, equality and wellbeing is still far from being achieved. Like the idea of paradise or utopia, it is a valid dream, a yearning, an aspiration, which the park cannot solve on its own; however, the park may proffer a breather and a rest from the immense sprawl caused by planned, as well as, self-built neighborhoods.

Landscape

Landscape as an idea emerges in the Renaissance. It is an element that together with architecture extends outside the perimeter of the building to encompass vast villa gardens. These spaces become a place of socialization for

¹Le Verger de déduit (Le Roman de la Rose, manuscrit Egerton 1069), <http://utpictura18.univ-tlse2.fr/GenerateurNotice.php?numnotice=A0592>.

²Tomás Moro. *Utopía* (Utopia), Colección “Sepan Cuántos...”, No. 282, México, Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1975, p. 39.

royalty, aristocracy, nobility and, much later, for the emerging bourgeoisie, becoming public spaces for popular promenades. The cue of a recreational space, generous, welcoming, endowed with pacifying attributes, is picked up in the industrialized city and turned into a deliberate object of urban planning.

The landscape recreated in the park is imbued with symbolism conferred to it by the intentions of the local authority, the developer, the designer, creating a microclimate, a geography, recognizable views of a region, for the sake of fostering pride of place or the appropriation of local characteristics. Contrary to this, the intention might be to create an exotic, uncommon scenery, to awaken the interest for something different, to follow a fashion tendency or because it allows foreign landscapes to become familiar. Landscape in this sense is charged with a social, economic and even political agenda.

The park being both design and construction implies ample technical knowledge, perfected through years of experience in ground leveling, hydraulics, plant palette, climate, ground composition, topography, watershed, and numerous practices not my intention to cover in this article. The park is equally a materialization of a system of symbols, as well as the result of a disciplined profession.

The French philosopher Alain Roger concludes that nature is a product of the mind¹ and the landscapes we visualize are nuanced by what our brain perceives or what it has been trained to perceive. “It did not exist until art invented it.”² In landscape painting, which began in Flanders in the 15th Century, followed by the Dutch in the 17th Century, by the British in the 18th and 19th Centuries, and the French in the 20th Century³, artists have captured certain elements of nature that have become explicit in these representations. These elements provoked feelings in the spectators that in time became imbued in human memory, building a taste and recognition of their existence, appreciating their aesthetic value, and more importantly, their emotional value.

The park, as landscape, is an artistic representation of an ‘idea’ of nature, impregnated with the fashion and tendencies of the age. For example, in the Renaissance: the arcadian spaces and pastoral landscapes; later, when more panoramic scenery was deemed interesting, the sea, the beach and the mountain were invented as landscapes.⁴

Landscape changes as do the tastes, tendencies, new infrastructures, the idea of sustainability and the stewardship of natural resources so recurrent in today’s discourses. And the present discussion should involve the community. In this sense, the common landscape, the landscape of collectivity, the public landscape, the landscape of the park can, and should be, the result of a collaboration between society, specialists and local authorities. Not in vane has the design process, ever

¹Roger. *Breve tratado...*, Kindle p. 77.

²*idem.*

³Roger. *Breve tratado...*, Kindle p. 548.

⁴Roger. *Breve tratado...*, Kindle pos. 697. “This is how landscape during two centuries will inhabit our gaze, and will reign exclusively until the Enlightenment will, always under the beacon of art, invent new landscapes, the sea, the mountain, adding to the beautiful, the category of sublime, and completely transforming Western sensibility.” (translation by author from Spanish version)

since the second half of the 20th Century, led the way from site research and analysis, through engineering, architecture, industrial design and project management in the Kevin Lynch style of the 1950's, later influenced by the environmental revolution and ecological method of Ian McHarg in the 1960's, later challenged by Lawrence Halprin with his collaborative methodology and community product.¹

Landscape and its prefiguration, its design, its materialisation, are representational practices that reflect the human ideas about nature. In this sense, the relationship nature-society is historic, changing through time, and is displayed in the urban park.

The following paintings (Figures 7 to 12) depict the change in vision and significance of nature, through the representation of the idea of a 'park'.

