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Social Expectations Regarding Municipal Parks in the Aspect of Work-life Balance (Using the Example of Lubelskie Voivodeship)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Using the Lubelskie voivodeship as an example, this paper seeks to identify and analyse consumers' (users of municipal parks) expectations regarding the functions of municipal parks in the context of work-life balance. We determined expectations regarding the parks' functions based on the reasons for visiting them.

Research Design & Methods: The primary data collection method was a survey method, which used a questionnaire technique. Non-random sampling was used. Respondents were recruited online using a snowball technique. The survey was conducted remotely using Google Forms. The gathered primary data were subjected to quantitative analysis, that is, the mean score test, Mann-Whitney *U* test and exploratory factor analysis.
Findings: We confirmed that the offer of municipal parks improves the likelihood of achieving a work-life balance, mainly due to recreation and leisure and health-promoting functions. The pilot survey revealed that interviewed consumers who used municipal parks in the Lubelskie voivodeship had varying expectations regarding the parks' roles. The foremost expectations involved parks' leisure function, which is the ability to relax in a natural environment, experience tranquillity and seek shelter from the sun, admire the beauty and sounds of nature, and engage in leisure activities, including meeting family and friends. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney *U* test showed that the variable frequency of visits to city parks was not a statistically significant differentiating variable for most respondents' expectations regarding their function. Nevertheless, through factor analysis, segments were identified for each category of respondents analysed that differed in their expectations regarding the urban park offer.
Implications/Recommendations: The study's findings can be utilised by city authorities to develop local municipal park management policies. Knowing what residents look for from municipal parks allows them to update their municipal park management strategies to align them with the demands of the public and to boost their appeal to city inhabitants. It can be applied to the management of existing parks and the development of new park spaces in cities.
Contribution: The review of the literature and the analyses enrich the literature focusing on work-life balance, specifically examining the impact of municipal parks on worker well-being and the significance of measures and innovations related to developing green areas as part of city policy. The presented findings can be a starting point for further research on this topic.

Article type: original article.

Keywords: municipal parks, work-life balance, local policy, social expectations.

JEL Classification: J22, J24, J28, Q57.

1. Introduction

The concept of work-life balance is associated with the desire to achieve goals in various aspects of one's life. This concept emphasises the significance of correctly prioritising work and private life, including family, leisure, enjoyment, and spiritual development (Khan & Fazili, 2016). Work-life balance is becoming increasingly important in light of the following:

– considerably rising expectations towards workers and businesses associated, among other things, with global competition, the need to align working hours with customer demands, and order processing time,

– dynamic development of innovative technologies and information and communications technologies, for instance, using communication platforms and mobile devices, allowing the workers to stay connected with the workplace and leading to the blurring of awareness of the necessity to separate their personal lives from work,

– increasing significance of remote working,

– workers' desire to increase their income and improve their quality of life.

The literature includes considerations of the relationship between the offer of municipal parks and work-life balance, consumer expectations regarding municipal parks and the gender and age of respondents, and the functions of municipal parks in this context. However, there is a research gap in terms of studies identifying expectations regarding the role of municipal parks according to the frequency with which respondents visit them. There is also a lack of studies identifying consumer segments according to reasons for visiting municipal parks among those who visit them rarely and often. This is a research gap that the present study attempts to address.

The research problem in this study is to identify and analyse the expectations regarding the offer of municipal parks due to the frequency of visits by respondents, together with the identification of respondent segments according to the reasons for visiting municipal parks among people who rarely and often visit them.

Using the Lubelskie voivodeship as an example, this paper seeks to identify and analyse consumers' (users of municipal parks) expectations regarding the functions of municipal parks in the context of work-life balance depending on the frequency of visiting parks. We determined expectations regarding the parks' functions based on the reasons for visiting them.

This research objective raises the following research questions:

– What is the relationship between municipal park offer and work-life balance in the light of the literature?

– What functions do consumers expect regarding municipal parks?

– What are the specific segments of respondents according to reasons for visiting municipal parks among all the respondents?

– Are there any statistically significant differences in respondents' expectations regarding the roles of municipal parks based on how frequently they visit these places?

– What are the specific segments of respondents according to reasons for visiting municipal parks among people who rarely and often visit them?

To achieve this research objective, we sought to verify the hypothesis that expectations regarding the roles of municipal parks differ depending on how frequently they are visited.

The study's findings can be utilised by city authorities to develop local municipal park management policies. Knowing what residents look for in municipal parks

allows city authorities to update municipal park management strategies to align them with the demands of the public and to boost their appeal to city inhabitants. It can be applied to the management of existing parks and the development of new park spaces in cities. The study indicates the expectations, important to respondents, regarding the offer of municipal parks, the implementation of which is the task of the municipal authorities and the urban planners working with them. Knowledge of park visitors' expectations according to the frequency of their visits can also give urban planners clues as to how parks should be laid out. The division of park space into different zones suited to particular consumer groups, the offer of specific facilities (e.g., playgrounds, sports equipment) and additional services (e.g., the possibility of organising events for family and friends) are important.

2. Theoretical Background

Nowadays, the concept of work-life balance is gaining increasing importance, although it is sometimes criticised for the lack of clarity in its definition, as well as ambiguity and the lack of consistent measures to assess work-life interactions (Omar & Zakaria, 2015). Furthermore, it is also pointed out that the focus is mainly on the quality of work-life areas, neglecting the causes of imbalance and precarious working conditions (Resch & Bamberg, 2005). Work-life balance policies can sometimes also reinforce gender inequalities and paradoxically lead to increased levels of work-life conflict (Brough *et al*., 2008).

