

Visitation to Urban Parks and Contributions to Health and Wellness

Altair Sancho-Pivoto ^I

Sidnei Raimundo ^{II}

Glauber Eduardo de Oliveira Santos ^{III}

Abstract: Green areas such as parks are increasingly important in cities, by contributing to the maintenance of air quality, thermal balance and providing aesthetic values and balanced environments, which provide opportunities for contact with nature and contribute to the improvement of health and well-being of populations. Inspired by this context, the present work aims to investigate the perceptions of visitors to Ibirapuera Park (SP) about the motivations and benefits generated by visiting this urban green area, with special attention to the contributions to health and well-being. The methodological procedures of this investigation, of a qualitative and quantitative nature, involved a bibliographic and documental survey, as well as the application of 197 structured questionnaires with Ibirapuera's visitors. The results indicate that the main benefits perceived after the visit are psychological and emotional, followed by improvement in physical health and relaxation made possible by contact with nature.

Keywords: Protected Areas, Tourism, Quality of life, Wellness, Health, Ibirapuera Park.

^I Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil.

^{II} University of São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

^{III} University of São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

São Paulo. Vol. 28, 2025

Original Article

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-4422asoc00451vu28L2OA>



All the contents of this journal, except where otherwise noted, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License.

Introduction

Green areas, such as parks, have contributed to the quality of life of urban population. In this regard, Romagosa, Eagles, and Lemieux (2015) highlight the role of parks and protected areas more generally in improving human health and well-being, emphasizing that many of the original justifications for the movement of creating these areas are even more relevant today, offering options for leisure, relaxation, and escape from the stress associated with urban living. In this context, green areas located in cities are increasingly central, as they contribute to maintaining air quality, thermal balance, and providing aesthetic values and balanced environments that foster contact with nature and enhance health and well-being (Maller et al., 2005). As a result, the creation and maintenance of green areas and parks have become part of public debates on health, urban living conditions, and sustainability (Moyle & Weiler, 2017), thus establishing themselves as providers of diverse ecosystem services (Raimundo & Sarti, 2019).

In the Brazilian context, a preliminary survey on the contribution of parks to visitors' health and well-being indicates that a considerable portion of research focuses on parks and green areas located in urban centers, aiming to demonstrate their importance for the enjoyment of surrounding or distant communities and for maintaining environmental quality in cities. Consequently, these areas enable contact with nature and create spaces for social interaction, facilitating gatherings and promoting physical and leisure activities, with direct impacts on visitors' health, such as reducing sedentary behavior and stress and increasing daily blood oxygenation levels for their users (Arana & Xavier, 2017; Londe & Mendes, 2016; Souza *et al.*, 2015; Perehouskei & De Angelis, 2012).

It is worth noting that, according to Sancho-Pivoto and Raimundo (2022), studies still pay special attention to aspects related to physical health, disease prevention, and restoration through contact with nature. Other aspects related to visitors' health and well-being, such as social, cultural, economic, psychological, intellectual, and environmental well-being, are still on the periphery of debates. Thus, research that aims to provide a broader view of the diverse potential contribution of parks to the improvement of visitors' health and well-being, as suggested by Lemieux et al. (2012), is still incipient. This research perspective is anchored in a broader interpretation of health, beyond the reductionist idea of the absence of disease, thus emphasizing the importance of access to conditions that ensure quality of life and well-being, such as clean air, water, and thermally balanced environments.

Another relevant aspect of this debate is that studies that prioritize the perceptions of visitors and local communities regarding the benefits associated with visiting and experiencing parks and green areas are still incipient. In this regard, Romagosa et. al (2015) state that understanding these individuals' perceptions is essential for deciphering the real impacts of activity in green spaces, and proving these benefits to individuals is essential for them to advocate for the conservation of and protection of these areas.

Inspired by these debates, this study sought to investigate the perception of visitors to the main urban park of Brazil's largest metropolis, Ibirapuera Park, located in the municipality of São Paulo (SP), regarding the motivations and benefits generated by visit-

ing this urban green area, with close attention to contributions to health and well-being.

Methodological Procedures

The present investigation, both qualitative and quantitative in nature, is based on a perception study with urban park visitors to recognize and better understand their motivations for visiting, as well as the most directly perceived benefits to health and well-being. The first stage of the investigation involved an approach to existing research on park visitation and its relation to generating health and well-being benefits for visitors, both in Brazil and internationally, through a bibliographic and documental review of indexed journals, books, dissertations, theses, among others.

Next, 12 field incursions were conducted between November 2020 and February 2021, totaling 197 valid interviews with visitors, aiming to understand the motivations and perceived benefits of visiting Ibirapuera Park. The main research techniques were field observations and structured interviews. This research received authorization and approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora through Plataforma Brasil, Ministry of Health (CAAE: 48765721.4.0000.5147). All interviewees were informed beforehand of the research objectives, and their agreement to participate involved signing two copies of the Informed Consent Form (ICF), one of which was kept by the participant and the other archived by the researcher.

Firstly, the aim was to recognize the profile of visitors by gathering information such as gender, age, educational level, average monthly family income, type of group, residence location, and proximity to the protected area. Another investigative approach involved understanding the meaning of nature for the interviewees, the types of connections and relationships established with the visited park, perceptions about the quality of public-use infrastructure and the natural characteristics in the protected area, and their relation to well-being.

Finally, the goal was also to identify and measure the benefits of park visitation for health and well-being, based on visitors' perceptions. This effort was inspired by the studies of Lemieux et al. (2012), which suggest a broad interpretation of the health and well-being benefits of visiting protected areas, encompassing 11 indicators or attributes:

1. Physical well-being (engaging in general physical activities, prevention, care, or treatment of physical body health);
2. Psychological/emotional well-being (to recover from mental fatigue/stress, reduce sadness levels, relax, feel calm, peaceful);
3. Social well-being (for opportunities for greater social interaction/bonding with family and/or friends/meet new people);
4. Community well-being (to increase the sense of connection with neighbors, feelings of community belonging, and engagement in local collective causes/social cohesion);

5. Intellectual well-being (for opportunities to engage in intellectual, creative, and stimulating activities/expand knowledge);
6. Spiritual well-being (to connect with nature, seek inspiration from nature, find meaning/purpose in life, meditate, reflect/self-knowledge);
7. Ecological well-being (to experience, get to know the natural environment, and develop more engaged behaviors with sustainability);
8. Environmental well-being (to engage with the natural environment, be outdoors in desirable weather, connect with something beyond human concerns);
9. Cultural well-being (to participate in cultural activities/get to know and experience cultural and historical heritage, lifestyles, and knowledge of other people/cultures);
10. Occupational/work-related well-being (to improve working ability after the visit, increase concentration, readiness, performance in work activities); and
11. Economic well-being (to support local economy/the visit generates jobs and income for the area).