Figures 7-12. *The Park Viewed through the Painter's Representation throughout Three Centuries*



Source: Various (see footnotes).

The park is built not only to be contemplated, remembered, imagined, but more so to be used, touched, sensed, smelled, walked upon, talked about, shared.

¹Simon Swaffield, *Theory in Landscape Architecture*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 144.

²<https://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=104217>.

³<https://bit.ly/2OLyAMz>.

⁴<https://bit.ly/2xABflv>.

⁵https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection_ge/objbytech/objbytech_tech-6_sov_page-7.html.

⁶<https://theartstack.com/artist/david-hockney/le-parc-des-sources-vich>.

⁷<https://theartstack.com/artist/david-hockney/le-parc-des-sources-vich>.

Therefore, the other important component of the park is society itself, not as an abstraction, but as a host of people, tastes, genders, ages, economic levels, intellectual and physical abilities, that in theory, as a sum total, have a right to access and use it. NATURE and DEMOCRACY combine in this hybrid space that today offers a wide variety of forms in an attempt to adapt to a world that is ever changing, to new and modern needs, to diverse tastes and fashions.

Many professions are involved in the design, construction and management of parks. They all design the NATURE of the park. ¿Who is designing the DEMOCRACY of the park?

Commonplaces of the Park

The urban park of today is the product of transformation, from an open space, random and without special attention, used by Kings and common folk, to a modern space, part of the urban conglomerate, worthy of study, to which multiple functions are ascribed, sometimes with heroic redeeming capabilities.

Among these capabilities, 32 commonplaces of the park have been found: 8 related to NATURE (GOOD); 21 related to DEMOCRACY (15 GOOD and 6 EVIL) and 3 as the RESULT OF A PROCESS (without moral qualification). Figure 13 shows the most recurrent commonplaces among authors (literature), users, designers and park managers (survey).

Figure 13. *Most Frequently Mentioned Commonplaces of the Park (Including Literature and Survey)*

| 32 COMMONPLACES | | Authors, Surveys, Mental Maps and Newspaper Articles | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|--|---------------|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|---|---------------|
| | COMMONPLACES | AUTHORS | | SURVEYS | | | | | |
| | | PARK AS THEME | CITY AS THEME | USERS | | | | Designers (architects, urban designers, landscape architects) | Park Managers |
| | | | | Housewife | Professional | Student | Employee | | |
| NATURE (8) | NATURE'S GUARDIAN | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE ARCADIAN MEMORY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE URBAN IMAGE BEAUTIFIER | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| DEMOCRACY GOOD (15) | THE DISPENSER OF HEALTH | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE URBAN STRUCTURE ORGANIZER | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE SOCIAL UNIFIER | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE CUPID | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PACIFIER | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE TRANSMITTER OF CULTURE, ART AND HUMAN VALUES | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE PLACE FOR RECREATION | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE PLACE FOR SPORTS | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE PERPETUATOR OF BOURGEOIS VALUES | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| DEMOCRACY EVIL (6) | THE ENCOURAGER OF VANDALISM, DRUG ADDICTION AND SEXUAL ABUSE | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | THE INSTILLER OF INSECURITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| PROCESS (3) | FROM GARDEN TO PUBLIC PARK | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |

Source: Doctoral Thesis by author 2015.

Of the 32 commonplaces, 16 were the most mentioned. In NATURE, where no EVIL was found, Nature's Guardian was mentioned by all, followed

