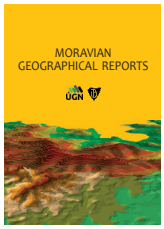

MORAVIAN GEOGRAPHICAL REPORTS

Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Geonics
Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Science

journal homepage: www.geonika.cz/mgr.html

doi: https://doi.org/10.2478/mgr-2026-0001

Placemaking for urban green spaces: Journey towards a better public space

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Abstract

Urban green spaces (UGS) provide a range of benefits and services that enhance the quality of life for city residents and UGS visitors. However, the potential of UGS often remains unfulfilled. This study presents an application of the placemaking concept for UGS planning, using the example of an urban park in Pardubice, Czech Republic. Its aim is to gain a deeper understanding of both the physical and social dimensions of the park. This research involved the use of a geo-questionnaire to explore visitors' motivations, perceived positive and negative aspects, and suggestions for improving the park area. The geo-questionnaire method enables people to directly influence planning decisions, contributing to a more inclusive and functional public space. The results show that the most common reasons for visiting the park are: walking, activities with children, the attractiveness of the environment, sports, and relaxation. The park's positives include its greenery and natural character. In contrast, the greatest negative is insufficient amenities. The analysis showed that the suggested changes are spatially concentrated, mainly in the park's central and northern areas. Frequently mentioned suggestions for specific improvements include new seating areas and refreshment stands. This study demonstrates a practical approach to engaging residents in the planning process and improving the quality of public spaces.

Keywords: Placemaking, participatory planning, geo-questionnaire, sketch map, urban park, Pardubice

Article history: Received 18 June 2025, Accepted 28 January 2026, Published 31 March 2026

1. Introduction

Urban green spaces (UGS), such as urban parks, are essential components of modern cities and have been part of urban areas since the earliest settlements, regardless of their economic level, type, or cultural context (Miller et al., 2015). Increasing urbanisation and the steadily growing population of cities (United Nations, 2025) put pressure on public spaces, including urban parks (hereinafter referred to as parks). Originally, these UGS were created primarily for aesthetic and decorative purposes (López-Mosquera & Sanchez, 2011). It is well known that they provide numerous benefits and ecosystem services (Konijnendijk et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2025), including cultural ecosystem services, such as opportunities for recreation, allowing people to escape from a busy city to a UGS (Doležal et al., 2024). However, motivations for visiting a park can vary (see Chiesura, 2004; Schipperijn et al., 2010; Irvine et al., 2013; Bertram & Rehdanz, 2015). Thus, it can be concluded that parks and other UGS have a fundamental impact on the quality of life of urban residents. But in practice we can encounter UGS that fulfil this function only partially or not at all (e.g. Hou & Rios, 2003; Wolch et al., 2014; Šimáček et al., 2020; Talal & Santelmann, 2021; Hofman, 2024; PPS, 2024). This situation highlights the need to develop new strategies for revitalising UGS which could improve their condition and their management, and create new opportunities for leisure activities in these green areas. Interventions in parks, such as revitalisation, positively affect both visitation rates and residents' quality of life (Veitch et al., 2012; Slater et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2019). Moreover, involving the public in the revitalisation process can have additional positive impacts on a project's final outcome (National Research Council, 2008).

One approach to addressing this issue is the concept of placemaking, which aims at 'making better places' (Palermo & Ponzini, 2015, p. 3) through the active participation of residents in the planning and decision-making process (Strydom et al., 2018; Ellery et al., 2021). For decision-makers, it is crucial to view UGS, such as a park, through the eyes of their users (Vasiljević et al., 2023), which is precisely what the concept of placemaking offers.

Based on the literature review, a significant number of studies emphasise the importance of UGS and investigate people's motivations for visiting parks, including their positive and negative aspects. However, it is desirable to expand the scholarly literature with studies that directly connect these findings to spatial proposals for changes in specific areas, derived directly from the inputs of people who commonly use the spaces under study. Such an understanding of a park, followed by an analysis of the suggested changes, can contribute to creating a high-quality and functional public space. Participatory mapping seems to be a highly effective method for collecting proposals for changes from local residents. This method has been successfully applied and explored in numerous studies focusing on participation and spatial development (e.g. Burini, 2016; Kahila-Tani et al., 2019; Pánek, 2019; Brisudová et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2022).

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This paper focuses on the application of the placemaking concept and participatory mapping in the planning and development of a UGS in the city of Pardubice, Czech Republic. The aim is to examine the park not only as a physical space, but also as a social space, taking into account how it is experienced by those who use it. This may prevent potential negative outcomes such as green gentrification (see Bressane et al., 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the park in all its complexity before initiating its revitalisation. The study presents an approach to involving city residents, specifically park visitors, in the decision-making process through the use of a geo-questionnaire (see Jankowski et al., 2016). In this survey, respondents shared their motivations for visiting the park, identified its strengths and weaknesses, and proposed specific changes for its revitalisation.

For clarity, the following research questions were defined:

- RQ1: What are the main motivations for visitors to come to the park? Output of the geo-questionnaire's textual section, where visitors state their most common motivations for visiting the park.
- RQ2: What positive and negative aspects of the park do its visitors perceive? Output of the geo-questionnaire's textual section, where visitors state the positive and negative aspects of the park and its parts.
- RQ3: Are the change proposals spatially dispersed or concentrated? Output of the geo-questionnaire's mapping section, where visitors mark specific locations on a sketch map and describe their intended changes.

The aim of these questions is to understand the functional use of the park; its strengths and weaknesses, and its potential for community-driven design interventions, and the questions should address both the physical and social dimensions of the space.

