

Article

The Perceptions and Attitudes of Residents Towards Urban Green Spaces in Emilia-Romagna (Italy)—A Case Study

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Abstract: Rapid urbanisation has highlighted the importance of urban green spaces (UGS) in promoting environmental sustainability and human wellbeing, yet the gap between urban planning practices and community preferences remains a significant challenge. This study investigated residents' perceptions and attitudes towards UGS in a neighbourhood of an Italian city (Quartiere Marconi, Imola), focusing on understanding both the strengths and limitations of existing public green spaces from users' perspectives. Through a comprehensive questionnaire survey of 126 residents, we examined the associations between socio-demographic characteristics and four aspects of UGS utilisation: visiting purposes, barriers to visits, satisfaction levels, and suggestions for improvement. Chi-square tests were conducted to identify significant relationships. The results indicate that life stage, rather than scattered socio-demographic factors, plays a crucial role in shaping UGS perceptions and usage patterns. Particularly, the 31–45 and 46–60 age groups, characterised by family-caring and career responsibilities, showed distinct preferences for social activities, while individual users focused more on nature enjoyment. Although accessibility was generally sufficient, satisfaction levels varied significantly based on living arrangements, with families emphasising facility-related issues and individual users prioritising natural features. These findings suggest that successful UGS planning requires attention to both high-quality natural elements and user-oriented facilities to meet the diverse needs of different life stages. This study represents the preliminary phase of a project, which concerns the redevelopment of the area under study, in order to create a more inclusive and high-quality UGS, taking into account the needs of the resident population.



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Keywords: urban green spaces; perception and attitudes; green space quality

1. Introduction

The rapid urbanisation of the 21st century has increased the significance of urban green spaces (UGS) in promoting environmental sustainability and human wellbeing [1,2]. The UGS, including parks, gardens, urban forests, and other vegetated areas, provide multiple functions in urban areas: they provide essential environmental services [3,4], support biodiversity [5,6], and offer recreational venues that contribute to public health [7–10] and social cohesion [11,12].

In the European context, Italy is now facing multiple challenges in managing UGS due to its unique urban pattern, which usually combines a dense historic centre with modern suburban development [13,14]. The Emilia-Romagna region, located in the northern

part of Italy, represents these challenges with its high population density and significant urbanisation pressures, which highlights the imbalance between supply and demand for UGS [15–17]. Additionally, Emilia-Romagna is at the forefront of ongoing initiatives aimed at promoting the development of sustainability and adapting to the challenges of climate change, emphasising the necessity of the balance of ecological goals and the enhancement of green spaces, improving climate resilience, and increasing residents' quality of life [18–20]. Furthermore, the region's rich historical and cultural heritage heavily influences urban planning decisions [21], while its Mediterranean climate shapes both the design and usage of these green spaces [22].

Meanwhile, despite the close relationship between UGS planning and residents' daily lives, as well as the importance of public participation in governance having been emphasised over two decades, progress in this area has remained slow [23]. Bureaucratic urban planning usually overlooks residents' perceptions and attitudes towards UGS, focusing instead on macroscopic goals such as economic efficiency, spatial optimisation, and ecological functionality [24–26]. Although European policymakers have recognised the importance of shifting planning and management strategies, the lack of effective tools and limited resources hinder the promotion of meaningful public participation [25]. This gap not only leads to mismatches between the supply of and demand for UGS but also raises significant concerns regarding environmental equity [25,27–30]. In other words, residents' expectations and preferences for UGS vary across age, gender, health status, and socioeconomic status [31–33]. Also, due to the green gentrification effect, the allocation of high-quality green spaces can drive up local living costs, potentially impacting socially disadvantaged groups negatively [34–36]. When residents' needs and preferences are inadequately addressed, it may cause reduced user satisfaction, lower utilisation, and weakened health benefits and community ties, resulting in inefficient use of valuable urban resources [37–40].

Therefore, this study was carried out to focus on residents' perceptions and attitudes towards UGS in a neighbourhood of an Italian city (Quartiere Marconi, a district in Imola, Emilia-Romagna region) where a redevelopment of the area is being considered, and therefore the opinion of the residents is important for the purposes of the planning. In this study, the term "urban green space" refers specifically to public, open-access green areas within urban environments, such as parks, public gardens, and recreational lawns, as opposed to other types of green infrastructure like street trees or private gardens. With the development of a comprehensive questionnaire survey, this research aims to (a) understand the strengths and limitations of existing UGS in the considered area from users' perspectives, including aspects such as spatial characteristics, biodiversity, recreational facilities, and accessibility; (b) by examining residents' motivations for UGS utilisation and their suggestions for enhancement, this study seeks to identify potential gaps between current provisions and community needs. The findings of this research will serve as valuable input for ongoing green space planning projects in Imola and contribute to the broader regional development strategy in the Emilia-Romagna region. By bridging the disconnect between urban planning practices and community preferences, this study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for creating more high-quality and user-friendly green spaces in the considered area, thereby making more rational use of limited land resources.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Area