Despite these critical elements, the literature indicates that lack of work-life balance can cause conflicts between the two domains, resulting in frustration at work, job burnout and poor performance (Chandran & Abukhalifeh, 2021). Overworking also leads to various health problems and may be a source of stress at the individual level (manifested, for example, as anxiety, helplessness, and psychosomatic disorder), interpersonal level (e.g., worker irritability or generating conflicts), and organisational level (manifested, for instance, as dissatisfaction with one's job or a loss of motivation to work) (Chirkowska-Smolak, 2008). Employers who implement an innovative and accommodating work-life balance strategy have more resolute employees who are more productive, eventually contributing to increased business performance (Yadav, Pandita & Singh, 2022). The research outcomes imply a beneficial correlation between the workers' impact on the work schedule and work-life balance approach on the one hand and their psychological well-being and job satisfaction on the other (Jang, Park & Zippay, 2011). This approach integrates, for example, flexible working hours to improve the balance between work and family life (Hill *et al*., 2001).

The desire to preserve work-life balance is linked to leisure activities such as engagement with nature in parks. Research indicates that there is a link between

lower levels of work-life balance and poorer mental and physical health (Borowiec & Drygas, 2023). Hence, there is a need to implement activities aimed at improving the health of employees, which will contribute to a better work-life balance. In light of the literature, interaction with nature has numerous benefits, including a positive impact on the population's health (physical and mental), quality of life, stress reduction, increased job productivity and efficiency, and the establishment of social ties (Szulczewska, 2020). This is particularly relevant in cities, which, compared to the countryside, provide fewer opportunities for spending time outdoors in a natural setting. Thus, city officials' efforts to expand park offerings are vital. It should be mentioned that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of municipal parks and other green areas increased (as indicated by the growing number of park visitors) because of their advantageous impact on citizens' physical and psychological well-being (Geng *et al*., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also raised the value of work-life balance and the number of interactions with nature, as evidenced by different measures and innovations in municipal strategies regarding the expansion of green areas and investments in city transport and green spaces (Mittal & Woodside, 2022). Visits to municipal parks can considerably improve general health and meet an individual's desire to connect with others (Xie *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, they can influence how city people describe their enjoyment (Cheng *et al*., 2021).

Green areas, including city parks, have the following main functions: recreation and leisure, environmental protection, health-promoting functions, aesthetic roles, and education (Chojecka, 2014). The recreational and leisure functions associated with the possibility of spending spare time on various forms of physical activity (walking, hiking, and sports), relaxation in a green area, and meeting and interacting with people exemplify the impact of municipal parks on the ability to maintain work-life balance. The use of municipal parks plays a significant role in improving work-life balance by, among other things, reducing stress and improving mental health of individuals (including employees) by spending time in municipal parks (Wang, 2023). Parks also offer a variety of opportunities to engage in physical activity, which contributes to both improving physical health and alleviating work-related stress (Koramaz & Türkoğlu, 2018; Zhao, Aziz & Ujang, 2024). Spending time in municipal parks facilitates social interactions and social connections that provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, which are important for work-life balance (Jang, Choi & Kim, 2024).

Furthermore, the environmental protection function is linked to the parks' health-promoting functions, which are directly related to protecting city residents from pollution and other external aggressors while establishing a healthy microclimate. In the work-life balance context, it is particularly significant that green areas affect people's general health and physical activity, reduce stress and fatigue,

improve concentration, accelerate recovery from surgeries and diseases, and increase pain tolerance (Kosmala & Błaszczyk, 2012). Studies demonstrate that even short excursions to natural places (e.g., municipal parks) have a beneficial influence on stress alleviation compared to the built-up environment (Tyrväinen *et al*., 2014). The offer of municipal parks related to cultural services, relaxation and exercise spaces, and leisure activities, among others, influences the quality of urban life, which contributes to a better work-life balance (Zhao, 2020).

Municipal parks attract visitors for a variety of reasons, which can be divided into several key segments based on their motivations:

– the opportunity for rest and relaxation (Liu *et al*., 2017; Gong *et al*., 2023),

– engaging in physical activity (Liu *et al*., 2017; Gong *et al*., 2023),

– meeting place with family and friends (Hui & Jim, 2022; Gong *et al*., 2023),

– the desire to connect with nature (Taylor *et al*., 2020),

– presence of specific amenities, e.g., playgrounds, picnic areas, sports fields (Taylor *et al*., 2020; El-Murr *et al*., 2021),

– proximity of the park to one's place of residence or work (Gao *et al*., 2017; Chiang & Li, 2019).

A review of the literature indicates that studies on expectations of municipal parks look for relationships with socio-demographic characteristics, i.e., gender (Derose *et al*., 2018; Bąkowska-Waldmann & Piniarski, 2023) and age (Brkljačić, Majetić & Tarabić, 2017; Kimic & Polko, 2022). Studies in the literature have examined, for example, different characteristics of visitation and activity patterns for different socio-demographic groups (Hui & Jim, 2022), or the influence of socio-demographic, environmental and individual variables on the frequency of park visitation (Liu *et al*., 2017). It is noteworthy that there is a lack of studies in the literature indicating whether expectations regarding the function of municipal parks vary according to how often they are visited. Studies indicating consumer segments according to reasons for visiting municipal parks among those who visit them rarely and often were also not found. This is a research gap that this study attempts to address.

In summary, people who visit municipal parks expect accessible space (i.e., close to where they live or work) for rest and relaxation, physical activity, meetings with family and friends, contact with nature, and use of amenities. Municipal parks support work-life balance by providing spaces for stress relief, physical activity and social interaction (Fig. 1). It seems that the described relationship may be a self--reinforcing mechanism, i.e., the increasing quality of life of residents resulting from, among other things, the offer of municipal parks and the implementation of the work-life balance concept may contribute to increasing expectations regarding the offer of municipal parks (e.g., in the form of special amenities in parks or the offer of cultural events). This, in turn, may translate into the quality and diversity of

the parks' offer and have an even greater impact on the quality of life and work-life balance of residents.