2. Theoretical background

One of the primary benefits of parks is their positive effect on urban microclimates (Lehnert et al., 2021a; Lehnert et al., 2021b), climate adaptation (Květoňová et al., 2024), air quality (Selmi et al., 2016), and stormwater management (Pauleit & Duhme, 2000). These benefits/services are part of the regulatory ecosystem services, and furthermore, there are provisioning, supporting, and cultural ecosystem services (MEA, 2005). A large number of the functions and benefits provided by parks are described in the literature (see Konijnendijk et al., 2013 and Działek et al., 2025). However, this paper looks at UGS from the specific perspective of the relationship between humans and nature. Therefore, it only deals with cultural ecosystem services (CES), which can be defined as the non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems such as parks (MEA, 2005). According to MEA (2005), these benefits include; recreation and ecotourism, social relations, educational value, aesthetic value and sense of place.

In the case of parks, CES can benefit individual health, whether mental (Orsega-Smith et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2017) or physical, by providing space for recreation in the form of physical activities (Cohen et al., 2007; Kaczynski et al., 2008). Parks also serve as venues for social interactions, allowing individuals from various social groups to connect. Thus, they promote social relations and cohesion among visitors (Konijnendijk et al., 2013; Sadeghian & Vardanyan, 2013).

Parks are often used and co-created by society (Daniel & Jirmus, 2023). Parks serve as spaces for recreation and other activities, and the motivations for visiting vary among individuals. Authors such as Poplin (2020), Doležal et al. (2024), Grzyb (2024) and Meenar et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of green and blue elements, which increase the overall attractiveness of parks. In a study focused on a park in Amsterdam, Chiesura (2004) identified rest and immersion in nature as the most common motivations for visiting. Other activities, such as spending time with children, walking dogs, or engaging in sports, were also highlighted. Similarly, a study by Schipperijn et al. (2010) on UGS in Denmark emphasised motivations related to being outdoors in the fresh air, relaxation, sports, and spending time with family and friends. Research by Irvine et al. (2013), conducted in Sheffield, found that the most common motivations included walking (e.g. dog walking or just passing through), nature-related motivations, and activities involving children. A study by Bertram and Rehdanz (2015), which focused on four European cities (Berlin, Stockholm, Rotterdam, and Salzburg), revealed differences in motivations across the cities. However, after generalisation, common motivations included spending time in fresh air, relaxing, experiencing nature, and walking.

The facilities available in a park can also influence visitors' motivation to visit. For example, Kaczynski et al. (2008) highlighted the positive impact of both paved and unpaved trails on physical activity, with paved trails being suitable for running and cycling, and unpaved trails for walking and jogging/running. Veitch et al. (2022) further emphasised the positive impact of sports fields on sports-related motivations and the benefits of picnic areas for social cohesion. McCormack et al. (2010) underscored the importance of functional amenities for children, such as playgrounds, in order to encourage the use of these spaces. Insights into visitors' motivations provide valuable information for the development of strategic and planning documents that better reflect the functional context of parks (Chiesura, 2004; Doležal et al., 2024).

People may perceive UGS in different ways, which can be triggered by the elements that are present in a park. Parks contain elements that visitors perceive positively, and which may influence visitation frequency, such as various types of facilities. Palliwoda and Priess (2021) supplemented facilities with other attributes and characteristics of parks that visitors rate favourably, including greenery itself, high maintenance quality (also Meenar et al., 2025), aesthetic appeal (also Daniel & Jirmus, 2023), location, accessibility, and size (also Doležal et al., 2024). However, parks also feature elements and attributes perceived negatively by visitors, which can adversely affect their visitation rates. Negative aspects include insufficient park amenities, such as inadequate seating, children's playgrounds, or refreshment stands (Burgess et al., 1988), poor UGS management (Jim & Chen, 2006; Palliwoda & Priess, 2021), overcrowding, litter, and a lack of waste bins (Palliwoda & Priess, 2021). Social issues, such as the presence of problematic individuals (e.g. alcohol users, vandals, or the homeless), are also noted (Bogacka, 2020). Concerns about sexual assault (Madge, 1997) or changes that occur over a day, such as the onset of darkness and insufficient lighting, also contribute to negative perceptions (Jim & Chen, 2006; Maruthaveeran & Konijnendijk, 2015). In extreme cases, negatively perceived aspects of parks can evoke fear among visitors (Maruthaveeran & Konijnendijk, 2015; Brisudová et al., 2020; Šimáček et al., 2020).

Currently, more than half of the world's population resides in urban areas, with estimates suggesting that this could reach almost 70% by 2050 (United Nations, 2025). In the past, urbanisation often led to the degradation or loss of UGS. Although the situation has improved in the European context in the new millennium (Kabisch & Haase, 2013), it is still necessary to prioritise the proper management, planning, and development of UGS. The importance of UGS is reflected in the strategic document Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015). As the significance of these UGS is increasingly recognised, decision-makers are showing greater interest in these spaces (see Schipperijn et al., 2010; Li & Bergen, 2018). Participation is a key element of urban green infrastructure planning (Hansen et al., 2016; Działek et al., 2025). The importance of public participation in the decision-making

process is also emphasised in the document Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992). The involvement of the public in shaping the spaces around us is addressed by the concept of placemaking.

Before introducing the concept of placemaking, thus creating a place, it is necessary to briefly define the term 'place'. According to Tuan (1977), space transforms into place when it enters human consciousness and acquires meaning. The terms 'space' and 'place' are interconnected; however, place is a human construct (Relph, 1976), derived from space, which, unlike place, exists only in a physical sense. Placemaking is a collaborative process that allows people to collectively reshape public spaces, transforming them into places while strengthening the connection between place and community (PPS, 2022). The goal of this process is to create what is referred to as a 'sense of place' (Sweeney et al., 2018, p. 574). Williams and Stewart (1998, p. 19) describe sense of place as a "collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals or groups associate with a particular locality". Mateo-Bibiano & Lee (2020) thus describe placemaking as a philosophy or process that gives people the ability to assign a space, as a physical location, a meaning, and transform it into a place (see Fig. 1). The concept of placemaking enables both professionals and urban residents to participate in shaping their surroundings. This can result in active, diverse, and comfortable public spaces (Hein et al., 2024).