Imola is one of the seven major cities of the Romagna subregion and the second-largest municipality in the Metropolitan City of Bologna after the regional capital. As a medium-

sized municipality with a population of around 69,357 residents, Imola is situated along the Via Emilia in the Romagna subregion. The municipal territory is predominantly flat, with a hilly area in the southern part. According to the Italian National Climate Classification, Imola has a heating degree day value of 2292 GR/G, placing it in climate zone E [41]. This study concentrates on a residential neighbourhood (Quartiere Marconi) located in the northern part of Imola, where there are ongoing urban redevelopment efforts led by the Imola municipal government. Figure 1 illustrates the geographic location of the study area within Italy, alongside the spatial distribution of UGS and trees in the area of Quartiere Marconi. These initiatives focus on renovating public housing, improving infrastructure, and expanding green spaces, all with active resident engagement to address local needs. Additionally, the considered neighbourhood exemplifies the mix of old and new urban areas common in medium-sized Italian cities, making it a valuable case for understanding green space perceptions and attitudes [42].

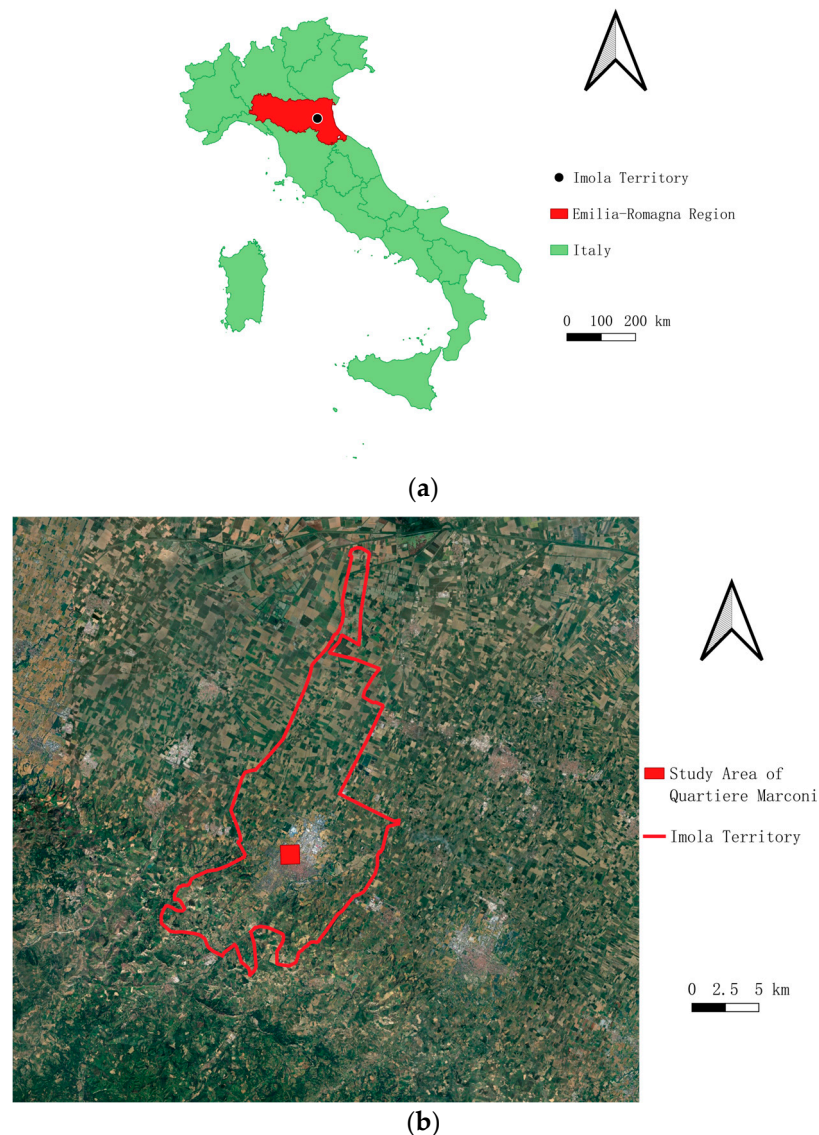


Figure 1. Cont.