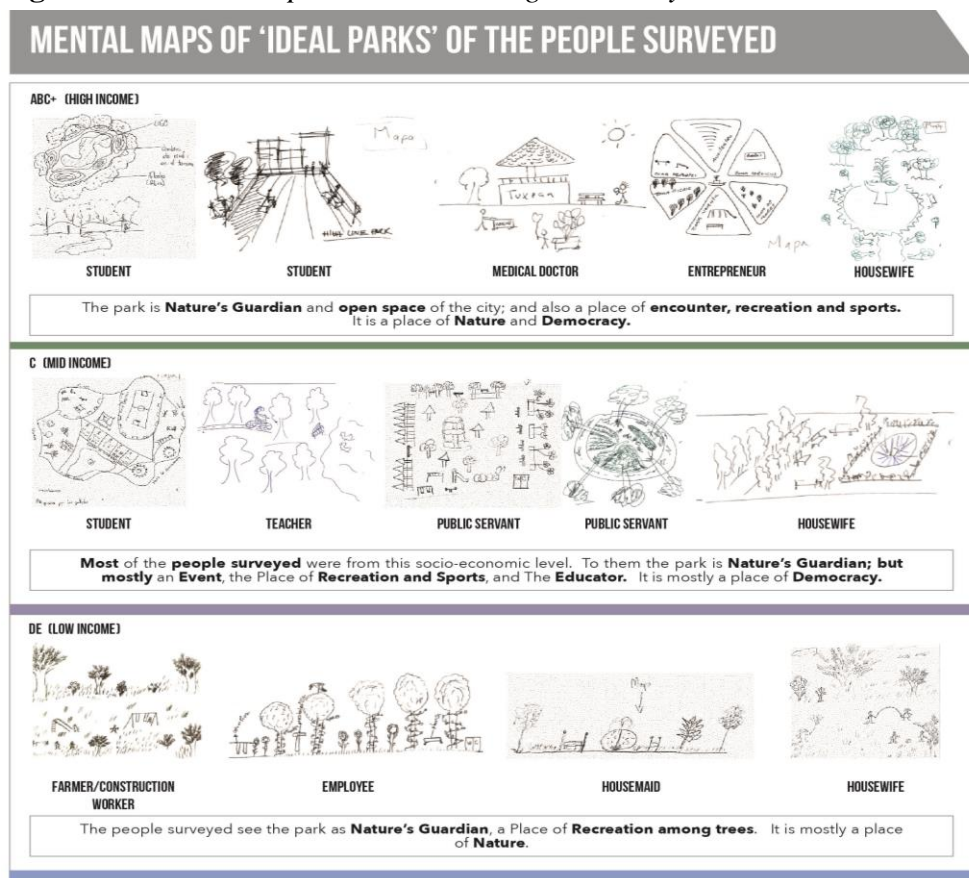
by The Urban Image Beautifier. In DEMOCRACY, The Dispenser of Health was mentioned by all, followed by The Psychological Pacifier and The Place for Recreation, as GOOD commonplaces; and The Encourager of Vandalism, Drug Addiction and Sexual Abuse, mentioned especially by users, as an EVIL commonplace.

Authors agreed that the park has a considerable potential for urban structuring. In RESULT OF A PROCESS, authors and park managers agreed that the most notable occurrence in park history is the transformation From Garden to Public Park.

Survey among Users, Designers and Park Managers

Figure 14 shows some results of the comparative analysis between users of different **ages, genders, income levels and occupations**, who contributed to the survey by drawing a **mental map** of their ‘**ideal park**’. **ABC+** corresponds to a **high-income** level, for which the park is a space of **NATURE** and **DEMOCRACY**; **C** corresponds to a **mid-income** level (the most numerous level surveyed), for which the park is a space of **DEMOCRACY**; **DE** corresponds to a **low-income** level, for which the park is a space of **NATURE**.

Figure 14. Mental Maps Collected during the Survey



Source: Doctoral Thesis by author in 2015 and subsequent research in 2017.

It is interesting to note that there exists a chasm between the wishes of users and the idea of the park designers and managers and some authors have in their heads.

The following summary gathers the opinions found in literature and survey:

- **Designers** (architects, urban designers, landscape architects), consider the park an **object**, nature turned into art, manipulated, submitted.
- Park **managers** consider the park an **object**, difficult to maintain, endowed with potential, but lacking the tools for the upkeep.
- **Users** consider the park a ‘place’ of nature, beautiful, recreational, mostly where activities are carried out, an **event**.
- **Authors** who are mainly **sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists**, agree that in park design and management there is a **lack of user participation**.