Lew (2017) mentions two approaches to the concept of placemaking: the bottom-up approach, driven by active citizens, and the contrasting top-down approach, often led or heavily influenced by decision-makers and experts. In practice, these two approaches can be integrated, with the top-down approach drawing on insights gathered at the grassroots level (Šerý et al., 2023). Ellery et al. (2021) present the placemaking continuum in their work, criticising a rigid distinction between the two aforementioned approaches. According to this continuum, placemaking can emerge from an undefined position between these extremes, with variations such as the level of community involvement. Hague and Jenkins (2005, in Strydom et al., 2018) believe that placemaking is the desired outcome of spatial planning. The process of placemaking itself is an inseparable part of creating a place, as it involves public participation, allowing people to share, for example, their visions for a place (Strydom et al., 2018). Community involvement in planning can also increase residents' sense of belonging to a place (Ellery & Ellery, 2019).

3. Area under study

Pardubice is a regional capital located in the central part of the Czech Republic. As of December 31, 2023, the city reported a population of 92,319 inhabitants and an area of 82.7 km^2 (CZSO, 2026). Geographically, it is situated approximately at 16° east longitude and 50° north latitude, about 100 km east of Prague (see Fig. 2, top-right map). Pardubice lies at the confluence of the Labe and Chrudimka Rivers. The rivers are surrounded by numerous UGS, even in the city's central part. These green areas are thus a significant component of the city's public spaces. Such public spaces also include the Stará Vojenská Plovárna park, which is the subject of this study. Figure 2 illustrates the location of Pardubice in the context of the Czech Republic (top-right map), the location of the park under study within the city of Pardubice (top map), and in the bottom map a detailed division of the park into five spatial zones: northern zone (N), eastern zone (E), southern zone (S), western zone (W), and central zone (C).

The Stará Vojenská Plovárna park spans approximately 8 ha (OpenStreetMap, 2025) and is located along the Chrudimka River. The connection to the river enhances the park's potential. To the south, the park is separated from an industrial facility by the remains of a former military railway line, while to the north and east, it is defined by the Chrudimka River. On the western side, the park borders new residential developments and a sports complex (see Fig. 2). According to Pardubice city (2020), this park has a positive effect on the thermal comfort of city residents, with temperatures during summer months significantly lower than in the city's central parts. The park serves as a cooling zone during hot summer months, which is particularly appreciated by nearby residents. According to CZSO (2023), more than 12,000 residents live within a 15-minute walking distance of the park, while nearly 1,000 residents are located within a 5-minute walking radius.

Most of the park's various features are located in its central area. There are structures in disrepair – a former swimming facility and a sports club area (see Fig. 3 – C1), and also a pump track (C2), an educational trail with information boards, the remains of an original tree-lined avenue and a grassy area. In the northern part, there is an unmanaged natural floodplain with vegetation along the Chrudimka River and extensive grassy areas (N1). There is also a run-down boat storage structure on the riverbank, remnants of the swimming area's bridge and an old weir. The bike path and the sports shooting range are in the southern part (S1), which extends to the eastern part. Both the eastern and western parts have a predominantly natural character and serve as the entrances to (or exits from) the park. The eastern part is more of an urban wilderness (E1), while the western part is more formal (W1).

4. Data and methods

There are numerous ways to engage the public in the planning process for urban public spaces. One of these is participatory mapping, which can be defined as "public participation that includes the generation and/or use of spatial information for a variety of purposes" (Brown et al., 2018, p. 65). Such public involvement provides decision-makers with crucial information about the needs, values, and interests of residents, which can be used for the further development of a city (Amado et al., 2010).

To achieve this public involvement, some authors combine maps and questionnaires, which Jankowski et al. (2016) refer to as a geo-questionnaire. Such geo-questionnaires can be employed in an online environment using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) approach (e.g. Poplin, 2012). In this study, participatory

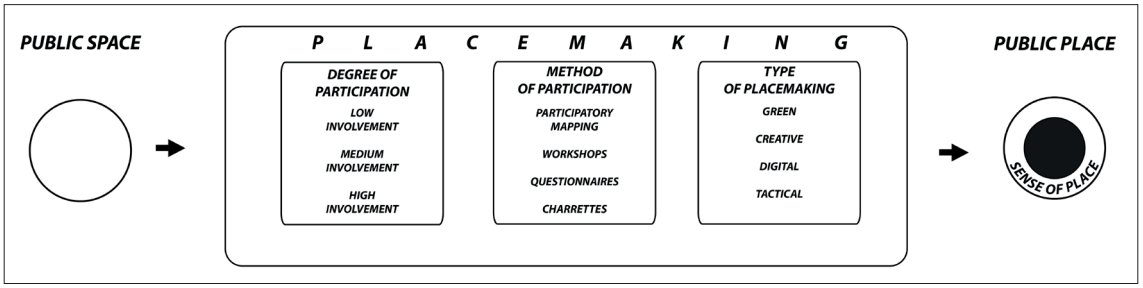

Fig. 1: Placemaking – the process of transforming space into place
Source: Own elaboration