These 11 indicators were organized as questions, with a structured questionnaire applied to Ibirapuera visitors. Thus, the aim was to understand perception from two main focuses: a) motivations, through an open question about the main motivations for visiting the park; and b) perceived benefits and/or drawbacks of the visit, using the aforementioned 11 indicators or attributes, measured with 7 response options on a Likert scale: (1) Much Worse, (2) Worse, (3) Slightly Worse, (4) Neutral, (5) Slightly Better, (6) Better, (7) Much Better. It is important to emphasize that visitors who were already enjoying the park, were over 18 years old, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the research were interviewed. When in groups, only one person was interviewed, selected based on the nearest upcoming birthday, as a way to maintain independent samples and avoid sampling biases. The form and responses were collected using the ODK – Open Data Kit platform on smartphones or tablets. As this is an exploratory study to approach the reality studied, an accidental sampling technique was proposed. A total of 197 visitors were interviewed at Ibirapuera Municipal Park, covering two distinct profiles: a) frequent visitors, covering those who visit the park at least once a week; in this case, 107 visitors were interviewed on weekdays; and b) occasional visitors, covering those who visit the park up to six times a year; in this case, 90 visitors were interviewed on weekends (Saturday and Sunday). The interviews were conducted on weekends during the visitation experience. The sampling was accidental by interception, with individuals selected as they crossed the research location. In comparing two groups of the same size, this sample size is sufficient to provide high statistical power (0.937) in correctly identifying differences if the effect size is medium or large (Cohen's $D \geq 0.5$). Therefore, the sample size can be considered acceptable to identify how motivations, benefits, and meanings generated by the park visit are associated with the visitor's profile.

Urban parks, cities, and their relationship with promoting quality of life

Originating from the creation of gardens, particularly public gardens (Loboda & De Angelis, 2005) and garden neighborhoods and cities (Ottoni, 2002), urban parks are interpreted as all public spaces designated for mass recreation, regardless of type, performing ecological, aesthetic, recreational, and leisure functions, with the potential to incorporate conservation intentions, and a self-sufficient morphological structure, meaning it is not directly influenced by any structure established in its surroundings. Thus, beyond morphology, usage types, and functions, the presence of arboreal vegetation is required, as the plant mass and its positive effects on the urban environment distinguish parks from other green areas, such as squares and gardens (Silva & Pasqualetto, 2013; Graça & Telles, 2020).

In the contemporary context, green areas and urban parks have seen amplified representation due to the growth driven by the commodity city, influenced by real estate capital, in which cities and the numerous problems they present, such as air and water pollution, noise excess, violence, floods, traffic, thermal imbalance, among others, directly impact residents' quality of life (Campos & Castro, 2017; Sancho & Deus, 2015; Viana et al., 2014).

Some authors recognize the importance of green areas in the composition of urban spaces and their role in consolidating more sustainable cities, becoming important as locations capable of moderating thermal conditions during the seasons, contributing to urban micro and mesoclimate control and improving environmental conditions for the population's well-being (Bovo & Amorim, 2011; Viana et al., 2014). These areas function as organisms within cities, providing ecosystem services directly related to chemical and physical phenomena in urban environments, contributing to flood reduction, water quality improvement, carbon capture, among others, which directly affect the functioning of large metropolises and urban sustainability (Belusso & Pagnussat, 2016; Campos & Castro, 2017; Momm-Schult, et al., 2014).

Green areas and parks are increasingly recognized for their potential contributions to the health and well-being of urban populations. Various aspects of health, both physical and mental, can be enhanced by contact with nature (Graça & Telles, 2020; Wolf et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2017; Pierone et al., 2016; Maller et al., 2002; Pröbstl & Haider, 2013; Willis, 2015; Wolf & Wohlfart, 2014). In this regard, urban parks offer support tools for disease treatment (Campos & Castro, 2017; Perehouskei & De Angelis, 2012), provide relaxation and sociability spaces for families and friends (Graça & Telles, 2020; Londe & Mendes, 2016; Viana et al., 2014; Pierone et al., 2016), enable contact with nature and clean air, besides allowing visitors to break from the routine, often fast-paced due to daily obligations. These aspects are highlighted by several authors as ways to combat stress and increase concentration, generating health benefits in general, promoting rest and improving the quality of life of those who visit these spaces (Canto-Silva & Silva, 2017; Gonçalves & Guerra, 2019; Viana et al., 2014).

Green areas are responsible for various improvements in psychological and emotional health, as visitation contributes to stress relief and combating symptoms of anxiety

and depression (Romanillos et al., 2018; Frumkin et al., 2017; Ramkissoon et al., 2018; Puhakka et al., 2016; Wolf et al., 2015) and can be used for walking and general physical activities (Lev et al., 2020; Graça & Telles, 2020; Araújo & Barreto, 2020; Wolf et al., 2015; Soares et al., 2019; Xavier et al., 2018). Due to this characteristic, the quality of infrastructure and equipment, diverse programming, sense of safety, and regular maintenance of urban parks are highly valued by visitors (Grilli et al., 2020; Fischer et al., 2018; Arana & Xavier, 2017). Psychological benefits include, according to Willis (2015), the improvement of human capital through skill acquisition, contributing to new and better job opportunities, enhanced self-esteem through greater knowledge, competence, and confidence, and increased awareness of natural capital and environmental conservation support (Dorigo & Lamano-Ferreira, 2015; Viana et al., 2014).

Urban parks can also provide additional benefits, such as making neighborhoods more livable, creating a sense of community (Lev et al., 2020), offering recreational activities for the youth at risk and low-income families, and connecting people from various cultures (Weiler, 2017; Mainella et al., 2011), this includes another aspect highlighted by authors that the perceptions of these benefits vary among different groups.