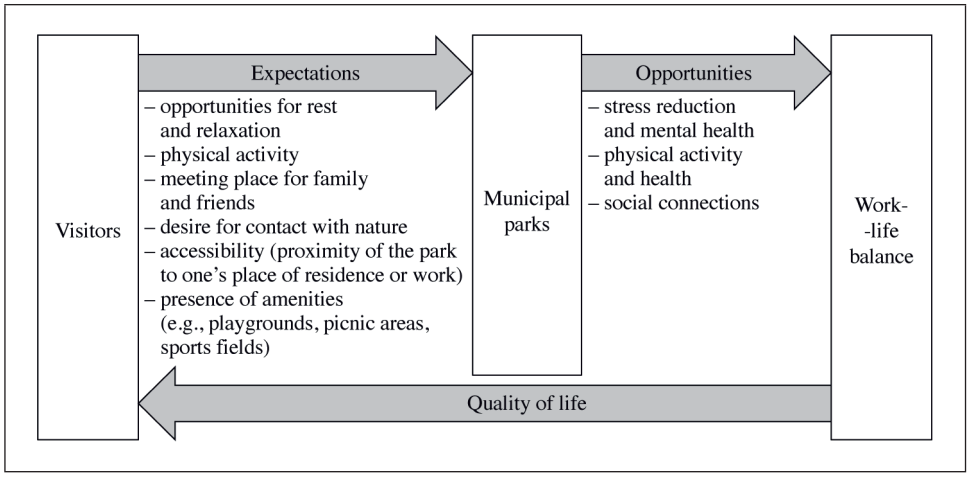

Fig. 1. Relationship between Work-life Balance and Municipal Parks and Visitor Expectations
Source: the authors.

3. Materials and Methods

We conducted an empirical pilot study to achieve the study objective and test the research hypothesis. We gathered primary data through a survey. Non-random sampling was used. The respondents were recruited online using the snowball technique. The sampling technique used does not guarantee that the sample is representative of the population from which it was drawn. In order to mitigate this risk, five urban parks from the Lubelskie voivodeship, different in terms of their functions, were selected, three located in the administrative area of the city of Lublin (Saski Garden – located in the strict centre of the city, in close proximity to the academic town; Park Ludowy – located in the centre of the city, in close proximity to the Lublin Fair and the Arena Lublin and Aqua Lublin sports facilities; and Zawilcowa Park – located in an outlying district of the city of Lublin), two located in the area of urban-rural municipalities: Opole Lubelskie and Poniatowa. In the administrative areas of the parks, using observation techniques, and face-to-face interviews, people who were in the urban parks were segmented, taking into account the variables: age (young people under 25 and adults over 25), and how they spent their time (active/passive and alone/companion). From these six categories of people, "seeds" were recruited ($n = 40$), i.e., people who not only participated in the survey, but also recommended other people from their network who also meet the research criteria.

The survey sample was limited only to people who use the offerings of city parks, a practice often used in the literature (Brkljačić, Majetić & Tarabić, 2017; Hanif, Shirazi & Majid, 2020), due to the fact that these are the groups who, through the direct benefits they derive from being in city parks, are most familiar with their offerings, are aware of the relevance of those offerings to their own needs, and are best able to indicate their expectations regarding them. The survey was conducted remotely using Google Forms. The filtering questions used in the questionnaire, as well as the distribution of the questionnaire via a link, allowed the survey to reach the segments of respondents identified during direct observation. The use of this tool was negatively reflected in the low level of returns, especially from respondents of retirement age, who often make limited use of the Internet. A low level of returns was also obtained in the male category. The next round of surveys is worth conducting face-to-face surveys (PAPI). Participation in the survey was voluntary. The survey was conducted in the second half of 2022 among residents of the Lubelskie voivodeship. A total of 154 respondents took part in the survey. The small sample size is due to the fact that the survey was discontinued on 30 September. This is because it was considered that the change of season, and the end of the vacation and vacation season, could change the respondents' expectations. Respondents were between the ages of 18 and 75 (average age: 32.27). Women (121) made up the majority (78.6%), while men (33) accounted for only 21.4%. The underestimation of the male category in the survey is an important limitation. Therefore, it is significant for the next edition of the survey to include the gender category when defining research categories. Those who were most likely to be alone in the parks accounted for 57%, and those who spent time actively – 36%. This study had a much broader scope than that presented in this paper. This article covers an independent variable – the frequency of visits to municipal parks, and a dependent variable – the reasons for park visits, serving as an indicator of consumer expectations regarding the functions of this type of green space:

– looking for some rest in a quiet place – $X1$,
– looking for some rest and shelter from the sun – $X2$,
– looking for some rest surrounded by nature – $X3$,
– looking for a place to spend my free time – $X4$,
– looking for a pet (dog, cat) walking area – $X5$,
– looking for a place to admire beautiful nature – $X6$,
– looking for a place with a friendly microclimate – $X7$,
– looking for a place where I feel safe – $X8$,
– looking for a place that is good for my health – $X9$,
– looking for a place to meet family/friends – $X10$,
– looking for pleasant sounds of nature (e.g., water, leaves, bird song) – $X11$,

– looking for a playground for my child/grandchild/charge – *X*12,
– looking for a place to meet new people – *X*13,
– looking for a location to throw a party for my family and friends (e.g., birthday party) – *X*14,
– looking for a prominent venue bringing prestige to visitors – *X*15,
– looking for a place for active leisure (running, walking, cycling/roller-skating, gymnastics) – *X*16,
– looking for a place to read a book/magazine – *X*17,
– looking for beautiful landscapes – *X*18,
– looking for a sunny place – *X*19,
– looking for a peaceful place where I could contemplate or meditate – *X*20,
– visiting because of its comfortable location (e.g., close to one's place of residence, easy access, car park) – *X*21,
– visiting because it is a convenient route to my work/school/shop/university – *X*22.

All motives were positively coloured, but were related to different types of needs: health needs, aesthetic needs, social needs, recreational needs, safety needs.

The gathered primary data were subjected to quantitative analysis, that is, the mean score test, Mann-Whitney *U* test and exploratory factor analysis. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to compare two independent groups. It applies when a dependent variable is assessed, at least on an ordinal scale, but the analysed data do not meet the assumptions for parametric tests. The Mann-Whitney *U* test ranked the scores for the dependent variable (from lowest to highest) in the groups under review. The test statistic for the null hypothesis assuming no differences between groups is the comparison of the mean ranks for each of the two variables (groups) (Kowal, 1998, pp. 81–82; Milenovic, 2011, pp. 73–79) and establishing whether the difference is statistically significant at the assumed level of significance $p \leq 0.05$ (Cypryańska & Bedyńska, 2007, pp. 184–207). Statistical analysis of the gathered primary data was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Ver. 9.0.