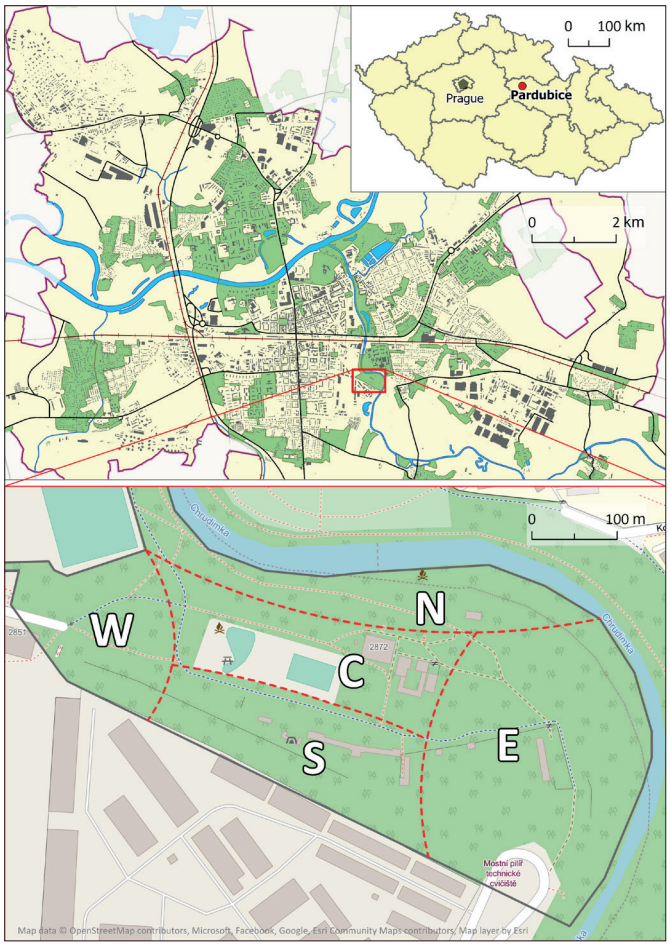

Fig. 2: Location of the Pardubice city within the Czech Republic (top right); Map depicting the area under study within the city of Pardubice (top map); A close look at the area under study (bottom map)
Source: ArcČR (2024), ČÚZK (2024), EEA (2025), OpenStreetMap (2025); own elaboration

Fig. 3: Photos from the park (the letters in the photo refer to the parts of the park as shown in Fig. 2)
Source: Own elaboration

mapping and the Pen and Paper Interviewing (PAPI) approach were employed. The paper-based variant was also used in studies by Poplin (2017) and Poplin et al. (2017). One of the possible outcomes of participatory mapping is a mental map, which is a product of cognitive transformation of the geographic environment perceived within our minds (Beck & Wood, 1976). In this case, the result is referred to as a sketch-map. According to Denwood, Huck, and Lindley (2022), a mental map exists only when respondents draw on a blank piece of paper, while using a pre-printed base map results in the aforementioned sketch-map. The sketch-map method is a verified approach used to analyse respondents' environmental perceptions (see e.g. Curtis et al., 2014 or Pánek, 2019).

4.1 Data collection

The research idea was initiated in the academic sphere, but the Chief Architect's Department of the Pardubice Municipality was consulted concerning the study's preparation, and approved its implementation. The municipality subsequently became the recipient of the survey results. Data were obtained through in-person research in the Stará Vojenská Plovárna park using the geo-questionnaire method. The geo-questionnaire consisted of several parts: 1) an open question about the motivation for visits, which addressed the first research question of this study; 2) an open question about the positive aspects of the park; 3) an open question about the negative aspects of the park (both positives and negatives relate to the second research question); 4) a sketch map question (see Appendix 1) about possible improvements to the locations selected by the respondent – respondents could mark areas on the map that they wished to modify or completely change, with each mark (sketch) requiring justification (this part of the geo-questionnaire relates to the third research question); 5) closed questions on the demographic characteristics of the respondent (e.g. gender, age, etc.).

All responses were gathered by a single individual (the author of this study) to ensure consistency and uniformity throughout the process. Data was collected over 23 days of May 2023. Responses were not collected during adverse weather conditions or nighttime hours. A total of 101 respondents participated in the survey, comprising 42% men and 58% women. In terms of age, the most represented group was people aged 30–49 (61%), followed by those aged 50 and over (20%) and those aged 29 and under (19%).

4.2 Data processing

All data had to be converted into digital form. The textual part of the geo-questionnaire was transcribed into a digital format following standardised procedures, and prepared for further analysis. For open-ended questions, categories were created to group individual responses based on common themes. Specifically, this applied to the question addressing the main motivations for visiting the park, where the classification was inspired by the work of Irvine et al. (2013), but modified and generalised for this study. A similar procedure was used for responses regarding the park's positive and negative aspects. The presentation of the resulting categories, including specific responses to the aforementioned questions, is visualised as word clouds in the results section.

The map portion of the geo-questionnaire was digitised using the Sketch Map Tool (SMT) (Klonner & Norze, 2023). This platform allows users to upload collected map data to the SMT website, where it is automatically digitised and georeferenced. The resulting data can be downloaded for free and further processed in GIS environments; for this study, ArcGIS Pro was used. A GIS tessellation method was employed to visualise spatial data. First, a hexagonal grid consisting of equilateral hexagons was created, with each hexagonal side measuring 10 metres. This length allows for relatively accurate spatial mapping at the given scale and provides sufficient detail for analysing and planning the area (Brisudová et al., 2020). After creating the grid, individual sketches were assigned to hexagons using the Spatial Join tool.