An important aspect of studies on urban parks relates to the existence of green areas and the proximity and access available to populations as determinants for the effective perception of their benefits (Moyle & Weiler, 2017; Pröbstl & Haider, 2013; Wolf & Wohlfart, 2014). For example, Wolf and Wohlfart (2014) highlight that benefits are more frequently perceived by those living near urban parks and green areas, becoming a reason for visiting and resulting on valorization by users. However, it is worth noting that some studies indicate that proximity alone does not guarantee effective utilization of urban parks' potential to enhance quality of life, health, and well-being. Factors such as orientation toward nature, individual preferences, and knowledge about the green area (Perehouskei & De Angelis, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Arana & Xavier, 2017) directly influence the establishment of regular visitation habits to urban parks.

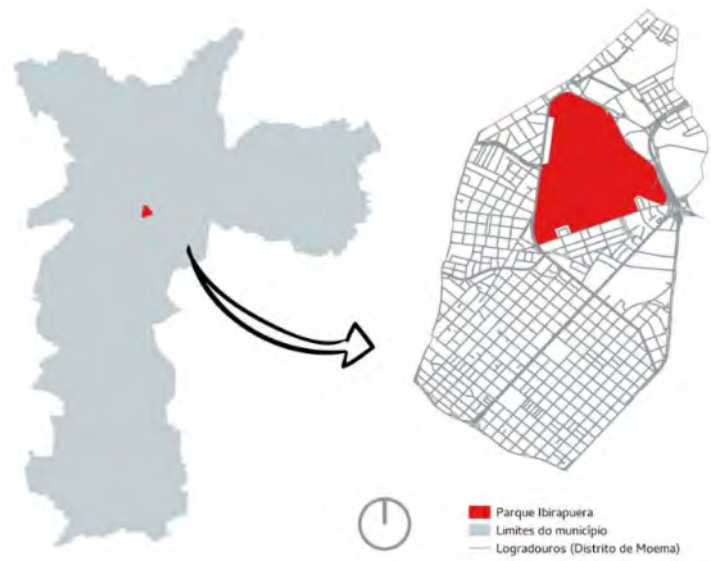
Finally, it is possible to highlight that green areas and parks also serve educational and recreational functions. These spaces are highly influential for children, with benefits acquired through lived experiences during visits, as these areas consist not only of tangible objects but also of symbolic and imaginary elements (Carvalho & Gosling, 2019), besides also including aspects that are directly related to children's physical development, group relationship abilities, cognitive learning, language, and combatting anxiety, hyperactivity, inattention, respiratory issues, among others (Lemieux et al., 2012).

Study area

Ibirapuera Park, one of the 106 urban parks located in the municipality of São Paulo, is situated in the sub-municipality of Vila Mariana, Moema district, and was inaugurated on August 21, 1954. Covering 158 hectares, it hosts a rich diversity of fauna and flora species and is one of the most popular destinations for the people of São Paulo, as well as one of the city's most important green, cultural, and leisure areas, attracting around 250,000 visitors per week. The park is a reference for leisure and tourism visitation in

the city, with an infrastructure that includes a jogging track, playground, rest areas, bike lane, bike rack with equipment rental, multimedia fountain, multipurpose courts, soccer fields, exercise equipment, and squares.

Figure 1: Location of Ibirapuera Park in the municipality of São Paulo



Source: Faustino and Teles (2021).

Results and Discussion

The research at Ibirapuera Park addressed two main visitor profiles: regular visitors (who visit the park at least once a week) and occasional visitors (who visit the park up to six times a year). The goal was to recognize the specificities of each visitor profile in terms of motivations, meanings attributed to the park, and the level of perceived benefits associated with visiting. The interviews were conducted between November 2021 and February 2022. Table 1 presents the main profile characteristics between these two groups.

Table 1 – Sociodemographic data of Ibirapuera Park visitors

IBIRAPUERA URBAN PARK		
	Regular Visitors	Occasional Visitors
Gender		
M	50%	41%
F	50%	59%
Age		

18-29	42%	44%
30-45	36%	51%
46-60	15%	3%
over 60	7%	1%
Educational level		
Elementary School	3%	0%
Unfinished High School	5%	2%
High School	24%	30%
Unfinished Higher Education	15%	18%
Higher Education	47%	38%
Post-Graduate studies	7%	12%
Average Family Income		
Up to 2 MW	14%	16%
from 2 to 4 MW	13%	18%
4 to 10 MW	26%	27%
11 to 20 MW	7%	11%
over 20 MW	7%	3%
Prefer not to disclose	32%	26%
Group type		
Alone	37%	17%
Couple	16%	24%
Friends	21%	22%
Family	21%	33%
Friends and Family	5%	3%

Source: designed by the authors

The profile of frequent visitors to Ibirapuera Park is evenly distributed between men and women aged 18-45, with a high level of education (68% having completed or pursuing higher education), an average family income between 4 and 10 minimum wages (R\$ 4,400.00 to R\$ 11,000.00), and they usually visit the park alone, traveling on foot (23%), by bus (20%), or by private cars (19%). For occasional visitors to Ibirapuera, a very similar profile was observed regarding age, income, and education (see Table 1). A notable difference is that the proportion of occasional visitors accompanied by friends, family, or a partner is significantly higher than that of frequent visitors, who typically visit the park alone. Furthermore, only 5% of occasional visitors traveled to the park on foot; most used a private car or bus for transportation. This is directly related to distance, as

it is observed that the majority (79%) of this group lives more than 5 kilometers from Ibirapuera.

The “distance from residence” factor is identified in specialized literature as a decisive aspect for visitation (Moyle & Weiler, 2017; Pröbstl & Haider, 2013; Wolf & Wohlfart, 2014). However, in the case of frequent visitors, a considerable portion (48%) lives more than 5 kilometers from the park and still maintains regular visitation, reporting a high or very high connection (65%) and having an average (29%), very high (18%), or high (12%) level of knowledge about this green area. On the other hand, occasional visitors, most of whom live more than 5 kilometers from the park, indicated a lack of closeness to this green space: 30% have a medium connection, 20% low, and 29% have a very low connection, along with a very low or low level of knowledge (54%) about Ibirapuera’s main features, such as attractions, history of creation, or available cultural and leisure facilities.