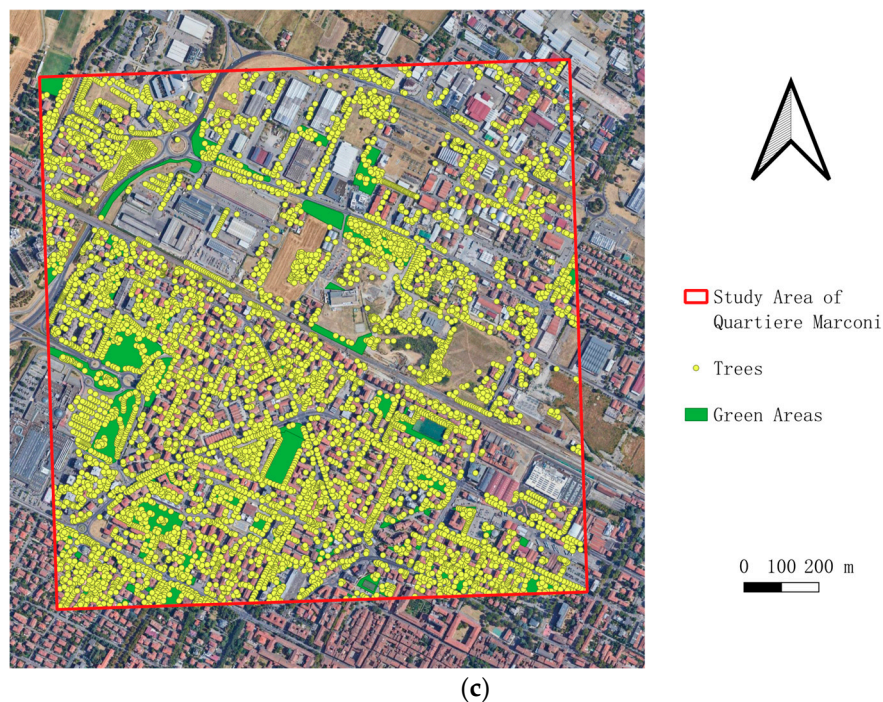


Figure 1. Description of the study area: (a) national geographic setting of the study area in Italy; (b) regional geographic setting of the study area in Imola; (c) spatial distribution of urban green spaces and trees in the study area.

2.2. Survey Design and Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through a comprehensive questionnaire survey conducted with residents who live in the neighbourhood (Quartiere Marconi) in Imola. The questionnaire survey was designed based on existing literature and expert feedback to ensure its relevance and content validity, aiming to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights into participants' perceptions, attitudes, and suggestions towards the neighbourhood's existing UGS.

The ad hoc questionnaire consisted of a mix of single-choice, multiple-choice, and Likert-scale questions. Key topics covered included the following:

- Socio-demographic characteristics, including sex, age, nationality, marital status, living arrangement, educational level, employment status, and housing type;
- Purpose and patterns of UGS usage;
- Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with existing UGS attributes in Quartiere Marconi (e.g., size, accessibility, facilities);
- Demands and suggestions for future UGS development and improvement.

The questionnaire was distributed randomly in collaboration with the Municipality of Imola, inviting residents to participate through a combination of neighbourhood association outreach and online promotion. The formal power analysis was not conducted due to time and resource constraints. The online survey was conducted from November 2023 to June 2024 using Google Forms (Google LLC, Mountain View, CA, USA), while the paper-based questionnaires were distributed on-site at random locations within the study area by four trained researchers from July 2024 to September 2024, with multiple sampling sessions, providing assistance as needed. We conducted sampling at different times of day and on different days of the period to maximise the diversity of respondents. The survey was approved by the Bioethics Committee of the University of Bologna (Prot. N 169182). All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. To protect participants' privacy, all survey responses were anonymised before the analysis. A

total of 144 residents completed the questionnaires (comprising 95 online responses and 49 on-site responses), but 18 on-site questionnaires were excluded due to invalid responses. Ultimately, 126 valid questionnaires were included in this study.

2.3. Data Analysis

We performed all statistical analyses using Stata/SE 17.0 (StataCorp LLC, College Station, TX, USA). In order to prepare the data for analysis, several modifications were made to ensure clarity and facilitate interpretation. Age groups were categorised into four intervals based on participants' dates of birth: young (≤ 30), early middle age (31–45), middle age (46–60), and elderly (>60). The multiple-choice question regarding living arrangements was transformed into three binary variables: living with family (yes/no), living with children aged 12 or younger (yes/no), and living with elderly requiring assistance (yes/no). Due to small sample sizes, we combined primary school and secondary school education levels into a single category, "below high school". The variable "Housing characteristics" was generated by merging housing type and garden availability, resulting in three categories: "detached house" (all samples were with gardens), "apartment with private garden", and "apartment without private garden". Categories with zero response in other variables were omitted from the statistical analysis.

Socio-demographic characteristics were analysed across age groups (≤ 30 , 31–45, 46–60, and >60 years). Descriptive statistics were presented as frequencies and percentages. Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the associations between age groups and categorical variables, including sex, marital status, educational level, employment status, and living arrangement. We removed the nationality because there were only 5 foreigners (3.97%) out of 126 samples. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

The analysis of residents' preferences and attitudes was conducted in four main aspects, including the associations between socio-demographic characteristics and main reasons for visiting UGS, main barriers to visiting UGS, most satisfying aspects of existing UGS, and most unsatisfying aspects of existing UGS. The questions were structured as single-answer questions with an "Other" option. Due to the very low response rate for the "Other" option and the fact that the only responses in this category aligned with provided options, these responses were merged with their corresponding existing categories based on their content. Cross-tabulation analyses were performed using chi-square tests. For contingency tables with expected cell frequencies less than 5, we validated the results using Fisher's exact tests. As the results showed minimal differences between these two methods, we reported chi-square test results for all the tables, determining significant associations between socio-demographic characteristics and response.

To further understand the impact of socio-demographic factors on weekly time spent in UGS and overall satisfaction score, we conducted a backward stepwise regression analysis. For each dependent variable, a set of independent variables was tested for their ability to explain variance. The initial model for both dependent variables included socio-demographics, including sex, age group, marital status, education level, employment status, living arrangement, housing type, time required to reach UGS, and transportation choice. The stepwise procedure was performed with a p -value threshold of 0.05 for variable inclusion and removal. Following the stepwise regression, a mediation analysis was conducted to explore whether overall satisfaction acted as a mediator in the relationship between weekly time spent in UGS and other predictors.

