

Great Design, Awful Implementation

Introduction

My mother has knee joint disease. So, the doctor advised her to perform physical activities but with precaution in order to not increase the pain. He suggested her to walk for an hour every other day. So, going to a park seemed to be the best idea for this. However, parks in Qatar are not that common. In addition to that, the experience of performing outdoor activities can be ineffective activities due to poor implementation and design choices. In this paper, I analyze the designed experience of performing outdoor activities at the Aspire Park, Qatar for the first time. Then, I use John Dewey's theory of experience to validate it as an experience. Later on, I analyze how the experience of physical activities is effective or ineffective at Aspire park through analyzing certain aspects of purpose, scene, agency, act and agent.

Personal Experience

I've been to Aspire park couple of times before just to hang out with my friends, meeting relatives but never with the sole intention of performing physical activities alone. Besides it being near my home, the reason of choosing Aspire park was because they had rubbery road to walk. As osteoarthritis patients walk, they

also hurt their knees if they walk on hard surface or uncomfortable shoes. Therefore, our experience of performing outdoor activities at Aspire park started even before even reaching there. I usually come home around 8 at night and my Mom finishes her chores by then, so we planned to start walking around 10pm. In addition to that, the park is far less crowded at that time; even parking becomes easier late at night which is otherwise a serious issue at peak hours. As the park occupies a vast green space there is no proper fencing or wall around it making it more accessible to the public from any direction. However, many single male residents are denied access by the security guards who are placed at almost every 300 meters. After we marked our starting point thanks to the mile stones on the side of the road marking "1000 meters", we stretched a bit before walking with an average pace of 3 km per hour. The experience of our outdoor walk was also accompanied by little bit slope climbing, watching the goose at the lake, walking under the water fountain with few drops of water cooling us down in the middle of the walk and getting complementary water bottle to dehydrate from the park facilities. Besides the water fountain, the vast green space with trees provided a soothing and comfortable temperature to walk. The rubbery road was really comfortable for the walk which was also equipped with airport runway light to distinguish road easily at night. The whole dark, calm environment was really helpful for the walk which was however interrupted by fake chirping sounds of birds by speakers throughout the park. However, when I tried to sit on the grass in the middle of the walk, a security guard

approached and asked me that it's prohibited to sit on the grass alone and suggested me to use a bench instead; which seemed ridiculous to me. After a while, I saw the same guard stopping some kids playing football on the grass. I was sure, anything that is fun in the park is prohibited. We finished our walk in an hour and went to our car directly but if it were not for losing calories, we would've surely had something from the cafeteria before.

Analysis

Now analyzing the experience through John Dewey's framework, it can be validated if performing outdoor activities at Aspire park qualifies an experience or not. According to Dewey (2005), **Forms** are created by processes, energy and intention in the society with which we interact and make them an experience. In this regard Goldberger (2014) claims, "Every (physical) space is architecture, as long its physical form reflects some degree of civilizing intent". The forms of Aspire park include the interactions like the parking space, road, cafeteria, it also includes the environment itself and the main vision and goals of the park which is to promote healthy living. People interact with these forms by performing physical activities and make it as an experience.

According to Dewey, the experience also needs to be of something of great or just slight **importance** which the experience is because of its importance of healthy living as well as maintaining healthy communities. Created for the 2006

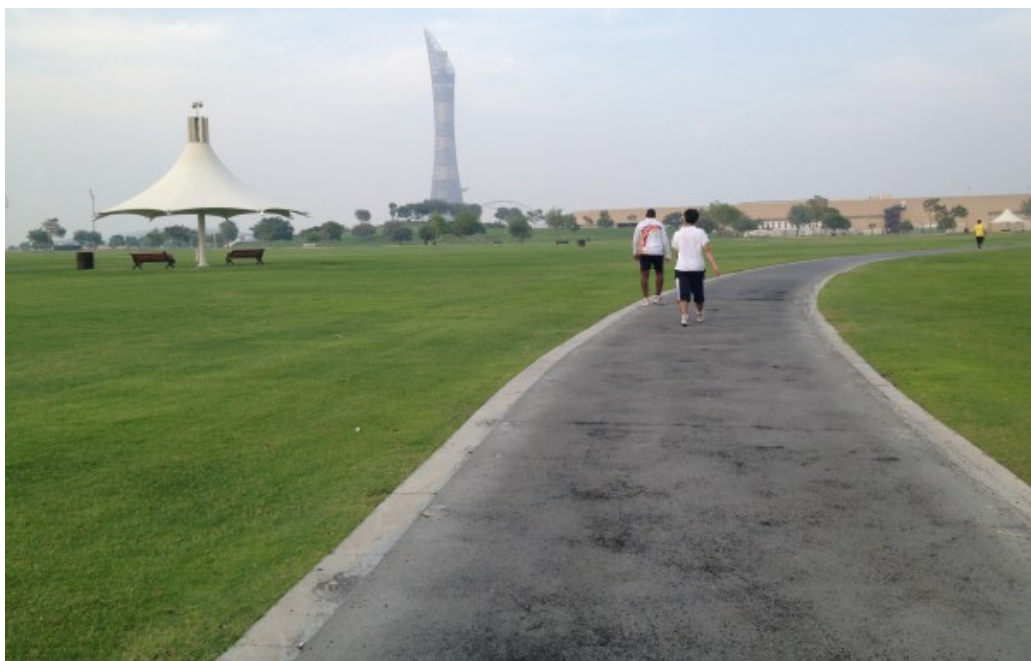
Asian Games, it still has a long lasting positive effect as a great public space that not only promotes personal and health wellbeing but societal health as well.