Further considerations fruit of this investigation:

- The urban park is a **moral place** that summons good behaviour.
- As part of the new way of analyzing cities, where the ‘spatiality of human life’¹ becomes an important issue to be assessed, the urban park **contributes to building a sense of community**.
- The urban park, as part of urban form, is a **powerful component of spatial structure**, but fragile if not taken care of.
- The urban park is capable of becoming a ‘**place**’, **deeply meaningful** and capable of being cherished.²
- The urban park requires the **intervention** not only of **designers and managers**, but also of **citizen participation**.
- All this ‘goodness’ and advantages of the urban park require recommendations to feed public policy:
 - The urban park requires mixed uses, mixed income levels, a complex urban setting.
 - The urban park requires maintenance and care.
 - The urban park requires the active involvement of local authority, designer and user.

¹Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: critical studies of cities and regions*, Oxford, UK, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003, p. 7.

²Tim Creswell. *PLACE an Introduction*, West Sussex, UK, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015, Kindle Edition, p. 527.

Discussion

Urban form has been the subject of a great deal of study, by historians, architects, planners and other disciplines concerned with the quality of the built environment. Perhaps not enough attention has been given to parks and park systems as a planning strategy for improving existing urban forms or designing new city extensions. In this respect, following are lessons learned from various examples of urban form that have utilized a park system to structure and create potential for a benevolent urban environment.

Four Urban Forms Structured by Means of Urban Parks

The following examples of urban form evolved in different historic periods, with different aesthetic intentions and different political ambitions. What is common to them is that they bet their quality and continuity on a park system as part of the urban structure.

Renaissance in America: Enlightened Grid of Savannah, Georgia

The historic centre of the city of Savannah, in the State of Georgia, USA, is a sublime example of the use of the ‘checkerboard’ design, adapted to create an exceptional layout. General James Oglethorpe travelled to America in 1733, to establish an egalitarian agro-urban colony, devoid of slaves, as part of a defensive line between English and Spanish territories in the New World.

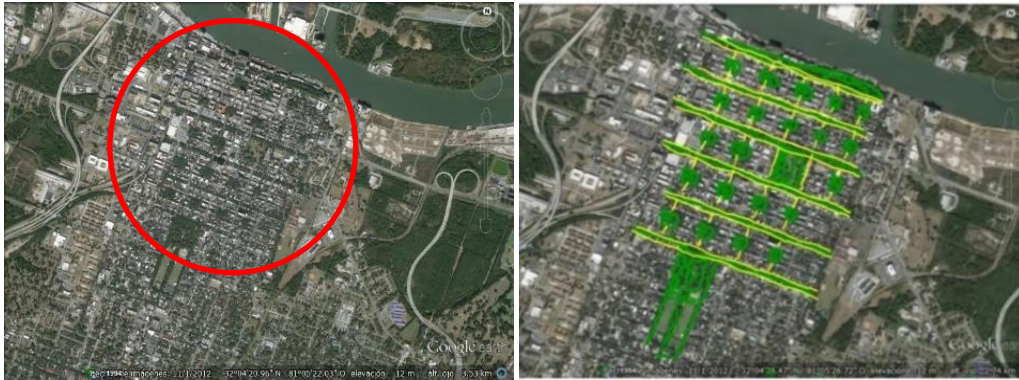
He decides to divide the territory into cellular units of 40 lots each, to form neighborhoods, each endowed with a central garden-square that provides local services, identity and character (Figure 15 and, in green in Figure 16).¹ Once the plots were built, another neighborhood would be traced, avoiding uncontrollable expansion.²

The main avenues, furnished with generous wooded central medians are literally linear parks, running parallel to the Savannah River, and not touching the intimacy of the neighborhoods (in yellow in Figure 16). Currently, these avenues accommodate modern public transport systems, continuing to respect the domestic quality of the adjacent neighborhoods (Figures 17 to 20).

¹Ruth Eaton. *Ideal Cities, Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2002, p. 88.

²Edmund Bacon. *Design of Cities*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, Penguin Books, 1976, p. 221.

Figures 15 and 16. *Aerial Views of Savannah¹; on the Right, Park System in Green, Boulevards in Yellow²*



Source: Google Earth 2012.

