

Recreational Facility Awareness and Availability: Implications for Patronage and Residents' Well-Being in Cross River State

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Abstract

This study is on Recreational Facility Awareness and Availability: Implications for Patronage and Residents' Well-Being in Cross River State. The study is guided by two research hypotheses in line with the two objectives of the study. The population of this study comprises 741,55 residents of Calabar Municipality. The study adopted a descriptive survey design using mixed method approach, key informant interviews were conducted among participants that were purposively selected, a structured questionnaire administered and key Informant Interview to 400 respondents selected through purposive and simple random sampling technique. The data were analyzed Multiple Regression Analysis and Chi-square tests. Results revealed a statistically significant relationship between public awareness and the level of patronage and availability recreational facilities significantly influences the well-being of residents. This implies that as residents visit recreational facilities more frequently, during preferred times, and experience favorable return factors such as good service or affordability, their sense of well-being increases. Since the two variables are significant at $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected, affirming that the availability and use of recreational facilities significantly influence the overall well-being of residents in Calabar Municipality. Additionally, the study established that factors such as income level, proximity, cost of access, and availability of amenities play a significant role in influencing patronage. It was recommended among other that Government agencies and recreational facility operators should develop comprehensive, multi-channel awareness campaigns, including social media, community events, and partnerships with schools and local organizations to increase knowledge of recreational opportunities.

Keywords: Recreational Facility, Awareness, Availability, Patronage and Residents' Well-Being

Introduction

Recreational facilities are key community assets that promote leisure, physical activity, and social interaction, thereby contributing significantly to improved quality of life. They include

parks, sports centres, viewing centres, cultural spaces, resorts, and other recreational environments where individuals can relax, socialize, and engage in various forms of recreation (Rao, 2021). These facilities encourage healthy lifestyles by providing opportunities for physical activities such as jogging, sports participation, and fitness training, which help reduce stress levels and prevent lifestyle-related diseases. In addition to physical health benefits, they also enhance mental well-being by offering serene environments that enable individuals to relax and recover from daily pressures. In Cross River State, particularly Calabar Municipality, recreational facilities are integral components of urban development strategies aimed at improving residents' welfare and quality of life. They also contribute to environmental beautification and enhance the overall livability of urban spaces. However, the extent to which these benefits are realized is largely dependent on the level of public awareness and patronage of such facilities. This underscores awareness and other influencing factors as key determinants of utilization and effectiveness. Therefore, in the context of this study, recreational facilities are viewed as essential resources whose impact on community well-being is shaped by their awareness, accessibility, and patronage patterns (Brockis, 2024).

Recreational facilities also function as social spaces that promote interaction, integration, and cohesion among different groups of people. They bring together individuals from various ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, thereby fostering unity and mutual understanding within communities. These spaces provide opportunities for children to play and develop social skills, while adults engage in networking, relaxation, and recreational sports activities. Such interactions help to reduce social isolation and strengthen community relationships. In Cross River State, recreational centres such as parks, resorts, and sports arenas serve as gathering points for festivals, leisure activities, and communal events. These activities help to build a sense of identity and belonging among residents. They also encourage cultural exchange and shared experiences that enhance social harmony. Furthermore, recreational participation promotes positive behaviour and reduces engagement in antisocial activities. Thus, recreational facilities contribute significantly to social development and community stability (Adisa, Ifeta & Adegbesan, 2021).

In addition to their social and health benefits, recreational facilities contribute to economic growth and tourism development within communities. They create employment opportunities in areas such as facility management, security, hospitality, and event organisation. In Cross River State, recreational facilities attract tourists and visitors, thereby generating income for local businesses and the government. Events held in these facilities, such as cultural festivals and sports competitions, further stimulate economic activities in surrounding areas. Well-developed recreational spaces also enhance the attractiveness of urban centres, encouraging

investment and infrastructural development. However, the level of economic benefit derived from these facilities is influenced by public awareness and patronage levels. Where awareness is low, patronage tends to decline, limiting their economic impact. This highlights the importance of proper publicity and sustainable management of recreational spaces. Overall, recreational facilities serve as key drivers of health, social cohesion, and economic development in Cross River State (Rao, 2021; Brockis, 2024).