5. Results

5.1 Motivation for visiting the park

The survey revealed that motivations for visiting the park varied greatly among respondents. Given the option for open-ended answers, it was necessary to establish a basic classification system into which all reported motivations were categorised. As respondents could declare more than one motivation, a total of 167 responses regarding motivation were collected during the participatory survey. The most frequently cited motivation for visiting the park was 'walking' (43 responses). This category includes answers such as 'walk', 'walking the dog', 'walk in nature', etc. The second most common motivation was 'activities with children' (37 responses), which includes responses such as 'pump track', 'walk with children', 'time with children', etc. The third most frequently cited motivation was 'environmental features' (24 responses), including answers such as 'nature', 'greenery', 'staying in nature', etc. The fourth most common motivation was 'sports' (22 responses), encompassing answers such as 'jogging/running', 'exercise', 'cycling', etc. Similarly, 'relaxation' was also frequently mentioned (21 responses), with answers such as 'relaxation', 'rest', 'calm', etc. Less frequently mentioned motivations were related to 'socialising', 'transit', or the 'public fireplace'. Responses that could not be categorised under any of the above classifications were grouped into the category 'other motivations'. The individual motivations are presented in the word cloud below (Fig. 4).

As Figure 4 shows, benefits which relate to cultural ecosystem services, such as recreation (e.g. all types of walking and physical activity), social relations (e.g. spending time with friends and children), aesthetic values (e.g. nature, greenery), and sense of place (e.g. calm, smell of nature, I like it here) significantly influence people's motivations for visiting the park.

5.2 Positive and negative aspects of the park

In the textual section of the geo-questionnaire, respondents shared their perceptions of the park's positive and negative aspects. A total of 181 responses reflecting positive aspects were recorded. As with the motivation for visiting the park, respondents had the option of open-ended answers, necessitating the categorisation of responses by common themes. A summary of the positive aspects and their categories is visualised in the word cloud below (Fig. 5). The most frequently mentioned positive aspects were related to the 'greenery and natural character' of the park (53 responses), including answers such as 'nature', 'greenery', etc. The second most frequently cited positives were associated with the 'quiet and peaceful atmosphere' (41 responses), with answers such as 'peace', 'silence' and 'no cars'. The third most common positive aspect of the park was 'pump track and other fun' (28 responses), which included answers such as 'pump track', 'educational boards', and 'entertainment elements'. Another significant positive mentioned was 'water features' (11 responses), with answers such as 'water', 'river', and 'proximity to the river'. Additionally, 'accessibility of the park' was highlighted as a positive aspect (10 responses), with responses such as 'location', 'proximity to home', and 'good accessibility'.

Positive aspects also included the 'public fireplace' (9 responses), with responses such as 'fireplace' or 'barbecue'. Another frequently mentioned positive was the 'large open space area' of the park (8 responses), with answers such as 'large' or 'open space'. Similarly, the 'low concentration of people' in the park was noted as a benefit (8 responses), with responses such as 'not crowded'. Respondents also positively evaluated 'paths and trails' (7 responses), which included mentions of 'maintained paths', 'trail', and 'newly paved paths for wheelchairs'. Responses that could not be assigned to any of the above categories were grouped under 'other positives' (6 responses), including answers like 'cool', 'fun', or 'everything'. As Figure 5 shows, in this case, cultural ecosystem services such as aesthetic values (e.g. elements of nature, greenery, river), sense of place (e.g. peace, silence), recreation (e.g. physical activities, entertainment elements), social relations (e.g. all types of activities with offspring), and educational values (e.g. education boards) have a significant impact on people's positive perception of the park.

Fig. 4: Wordcloud of motivations for visiting the park
Source: Authors' research; own elaboration

Fig. 5: Wordcloud of positive aspects of the park
Source: Authors' research; own elaboration

As mentioned above, respondents also had the opportunity to give their opinions on what they perceived as negative aspects of the park. A total of 108 responses reflecting negatives were collected. Again, due to the open-ended nature of the questions, responses were categorised by shared themes. An overview of the perceived negatives and their categories is visualised in the word cloud below (Fig. 6). The most frequently mentioned negative aspect was 'insufficient park amenities' (53 responses), which included answers such as 'no refreshment', 'lack of seating', and 'no playground'. The second most common negative was 'greenery management' (15 responses), with responses such as 'poorly maintained grass' or 'unmaintained greenery'. The third most cited negative was 'clutter and lack of rubbish bins' (14 responses), including responses such as 'not enough rubbish bins' or 'litter'. Other notable negatives included 'deteriorated buildings' (7 responses), with answers such as 'unused buildings' or 'deteriorating buildings'. Another concern was 'social issues' (6 responses), including answers such as 'homeless people' and 'crowded'. Less frequently mentioned negatives included the 'shooting ground' (3 responses) and 'negatives associated with the river' (3 responses). Responses that could not be categorised were grouped under 'other negatives' (7 responses), including mentions such as 'construction site near the park' or 'loose dogs running around', etc.

Perceived negatives can cause weakened functioning of certain CES. For example, inadequate infrastructure can lead to reduced recreational function, just as poor maintenance of green areas can result in lower ratings in terms of aesthetic values, which can subsequently affect social relations, etc.