Figures 17 and 18. *Linear Park/Boulevard, Left; Intimate Neighborhood, Right³*



Source: Photographs taken by the author in 2008.

Figures 19 and 20. *Neighborhood Central Squares with Garden and Public Services⁴*



Source: Photographs taken by the author in 2008

¹Google Earth photograph dated January 2012, taken by the author for teaching purposes.

²*idem.*, including overlapping drawing by author.

³Photographs taken by the author during a study trip in November 2008.

⁴*idem.*

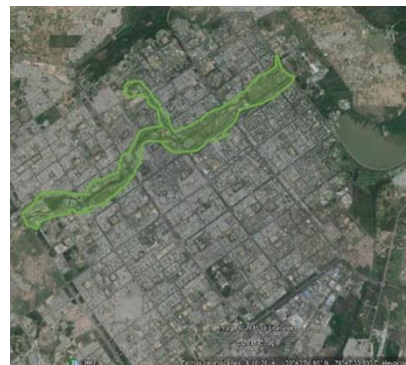
Lessons: The cellular building sequence of this early American city guaranteed urban compactness. But more praiseworthy was the adaptation of the conventional Milesian grid to accommodate green squares, wide wooded medians in avenues and a municipal park as terminus of the central street that connects this open space to the Savannah City Hall landmark.

The square as a public space is formative, defined by its architecture, but more to our case, the park atmosphere conveys each space with an identifying character (Figure 20). The grid is not alone in transmitting urban quality. It is the juxtaposition of the potential for greenness in the grid that delivers the extraordinary end result. This park system acts as the organizing structure for urban development.

The Modern Movement, Chandigarh, Punjab, India

The original project by Mayer, Whittlesey and Glass, in the picturesque 'garden city' tradition, was modified by Le Corbusier when he was invited in 1950 to participate in forming a design team for Chandigarh, the new capital of the Punjab province in India.¹ He straightened streets, established a road network hierarchy (primary avenues, boulevards, bazaar streets, secondary and tertiary roads, pedestrian walkways), producing focal points,² dividing the city into sectors (Figures 21 and 24) and juxtaposing a complex park system (Figure 23), also based on a hierarchy of open spaces (link to street network, squares, neighborhood services) and using a central wide linear park as the backbone of the design (Figure 22), complemented with links to municipal parks.

Figures 21 and 22. *Le Corbusier Master Plan of 1951³; Aerial View of Ensemble and Green Backbone⁴*



Source: Boesiger, 1972 and Google Earth, 2018.

¹Willy Boesiger (Ed.). *Le Corbusier*, London, Tames & Hudson Ltd., 1972, p. 192.

²Boesiger (Ed.). *Le Corbu...*, p. 192.

³Boesiger (Ed.). *Le Corbu...*, p. 194.

⁴Google Earth Pro photograph taken by the author, March 15, 2018, for teaching purposes.

Figures 23 and 24. *Aerial View, Green Areas, Sectors 37, 36 and 35, Left to Right¹; Typical Residential Layout²*



Source: Google Earth, 2018 and Boesiger, 1972.

Each Sector is equipped with diverse housing solutions, generating mixed income and mixed age groups in neighborhoods (Figures 25 to 27). The distribution of services this layout allows achieves semi-autonomy in neighborhoods.

Figures 25, 26 and 27. *Parks and Pedestrian Walkways in Sector 17³*



Source: Photographs taken by the author in 2013.

Figures 28, 29 and 30. *From Left to Right: Tree-lined Avenues Acting as Sector Borders; Two Metropolitan Parks: Rock Garden and Lake Sukhna Park⁴*



Source: Photographs taken by the author in 2013.

¹idem.

²Boesiger, *Le Corbu...*, p. 195.

³Photographs taken by the author in Chandigarh, on a study trip in April 2013.

⁴Photographs taken by the author in Chandigarh on a study trip in April, 2013.