This result suggests that proximity, knowledge level, and identity-building are directly related to visitation frequency. This is true once, in the case of frequent visitors, the average visitation is twice a week (42%), followed by once a week (25%) and five times a week (18%), resulting in a perception of high or very high connections to Ibirapuera for most (41% very high, 34% high). Very few frequent visitors expressed having a low (4%) or very low (3%) connection to the park. As for occasional visitors, 24% were visiting Ibirapuera for the first time, and among those who were already familiar with the park, most reported visiting it two or three times a year (42%).

Therefore, having a nearby park, as in the case of these more frequent visitors, fosters a sense of belonging and identity, creating bonds and a spirit of community, and thus a green area allows people to remain healthier beings.

Other themes, such as orientation toward nature, infrastructure quality, and the park’s degree of preservation and biodiversity, also seem to be factors influencing urban park visitation habits and the visitation experience and perceived benefits (Perehouskei & De Angelis, 2012, Lin et al., 2013). It was found that half of the frequent and occasional visitors, 51% and 49% respectively, have the habit of traveling to visit natural parks, confirming a profile interested in experiencing contact with nature. Another aspect observed in the research is that over 90% of these visitors consider the degree of preservation and patches of vegetation, bodies of water, and animal sightings in the park to be very important for the quality of the visitation experience, an aspect more valued than the quality of infrastructure and available equipment in the park, considered very important by 75% of regular visitors and 80% of occasional ones. Thus, the presence of forest fragments and the relative diversity of fauna and flora species in urban parks gains centrality in this debate as valued elements that affect the attractiveness of these green areas, as well as the perceived health and well-being benefits, as stated by Lev et al. (2020). It is an outdoor experience but with remnants of vegetation serving as an enhancement to the visit and space itself.

Regarding the senses and meanings of nature, it was possible to recognize that both occasional and frequent visitors associate nature with peace, tranquility, and relaxation,

emphasizing the vital importance of the natural environment to human beings and its role in health, well-being, and quality of life. Nature is also interpreted as something sacred that allows connection with God and one's inner self. Along these lines, one could say that the park constitutes an important space for the exercise of people's spirituality, the connection of their "self" with the cosmos, as studies in other locations by Verschuuren et al. (2021) and Fernandes-Pinto and Irving (2017) point out.

As for the meanings and representation of Ibirapuera Park, visitors generally expressed similar opinions in most cases. They recognize the park as an important space for leisure, as well as for relaxation, rest, and peace for São Paulo, playing a central role for the city's environmental balance by preserving significant vegetation fragments. Its function as an "oasis" and refuge amid urban chaos, its democratic character as a place of encounter and sociability (Graça & Telles, 2020; Londe & Mendes, 2016; Viana et al., 2014; Pierone et al., 2016), and the opportunity it provides for contact with nature were also highlighted.

Although urban parks are commonly seen as highly valued spaces for practicing physical activities and outdoor exercises (Lev et al., 2020; Graça & Telles, 2020; Araújo & Barreto, 2020; Wolf et al., 2015; Soares et al., 2019; Xavier et al., 2018), the study results show that this practice appears only as the fourth most reported motivation by frequent and occasional visitors to Ibirapuera. The main motivation for both profiles is related to seeking moments of leisure and sightseeing.

However, it is worth mentioning that some differences between the two interviewee profiles were recognized. The search for contact with nature/landscape contemplation was the second most common motivation among frequent visitors, followed by moments with family and/or friends. Seeking peace, relaxation, and tranquility in an urban green area appears as the fifth motivation for this audience who visits the park weekly. While for occasional visitors, the second main motivation for visiting was precisely the search for peace, relaxation, and rest, followed by social moments with family and friends. Contact with nature and natural landscape contemplation ranked as the fifth motivation for this visitor profile. This scenario suggests that, for visitors not in the habit of visiting Ibirapuera Park, this green area holds greater importance as a leisure attraction, which provides moments of enjoyment and rest with family members. Contact with nature and the search for a more natural environment seem to play a secondary role in the visitation experience.

In general, Ibirapuera visitors felt much better or better in most of the well-being dimensions evaluated. Both frequent (82%) and occasional visitors (86%) reported that the most perceived benefits from the visit were psychological and emotional (see tables 2 and 3), which confirms the role played by urban green areas, especially in a post-pandemic scenario, in combating stress, reducing mental fatigue, and promoting peace and relaxation (Romanillos et al. 2018; Frumkin et al. 2017; Ramkissoon et al., 2018).

Table 2 – Perception of well-being and health benefits from visiting Ibirapuera Park – frequent visitors

	Much better	Better	Slightly better	Neutral	Slightly worse	Worse	Much worse	Rank
Physical	72%	20,5%	2%	5,5%	0%	0%	0%	2
Psychological/ Emotional	82%	10%	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%	1
Social	52%	22%	8%	17%	1%	0%	0%	7
Community	40%	23%	7%	28%	1%	0%	1%	10
Intellectual	43%	23%	9%	21%	3%	1%	0%	9
Spiritual	70%	18%	6%	6%	0%	0%	0%	3
Ecological	61%	30%	4%	4%	1%	0%	0%	6
Environmental	67%	23%	2%	7%	1%	0%	0%	4
Cultural	45%	26%	8%	20%	1%	0%	0%	8
Occupational	66%	20%	5%	8%	1%	0%	0%	5
Economic	34,5%	22,5%	13%	25%	1%	3%	1%	11

Source: designed by the authors

Table 3 - Perception of well-being and health benefits from visiting Ibirapuera Park – occasional visitors

	Much better	Better	Slightly better	Neutral	Slightly worse	Worse	Much worse	Rank
Physical	73%	21%	4%	1%	1%	0%	0%	3
Psychological/ Emotional		11%						
	86%		2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1
Social	58%	21%	6%	13%	1%	1%	0%	8
Community	50%	14%	9%	22%	0%	2%	0%	9
Intellectual	49%	18%	17%	13%	2%	0%	1%	10
Spiritual	71%	14%	5%	9%	0%	0%	1%	4
Ecological	70%	14%	8%	8%	0%	0%	0%	5
Environmental	74%	12%	5%	8%	0%	0%	0%	2
Cultural	60%	10%	13%	14%	1%	0%	1%	7
Occupational	64%	23%	5,5%	5,5%	1%	0%	0%	6
Economic	38%	23%	12%	24%	1%	1%	0%	11

Source: designed by the authors

Regarding other types of benefits perceived from the visit, some ranking and value differences were identified for each of the analyzed profiles. Physical well-being provided by visiting Ibirapuera Park was the second most valued dimension by frequent visitors (72%), while for occasional visitors, this dimension held the third position (73%), confirming Ibirapuera Park's vocation as an important space for physical activities amidst nature, especially for residents living nearby.