Finally, to study residents' preferences and suggestions for future UGS development, we analysed residents' priorities using a multiple-choice question where respondents selected and ranked their top three preferred features from 13 options, and the results were presented as frequencies and percentages for each priority level. Thematic analysis

of the open-ended supplementary suggestions was not pursued due to the extremely low response rate (18.3%).

3. Results

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of participants across age groups are presented in Table 1. The sample shows a relatively balanced age distribution, with the majority falling into the early middle-age (31–45) and middle-age category (46–60). We found significant differences in age groups in marital status ($\chi^2 = 45.573$, $p < 0.001$), employment status ($\chi^2 = 132.569$, $p < 0.001$), and living arrangements with children aged 12 or younger ($\chi^2 = 15.027$, $p = 0.002$) and with elderly requiring assistance ($\chi^2 = 8.122$, $p = 0.044$). The 31–45 age group showed the highest proportion of full-time employment (90.4%) and living with children (48.1%). The 46–60 age group demonstrated the highest percentage of living with the elderly requiring assistance (11.9%). Educational level differences across age groups approached but did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 19.797$, $p = 0.071$). Sex distribution and living with family or not showed no significant differences across age groups ($p > 0.05$).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics by age group.

	Total (N = 126)	≤30 (n = 17)	31–45 (n = 52)	46–60 (n = 42)	>60 (n = 15)	χ^2	p
Sex						2.5	0.470
Male	49 (38.89%)	6 (35.29%)	17 (32.69%)	18 (42.86%)	8 (53.33%)		
Female	77 (61.11%)	11 (64.71%)	35 (67.31%)	24 (57.14%)	7 (46.67%)		
Marital status						46	<0.001 ***
Married	66 (52.38%)	2 (11.76%)	25 (48.08%)	27 (64.29%)	12 (80.00%)		
Unmarried	48 (38.10%)	15 (88.24%)	23 (44.23%)	10 (23.81%)	0 (0.00%)		
Divorced	10 (7.94%)	0 (0.00%)	4 (7.69%)	5 (11.90%)	1 (6.67%)		
Widowed	2 (1.59%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (13.33%)		
Educational level						20	0.071
Below high school	5 (3.97%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (7.14%)	2 (13.33%)		
High school	48 (38.10%)	8 (47.06%)	14 (26.92%)	20 (47.62%)	6 (40.00%)		
Bachelor	16 (12.70%)	3 (17.65%)	7 (13.46%)	5 (11.90%)	1 (6.67%)		
Master	36 (28.57%)	6 (35.29%)	17 (32.69%)	10 (23.81%)	3 (20.00%)		
Doctorate	21 (16.67%)	0 (0.00%)	14 (26.92%)	4 (9.52%)	3 (20.00%)		
Employment status						133	<0.001 ***
Full-time/self-employed	95 (75.40%)	10 (58.82%)	47 (90.38%)	33 (78.57%)	5 (33.33%)		
Part-time	12 (9.52%)	0 (0.00%)	4 (7.69%)	8 (19.05%)	0 (0.00%)		
Student	7 (5.56%)	7 (41.18%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)		
Unemployed	2 (1.59%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (1.92%)	1 (2.38%)	0 (0.00%)		
Retired	10 (7.94%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	10 (66.67%)		
Living with family						0.8	0.848
Yes	106 (84.13%)	14 (82.35%)	43 (82.69%)	37 (88.10%)	12 (80.00%)		
No	20 (15.87%)	3 (17.65%)	9 (17.31%)	5 (11.90%)	3 (20.00%)		
Living with children ≤ 12						15	0.002 **
Yes	37 (29.37%)	3 (17.65%)	25 (48.08%)	7 (16.67%)	2 (13.33%)		
No	89 (70.63%)	14 (82.35%)	27 (51.92%)	35 (83.33%)	13 (86.67%)		
Living with elderly requiring assistance						8.1	0.044 *
Yes	6 (4.76%)	1 (5.88%)	0 (0.00%)	5 (11.90%)	0 (0.00%)		
No	120 (95.24%)	16 (94.12%)	52 (100.00%)	37 (88.10%)	15 (100.00%)		

Values are presented as frequency (percentage); * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

3.2. The Main Reasons for Visiting UGS

The analysis of the most important reasons for visiting UGS revealed interesting patterns in residents' preferences and behaviours (Table 2). Nature enjoyment proved to be the primary motivation across all groups (42.9% of total respondents), followed by relaxation (24.6%) and social activities (15.9%). Meanwhile, the main reasons for visiting UGS revealed significant associations with family living arrangements. Residents living with family members significantly showed different visiting purposes compared to those living alone ($\chi^2 = 27.409$, $p < 0.001$), with the former group more inclined to nature enjoyment (47.2%) and social activities (17.9%), while the latter preferred relaxation (50.0%) and walking pets (20.0%). Similarly, the presence of children aged 12 or younger significantly influenced visiting purposes ($\chi^2 = 26.159$, $p < 0.001$), with these residents showing a strong preference for social activities (40.5%) compared to residents without children aged 12 or younger (5.6%). Most participants (94.4%) lived within 20 min of UGS, with 42.9% living within 5 min and 51.5% within 5–20 min, suggesting high accessibility of UGS in the study area. The difference in time requirement for different reasons visiting UGS was approaching a significant level ($\chi^2 = 14.413$, $p = 0.072$), with those living 5–20 min away more likely to engage in physical activities (18.5%), and those spending more time on the way showing increased preference for nature enjoyment (57.1% for 20–45 min distance). Other socio-demographic characteristics, including sex, age, marital status, educational level, employment status, living with elderly requiring assistance, housing type, and transportation choice, showed no significant associations with visiting purposes (all $p > 0.05$).