Lessons: Descriptions of Chandigarh by some authors generally miss out on the benefits of the green infrastructure and park system of this novel 20th Century grid adaptation. The planning strategy based on a hierarchy of roads and equally hierarchical ensemble of linked green spaces, provides exceptional walkability in neighborhoods (Figures 28 to 30). The inhabitants of this city have a memorable pride of place for their city, feeling that is perceivable even by tourists. Bicycles are also very much in use, and the whole layout provides multiple transport choices. The structure of green spaces furnishes an amiable urban image to a dense and intense urban environment.

Garden City Movement in Mexico City: San Juan de Aragón Low-Income Housing Development

This urban design effort to provide mid and low-income housing in Eastern Mexico City, was built in 1960.¹ The layout is based on a rectangular grid, with a primary street structure in the form of wide avenues with ample, tree-lined medians that function as linear parks and neighborhood borders (Figure 31 and 34).

Inside these border avenues, neighborhoods congregate around a park centre with local services that act as focal points of a secondary street network in ‘horseshoe’ shape (Figure 32, 33 and 35). Plots have a narrow street frontage, which encourages alignment of the buildings, providing a defined streetscape and ‘eyes on public space’ (Figure 36).

Figures 31 and 32. Aerial Views² Showing, on the Left, 1st and 2nd Sectors of the Development; on the Right, a Close-up to the Park System: Parks, Border Avenues and Squares in Green, Street Horseshoe Circuits in Yellow, and Services in Red



Source: Google earth, 2000.

¹ http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Juan_de_Arag%C3%B3n.

² Google Earth photographs dated 28 December 2000, taken by the author. Overlapping drawings are the author’s.

Figures 33 and 34. *Aerial View Showing Walkways and Trails in Dotted Yellow Line¹; Photograph of Linear Park in Border Avenue Median²*



Source: Google Earth, 2000 and photograph taken by the author in 2015.

Figures 35 and 36. *Views of, Right, Neighborhood Centre in 1st Sector of Development; Left, One of the Residential Streets Seen from the Park³*



Source: Photographs taken by the author in 2015.

Lessons: The central neighborhood park is the pivotal area of the ensemble of circuits, which tend to self-organize in community groups, thanks to the limited number of houses. Neighborhood centres tend to self-regulate land uses, tolerating houses opening small services related to public services (Example: photocopying and stationery shops next to local schools). Informal street vendors are also tolerated, provided they keep sidewalk clean and organized. Parks are the pride of the neighborhood and provide an amiable urban image, as well as a mobility option.

Modi'in, Israel, a Park System as Promoter of Quality

Modi'in is a recently built city between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in Israel, for the purpose of absorbing growing population, as well as to create new industrial

¹Google Earth photographs dated 28 December 2000, taken and drawn over by the author.

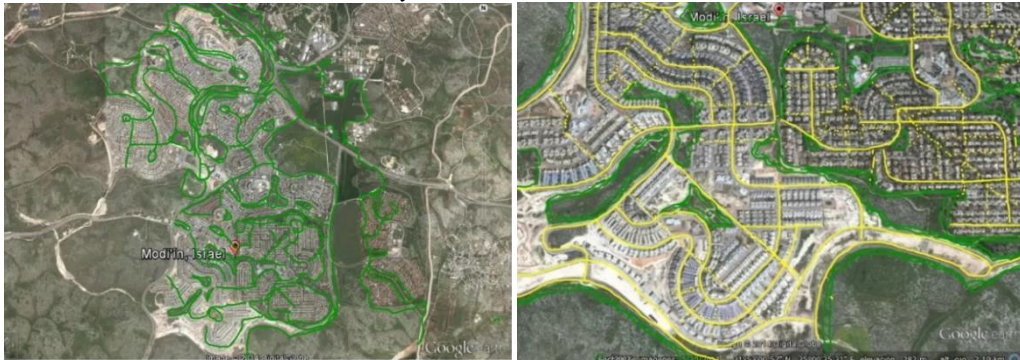
²Photographs by the author taken in March 2015.