We applied exploratory factor analysis in reducing observable variables by converting a mutually correlated set of observable variables into a new set of variables that are not mutually correlated but comparable with the observable variables set. It is assumed that the identified factors reach a "deeper" level of the reality under review and are reasons underlying the observable changes. Therefore, an advantage of factor analysis is the possibility of discovering the optimum number of hidden variables, which explain the relationships between observable variables (Kowalska-Musiał & Ziółkowska, 2013). We used this analysis to reduce the set of variables affecting the research category "reasons for visiting municipal parks" and detect

internal correlations in the relationships between such variables. The factors were differentiated using the principal component analysis. We used the Kaiser criterion to determine the number of shared factors (so-called principal components). The Kaiser rule is to drop all components with eigenvalues under 1. Each component explains a certain level of the common variance of the analysed phenomenon, defined by the percentage of variance, which can be interpreted as a measure to explain it. The factors were rotated using Varimax. For individual factors we identified variables with the largest factor loadings in relation to the specific coefficient, that is, variables with the value of at least 0.7, which is the generally acceptable limit according to the reference literature (Bedyńska & Cypryańska, 2007, pp. 134–161).

4. Results

Based on a cognitive and critical review of the reference literature as well as the outcomes of unstructured interviews conducted during the survey questionnaire preparation process, we found 22 reasons for visiting municipal parks (Table 1).

Table 1. Reasons for Visiting Municipal Parks

Variables	Responses (%)					Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5				
*X*1	5.8	10.4	14.9	27.9	40.9	3.88	1.222	31.49485	2
*X*2	8.4	11	20.1	29.9	30.5	3.63	1.257	34.6281	5
*X*3	5.8	3.2	13.6	29.9	47.4	4.1	1.125	27.43902	1
*X*4	3.9	7.1	25.3	26.6	37	3.86	1.117	28.93782	3
*X*5	50	9.7	10.4	6.5	23.4	2.44	1.672	68.52459	17
*X*6	7.0	10.0	29.0	21.0	34.0	3.65	1.229	33.67123	4
*X*7	9.1	14.3	23.4	26.6	26.6	3.47	1.274	36.7147	9
*X*8	16.9	17.5	22.7	24.7	18.2	3.1	1.352	43.6129	12
*X*9	14.3	9.1	24	22.1	30.5	3.45	1.382	40.05797	10
*X*10	11	12.3	17.5	28.6	30.5	3.55	1.334	37.57746	7
*X*11	7.8	11	26	26	29.2	3.58	1.236	34.52514	6
*X*12	56.5	7.1	8.4	14.3	13.6	2.21	1.555	70.36199	19
*X*13	58.4	22.7	9.7	3.9	5.2	1.75	1.118	63.88571	21
*X*14	66.9	16.9	9.1	4.5	2.6	1.59	1.007	63.33333	22
*X*15	63.6	12.3	10.4	9.1	4.5	1.79	1.215	67.87709	20
*X*16	26	16.2	21.4	18.2	18.2	2.86	1.451	50.73427	14
*X*17	39	18.8	16.2	18.2	7.8	2.37	1.362	57.46835	18

Table 1 cnt'd

Variables	Responses (%)					Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5				
*X*18	7.1	14.3	29.2	21.4	27.9	3.49	1.238	35.47278	8
*X*19	26.6	27.3	17.5	16.9	11.7	2.6	1.35	51.92308	15
*X*20	22.1	16.9	22.1	20.8	18.2	2.96	1.414	47.77027	13
*X*21	9.7	14.9	29.2	23.4	22.7	3.34	1.254	37.54491	11
*X*22	37	14.3	17.5	16.9	14.3	2.57	1.481	57.62646	16

Source: the authors.

These reasons represent consumer expectations for parks, while also identifying their expected principal functions. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of individual motivation using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree," 2 – "disagree," 3 – "neutral," 4 – "agree," and 5 – "strongly agree."

The findings indicate that the arithmetic mean for the 22 analysed reasons why people go to municipal parks ranges from 1.59 to 4.1. The strongest drivers of park visits were looking for some rest surrounded by nature, looking for rest in a quiet place, looking for a place to spend their free time, looking for a place to admire beautiful nature, looking for some rest and shelter from the sun, looking for the sounds of nature, and looking for a place to meet family/friends. The mean values for these seven variables were above 3.5, whereas "looking for some rest surrounded by nature" scored the highest – 4.1. For the reasons listed above, more than 55% of the respondents answered "agree" or "strongly agree." The findings show that the most essential motivations for visiting a park are recreation, contemplation of nature, and the preservation of social relationships. Similar results were also found in earlier studies (e.g., Liu *et al*., 2017; Taylor *et al*., 2020; Hui & Jim, 2022; Gong *et al*., 2023).

The second group of drivers of municipal parks visits includes reasons with an arithmetic mean ranging from 3.0 to 3.5. This category covers variables such as looking for beautiful landscapes, places with a healthy microclimate, health--promoting places, comfortable locations, and safe places. These reasons were a very important or important motivation for 40–55% of the respondents. This implies that respondents expect municipal parks to be not just visually appealing but also safe for human health and conveniently located.

The third group of reasons encouraging respondents to spend their time in a park included looking for a place to meditate, looking for a place for active leisure, looking for a sunny place, a convenient location on the way to work/shop/university, looking for a place to walk a pet, looking for a place to read a book, and looking for a playground. The arithmetic mean for these drivers ranges from 2.0 to 3.0,

and 25–40% of the respondents find them important or very important. A characteristic shared by these drivers is their relationship to seeking a good place to pursue one's hobby (except for two: convenient location and spending time with one's kids/charges).