Table 2. Socio-demographic differences in most important reasons for visiting UGS.

	Physical Activities	Nature Enjoyment	Relaxation	Social Activities	Walking Pets	χ^2	p
Sex						4.255	0.373
Male	5 (10.2%)	23 (46.9%)	15 (30.6%)	5 (10.2%)	1 (2.0%)		
Female	11 (14.3%)	31 (40.3%)	16 (20.8%)	15 (19.5%)	4 (5.2%)		
Age group						13.105	0.361
≤30	3 (17.6%)	7 (41.2%)	4 (23.5%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)		
31–45	6 (11.5%)	22 (42.3%)	9 (17.3%)	12 (23.1%)	3 (5.8%)		
46–60	5 (11.9%)	20 (47.6%)	15 (35.7%)	2 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)		
>60	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20.0%)	4 (26.7%)	1 (6.7%)		
Marital status						17.181	0.143
Married	8 (12.1%)	28 (42.4%)	15 (22.7%)	14 (21.2%)	1 (1.5%)		
Unmarried	8 (16.7%)	22 (45.8%)	9 (18.8%)	6 (12.5%)	3 (6.3%)		
Divorced	0 (0.0%)	4 (40.0%)	5 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)		
Widowed	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Educational level						19.131	0.262
Below high school	0 (0.0%)	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
High school	5 (10.4%)	23 (47.9%)	10 (20.8%)	10 (20.8%)	0 (0.0%)		
Bachelor	3 (18.8%)	8 (50.0%)	4 (25.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
Master	6 (16.7%)	15 (41.7%)	7 (19.4%)	5 (13.9%)	3 (8.3%)		
Doctorate	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.0%)	9 (42.9%)	4 (19.0%)	2 (9.5%)		
Employment status						9.202	0.905
Full-time/self-employed	13 (13.7%)	38 (40.0%)	26 (27.4%)	15 (15.8%)	3 (3.2%)		
Part-time	2 (16.7%)	7 (58.3%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)		
Student	1 (14.3%)	3 (42.9%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)		
Unemployed	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Retired	0 (0.0%)	5 (50.0%)	2 (20.0%)	2 (20.0%)	1 (10.0%)		

Table 2. Cont.

	Physical Activities	Nature Enjoyment	Relaxation	Social Activities	Walking Pets	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Living with family						27.409	<0.001 ***
Yes	15 (14.2%)	50 (47.2%)	21 (19.8%)	19 (17.9%)	1 (0.9%)		
No	1 (5.0%)	4 (20.0%)	10 (50.0%)	1 (5.0%)	4 (20.0%)		
Living with children ≤ 12						26.159	<0.001 ***
Yes	2 (5.4%)	14 (37.8%)	6 (16.2%)	15 (40.5%)	0 (0.0%)		
No	14 (15.7%)	40 (44.9%)	25 (28.1%)	5 (5.6%)	5 (5.6%)		
Living with elderly requiring assistance						0.659	0.956
Yes	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)		
No	15 (12.5%)	52 (43.3%)	29 (24.2%)	19 (15.8%)	5 (4.2%)		
Housing type						9.004	0.342
Apartment without garden	11 (14.3%)	32 (41.6%)	18 (23.4%)	11 (14.3%)	5 (6.5%)		
Apartment with garden	0 (0.0%)	13 (52.0%)	7 (28.0%)	5 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Detached house	5 (20.8%)	9 (37.5%)	6 (25.0%)	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)		
Time to reach UGS						14.413	0.072
<5 min	4 (7.4%)	22 (40.7%)	17 (31.5%)	7 (13.0%)	4 (7.4%)		
5–20 min	12 (18.5%)	28 (43.1%)	12 (18.5%)	13 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
20–45 min	0 (0.0%)	4 (57.1%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)		
Transportation						8.281	0.406
On foot	8 (10.0%)	31 (38.8%)	24 (30.0%)	12 (15.0%)	5 (6.3%)		
By bicycle	2 (16.7%)	7 (58.3%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)		
By car	6 (17.6%)	16 (47.1%)	6 (17.6%)	6 (17.6%)	0 (0.0%)		

Values are presented as frequency (percentage); *** $p < 0.001$.