³Photographs by the author taken in March 2015.

centres and sources of employment in the services sector. The Master Plan is by the Architect Moshe Safdie and Associates, and it was carried out in 1989.¹

It is built on a former military reserve, on an uneven terrain composed of several hills that form a system of interconnecting valleys (Figure 37). Housing projects of different densities are disposed along the streets that follow the contour of the land. In the opposite sense, the streets are connected by continuous terraced walkways from the top of the hills to the bottom of the valleys (Figures 38 and 40). These terraces form comfortable shaded nooks along the way for sitting and resting (Figure 41). Vegetation is endemic, needing little irrigation. Some of these walkways also offer ramps for people with disabilities. The focal point and terminus of these walkways are the municipal parks at the bottom of the hills (Figure 39), providing playgrounds, features for mothers, children, pregnant women, cyclists, the elderly and the population as a whole. Neighborhood centres are connected through this park system.

Figures 37 and 38. *Two Scales of Aerial Photographs²: 1) on the Left, the Park System in Green; 2) on the Right, the Mobility Options: Cars in Continuous Yellow Line, Pedestrian and Bicycle Paths in Discontinuous Yellow Line*



Source: Google Earth, 2002 and drawing by author.

¹Witold Rybszynski. *Makeshift Metropolis: Ideas about Cities*, New York, Scribner, Kindle Edition, 2010, position 2234 of 3726.

²Google Earth photographs dated February 2002, taken by the author and drawn over.

Figures 39, 40 and 41. *From Left to Right: View of the Main Park; Aerial Photo Close-up; Photograph of the Terraced Walkway*¹



Source: Photographs taken by author in 2014 and Google Earth, 2002.

Figures 42, 43 and 44. *Views from Left to Right: the Public Domain, a Semi-private Cluster, a Streetscape*²



Source: photographs taken by the author in 2014.

Lessons: The urban form presented is a testimony to the intention of creating an urban environment that fosters community and identity of place. A key component in the design is the diversity of housing densities (Figures 42 to 44), housing values, and features and services for a wide range of ages, incomes and tastes. The Master Plan centres its solution in a park system, which structures the street layout and movement systems to conform to the topography.³ The quality of the overall image is focused on the use of a local light cream-colored limestone for all buildings (Figure 42), as well as on the vegetation that permeates the whole scheme, thanks to the park system, constituting a legible and defined hierarchy.

Conclusions

The urban park is a powerful element in the modern city. The better parks are connected to each other, through tree-lined avenues, pathways, trails, protected ravines and streams and the preservation of valuable natural features of a site, the stronger and more empowered they will be to create sense and pride of place, inspire stewardship and respect for regulations by users and managers alike.

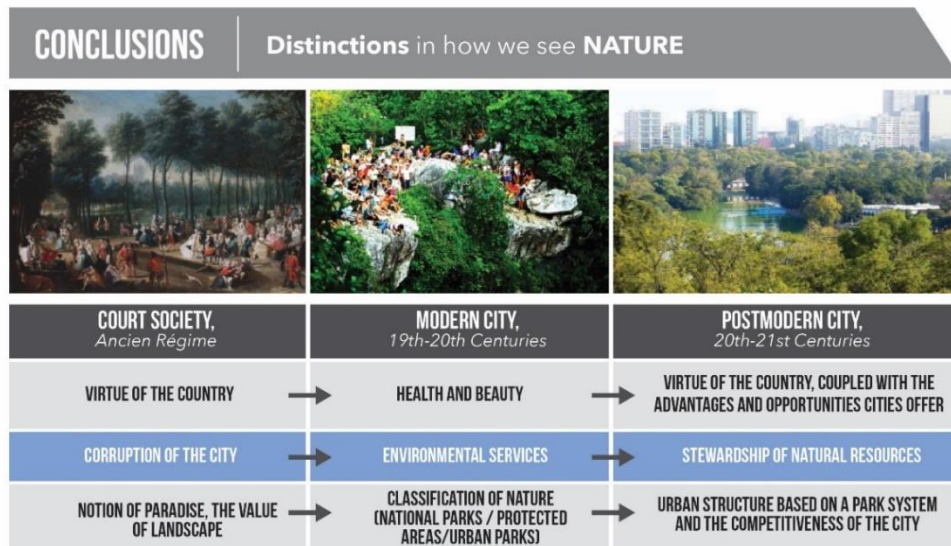
¹Photographs taken by the author during a study trip to Israel in May 2014; Google Earth photo dated 20 March 2011.