The weakest drivers of park visits are the need to socialise and the desire for prestige: looking for a prominent venue, looking for a place to meet new people, and looking for a location to throw a party. The arithmetic mean for these drivers is below 2.0. Less than one-sixth of the respondents found them important.

To compare the distribution of the results for individual variables, we calculated the coefficient of variation. For 12 variables, it falls within the range from 20% to 40%, suggesting a moderate variation in their value, while for six variables the coefficient of variation ranges from 40% to 60%, which points to a strong variation – a significant distribution of the variable. Thus, the arithmetic mean was an acceptable measure for this set of variables. For the remaining five variables, the coefficient of variation exceeded 60%, indicating a very strong variation in the value of individual variables; this group varied relative to the extent of these features.

Next, we attempted to determine whether there were variations in respondents' expectations regarding the parks' functions based on how frequently they visited them and whether such differences were statistically significant. To this end, we assigned the respondents to two categories (Table 2). The first group consisted of people who rarely went to parks, that is, once a month or less frequently (49.4%), and the second group comprised frequent visitors, that is, people who went there more than once a month.

Table 2. Frequency of Visits to Municipal Parks

Frequency Categories	Frequency	Responses (%)	
Rarely	max. once a year	12.3	49.4
	several times a year	31.8	
	approx. once a month	5.2	
Often	2–3 times a month	20.1	50.6
	once a week	14.9	
	several times a week	12.3	
	every day	3.2	

Source: the authors.

Afterwards, we ran a non-parametric Mann-Whitney *U* test, which revealed that at the level of significance $p \leq 0.05$, the variable "reasons for visiting municipal parks" shows a statistically significant variation in respondents' expect-

ations regarding six of the 22 listed functions of the park (Table 3). As a result, the research hypothesis's claim was valid for only six types of expectations. Visibly more likely to go to the park are people who walk their pets (*X*5), people who actively engage in sports (*X*16), people who seek sunny places (*X*19), people who seek places that allow them to quiet down and collect their thoughts, and people (*X*20) for whom parks are conveniently located (*X*21, *X*22). Therefore, the frequency of visits to municipal parks is not a characteristic that determines the variation in most respondents' expectations regarding the functions under consideration.

Table 3. Analysis of the Significance of Variations between the Respondents' Answers Given the Frequency of Visits to Municipal Parks

Variables	How Often Do You Visit the Park	Mean Rank	Total Ranks	Mann-Whitney *U* Test	Asymptomatic Significance (Bilateral)
*X*1	R	79.55	6,046	2,808	0.553
	O	75.5	5,889		
*X*2	R	73.45	5,582.5	2,656.5	0.25
	O	81.44	6,352.5		
*X*3	R	74.66	5,674.5	2,748.5	0.402
	O	80.26	6,260.5		
*X*4	R	74.22	5,640.5	2,714.5	0.346
	O	80.7	6,294.5		
*X*5	R	69.88	5,310.5	2,384.5	0.024
	O	84.93	6,624.5		
*X*6	R	72.59	5,517	2,591	0.162
	O	82.28	6,418		
*X*7	R	74.59	5,668.5	2,742.5	0.41
	O	80.34	6,266.5		
*X*8	R	72.06	5,476.5	2,550.5	0.127
	O	82.8	6,458.5		
*X*9	R	71.57	5,439.5	2,513.5	0.094
	O	83.28	6,495.5		
*X*10	R	74.51	5,662.5	2,736.5	0.396
	O	80.42	6,272.5		
*X*11	R	78.79	5,988	2,866	0.715
	O	76.24	5,947		

Table 3 cnt'd

Variables	How Often Do You Visit the Park	Mean Rank	Total Ranks	Mann-Whitney *U* Test	Asymptomatic Significance (Bilateral)
*X*12	R	77.07	5,857.5	2,931.5	0.896
	O	77.92	6,077.5		
*X*13	R	73.13	5,557.5	2,631.5	0.176
	O	81.76	6,377.5		
*X*14	R	75.07	5,705	2,779	0.423
	O	79.87	6,230		
*X*15	R	71.85	5,460.5	2,534.5	0.071
	O	83.01	6,474.5		
*X*16	R	68.95	5,240	2,314	0.016
	O	85.83	6,695		
*X*17	R	74.25	5,643	2,717	0.353
	O	80.67	6,292		
*X*18	R	73.47	5,584	2,658	0.254
	O	81.42	6,351		
*X*19	R	68.78	5,227.5	2,301.5	0.014
	O	85.99	6,707.5		
*X*20	R	69.8	5,305	2,379	0.031
	O	85	6,630		
*X*21	R	67.2	5,107	2,181	0.004
	O	87.54	6,828		
*X*22	R	70.28	5,341.5	2,415.5	0.04
	O	84.53	6,593.5		

Notes: R – rarely visiting; O – often visiting.

Source: the authors.

Analysis of mean values does not allow for identifying hidden relationships between variables. To determine the optimum number of hidden variables explaining the correlations between observable variables such as "reasons for visiting municipal parks" and compare the reasons for people who often and rarely visit municipal park, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis for all the respondents, and for each of the two groups identified based on the variable frequency of visits to municipal parks. Having standardised the data, we used the Cronbach's alpha to measure the reliability of the research tool. The catalogue of expectations for municipal parks contained 22 observable variables for which the Cronbach's alpha was 0.889,

that is, exceeded 0.8. It proves that the scale is highly reliable and thus features high internal consistency (Bedyńska & Cypryańska, 2007, pp. 134–161). Next, based on the Kaiser rule, we identified five factors for all the respondents, six factors for people who rarely visit municipal parks, and seven factors for frequent visitors with the eigenvalues of variables above 1. In each case, these factors explain 60% of the common variance of the phenomenon under review (Table 4).