3.3. The Main Barriers to Visiting UGS

The analysis of the most important barriers to visiting UGS showed different patterns across socio-demographic groups (Table 3). The lack of time was the most emphasised barrier (61.9% of total respondents), followed by poor cleanliness and maintenance (11.1%) and lack of public toilets (7.9%). Age group and employment status showed significant associations with visiting barriers ($\chi^2 = 61.922$ and 45.455 , $p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.020$, respectively). In particular, the elderly group (>60) reported concerns with public toilets (40.0%) and health issues (20.0%) as their primary barriers rather than time constraints. Meanwhile, educational level demonstrated significant variations in perceived barriers ($\chi^2 = 43.214$, $p = 0.033$), with higher education groups predominantly citing time constraints (71.4% for doctorate holders), while those with lower educational levels reported more diverse barriers, including cleanliness and maintenance issues (40.0%). Among those who live within 20 min of the journey to UGS (94.4% of respondents), the lack of time remained the primary barrier regardless of transport mode choices, though those walking (63.5% of respondents) showed more concerns about cleanliness (12.5%) and security (7.5%). Notably, marital status revealed significant differences ($\chi^2 = 68.180$, $p < 0.001$), while other living arrangement factors, including living with family, children aged 12 or younger, or elderly requiring assistance, showed no significant associations with perceived barriers (all $p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Socio-demographic differences in most important barriers to visiting UGS.

	Health Problems	Lack of Free Time	Lack of Public Toilets	No Desired Facilities	Poor Cleanliness	Poor Accessibility	Sense of Insecurity	Too Crowded	χ^2	p
Sex									5.657	0.580
Male	1 (2.0%)	29 (59.2%)	6 (12.2%)	2 (4.1%)	7 (14.3%)	3 (6.1%)	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Female	3 (3.9%)	49 (63.6%)	4 (5.2%)	2 (2.6%)	7 (9.1%)	5 (6.5%)	6 (7.8%)	1 (1.3%)		
Age group									61.922	<0.001 ***
≤30	0 (0.0%)	10 (58.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.8%)	2 (11.8%)	0 (0.0%)		
31–45	1 (1.9%)	34 (65.4%)	2 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (15.4%)	4 (7.7%)	3 (5.8%)	0 (0.0%)		
46–60	0 (0.0%)	32 (76.2%)	2 (4.8%)	2 (4.8%)	4 (9.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)		
>60	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)		
Marital status									68.18	<0.001 ***
Married	1 (1.5%)	40 (60.6%)	8 (12.1%)	2 (3.0%)	8 (12.1%)	3 (4.5%)	3 (4.5%)	1 (1.5%)		
Unmarried	1 (2.1%)	31 (64.6%)	2 (4.2%)	2 (4.2%)	5 (10.4%)	4 (8.3%)	3 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
Divorced	0 (0.0%)	7 (70.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Widowed	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Educational level									43.214	0.033 *
Below high school	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
High school	0 (0.0%)	29 (60.4%)	6 (12.5%)	1 (2.1%)	7 (14.6%)	2 (4.2%)	3 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
Bachelor	0 (0.0%)	12 (75.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)		
Master	2 (5.6%)	21 (58.3%)	1 (2.8%)	3 (8.3%)	2 (5.6%)	6 (16.7%)	1 (2.8%)	0 (0.0%)		
Doctorate	1 (4.8%)	15 (71.4%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)		
Employment status									45.455	0.020 *
Full-time/self-employed	2 (2.1%)	64 (67.4%)	6 (6.3%)	2 (2.1%)	11 (11.6%)	3 (3.2%)	6 (6.3%)	1 (1.1%)		
Part-time	0 (0.0%)	8 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Student	0 (0.0%)	3 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
Unemployed	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Retired	2 (20.0%)	1 (10.0%)	4 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Living with family									5.95	0.546
Yes	2 (1.9%)	67 (63.2%)	8 (7.5%)	3 (2.8%)	13 (12.3%)	7 (6.6%)	5 (4.7%)	1 (0.9%)		
No	2 (10.0%)	11 (55.0%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (5.0%)	2 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Living with children ≤ 12									7.658	0.364
Yes	2 (5.4%)	23 (62.2%)	1 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (18.9%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.4%)	0 (0.0%)		
No	2 (2.2%)	55 (61.8%)	9 (10.1%)	4 (4.5%)	7 (7.9%)	6 (6.7%)	5 (5.6%)	1 (1.1%)		
Living with elderly requiring assistance									2.972	0.888
Yes	0 (0.0%)	5 (83.3%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
No	4 (3.3%)	73 (60.8%)	9 (7.5%)	4 (3.3%)	14 (11.7%)	8 (6.7%)	7 (5.8%)	1 (0.8%)		
Housing type									14.349	0.424
Apartment without garden	2 (2.6%)	44 (57.1%)	6 (7.8%)	4 (5.2%)	10 (13.0%)	6 (7.8%)	5 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)		
Apartment with garden	2 (8.0%)	16 (64.0%)	1 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.0%)	1 (4.0%)	2 (8.0%)	1 (4.0%)		
Detached house	0 (0.0%)	18 (75.0%)	3 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.3%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Time to reach UGS									7.199	0.927
<5 min	2 (3.7%)	34 (63.0%)	4 (7.4%)	1 (1.9%)	6 (11.1%)	2 (3.7%)	4 (7.4%)	1 (1.9%)		
5–20 min	2 (3.1%)	38 (58.5%)	6 (9.2%)	3 (4.6%)	8 (12.3%)	5 (7.7%)	3 (4.6%)	0 (0.0%)		
20–45 min	0 (0.0%)	6 (85.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Transportation									12.095	0.599
On foot	4 (5.0%)	47 (58.8%)	5 (6.3%)	2 (2.5%)	10 (12.5%)	6 (7.5%)	6 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)		
By bicycle	0 (0.0%)	7 (58.3%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
By car	0 (0.0%)	24 (70.6%)	3 (8.8%)	1 (2.9%)	3 (8.8%)	2 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.9%)		

Values are presented as frequency (percentage); * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$.