Spiritual benefits were also central for about 70% of frequent visitors and 71% of occasional ones, ranked as the third and fourth most valued dimensions, respectively, highlighting the role of urban parks as places that facilitate connection with nature, seen as a source of inspiration and a generator of feelings of peace and tranquility. Meanwhile, the second most valued well-being dimension among occasional visitors was environmental, with 74% reporting feeling much better after visiting a balanced environment surrounded by nature and open air. For frequent visitors, 67% felt much better in environmental terms, a dimension figured as the fourth most valued for this group.

Most frequent and occasional visitors also recognized that the experience was very important for improving work capacity, 66% and 64%, respectively, providing more energy and aiding in concentration and performance of routine work activities. This dimension, highly valued by the participants in this research, still remains on the periphery of studies on multiple benefits perceived from visiting urban parks. This appears to be, thus, another important perspective for research, still open, that could contribute to greater societal awareness of the relevance of these green spaces.

It is worth mentioning that 70% of occasional visitors and 61% of frequent visitors stated that they felt much better in terms of "ecological well-being," as the visit allowed them to connect with Ibirapuera's natural environment and raised awareness of the importance of sustainability-related issues. The challenge lies precisely in leveraging this awareness and increasing efforts to solidify the perspective of this green area as a common good, a natural and cultural heritage of great value, which should therefore be known, protected, and embraced by society, as highlighted by Willis (2015) and Viana et al. (2014).

Another benefit perceived from the visit was the perspective of sociability in urban parks as a place for meeting and experiencing unique moments with friends and family. About 52% of frequent visitors and 58% of occasional ones felt much better with the experience at Ibirapuera, which corroborates findings from other studies on social well-being linked to parks (Graça & Telles, 2020; Londe & Mendes, 2016; Viana et al., 2014; Pierone et al., 2016).

While economic, community, intellectual, and cultural benefits were the least perceived from visits to Ibirapuera Park. A small portion of frequent and occasional visitors associates the visit with the possibility of contributing to job and income generation for locals or even strengthening bonds with neighbors and engaging in collective causes in a space of common good, as suggested by Lev et al. (2020). Despite Ibirapuera's role as an important cultural facility, most visitors do not relate the benefits of the visitation experience to participating in cultural events, for instance.

Finally, the relationships between benefits perceived by occasional and frequent visitors to Ibirapuera Park were analyzed through the computation of linear correlations. The result of this analysis verified the existence of significant correlations between physical and psychological benefits (0.69), ecological and environmental (0.76), intellectual and cultural (0.61), and social and community ones (0.6), as presented in Figure 2. These results suggest that the perceived benefits may have fewer dimensions than initially researched, anchored in the research protocol suggested by Lemieux et al. (2012).