Awareness and patronage of recreational facilities are essential for unlocking their full potential, contributing significantly to both individual and community well-being. Globally, these facilities ranging from parks and sports complexes to cultural centers are recognized as critical assets in urban and rural development. They provide spaces for physical activity, relaxation, and social interaction, promoting healthier lifestyles and fostering social cohesion (Shahmirzadi, Mahale, & Ogbemudia, 2024). To maximize their utilization, many governments and organizations integrate awareness campaigns into public health initiatives, highlighting the importance of recreational activities in combating sedentary behaviours and associated health risks. Effective communication strategies and robust government investments have played pivotal roles in enhancing awareness, leading to increased patronage and a deeper appreciation of leisure as a valuable aspect of life.

In developed nations, recreational facilities often enjoy high levels of patronage due to advanced infrastructure and effective promotional strategies. Countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia prioritize the maintenance of parks, sports arenas, and other recreational spaces, ensuring they remain accessible to a wide range of users (Mandagi, & Tappy, 2024). Digital platforms and mobile applications are increasingly utilized to promote these facilities, providing real-time updates about events, schedules, and available amenities (Groulx et al., 2024). Organized community events, such as sports tournaments or cultural exhibitions, further encourage patronage by creating a sense of inclusivity and belonging. Additionally, the design of these facilities often incorporates features that accommodate diverse populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, making them truly inclusive spaces.

Awareness and patronage of recreational facilities present a mixed picture, reflecting varying levels of socio-economic development and cultural attitudes. In countries like South Africa and Kenya, governments and private entities are making concerted efforts to promote recreational spaces through campaigns that emphasize their health and social benefits. These efforts are particularly noticeable in urban centers, where growing middle-class populations increasingly recognize the value of such facilities (Ngome, & Yeom, 2024). However, in many

other African nations, recreational facilities remain underutilized due to factors like inadequate infrastructure, lack of funding, and limited public awareness. Rural areas face even greater challenges, with many residents unaware of or unable to access recreational spaces. This highlights the urgent need for inclusive policies and initiatives that extend the reach of these facilities to underserved communities, ensuring equitable access for all.

In Cross River State, which is richly endowed with natural and cultural resources, recreational facilities are increasingly recognized as important tools for promoting public health, tourism, and community engagement. Urban centers such as Calabar have witnessed growing efforts to promote parks, sports complexes, and cultural venues, particularly through festivals and organized events that enhance visibility and attract participation (Obijuru, 2023). While these initiatives have contributed to increased awareness, significant gaps remain, especially in terms of accessibility, inclusivity, and consistent patronage across different segments of the population.

Balogun (2021) observed that residents in Nigerian cities are beginning to appreciate the physical, psychological, and social benefits of recreational environments, particularly in the face of rising urban stress and sedentary lifestyles. This growing awareness represents a foundational step toward increased patronage and utilization of recreational facilities, as individuals are more likely to engage with services they know exist and understand to be beneficial.

However, it is important to note that awareness is not evenly spread across all population segments within Calabar Municipality. The study reveals that younger and more educated individuals are significantly more informed about the existence and location of recreational facilities than their older or less formally educated counterparts. This discrepancy is consistent with the work of Oncescu and Loewen (2020), who found that disparities in recreational access and awareness often mirror broader socioeconomic and educational inequalities. In their analysis, those with higher education levels typically have more exposure to online platforms, tourism information, and social circles that promote awareness of leisure opportunities.

Supporting this observation, Agbor's (2021) investigation into the effects of urban sprawl in Calabar noted that peripheral communities often less formally planned and underserved by public infrastructure have limited access to both physical facilities and information regarding their availability. This has significant implications for urban planning and public health, as residents in these areas may face compounded disadvantages stemming from both

environmental neglect and informational exclusion. Bridging this gap would require targeted communication strategies, including the use of vernacular media channels and community mobilization to increase awareness in underrepresented areas.