3.4. The Most Satisfying Aspect of the Existing UGS

The analysis of the most satisfying aspects of existing UGS presented different positive attitudes to UGS across different socio-demographic groups (Table 4). Among all aspects, accessibility and size of UGS were considered consistently to be the most satisfying aspects, accounting for 34.9% and 22.2% of total responses, respectively. Significant differences between sexes were observed ($\chi^2 = 16.356, p = 0.012$), with females expressing more diverse satisfaction patterns, particularly in landscape features (15.6%) and abundance of greenery (19.5%), while males concentrated their satisfaction on accessibility (38.8%) and UGS size (36.7%). The children aged 12 or younger in households significantly influenced the satisfaction patterns of the residents ($\chi^2 = 19.620, p = 0.003$). Residents with children aged 12 or younger showed the most satisfaction with size (29.7%), while residents without children aged 12 or younger reported the most satisfaction with accessibility (40.4%). Time spent on the way to UGS also demonstrated significant associations with satisfaction aspects ($\chi^2 = 25.761, p = 0.012$), with an interesting pattern where those spending more time on the way (20–45 min) expressed the highest satisfaction with greenery abundance (71.4%), indicating the possible value that high-quality UGS compensate for longer travelling. The factors, including age, marital status, educational level, employment status, and housing type, showed no significant associations with satisfaction aspects (all $p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Socio-demographic differences in the most satisfying aspect of the current UGS.

	Abundance of Greenery	Accessibility	Facilities	General Cleanliness	Sense of Security	Size of UGS	Landscape Features	χ^2	p
Sex								16.356	0.012 *
Male	6 (12.2%)	19 (38.8%)	3 (6.1%)	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (36.7%)	2 (4.1%)		
Female	15 (19.5%)	25 (32.5%)	6 (7.8%)	5 (6.5%)	4 (5.2%)	10 (13.0%)	12 (15.6%)		
Age group								24.339	0.144
≤30	3 (17.6%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	6 (35.3%)	1 (5.9%)		
31–45	5 (9.6%)	17 (32.7%)	7 (13.5%)	3 (5.8%)	1 (1.9%)	12 (23.1%)	7 (13.5%)		
46–60	11 (26.2%)	14 (33.3%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)	8 (19.0%)	6 (14.3%)		
>60	2 (13.3%)	10 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
Marital status								11.445	0.875
Married	10 (15.2%)	27 (40.9%)	5 (7.6%)	2 (3.0%)	2 (3.0%)	12 (18.2%)	8 (12.1%)		
Unmarried	9 (18.8%)	12 (25.0%)	4 (8.3%)	3 (6.3%)	1 (2.1%)	14 (29.2%)	5 (10.4%)		
Divorced	2 (20.0%)	3 (30.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)	1 (10.0%)		
Widowed	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Educational level								21.152	0.630
Below high school	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
High school	6 (12.5%)	17 (35.4%)	2 (4.2%)	1 (2.1%)	3 (6.3%)	13 (27.1%)	6 (12.5%)		
Bachelor	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)		
Master	9 (25.0%)	12 (33.3%)	4 (11.1%)	2 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (22.2%)	1 (2.8%)		
Doctorate	2 (9.5%)	6 (28.6%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)	3 (14.3%)	4 (19.0%)		
Employment status								26.062	0.350
Full-time/self-employed	13 (13.7%)	30 (31.6%)	8 (8.4%)	5 (5.3%)	3 (3.2%)	23 (24.2%)	13 (13.7%)		
Part-time	4 (33.3%)	4 (33.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)		
Student	2 (28.6%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)		
Unemployed	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)		
Retired	1 (10.0%)	8 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Living with family								5.071	0.535
Yes	15 (14.2%)	37 (34.9%)	9 (8.5%)	5 (4.7%)	4 (3.8%)	24 (22.6%)	12 (11.3%)		
No	6 (30.0%)	7 (35.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (20.0%)	2 (10.0%)		
Living with children ≤ 12								19.62	0.003 **