Table 4. Hierarchy of Factors According to Their Eigenvalues Determined Using the Kaiser Rule (for All the Respondents and for People Rarely and Often Visiting Municipal Parks)

Factor	Eigenvalue			Cumulative Eigenvalue			% of All Eigenvalues (Variance)			Cumulative % of Eigenvalues		
	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O
1	7.027	7.641	6.316	7.027	7.641	6.316	17.985	18.845	16.790	17.985	18.845	16.790
2	2.412	2.595	2.442	9.439	10.236	8.758	15.064	14.834	14.610	33.049	33.680	31.400
3	1.371	1.534	1.786	10.81	11.77	10.544	13.349	12.942	10.581	46.398	46.622	41.981
4	1.343	1.300	1.455	12.153	13.07	11.999	7.883	8.783	7.984	54.282	55.405	49.965
5	1.100	1.230	1.269	13.253	14.3	13.268	5.965	7.740	7.509	60.247	63.145	57.474
6	–	1.080	1.214	–	15.38	14.482	–	6.768	7.129	–	69.913	64.603
7	–	–	1.074	–	–	15.556	–	–	6.107	–	–	70.710

Notes: T – total (all respondents); R – rarely visiting; O – often visiting. "Total" – sampling adequacy measured using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (*KMO*) test is 0.852, that is, more than 0.7. The Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant (the variables are significantly statistically correlated); chi^2 = 1,450.138; and $p < 0.001$; "Rarely visiting" – *KMO* = 0.814; the Bartlett's sphericity test is significant; chi^2 = = 879.162; and $p < 0.001$; "Often visiting" – *KMO* = 0.756; the Bartlett's sphericity test is significant; chi^2 = 749.191; and $p < 0.001$.

Source: the authors.

Analysing the internal structure of individual factors (Table 5), we observed explicit differences between people who visited municipal parks rarely and often, and between each of the two categories and all the respondents. The first principal component for all the respondents consists of five variables, for those who rarely visit parks – one variable, and for those who visit them often – four variables. In addition, for respondents who often visit parks, the variables are identical with those for all the respondents. As regards the first factor for people who rarely go to the park, its variable is a component of the second factor for people who often visit parks, but is not a component of any factor for all the respondents. Thus, the structure of the first factor for all the respondents and for those who often visit parks is very similar. The second factor for all the respondents comprises one variable, three for those who rarely visit parks, and two for people who often go to the park.

Table 5. Results of the Factor Analysis of Reasons for Visiting Parks (for All the Respondents and for Those Who Visit Parks Rarely and Often)

Variables	Factors																				
	1			2			3			4			5			6			7		
	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O	T	R	O
*X*7	0.763	0.43	0.748	0.324	0.162	0.35	0.099	0.695	–0.08	0.085	0.075	0.062	0.05	0.176	0.13	–	0.22	0.178	–	–	0.15
*X*8	0.761	0.532	0.838	0.197	0.32	0.163	0.164	0.247	–0.009	0.145	0.198	0.12	–0.126	0.3	0.089	–	0.22	0.053	–	–	–0.163
*X*9	0.729	0.698	0.806	0.323	0.19	0.123	0.071	0.307	0.147	0.182	0.131	–0.057	0.025	0.322	–0.016	–	0.09	0.096	–	–	–0.013
*X*11	0.727	0.447	0.676	0.175	–0.077	0.119	0.054	0.482	0.316	0.099	0.295	0.138	0.06	–0.047	0.104	–	0.414	0.055	–	–	0.035
*X*6	0.705	0.378	0.701	0.351	0.242	0.361	0.162	0.712	0.206	–0.007	0.054	–0.003	0.195	0.08	0.037	–	0.137	–0.0103	–	–	0.188
*X*18	0.504	0.188	0.388	0.32	0.139	0.245	0.181	0.762	0.67	0.257	0.228	0.034	0.03	0.14	–0.059	–	0.057	0.031	–	–	–0.279
*X*12	0.463	0.021	0.255	–0.22	0.11	–0.006	0.318	0.154	–0.055	–0.251	–0.074	0.801	–0.439	–0.028	–0.054	–	0.878	–0.076	–	–	–0.186
*X*3	0.431	0.595	0.396	0.736	–0.088	0.792	0.028	0.485	0.063	–0.031	–0.052	0.052	–0.145	0.287	0.188	–	0.051	–0.047	–	–	–0.106
*X*1	0.339	0.827	0.189	0.691	–0.107	0.813	–0.017	0.164	0.167	–0.044	0.069	0.171	0.032	0.056	–0.14	–	0.013	–0.04	–	–	–0.037
*X*4	0.234	0.388	0.277	0.674	0.029	0.684	0.181	0.152	0.11	–0.057	–0.204	0.081	–0.415	0.735	0.301	–	0.181	–0.046	–	–	–0.08
*X*20	0.277	0.654	0.218	0.615	0.073	0.399	0.104	0.362	0.321	0.224	0.098	–0.19	0.14	0.062	0.343	–	–0.118	0.24	–	–	–0.154
*X*2	0.268	0.603	0.2	0.565	0.221	0.657	0.054	0.106	–0.004	0.112	0.076	–0.218	0.095	0.162	–0.099	–	0.116	0.127	–	–	0.152
*X*17	0.011	0.611	–0.129	0.515	0.401	0.405	0.43	0.11	0.314	0.006	0.053	0.03	0.26	–0.368	0.629	–	–0.097	–0.03	–	–	0.153
*X*14	0.056	–0.067	–0.08	–0.049	0.878	0.041	0.859	0.097	0.236	0.03	0.118	0.694	0.044	0.092	0.304	–	0.049	0.159	–	–	0.261
*X*15	0.157	0.179	0.077	0.012	0.877	–0.112	0.763	0.096	0.54	0.131	0.057	0.352	0.23	–0.021	0.157	–	0.058	0.254	–	–	0.317
*X*13	0.06	0.143	–0.158	0.225	0.758	0.324	0.726	0.067	0.6	0.158	0.329	0.344	0.086	0.111	0.101	–	0.172	0.048	–	–	0.1
*X*16	0.27	0.167	0.301	0.094	0.516	–0.093	0.471	0.23	0.056	0.137	0.001	0.196	–0.125	0.211	0.781	–	–0.165	0.062	–	–	–0.102
*X*10	0.065	0.072	0.039	0.36	0.245	0.439	0.435	0.104	0.297	0.266	0.257	0.421	–0.192	0.719	0.128	–	–0.109	0.272	–	–	0.115
*X*22	0.1	–0.012	0.06	–0.096	0.127	–0.05	0.142	0.152	0.263	0.813	0.853	0.06	0.223	–0.087	–0.252	–	–0.197	0.806	–	–	0.161
*X*21	0.191	0.22	0.132	0.126	0.144	0.086	0.189	0.117	–0.104	0.7	0.66	0.033	–0.214	0.176	0.306	–	0.194	0.777	–	–	–0.107
*X*19	0.281	0.563	0.302	0.328	0.318	0.067	0.327	0.048	0.762	0.426	0.548	–0.076	0.211	0.014	0.16	–	–0.113	0.002	–	–	0.047
*X*5	0.179	0.057	0.063	0.012	0.437	0.008	0.279	0.548	0.025	0.01	0.043	0.008	0.716	–0.193	–0.042	–	–0.4	0.019	–	–	0.902