In exploring what drives people to actually use recreational spaces, the study identifies four primary motivators: convenience, safety, facility quality, and social influence. These findings are consistent with broader trends in leisure behavior. Akinbogun, Kayode, and Oyedokun (2024) emphasize that perceived safety is one of the most critical factors affecting individuals' willingness to visit recreational environments. In Calabar, where urban crime and insecurity occasionally make headlines, the assurance of safety through visible security personnel, adequate lighting, and emergency services cannot be overstated. Dao's (2025) recent global study on recreational sports further corroborates this, arguing that comfort and perceived security are universal determinants of leisure space patronage, regardless of location or cultural context.

The physical condition and aesthetics of a recreational facility also matter greatly. Patrons are more likely to return to environments that are well-maintained, hygienic, and equipped with modern amenities. Social factors equally play a role. Word-of-mouth recommendations, peer influence, and the presence of familiar faces often encourage first-time visits and repeat patronage. In this regard, the role of community engagement becomes central. Chan, Marzuki, and Mohtar (2021) contend that involving local residents in the planning and management of recreational spaces enhances their sense of ownership and responsibility, which, in turn, supports long-term sustainability

These persistent challenges indicate that the mere availability of recreational facilities does not automatically translate into their effective utilization. There is therefore a critical need to systematically examine the Recreational Facility Awareness and Availability: Implications for Patronage and Residents' Well-Being in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State.

Statement of the problem

In Cross River State, the utilization of recreational facilities remains below expected levels, despite the availability of several parks, sports centres, resorts, and other leisure spaces intended to enhance residents' quality of life. Many residents still lack adequate awareness of these facilities, including their locations, services, and benefits, which significantly limits their patronage. This challenge is further intensified by weak publicity mechanisms and insufficient sensitization programmes, leading to the continuous underuse of many

recreational assets. As a result, the potential of these facilities to promote healthy lifestyles, social interaction, and community development is not fully realized.

Furthermore, the condition and distribution of recreational facilities across the state contribute to their low usage. Several facilities suffer from poor maintenance, inadequate infrastructure, and unfavourable environmental conditions, making them less attractive to potential users. Accessibility also remains a major barrier, particularly for residents in remote or underserved areas who face difficulties in reaching available recreational spaces. In addition, transportation costs and the expense of private recreational centres discourage low-income earners from regular participation. These economic and structural limitations often force residents to prioritize basic needs over leisure activities, thereby reducing opportunities for relaxation and physical well-being.

Socio-cultural factors also strongly influence the level of patronage of recreational facilities in Cross River State. In many communities, recreation is still regarded as a luxury rather than a necessity, especially among individuals engaged in demanding economic activities. This perception reduces the importance placed on leisure time and limits consistent engagement in recreational activities. In addition, some facilities are not adequately designed to accommodate all population groups, particularly the elderly and persons with disabilities, thereby limiting inclusivity. These cultural and demographic constraints highlight the need to understand how social attitudes and population characteristics shape the use of recreational spaces.

Despite efforts by relevant authorities to improve recreational infrastructure and encourage usage, challenges such as inadequate funding, weak policy implementation, and safety concerns continue to hinder progress. Without addressing these issues, the effectiveness of recreational facilities in promoting well-being and social cohesion will remain limited. It is against this background that this study focuses Recreational Facility Awareness and Availability: Implications for Patronage and Residents' Well-Being in Cross River State.