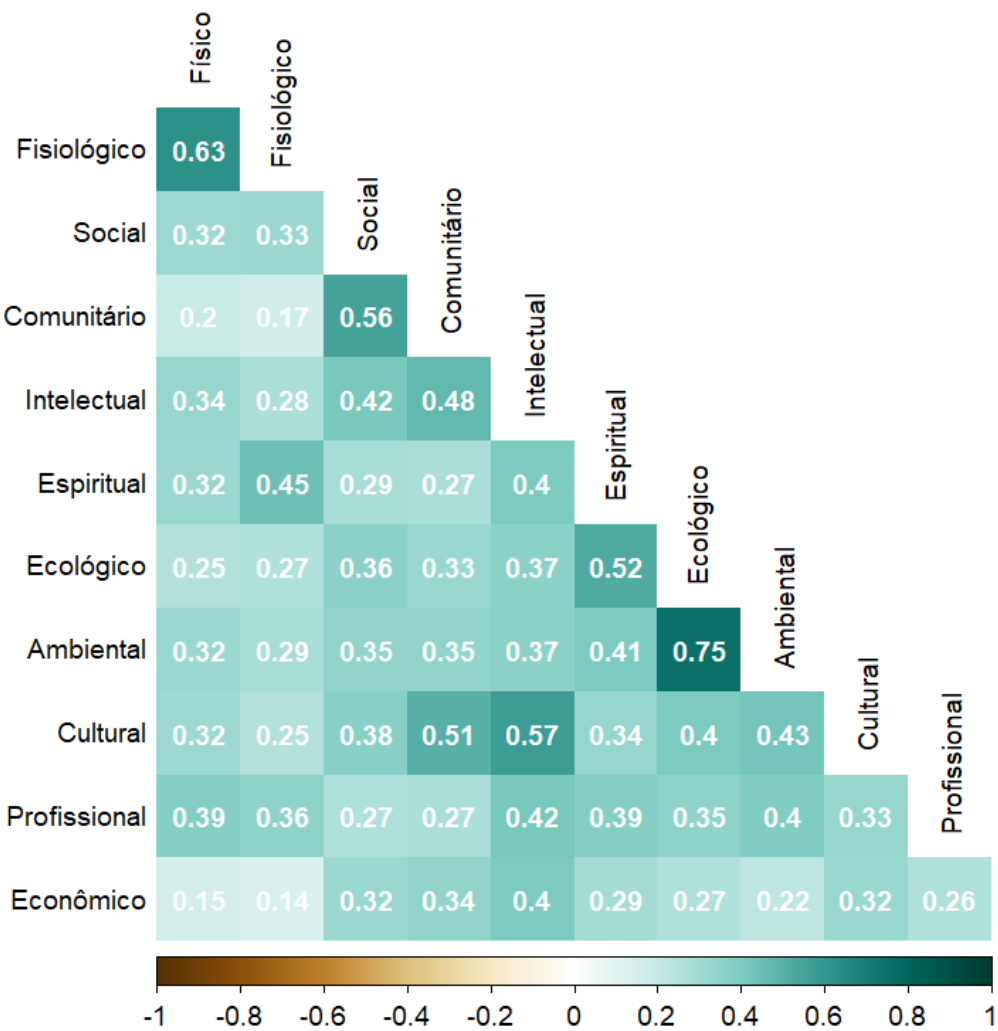


Figure 2: Correlation among perceived benefits

Source: designed by the authors

Final Remarks

The research with visitors to Ibirapuera Park highlighted the significance of this urban green space for the municipality of São Paulo and on a larger scale, as it attracts a regional, national, and even international audience. It provides various ecosystem services, being an option for leisure, relaxation, entertainment, sociability, and the promotion of health and well-being, due to the attraction it holds for this diverse public. The main motivations for visiting were associated with the pursuit of psychological/emotional well-being, with objectives of relaxation and recovery from mental fatigue, related to the urban pace of life, work, and stress, and the pursuit of spiritual and environmental well-being, as the visit allows for closer contact and connection with nature, or at least with the idea that this audience has of nature. In terms of perceived benefits after the visit, the aspects most valued by respondents also included contributions to psychological and emotional well-being, physical health improvement, and connection with nature, providing peace and relaxation, which reinforces that visits to green spaces are increasingly recognized by urban populations for their direct benefits to health and quality of life. At the same time, the results obtained confirm a contemporary need increasingly valued by populations regarding experiences of contact with nature and a “return to origin” as a strategy to mitigate the ever-more common problems of urban life, in what has come to be known as “nature baths” or “forest baths”.

In this regard, understanding how people perceive the experience and use Ibirapuera Park may represent a key element for raising society’s awareness about the necessary debate on urban sustainability and the importance of protected areas themselves for health and well-being, as well as for incorporating this perspective into the planning instruments for these areas, as they allow for the transformation of the desires, needs, and perceptions of these groups into formal activities within these instruments, such as in management plans. Along these lines, the results of this research may also justify institutional and financial support for designing public use programs, directing investments toward improving/expanding visitation structures, and implementing interpretation and environmental education actions (events, lectures, discussion groups, recreational activities, interpretive signage, among others), aimed at raising visitors’ awareness about the various functions performed by the park and its importance for the local and even regional context. Another initiative lies in developing interdisciplinary programs and projects in the fields of health, environment, tourism, leisure, education, and interpretation to enrich visitation experiences and amplify the benefits generated by the park in a broad sense.

At the same time, a challenge that arises in this context is precisely communicating the full potential of green spaces and parks for promoting health and well-being to increase visitation not only to Ibirapuera Park but to other green spaces in general, aiming to foster a culture of valuing and emotional connection with this rich natural and cultural heritage. As a result, it is possible to strengthen more meaningful, critical, creative, and educational leisure and tourism experiences, linked to the territory and the challenges of social and environmental conservation.

Acknowledgments

This work was carried out with the support of CNPq, National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - Brazil (Junior Post-Graduate Program/case no. 150439/2020-2) and Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement – CAPES – Brazil.

References

- ARANA, Alba A. e XAVIER, Fernanda B. Qualidade ambiental e promoção de saúde: o que determina a realização de atividades físicas em parques urbanos. *Geosul*, Florianópolis, v. 32, n. 63, p 201-228, Jan./Apr. 2017.
- ARAÚJO, N., & BARRETO, C. Uses And Roles Of Urban Parks: Perceptions On The Ecological Park Asa Sul, Brasília, Brazil. *Revista Espaço e Geografia*, v. 23, n. 2, 2020.
- BELUSSO, Amanda; PAGNUSSAT, Bruna. Caracterização das áreas verdes da cidade de Passo Fundo RS: análise e discussão. In: *V Seminário Internacional de Construções Sustentáveis*, October 27 and 28, 2016.
- BOVO, M. C., & AMORIM, M. C. da C. T. Áreas verdes urbanas, a imagem, o mito e a realidade: um estudo de caso sobre a cidade de Maringá/pr/br. *Formação (Online)*, 1(16), 2011. <https://doi.org/10.33081/formacao.v1i16.865>
- CARVALHO, Ítalo; GOSLING, Marlusa. Parques Verdes na Cidade de Belo Horizonte: atributos e pesos na perspectiva da ambiência. *Podium sport, Leisure and Tourism Review*, São Paulo, v.8, n.1, p.115-127, Jan./Apr. 2019.
- CAMPOS, Renata; CASTRO, Josiane. Áreas verdes: espaços urbanos negligenciados impactando a saúde. *Saúde e transformação social*, Florianópolis, v.8, n.1, p.106-116, 2017.
- CANTO-SILVA, Celson; SILVA, Jordana. Panorama da visitação e da condução de visitantes em Parques Brasileiros. *Revistas Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo - RBTUR*, São Paulo, v.11, n.2, p.347-364, May/Aug. 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7784/rbtur.v11i2.1286>
- DORIGO, T. A., & LAMANO-FERREIRA, A. P. N. Contribuições da Percepção Ambiental de Frequentadores Sobre Praças e Parques no Brasil (2009-2013): Revisão Bibliográfica. *Revista De Gestão Ambiental E Sustentabilidade*, 4(3), 2015, 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.5585/geas.v4i3.138>
- FAUSTINO, Daiane Uinnes e TELES, Reinaldo Miranda de Sá. Pesquisa de satisfação em parques urbanos: um estudo no Parque Ibirapuera (SP). *Revista Brasileira de Ecoturismo*, v. 14, n. 3, p. 391-416, 2021.
- FERNANDES-PINTO, E.; IRVING, M. de A. Sítios naturais sagrados: valores ancestrais e novos desafios para as políticas de proteção da natureza. *Desenvolv. Meio Ambiente*, v. 40, p. 275-296, April, 2017.
- FISCHER, M., RENK, V., MOSER, A., & ARTIGAS, N. Diálogos entre bioética e saúde global:

análise de usuários e usos de parques urbanos como indicadores éticos na promoção de bem-estar. *Cadernos Metrópole*, v. 20, p. 471-492, 2018. DOI: 10.1590/2236-9996.2018-4208