Notes: T – total (all respondents); R – rarely visiting; O – often visiting. Underlined numbers indicate the highest factor loadings (≥ 0.7), which served as the basis for the interpretation of the extracted factors.

Source: the authors.

Each category of respondents shows great variations between the component variables (only one variable forms a part of the second factor for all the respondents and for people who often go to the park). The third factor for all the respondents comprises three variables, two variables for those who rarely visit parks, and one variable for people who often go to the park. The third factor in each of the analysed categories of respondents consists of a different group of component variables; however, the variables forming this factor for all the respondents are identical with the variables forming the second factor for respondents who rarely visit parks. The fourth factor for all the respondents comprises two variables, and for respondents who visit parks rarely and often – one variable. One of the variables forming the fourth factor for all the respondents is a component of the fourth factor for people who rarely visit parks and of the sixth factor for those who often go to the park. The fifth factor consists of one variable for all the respondents and for those who often go to the park and of two variables for respondents who rarely visit parks. For each of the analysed category of respondents, this factor comprises another group of variables. The sixth factor was diagnosed only for two categories of respondents according to variable "frequency of staying in the parks" – for those who rarely visit parks it comprises one variable, and two variables for those who visit them often. The component variables differ between both groups of respondents. The seventh factor was identified only for the category of respondents who often visit parks, and its component variable is identical with the component variable of the fifth factor for all the respondents. The results of analyses imply a variation in the number of principal components identified for individual groups of respondents and within their internal structure.

In discovering the reasons for visiting municipal parks, the factor analysis result is the key since it makes it possible to identify individual factors with the segments of consumers of the municipal park offer (Table 6). After analysing the respondents' reasons for visiting municipal parks, we have identified five consumer segments among all the respondents, six segments among those who rarely visit municipal parks, and seven segments among those who visit parks often.

The first factor, explaining 18% of the common variance of the phenomenon under review, covers four variables associated with the need for physical and psychological safety: a place to feel safe, with a safe microclimate, safe to health, and with friendly sounds of nature. The second factor explains 15% of the common variance of the phenomenon. It covers two variables determining the need for leisure in a natural environment: rest surrounded by nature, and rest in a quiet place. The third factor comprises three variables associated with the need for socialising: a venue for team-building events, a prominent place, and a place to meet new people. This factor explains 13% of the common variance of the phenomenon. The fourth factor, explaining 9% of the common variance of the phenomenon, comprises one variable associated with the attractive location of municipal parks.

Table 6. Segments of Respondents Identified Based on Reasons for Which They Use the Offer of Municipal Parks (for All the Respondents and for Those Who Stay in the Parks Rarely and Often)

Segment	Description of the Segment		
	All respondents	Rarely visiting	Often visiting
1	– Looking for a place with a friendly microclimate – Looking for a place where I feel safe – Looking for a place that is good for my health – Looking for pleasant sounds of nature (e.g., water, leaves, bird song) – Looking for a place to admire beautiful nature	– Looking for some rest in a quiet place	– Looking for a place with a friendly microclimate – Looking for a place where I feel safe – Looking for a place that is good for my health – Looking for a place to admire beautiful nature
2	– Looking for some rest surrounded by nature	– Looking for a location to throw a party for my family and friends (e.g., birthday party) – Looking for a prominent venue bringing prestige to visitors – Looking for a place to meet new people	– Looking for some rest in a quiet place – Looking for some rest surrounded by nature
3	– Looking for a location to throw a party for my family and friends (e.g., birthday party) – Looking for a prominent venue bringing prestige to visitors – Looking for a place to meet new people	– Looking for beautiful landscapes – Looking for a place to admire beautiful nature	– Looking for a sunny place
4	– Visiting because it is a convenient route to my work/school/shop/university – Visiting because of its comfortable location (e.g., close to one's place of residence, easy access, car park)	– Visiting because it is a convenient route to my work/school/shop/university	– Looking for a playground for my child/grandchild/charge

Table 6 cnt'd

Segment	Description of the Segment		
	All respondents	Rarely visiting	Often visiting
5	– Looking for a pet (dog, cat) walking area	– Looking for a place to spend my free time – Looking for a place to meet family/friends	– Looking for a place for active leisure (running, walking, cycling/roller-skating, gymnastics)
6	–	– Looking for a playground for my child/grandchild/charge	– Visiting because it is a convenient route to my work/school/shop/university – Visiting because of its comfortable location (e.g., close to one's place of residence, easy access, car park)
7	–	–	– Looking for a pet (dog, cat) walking area

Source: the authors.

To match factors with consumer segments, the result of the factor analysis is crucial for determining the product's features considered in making decisions. Consumers in each segment had similar motivations for staying in the park, suggesting expected municipal park functions that differed from other categories.

Among all the respondents, the first segment consists of people who in the offer of parks seek qualities such as safety for physical and mental health and contemplation of the beauty of nature. The second segment comprises respondents who see parks as places to rest surrounded by nature. The third segment represents those for whom parks are mostly prominent venues for social integration, the fourth segment – respondents who highlight the attractive location of parks, and the fifth segment – people who choose parks as places to walk their pets.