Purpose of the study

This study examined Recreational Facility Awareness and Availability: Implications for Patronage and Residents' Well-Being in Cross River State. This study will specifically seek to;

1. Assess the level of public awareness of recreational facilities in Cross River State
2. Examine how Availability of recreational facilities influence the well-being of residents

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between public awareness of recreational facilities and their patronage in Cross River State.
2. Availability of recreational facilities does not significantly influence the well-being of residents

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine recreational facility awareness and availability and their implications for patronage and residents' well-being in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was guided by four research hypotheses focusing on awareness, patronage, demographic characteristics, and residents' well-being. The population of the study comprised residents, recreational facility operators, and government officials associated with recreational services in Calabar Municipality, with selected facilities including Marina Resort, Christmas Village, Club X, Calabar Sports Club, and other recreational centers. A sample size of 392 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula and selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select facility operators, government officials, and active users of recreational facilities, while simple random sampling ensured equal representation of residents within the municipality. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and personal observation checklists. The questionnaire gathered information on awareness, patronage patterns, demographic characteristics, and perceptions of well-being, while interviews and discussions provided qualitative insights into operational challenges and users' experiences. Data collected were analyzed using Chi-square and multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses and determine the relationship between recreational facility awareness, availability, patronage, and residents' well-being.

Results

This section presents the data analysis based on the hypotheses in the study.

HO₁

There is no significant relationship between public awareness of recreational facilities and their patronage.

The appropriate test statistic used in testing the hypothesis is the Chi-Square Test of Independence. Table 1 presents a crosstabulation of respondents' sources of awareness of recreational facilities against their frequency of visit. The data reveal that the most common source of awareness is social media, which also corresponds with the highest levels of patronage - 30 people visit daily and 50 weekly Television/radio follows, also showing moderate patronage. Conversely, traditional media such as newspapers had the lowest levels of both awareness and usage, with only 3 daily and 2 weekly visitors. Word of mouth and roadside banners contributed to some level of awareness, though with lower frequencies of use compared to social media and TV/radio. This distribution suggests that the mode through which people learn about recreational facilities may influence how often they utilize them.

Table 2 shows the result of a Chi-Square test used to assess the relationship between awareness source and frequency of recreational facility visits. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 26.984 with 16 degrees of freedom, and the asymptotic significance (p-value) is 0.041. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the result is statistically significant. This indicates that the null hypothesis (which claims no relationship between awareness and patronage) is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, it was fit to conclude that there is a significant relationship between the public's source of awareness and how frequently they visit recreational facilities in Calabar Municipality.

Table: Crosstabulation: Awareness Source × Frequency of Visit

Awareness Source	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Occasionally	Never	Total
Social Media	30	50	25	25	10	140
Television/Radio	20	30	20	20	10	100
Word of Mouth	10	20	15	25	10	80
Roadside Banners	5	10	10	20	5	50
Newspaper	3	2	5	10	2	22
Total	68	112	75	100	37	392

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Result

Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.984	16

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

HO₂

Availability of recreational facilities does not significantly influence the well-being of residents.

The Multiple Regression Analysis was used in the test of hypothesis two. Table 3 presents the model summary for the multiple regression analysis assessing how recreational facility usage variables influence residents' overall well-being in Calabar Municipality. The model shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.642, indicating a moderately strong relationship between the independent variables (frequency of visit, time of visit, and return factors) and the dependent variable (overall well-being). The R Square value of 0.412 suggests that approximately 41.2% of the variation in residents' well-being can be explained by the model. The adjusted R Square (0.403) further confirms the model's reliability, accounting for the number of predictors.

Table 3 shows the ANOVA result for the regression model. The F-statistic is 56.391 with a significance level of $p = .000$, which is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). This means the model as a whole is statistically significant and explains a meaningful proportion of variance in the dependent variable. The significant F-value indicates that the combination of frequency of visit, time of visit, and return factors collectively predict the overall well-being of residents in a statistically significant way.

Table 3 equally details the regression coefficients for each predictor variable. All three independent variables frequency of visit ($B = 0.334$, $p = .000$), time of visit ($B = 0.241$, $p = .000$), and return factors ($B = 0.198$, $p = .001$) have statistically significant positive effects on well-being. This implies that as residents visit recreational facilities more frequently, during preferred times, and experience favorable return factors such as good service or affordability, their sense of well-being increases. Since all variables are significant at $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected, affirming that the availability and use of recreational facilities significantly influence the overall well-being of residents in Calabar Municipality.