²Photographs taken by the author in Modi'in during study trip in May 2014.

³Rybszynski. *Makeshift...*, Position 2258 of 3726.

The urban park teaches through its transformation, the history of sustainability, a present unavoidable paradigm. How we treat nature tells us a lot about how we treat each other.¹ This exercise on commonplaces of the park has helped to envisage the richness of its identity, as well as visualize the historic distinctions of the idea of NATURE (Figure 45) and the idea of DEMOCRACY (Figure 46), as presented in the following Figures.

Figure 45. *Historic Distinctions in how we See NATURE*

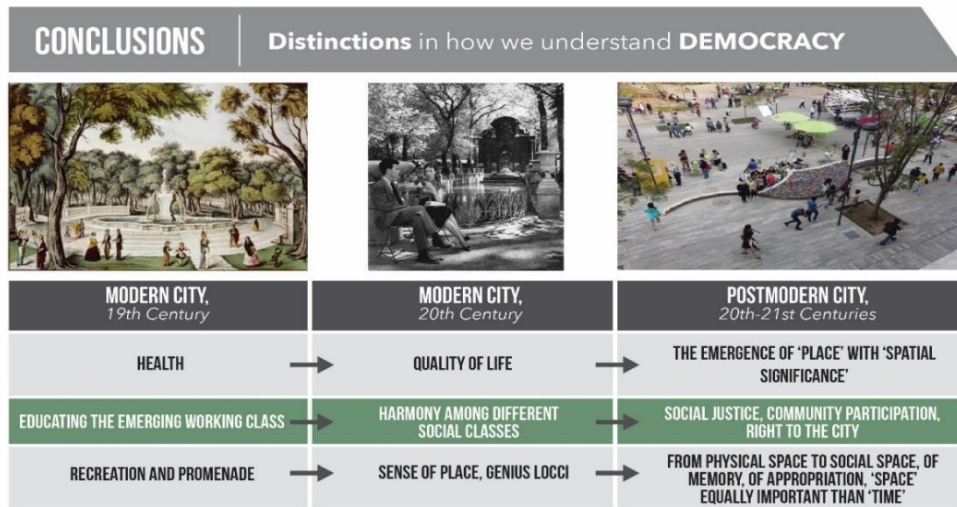


Source: Doctoral Thesis by author in 2015 and subsequent research in 2017.

NATURE, the longest standing component of the urban park encompasses the virtue of the country, the yearning for paradise and the pride of landscape. Together, they form the ‘promise’ of improvement and quality to the urban image and urban structure the park conveys. The city of today is as competitive, as the distribution of urban values is equally permeated throughout all neighborhoods. An urban structure based on a park system is a fortunate and virtuous choice. The caveat: the park needs care. Success in this endeavor includes the collaborative participation of the local authority, the designer and the users.

¹Paul Hawken. *Blessed Unrest: how the largest movement in the world came into being, and why no one saw it coming*, London, Penguin Books, Ltd., 2007, p. 73.

Figure 46. *Historic Distinctions in how we Understand DEMOCRACY*



Source: Doctoral Thesis by author in 2015 and subsequent research in 2017.

DEMOCRACY, the modern component of the urban park, meant a place for educating the emerging working class, cleaning the polluted industrial environment and providing healthy recreation. It has come a long way to signifying social justice and the right to a beautiful, healthy, vibrant, competitive, meaningful city (Figure 46).

The urban park is by far not the solution to all the problems of the city. However, it is a crucial component of urban form, and one of the essential elements of wellbeing of the city and its inhabitants. In this sense, the production, utilisation, and safekeeping of parks must be dealt with the utmost care. A park system will foster a walkable, identifiable, memorable urban structure, in support of a hierarchical street layout, and will enhance, strengthen and beautify a conventional public space structure. It is our moral obligation to treasure and promote the possibility of so much virtue.

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