FRUMKIN, H., BRATMAN, G. N., BRESLOW, S. J., COCHRAN, B., KAHN JR, P. H., LAWLER, J. J. & WOOD, S. A. Nature contact and human health: A research agenda. *Environmental health perspectives*, v. 125, n. 7, p. 075001, 2017. DOI: 10.1289/EHP1663

GONÇALVES, Eduardo; GUERRA, Ricardo. O turismo de saúde e bem estar como fator de desenvolvimento local: uma análise à oferta termal portuguesa. *Revistas de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural, Pasos*, v.17, n.2, p.453-472, April/June, 2019. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.25145/j.pasos.2019.17.030>

GRAÇA, P., & TELLES, F. A importância dos parques urbanos para a manutenção da biodiversidade e benefícios socioambientais: Uma análise realizada no Parque do Flamengo (Rio de Janeiro). *Revista Brasileira de Ecoturismo*, v. 13, n. 4, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34024/rbecotur.2020.v13.9876>

GRILLI, G., MOHAN, G., & CURTIS, J. Public park attributes, park visits, and associated health status. *Landscape and urban planning*, v. 199, p. 103814, 2020. DOI: 10.1016/j.landurbplan.2020.103814

LEMIEUX, C. J., EAGLES, P. F. J., SLOCOMBE, D. S.; DOHERTY, S.T., ELLIOT, S.J., & MOCK, S. E. Human health and well-being motivations and benefits associated with protected area experiences: An opportunity for transforming policy and management in Canada. *Parks*, 18 (1), 71–85, 2012.

LEV, E., KAHN JR., P., CHEN, H., & ESPERUM, G. Relatively wild urban parks can promote human resilience and flourishing: A case study of Discovery Park, Seattle, Washington. *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, v. 2, p. 2, 2020. DOI: 10.3389/frsc.2020.00002

LIN, B., FULLER, R., BUSH, R., GASTON, K., & SHANAHAN, D. Opportunity or orientation? Who uses urban parks and why. *PLoS one*, v. 9, n. 1, p. e87422, 2013. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0087422

LIU, H., LI, F., LI, J., & ZHANG, Y. The relationships between urban parks, residents' physical activity, and mental health benefits: A case study from Beijing, China. *Journal of environmental management*, v. 190, p. 223-230, 2017. DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvman.2016.12.058

LOBODA, C., & DE ANGELIS, B. Áreas verdes públicas urbanas: conceitos, usos e funções. *Ambiência*, v. 1, n. 1, p. 125-139, 2005.

LONDE, Patrícia R. & MENDES, Paulo C. Qualidade ambiental das áreas verdes urbanas na promoção da saúde: o caso do Parque Municipal do Mocambo em Patos de Minas. *Hygeia* 12 (22): 177 - 196, Jun/2016.

MAINELLA, F.P., AGATE, J.R. AND CLARK, B.S. Outdoor-based play and reconnection to nature: A neglected pathway to positive youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2011: 89-104. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.399>

MALLER, C., HENDERSON-WILSON, C.A., PRYOR, L., PROSSER, L., & MOORE, M. *The health benefits of contact with nature in a park context – A review of relevant literature* (2nd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Deakin University – School of Health and Social Development, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, 2002.

MALLER, C., TOWNSEND, M., PRYOR, A., BROWN, P., & ST. LEGER, L. Healthy nature Healthy people: 'Contact with nature' as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations. *Health Promotion International*, 21(1), 2005, 45–54.

MOMM-SCHULT, S. I. et al. Uso urbano e serviços ecossistêmicos em áreas protegidas: o caso do Parque Guaraciaba em Santo André (SP). In: *III Seminário sobre tratamento de áreas de preservação permanente em meio urbano e restrições ambientais ao parcelamento do solo*. APPUR- Belém, PA. 2014. 15p.

MOYLE, Brent D.; WEILER, Betty. Revisiting the importance of visitation: Public perceptions of park benefits. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, v. 17 n.1, p; 91–105, 2017.

OTTONI, Dacio Araújo Benedicto. *Cidade-jardim: formação e percurso de uma idéia*. São Paulo: Hucitec/Annablume, 2002.

PEREHOUSKEI, Nestor; DE ANGELIS, Bruno. Áreas verdes e saúde: paradigmas e experiências. *Diálogos & Saberes*, Mandaguari, v.8, n.1, p.55-77, 2012.

PIERONE, J., VIZZOTTO, M., HELENO, M., FARHAT, C. & SERAFIM, A. Qualidade de vida de usuários de parques públicos. *Boletim de psicologia*, 66(144), 99-112, 2016.

PRÖBSTL, Ulrike; HAIDER, Wolfgang. Challenges for outdoor recreation and nature based tourism, *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, ISSN 2213-0780, EDITORIAL, p. 1-2, 2013

PUHAKKA, R., PITKÄNEN, K., & SIIKAMÄKI, P. The health and well-being impacts of protected areas in Finland. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, v. 25:12, 1830-1847, 2016. DOI:10.1080/09669582.2016.1243696

RAIMUNDO, S.; SARTI, A. C. Parques urbanos como elemento de valorização do espaço a partir de atividades de lazer e turismo. *Geograficidade*, v. 9, p. 104-118, 2019.

RAMKISSOON, H., MAVONDO, F., & UYSAL, M. Social involvement and park citizenship as moderators for quality-of-life in a national park. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, v.26, n. 3, p. 341-361, 2018. DOI: 10.1080/09669582.2017.1354866.

ROMAGOSA, Francesc; EAGLES, Paul and LEMIEUX, Christopher J. From the inside out to the outside in: Exploring the role of parks and Protected areas as providers of human health and well-being. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism* 10, 2015, 70–77.

ROMANILLOS, T., MANEJA, R., VARGA, D., BADIELLA, L., & BOADA, M. Protected natural areas: In sickness and in health. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, v. 15, n. 10, p. 2182, 2018. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph15102182

SANCHO, Altair & DEUS, José Antonio Souza de. Áreas protegidas e ambientes urbanos: novos significados e transformações associados ao fenômeno da urbanização extensiva. *Sociedade & Natureza*. [online]. vol.27, n.2, pp.223-238, 2015. ISSN 1982-4513. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-451320150203>.