Among respondents who rarely use the offer of parks, the first segment consists of people looking for some rest in a quiet place, the second – looking for prominent venues for socialising, the third – looking for a place to contemplate the beauty of nature, the fourth – highlighting the attractive location of parks, the fifth – looking for a place to meet family and friends in their spare time, and the sixth segment comprises people going to the park with a child, grandchild or a person under their care.

The category of people who often use the offer of municipal parks includes seven segments. The first segment looks for physical and psychological safety and a place to contemplate the nature, the second segment looks for some rest in a quiet place surrounded by nature, the third segment looks for sunny spots in parks, the fourth

segment looks for playgrounds for children under their care, the fifth segment seeks places for active leisure, the sixth segment highlights the attractive location of parks, and the seventh segment visits municipal parks with their pets.

By distinguishing different segments of respondents, we can tailor the offer of city parks to them, ensuring physical and psychological safety throughout their territory, and separating zones for quiet rest, where consumers will be able to safely relax in the bosom of nature and contemplate it; zones dedicated to social integration, where visitors will be provided with infrastructure for meeting with family and friends; a play zone for children, where they can spend time actively; a zone of active recreation for adults, i.e., places where visitors will be able to engage in physical activity; and a pet-friendly zone, allowing pets to be safely taken outside. It is also important to keep in mind the development of infrastructure to improve the accessibility of city parks.

The limitations of the survey results are mainly due to the low sample size and also the underestimation of the male category, which was caused by the method and technique used to collect data, i.e., the online survey method and the snowball technique. Despite attempts to eliminate the limitations of this technique by isolating segments of respondents and recruiting seeds from them, it was not possible to fully eliminate its limitations. When planning future surveys, therefore, online surveys should be replaced by PAPI surveys.

5. Conclusions

The work-life balance concept emphasises the adverse effects of overworking on workers' health and job performance (including stress generation). Visiting a municipal park is a leisure activity that can help individuals enhance their physical and psychological well-being. Parks serve a variety of purposes, including stress relaxation, physical activity, social relationships, environmental improvement, and the formation of a favourable microclimate for visitors, which consequently contributes to an increased quality of life. Therefore, the objective of this paper, which is to identify and analyse social expectations about the functions of municipal parks in the context of work-life balance depending on the frequency of visiting parks, is essential. The research was conducted on the example of the Lubelskie voivodeship.

Our analyses demonstrated that the consumers of municipal parks' offerings in the Lubelskie voivodeship had varying expectations regarding the functions the parks should provide. The foremost expectations involved parks' leisure function, which is the ability to relax in a natural environment, experience tranquillity and seek shelter from the sun, admire the beauty and sounds of nature, and leisure activities, including meeting family and friends. This is in line with the results of other studies, which emphasise that the most important functions of parks are recreation and contemplation of nature, as well as social and cultural functions (Liu *et al.*,

2017; Taylor *et al*., 2020; Hui & Jim, 2022; Gong *et al*., 2023). It also seems that this dissimilarity of expectations with regard to the functions of parks is not a contradiction in terms, since the same infrastructural elements of urban parks can serve different purposes. Therefore, city authorities, when creating urban park offerings, should pay special attention to aligning local park management policies with the expectations of park users, creating infrastructure that will be used for a variety of purposes that meet their diverse needs. A review of the literature indicates that studies on expectations of urban parks look for correlations with socio-demographic characteristics, i.e., gender (Derose *et al*., 2018; Bąkowska-Waldmann & Piniarski, 2023) and age (Brkljačić, Majetić & Tarabić, 2017; Kimic & Polko, 2022). Based on the literature survey, it was noted that there is a lack of analysis on the relationship between expectations of the functions of urban parks and the frequency of their visitation. In order to look at this problem, a Mann-Whitney *U* test was conducted, the result of which shows that the frequency of visits to city parks is not an indicator of respondents' differentiated expectations regarding their functions. This variable differentiates the respondents' expectations about six out of 22 functions of parks in a statistically significant manner and the hypothesis is true only for them. People who walk their pets (*X*5), people who actively play sports (*X*16), people who seek sunny places (*X*19), people who look for places that allow them to calm down and collect their thoughts, and people (*X*20) for whom parks are conveniently located (*X*21, *X*22) go to the park more often. Thus, the frequency of visits to city parks is not a characteristic that determines the variation in respondents' expectations regarding most of the surveyed functions.

The factor analysis result made it possible to identify a varied number of segments for the analysed categories of respondents. Consumers in each segment showed similar motivations for staying in the park, suggesting expected functions of parks that differed from those reported by people from other categories. Analysing the internal structure of individual factors, we observed explicit differences between people who visited municipal parks rarely and often, and between each of the two categories and all the respondents. The identified principal components differ in their internal structure, which may imply that the analysed feature differentiated the reasons for visiting municipal parks. The individual factors were identified with consumer segments of the municipal park offer, within which consumers showed identical or very similar motivations for staying in parks. This allows municipal park management institutions to shape a specialised municipal park offer for selected target segments identified by frequency of stay in parks and to conduct marketing activities more effectively. Knowledge of the expectations of park visitors according to the frequency of their visits can also give urban planners clues as to how parks should be laid out. The division of park space into different zones suited to particular consumer groups, the offer of specific facilities (e.g., playgrounds,

sports equipment) and additional services (e.g., the possibility of organising events for family and friends) are important.

Future research directions could include conducting a study of respondents' perceptions of the role of parks in shaping work-life balance, including, among other things, reducing stress and improving mental health, enhancing physical activity or improving social relations. This would make it possible to determine to what extent, according to the respondents, municipal parks contribute to work-life balance and what could be further improved and supplemented in the municipal park offer in this context.

Authors' Contribution

The authors' individual contribution is as follows: Agnieszka Komor 42%, Anna Goliszek 43%, Agnieszka Kępkowicz 10%, Halina Lipińska 5%.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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