5.3 Proposed measures

A majority of respondents, specifically 70 individuals, indicated that they would make certain changes to the park. A total of 147 sketches were recorded showing the locations of proposed changes. Figure 7 illustrates the concentration of all the sketches regardless of their purpose. The highest concentration of proposals is visible in the central and northern parts of the park, with less concentration in the southern part. A minimal concentration of proposals is noted in the eastern and western areas of the park. As with motivations, it was necessary to create categories into which

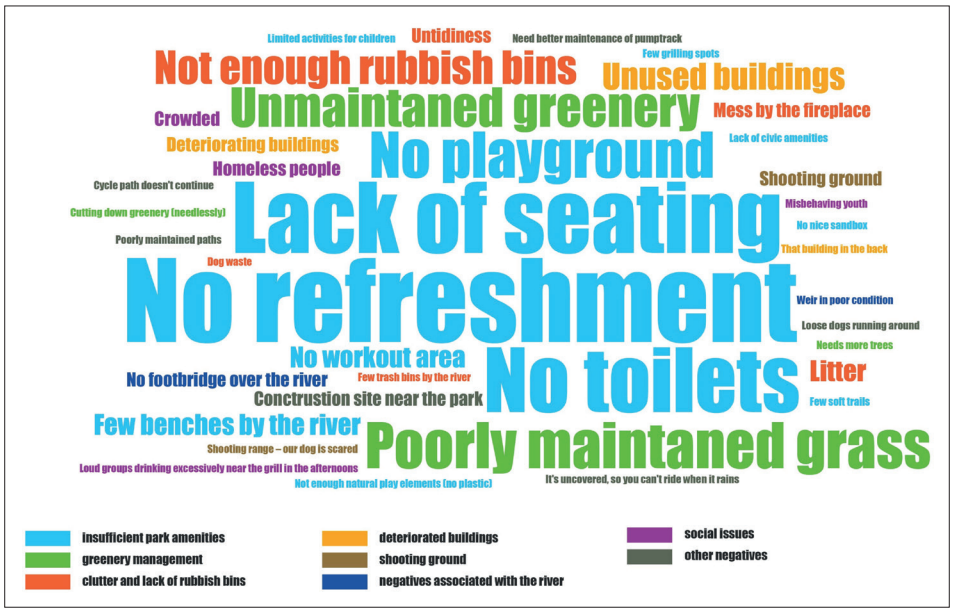

Fig. 6: Wordcloud of negative aspects of the park
Source: Authors' research; own elaboration

individual proposals were grouped based on common thematic features. The most frequently proposed change was the addition of new seating areas (30 sketches). This category includes suggestions such as 'benches', 'more seating areas', 'additional benches', 'benches by the water', etc. The highest concentration of these proposals is along the Chrudimka River. Such proposals were also concentrated along the trail in the northern part of the park and along the cycling path in the southern part of the park (see Fig. 7). The second most common proposal was for new refreshment facilities (27 sketches). This category includes suggestions such as 'refreshments', 'a tourist restaurant', 'a kiosk', 'a stand', etc.

The highest concentration of refreshment-related sketches can be attributed to the central part of the park, near or within existing buildings. The third most frequent proposal involved building a playground (25 sketches). This category includes sketches related to 'climbing frames', 'playgrounds', 'sandboxes', 'wooden play structures', etc. According to respondents, the preferred locations for playground construction were the grassy green area between the pump track and the deteriorating structures, and the green area in the eastern, more natural part of the park. The fourth most common proposal type involved locations for new toilets (15 sketches). The highest concentration of these proposals was near deteriorating buildings and along soft trails, with fewer proposals near the pump track.

A similar number of proposals were for sports facilities (13 sketches), including responses such as 'outdoor gym', 'workout area', and 'football pitch'. These sketches concentrated on the grassy area between the pump track and the deteriorating structures in the park's central part. Less frequently mentioned proposals included building a footbridge over the river (6 sketches), all of which were located near the old weir. Additional sketches suggested locations for new rubbish bins (6 sketches) and the construction of a shelter (3 sketches). Respondents also proposed new utilisation of existing buildings (7 sketches) in the park's central area, although these new proposals were not further specified. Other sketches included suggestions that could not be categorised (15 sketches). Examples of these proposals include 'a stage', 'a picnic zone', 'a swimming area', 'a more robust trail', etc.

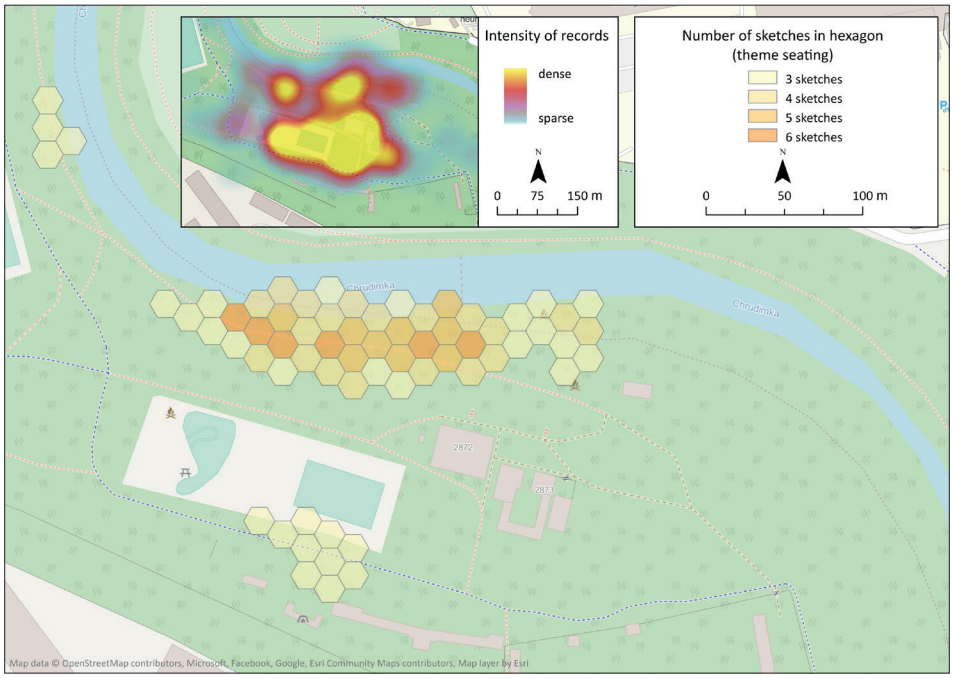

Fig. 7: Map showing the concentration of all proposals and suggestions related to new seating
Note: Only hexagons including at least 3 proposals are shown
Source: OpenStreetMap (2025); authors' research; own elaboration