For an experience to be successfully formed it requires the unity of a beginning, middle and end. All the successive parts should **flow** freely from one stage to another without any interruptions. As Dewey mentioned about having a meal in Paris as an experience, likewise the experience of performing outdoor activities with my mother for the first time is an experience as it has fulfillment. The **beginning** of the experience starts from planning out the perfect space for walking to buying proper shoes, choosing the perfect time and even parking the car. While the act of marking the starting point, walking on the road, fountain, having water, enjoying the environment all marks the **middle** of the experience. Finally, the **end** is represented by having a rest at the bench, stretching and walking back towards the car.

According to Dewey, for an experience to be complete, three things need to be united; the aesthetic and emotion, the intellectual and the practical. The **aesthetic** aspect is an important emotional binding agent to the experience which creates a wholeness based on prior experiences. Goldberger claims that all work of architecture has an aesthetic experience as pure physical sensation. Performing outdoor activities at the park qualifies as an emotional binding agent due to the enjoyment received by the people walking together in a vast open green space which is a rarity in the city. However, as Goldberger mentions "architecture cannot

begin and end with aesthetics”, the other aspects completes it as an experience.

The experience of the park is also **intellectual** for me as it has meaning for me than just a boring day at park. The value of the experience was being able to walk, help my mother perform physical activities as well as enjoying the environment. Finally, the experience also qualifies as **practical** due to the way we interacted with the events and objects in the park. Using the rubbery road which provides comfortable walk, cooling ourselves under the fountain, getting water bottles, even parking all provides practicality in the experience. Emphasizing on the importance of practical aspect, Goldberger states, “Architecture is balanced, precisely and precariously, between art and practicality”.



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Deconstruction

Now the experience will be analyzed the experience by deconstructing it through Burke's Five Acts of Dramatism. These acts and their effectiveness in the experience is described below:

Purpose: The purpose of the experience looks into the goals of the organization and stakeholders. Emphasizing on the importance of purpose, Goldberger claims that, "Real architecture should be reserved for noble, civic, or sacred purpose". For performing outdoor activities at Aspire park, the goals and vision of the park were the **most effective aspect** of the park experience. It is because the vision of the park was not just to boost the personal healthy growth but also to grow a healthy community. The designers have also incorporated the diversity in physical activities in the park to meet the vision of Qatar 2022 of being a sports hub.

Scene: The scene focuses on the physical location, environment of the experience. The designers have aimed to make the scene as effective as possible which is evident due to the park's centralized location and situated near popular spots which attracts more people to the park. The large green space with calm ambient lighting provides a relaxing and soothing walk even in warmer temperature due to the water bodies and grass cooling system.

Agency: The agency of an experience is the performance of a goal-directed activity by participants. The performance of doing physical activities at the park is somewhat effective due to its focus on walking/jogging and creating the scene

accordingly to this particular activity. However, the performance of the experience lacks in performing any other physical activities other than walking/jogging due to its restriction by the authority. As a result of which, the performance for single-directed physical activity is increasing while others are not affected much.

Act: The act focuses on the process and the interactive choreography of an experience. This is the **least effective aspect** of the experience due to the park's single-goal directed approach to promoting physical activity and ignoring other opportunities to utilize the resources available. Although the design of the park makes the grass field appeal the user to play on them and use them, however the implementation design of the facilities prohibits any activities on the grass which is ridiculous for the users. Due to its sole focus on increasing awareness on walking, it causes overcrowded use of certain resources like the rubbery roads and vacancy of other resources like the vast green grass fields. As a result, the process of the experience at the park seems more authoritative and restricted rather than enjoying it freely.

Agent: Finally, the agent are the users, consumers and service providers of any experience. Emphasizing the importance of people on physical space, Goldberger claims that "It takes many people to make a work of architecture and many people to use one". In this experience, it includes myself, my mother, other people walking, the guards and other facilities all play a huge role in this experience. Due to its restricted nature of the park, there exists greater quantity of guards observing

breach of any prohibitions. As a result of which, the users have to make sure of abiding by the rules which takes freedom out of the experience of enjoying the park.



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Conclusion

To conclude the experience of using Aspire park with the sole intention of performing physical activities was effective greatly. However, it lacked the freedom of what a park usually stands for; a place where people can use it freely with basic restriction like throwing trash. The strict implementation of the park design through its people and process results in loss of liberty from the user's perspective. However, it wasn't necessarily the intention of the designers of the park. The third order of design focuses on designing for experience and nine out of ten park experience is primarily based on a place to sit on the grass, gossip with friends, have picnic or throw a Frisbee. A park looks more into experience over efficiency. Although, Aspire park looks into the important aspect of efficiency but it shouldn't minimize its focus on the experience of a typical park.

Reference

Dewey, J. (2005). *Art as experience*. Penguin.

Goldberger, P. (2014). *Why architecture matters*. Yale University Press.