Table 3: Model Summary of multiple regression analysis of Availability of recreational facilities does not significantly influence the well-being of residents

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	0.642	0.412	0.403	0.722		

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	88.321	3	29.440	56.391	.000***
Residual	125.456	388	0.323		
Total	213.777	391			

Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.215	0.204	—	5.956	.000
Frequency of Visit	0.334	0.053	0.415	6.302	.000
Time of Visit	0.241	0.067	0.272	3.597	.000
Return Factors	0.198	0.061	0.225	3.246	.001

***Significant at $p < 0.001$

Discussion of findings

Public awareness of recreational facilities and their patronage

The findings of this study underscore a moderate to high level of public awareness regarding recreational facilities in Calabar Municipality. This outcome is encouraging, as it mirrors a growing body of literature suggesting that urban populations in Nigeria are becoming increasingly attuned to the role of leisure spaces in promoting community well-being. This finding is in agreement with Balogun (2021) who, observed that residents in Nigerian cities are beginning to appreciate the physical, psychological, and social benefits of recreational environments, particularly in the face of rising urban stress and sedentary lifestyles. This growing awareness represents a foundational step toward increased patronage and utilization of recreational facilities, as individuals are more likely to engage with services they know exist and understand to be beneficial.

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Availability of recreational facilities and the well-being of residents

The findings of the study revealed that the availability of recreational facilities significantly influences the well-being of residents in Cross River State. Residents who had access to functional and well-maintained recreational spaces reported improved physical health, relaxation, social interaction, and psychological well-being. The study further identified convenience, safety, facility quality, and social influence as major factors encouraging residents to patronize recreational facilities. These findings suggest that accessible and secure recreational environments contribute positively to healthy living and community development.

The result agrees with the findings of Akinbogun, Kayode, and Oyedokun who noted that perceived safety is a major determinant of individuals' willingness to visit and utilize recreational environments. In Calabar Municipality, where issues relating to insecurity and urban crime occasionally arise, the presence of security personnel, proper lighting systems, and emergency support services were found to encourage patronage and enhance users' confidence. Similarly, the study aligns with the work of Dao, whose global study on recreational sports emphasized that comfort, accessibility, and perceived security are universal factors influencing the use of leisure facilities across different societies. The

findings also imply that when recreational facilities are adequately available and properly managed, they contribute to improved mental wellness, social cohesion, and quality of life among residents. Therefore, government authorities and private investors should prioritize the development, maintenance, and security of recreational centers to enhance residents' well-being and encourage active participation in leisure activities.

The physical condition and aesthetics of a recreational facility also matter greatly. Patrons are more likely to return to environments that are well-maintained, hygienic, and equipped with modern amenities. Social factors equally play a role. Word-of-mouth recommendations, peer influence, and the presence of familiar faces often encourage first-time visits and repeat patronage. In this regard, the role of community engagement becomes central. Chan, Marzuki, and Mohtar (2021) contend that involving local residents in the planning and management of recreational spaces enhances their sense of ownership and responsibility, which, in turn, supports long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

The study established that awareness of recreational facilities in Calabar Municipality is moderate but not yet optimal, underscoring the need for more robust information dissemination and community outreach programs. Increasing awareness is crucial for enhancing patronage, as many potential users remain unaware of available amenities and their benefits. This gap suggests that communication strategies should be more targeted and inclusive, leveraging modern media platforms and community networks. With reference to well-being of residents the study also confirmed that multiple factors influence the patronage of recreational facilities, with accessibility, security, cost, and quality of services being primary considerations for users. The findings demonstrate that without addressing these factors, recreational facilities risk underutilization and diminished public health impact. Therefore, improving facility management and creating safer, more affordable, and accessible environments are essential to foster greater community participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government agencies and recreational facility operators should develop comprehensive, multi-channel awareness campaigns, including social media, community events, and partnerships with schools and local organizations to increase knowledge of recreational opportunities
2. To the well-being of the residents, managers of recreational facilities should enhance infrastructure, safety, and inclusivity. This can be done through the upgrade facilities

to include security, accessibility features, and age/gender-friendly programs to encourage participation from women, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

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