6. Discussion

The results of the research indicate that the motivations for visiting the park are consistent with the conclusions of similar studies focused on UGS. The most frequently mentioned motivation was 'walking', which aligns with the findings of Irvine et al. (2013) and Bertram & Rehdanz (2015). This result can be attributed to the presence of unpaved paths in and near the park, which corresponds to Kaczynski et al.'s (2008) assertion about the positive influence of pathways on physical activity. The second most common motivation was 'activities with children', which can be attributed to the presence of a pump track and educational boards that are particularly appealing to younger age groups. McCormack et al. (2010) state that the presence of amenities for children encourages park usage among the youngest residents. This motivation was also mentioned in studies by Chiesura (2004) and Irvine et al. (2013). Another key motivation was 'environmental features', particularly contact with nature. This aspect may be influenced by the natural character of the park, its proximity to the Chrudimka River, and its connection to the more natural park Červeňák. The nature motive was similarly emphasised in the works of Chiesura (2004), Doležal et al. (2024), and Wagner et al. (2025).

Activities labelled as 'sports' were the fourth most common motivation, which aligns with the findings of Doležal et al. (2024). This result may be related to the presence of quality bike paths and unpaved routes that allow for active movement in a natural environment. The positive influence of such pathways on physical activity is supported by Kaczynski et al. (2008). Sports and similar activities, which have also been identified as significant motivations, have been mentioned in studies by Schipperijn et al. (2010) and Irvine et al. (2013). Motivations associated with 'relaxation' were less frequent than might be expected based on studies such as Chiesura (2004). Lower preferences for relaxation may be related to higher noise levels, especially near the pump track and shooting range. Nevertheless, relaxation was a significant motivation for some respondents, confirming the multifunctional character of the park.

Less frequently mentioned motivations were associated with 'public fireplace', as well as 'socialising' and 'transit'. The unexpectedly low significance of social interactions, which does not comply with Daniel & Jirmus's (2023) study, can be explained by a lack of seating and picnic areas, which, according to Veitch et al. (2022), support social cohesion. The low significance of transit is likely influenced by the park's location on the periphery of the city and the absence of a bridge over the river, which limits its use as a pedestrian and cyclists' transit corridor.

The identified positive aspects of the park are often similar to the reasons and motivations for visiting it. Respondents most frequently identified 'greenery and natural character' as a positive aspect of the park. Visitors to the park perceive greenery in a similarly positive way to the residents of Leipzig, Germany (Palliwoda & Priess, 2021), and participants in research in Camden, New Jersey (Meenar et al., 2025). This positive aspect is so significant that for some visitors it serves as their primary motivation for being in the park. Authors such as Poplin (2020), Doležal et al. (2024), and Meenar et al. (2025) also emphasise the importance of green infrastructure, but do not overlook blue infrastructure (which was identified in this study as the fourth most common positive aspect of the park). The second most frequently mentioned positive aspect was the 'quiet and peaceful atmosphere', which may explain why people visit the park for relaxation purposes. Similar conclusions are presented in studies by Chiesura (2004) and Schipperijn et al. (2010). The third most frequently identified positive aspect is 'pump track and other fun', which exclusively pertains to facilities for children. These elements of park equipment are perceived positively, similar to findings by Palliwoda & Priess (2021). The same authors also mention other positively evaluated attributes of parks, such as location and accessibility, as well as a large area. These attributes are also appreciated in the context of the park in this study.

The identified negative aspects of the park are also comparable to similarly focused studies. The 'insufficient park amenities' is considered the most significant negative aspect, including areas related to refreshments, children's playgrounds, and insufficient seating availability. Similar conclusions were drawn by Burgess et al. (1988). The second most frequently mentioned negative aspect is 'greenery management', which is also noted by Jim & Chen (2006). The third most cited negative aspect was 'clutter and lack of rubbish bins', as highlighted in Palliwoda & Priess (2021). The issue of insufficient maintenance and cleaning of the park is also addressed by Meenar et al. (2025). It is interesting to note that although parks are often associated with 'social issues' in academic literature (Bogacka, 2020; Šimáček et al., 2020), or fears related to darkness and inadequate lighting (Jim & Chen, 2006; Hofman, 2024), these concerns were mentioned minimally or not at all in this study. From the identified positive and negative aspects of the park, it can be inferred that, for visitors, not only is the park's location within an urban environment crucial, but so is the presence of quality amenities, blue-green infrastructure, and effective management of the entire area.

Based on the identified motivations and positives, we can identify the significant CES from which people benefit in the studied park. In this case, this involves recreation, aesthetic values, social relations (predominantly focused on children), and a sense of place. On the other hand, the identified negatives can be used to identify CES with a potential for improvement. The findings of this study indicate that park visitors desire changes in some specific areas, and thus, they can serve as a basis for desirable placemaking.

Based on the research conducted, it can be stated that the majority of respondents are interested in interventions that would lead to improvements in the park's condition. Approximately 60% of the proposals involve significant changes to the landscape, including the establishment of refreshments, a children's playground, sports facilities, a bridge over the river, and the renovation and repurposing of existing buildings. The most frequently mentioned proposals were for establishing refreshments and sports facilities, consistent with Hou and Rios (2003). Another significant proposal was the construction of infrastructure for children, such as playgrounds, similarly noted in the study by Talal and Santelmann (2021). Among the most frequently proposed smaller-scale measures was the construction of seating areas, corresponding with the strategic document of the city of Pardubice (see Pardubice, 2022).