SANCHO-PIVOTO, Altair & RAIMUNDO, Sidnei. As contribuições da visitação em parques para a saúde e bem-estar. *Revista Brasileira De Pesquisa Em Turismo - RBTUR*, 16, 2546, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.7784/rbtur.v16.2546>

SILVA, J., & PASQUALETTO, A. O caminho dos parques urbanos brasileiros: da origem ao século XXI. *Revista EVS-Revista de Ciências Ambientais e Saúde*, v. 40, n. 3, p. 287-298, 2013.

SOARES, A., MACHADO, F., GULARTE, Y. & BORGES, D. V. Importância dos parques urbanos para promoção da qualidade de vida dos indivíduos. *Disciplinarum Scientia | Sociais Aplicadas*, v.15, n. 2, p. 243-257, 2019.

SOUSA, A., DE SOUZA MEDEIROS, J., DA SILVA ALBUQUERQUE, D., & HIGUCHI, M. I. G. (2015). Parque Verde Urbano como espaço de desenvolvimento psicossocial e sensibilização socioambiental. *Psico*, 46(3), 301-310. <https://doi.org/10.15448/1980-8623.2015.3.17423>

VERSCHUUREN B., MALLARACH J-M., BERNBAUM, E., SPOON J., BROWN S., BORDE R., BROWN J., CALAMIA M., MITCHELL N., INFELD M. and LEE E. *Cultural and spiritual significance of nature*. Guidance for protected and conserved area governance and management. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 32, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, 2021. XVI + 88pp.

VIANA, Álefe; LOPES, Marcileia; NETO, Nelson; KUDO, Stephany; GUIMARÃES, David; MARI, Maikel. Análise da percepção ambiental sobre os parques urbanos da cidade de Manaus, Amazonas. *Revista Monografias Ambientais - REMOA*, v.13, n.5, p.4044-4062, Dec. 2014. DOI: 10.5902/22361308115179

XAVIER, F., FELIPE, J., & ARANA, A. O parque verde urbano: características do uso através de observação sistemática. *Urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana*, 2018, v. 10, p. 82-95. DOI: 10.1590/2175-3369.010.SUPL1.AO05.

WILLIS, Cheryl. The contribution of cultural ecosystem services to understanding the tourism–nature–wellbeing nexus. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, ISSN 2213-0780, v. 10, p. 38-43, 2015.

WOLF, I.D., & WOHLFART, T. Walking, hiking and running in parks: A multidisciplinary assessment of health and wellbeing benefits. *Landscape and Urban Planning*. 130(2014)89–103. DOI:10.1016/j.landurbplan.2014.06.006

WOLF, I., STRICKER, H., & HAGENLOH, G. Outcome-focused national park experience management: Transforming participants, promoting social well-being, and fostering place attachment. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2015, v. 23, n. 3, p. 358-381. DOI: 10.1080/09669582.2014.959968

Altair Sancho-Pivoto

✉ altair.sancho@ufjf.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9943-1334>

Submitted on: 12/04/2023

Accepted on: 13/10/2024

2025;28:e00045

Sidnei Raimundo

✉ sraimundo@usp.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2182-9593>

Glauber Eduardo de Oliveira Santos

✉ glauber.santos@usp.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8731-101X>

Visitação a Parques Urbanos e as Contribuições para a Saúde e Bem-estar

Altair Sancho-Pivoto
Sidnei Raimundo
Glauber Eduardo de Oliveira Santos

Resumo: As áreas verdes, como os parques, adquirem cada vez mais centralidade nas cidades, ao contribuírem para a manutenção da qualidade de ar, equilíbrio térmico e fornecimento de valores estéticos e ambientes equilibrados, que oportunizam o contato com a natureza e contribuem para a melhoria de saúde e bem-estar das populações. Inspirados neste contexto, o presente trabalho tem por objetivo investigar as percepções dos visitantes do Parque do Ibirapuera (SP) sobre as motivações e benefícios gerados com a visitação a essa área verde urbana, com olhar atento para as contribuições à saúde e bem-estar. Os procedimentos metodológicos dessa pesquisa, de caráter qualitativo e quantitativo, envolveram levantamento bibliográfico e documental, bem como a aplicação de 197 questionários estruturados com visitantes do Ibirapuera. Os resultados indicam que os principais benefícios percebidos são de ordem psicológica e emocional, seguidos de melhoria na saúde física e relaxamento possibilitado pelo contato com a natureza.

São Paulo. Vol. 28, 2025

Artigo Original

Palavras-chave: Áreas Protegidas, Visitação, Qualidade de Vida, Bem-estar, Saúde, Parque do Ibirapuera.

Visita a Parques Urbanos y las Contribuciones a la Salud y el Bienestar

Altair Sancho-Pivoto
Sidnei Raimundo
Glauber Eduardo de Oliveira Santos

Resumen: Las áreas verdes, como los parques, tienen cada vez más protagonismo en las ciudades, ya que contribuyen a mantener la calidad del aire, el equilibrio térmico y aportan valores estéticos y ambientes equilibrados, que brindan oportunidades de contacto con la naturaleza y contribuyen a la mejora de la salud y el bienestar de poblaciones. Inspirado en ese contexto, el presente trabajo tiene como objetivo investigar las percepciones de los visitantes del Parque Ibirapuera (SP) sobre las motivaciones y los beneficios generados por la visita a esta área verde urbana, con una mirada cercana a las contribuciones para la salud y el bienestar. Los procedimientos metodológicos de esta investigación, de carácter cualitativo y cuantitativo, involucraron un levantamiento bibliográfico y documental, así como la aplicación de 197 cuestionarios estructurados con visitantes del parque. Los resultados indican que los principales beneficios percibidos son de carácter psicológico y emocional, seguidos de la mejora de la salud física y la relajación que resulta del contacto con la naturaleza.

São Paulo. Vol. 28, 2025

Artículo Original

Palabras-clave: Áreas Protegidas, Visitación, Calidad de Vida, Bienestar, Salud, Parque Ibirapuera.