The most pronounced spatial concentration of frequently proposed revitalisation measures can be identified in the following areas of the park: proposals related to refreshments are most often situated in the central part of the park, particularly in the area of existing deteriorated buildings. Proposals for installing new seating areas are predominantly concentrated on the left bank of the Chrudimka River, in the northern part of the park and along the bike path. Proposals for establishing children's playgrounds are most frequently located in green areas within the park that currently have no specific use. These findings reflect differing needs and preferences of park users, with the proposed locations for measures closely linked to existing spatial conditions and the characteristics of individual parts of the area. This information can be used in planning and implementing revitalisation measures aimed at improving the functionality and attractiveness of the park. According to the proposed responses, for example, it is suggested that children's facilities be built on part of a green meadow, more seating is added with a view of the river, and deteriorated buildings are transformed into areas for refreshments.

With data collection, a field geo-questionnaire survey was employed, which minimises the risk of marginalising certain segments of the population. This approach enables respondents to freely decide whether to participate in the research without being constrained by technological or other barriers, such as the need to own a smartphone/laptop, use specific online platforms, or subscribe to certain newsletters. As Thompson (2000) notes (in Poplin et al., 2017), choosing an online approach can lead to marginalisation of certain social groups from the entire participation process. The Face-to-face PAPI approach thus eliminates disadvantages associated with CAWI methods and ensures higher inclusivity. Despite the advantages of this approach, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations; it is time-consuming and it may not reach all passing cyclists and runners who primarily use the park for transit purposes. Nevertheless, the field face-to-face survey approach can be considered a suitable tool for democratising decision-making processes in public space planning. In this way, relevant information can be obtained from the broader public and subsequently incorporated into development plans and the transformation of public spaces (Amado et al., 2010).

The research results thus provide important foundations for planning and developing the park while emphasising the need to focus on developing infrastructure and amenities that meet visitors' needs and preferences. Placemaking contributes not only to improving public space by creating quality places, but also supports community life, active use of UGS, and reduces the risk of green gentrification (Bressane et al., 2024) by viewing public space from visitors' perspectives.

7. Conclusion

The study demonstrates, through the example of a specific park, the potential of placemaking to incorporate both the physical and social dimensions of a studied area/public space within the planning process. The findings concerning the RQ1 indicate that the motivations for visiting the Stará Vojenská Plovárna park align with most of the results in similar studies examining

this issue. The most common motivations for visiting the Stará Vojenská Plovárna park include walking, activities with children, the attractiveness of the environment, sports, and relaxation. In contrast to similar studies, motivations related to socialisation or transit were recorded the least frequently.

As for the RQ2, it can be concluded that both positive and negative aspects can be distinguished in the park, although the positives outweigh the negatives. Visitors most often appreciate the park's greenery and natural character. Many respondents similarly value the quiet and pleasant environment. Park visitors also positively emphasised the infrastructure for children, particularly the pump track, where their offspring can spend time being active. In addition to green infrastructure, the presence of blue infrastructure in the form of a river positively influences the perception of the park among certain groups of respondents. Regarding the negative aspects, a significant portion of complaints was associated with insufficient amenities in the park, such as the lack of refreshments, toilets, and seating areas. Some visitors perceived the inadequate maintenance of the greenery, as well as the insufficient cleaning of the park and a related lack of trash bins, in a negative light. The negative perception of deteriorated buildings in the central part of the park, as well as the presence of a shooting range, is also noteworthy. In contrast, social issues that are often discussed in academic literature do not significantly contribute to the negative perception of the studied park.

A significant contribution of this work is the identification of public preferences regarding possible revitalisation measures in the area. Regarding RQ3, the analysis revealed that the proposed changes are spatially concentrated, with the parts of the park most in need of change being the central area, specifically the space occupied by deteriorated buildings and their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, there is a grassy area between the pump track and these buildings, also located in the central part of the park. Finally, there is a section of the park to the north, specifically located on the riverbank and around the unpaved path. Less attention is given to the surroundings of the bike path in the southern part of the park. The study's results also indicate where respondents would prefer to place individual proposed measures. In terms of refreshments, most proposals are spatially concentrated within the central part of the park; this is also true for proposals for new toilets. Proposals for new seating areas are mostly concentrated in the northern part of the park along the unpaved path and the riverbank, as well as along the bike path in the southern part of the park. Proposals related to playgrounds are mostly concentrated in the central area, particularly in its grassy zone; a similar observation can be made about sports facilities. Proposals related to a new footbridge over the river are concentrated around the old weir.

The findings reflect both the factual and spatial needs, values, and preferences of residents, and can thus contribute to further development of this UGS. Based on the results, we can conclude that the approach used in this study is appropriate and can serve as an inspiration for similar future works in participatory processes and the democratisation of public space planning.

The research results have been submitted to the Chief Architect's Department of the Pardubice Municipality and were used as a basis for a chapter on participation within a development document concerning this UGS (Pardubice, 2024). To this time (winter 2025), a new playground, a refreshment stand, and several new benches have been added to the park. It can therefore be stated that this study has found practical application in decision-making and planning processes. For subsequent research it would be appropriate to focus on evaluating the implemented changes in this area and comparing their impact with the results of this study, thereby verifying the effectiveness of the proposed measures and gaining further valuable insights.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank all respondents involved in this research. This work was supported by the Faculty of Science, Palacký University Olomouc, internal grant IGA_PrF_2025_016 – Urban green spaces: accessibility, structures, perception. We would also like to thank David Richardson, who helped work up the language.

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Please cite this article as:

Hofman, M., & Šimáček, P. (2026). Placemaking for urban green spaces: Journey towards a better public space. Moravian Geographical Reports, 34(1), 2–13. https://doi.org/10.2478/mgr-2026-0001

Appendices

Appendix 1: The example of a collected map with sketches