Table 4. *Cont.*

	Abundance of Greenery	Accessibility	Facilities	General Cleanliness	Sense of Security	Size of UGS	Landscape Features	χ^2	p
Yes	3 (8.1%)	8 (21.6%)	7 (18.9%)	3 (8.1%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (29.7%)	5 (13.5%)	4.789	0.571
No	18 (20.2%)	36 (40.4%)	2 (2.2%)	3 (3.4%)	4 (4.5%)	17 (19.1%)	9 (10.1%)		
Living with elderly requiring assistance									
Yes	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	10.86	0.541
No	20 (16.7%)	43 (35.8%)	8 (6.7%)	6 (5.0%)	4 (3.3%)	27 (22.5%)	12 (10.0%)		
Housing type								25.761	0.012 *
Apartment without garden	16 (20.8%)	25 (32.5%)	5 (6.5%)	4 (5.2%)	3 (3.9%)	18 (23.4%)	6 (7.8%)		
Apartment with garden	2 (8.0%)	10 (40.0%)	1 (4.0%)	2 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (28.0%)	3 (12.0%)		
Detached house	3 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)	3 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.2%)	3 (12.5%)	5 (20.8%)	15.259	0.228
Time to reach UGS									
<5 min	7 (13.0%)	21 (38.9%)	3 (5.6%)	4 (7.4%)	3 (5.6%)	14 (25.9%)	2 (3.7%)		
5–20 min	9 (13.8%)	23 (35.4%)	6 (9.2%)	2 (3.1%)	1 (1.5%)	13 (20.0%)	11 (16.9%)	15.259	0.228
20–45 min	5 (71.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)		
Transportation									
On foot	16 (20.0%)	31 (38.8%)	4 (5.0%)	4 (5.0%)	4 (5.0%)	17 (21.3%)	4 (5.0%)		
By bicycle	1 (8.3%)	3 (25.0%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (25.0%)	3 (25.0%)		
By car	4 (11.8%)	10 (29.4%)	3 (8.8%)	2 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (23.5%)	7 (20.6%)		

Values are presented as frequency (percentage); * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

3.5. The Most Unsatisfying Aspect of the Existing UGS

The analysis of the most unsatisfying aspects of existing UGS emphasised significant variations across marital status ($\chi^2 = 31.957, p = 0.022$) and households with children aged 12 or younger ($\chi^2 = 18.154, p = 0.006$) (Table 5). Notably, households with children aged 12 or younger expressed distinct dissatisfaction patterns, particularly regarding facilities (35.1%) and general cleanliness (32.4%), while households without children showed more concern about greenery abundance (28.1%). Among marital groups, unmarried respondents were particularly dissatisfied with greenery abundance (37.5%), while married respondents expressed more diverse dissatisfactions, primarily about cleanliness (28.8%) and facilities (21.2%). This pattern suggests that the perception of UGS inadequacies varies by user groups, with maintenance and facility-related issues being very important among family users, while ecological aspects concern more individual users. Despite being a well-known barrier to visiting UGS, accessibility was rarely cited as a most unsatisfying aspect across all groups, indicating that existing UGS in Imola locations generally meet user expectations.

Table 5. Socio-demographic differences in the most unsatisfying aspect of the current UGS.

	Abundance of Greenery	Accessibility	Facilities	General Cleanliness	Sense of Security	Size of UGS	Landscape Features	χ^2	p
Sex								3.846	0.698
Male	12 (24.5%)	2 (4.1%)	12 (24.5%)	11 (22.5%)	6 (12.2%)	3 (6.1%)	3 (6.1%)		
Female	14 (18.2%)	4 (5.2%)	14 (18.2%)	21 (27.3%)	13 (16.9%)	2 (2.6%)	9 (11.7%)	17.712	0.475
Age group									
≤30	6 (35.3%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (29.4%)	2 (11.8%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)		
31–45	9 (17.3%)	4 (7.7%)	10 (19.2%)	17 (32.7%)	6 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (11.5%)		
46–60	8 (19.1%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (7.1%)	9 (7.1%)	9 (7.1%)	3 (2.4%)	4 (3.2%)		
>60	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	31.957	0.022 *
Marital status									
Married	6 (9.1%)	4 (6.1%)	14 (21.2%)	19 (28.8%)	11 (16.7%)	2 (3.0%)	10 (15.2%)		
Unmarried	18 (37.5%)	1 (2.1%)	11 (22.9%)	10 (20.8%)	5 (10.4%)	4 (4.2%)	3 (2.1%)		

Table 5. Cont.

	Abundance of Greenery	Accessibility	Facilities	General Cleanliness	Sense of Security	Size of UGS	Landscape Features	χ^2	p
Divorced	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	3 (30.0%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	15.730	0.898
Widowed	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Educational level									
Below high school	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
High school	10 (20.83%)	1 (2.1%)	9 (18.8%)	11 (22.9%)	10 (20.8%)	2 (4.2%)	5 (10.4%)		
Bachelor	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)		
Master	6 (16.7%)	2 (5.6%)	11 (30.6%)	9 (25.0%)	2 (5.6%)	2 (5.6%)	4 (11.1%)	20.911	0.644
Doctorate	4 (19.1%)	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.1%)	6 (28.6%)	3 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.5%)		
Employment status									
Full-time/self-employed	18 (19.0%)	4 (4.2%)	20 (21.1%)	26 (27.4%)	15 (15.8%)	4 (4.2%)	8 (8.4%)		
Part-time	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (25.0%)		
Student	3 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (28.6%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
Unemployed	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.865	0.932
Retired	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	3 (30.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)		
Living with family									
Yes	20 (18.9%)	5 (4.7%)	22 (20.8%)	28 (26.4%)	16 (15.1%)	4 (3.8%)	11 (10.4%)		
No	6 (30.0%)	1 (5.0%)	4 (20.0%)	4 (20.0%)	3 (15.0%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (5.0%)		
Living with children ≤ 12									
Yes	1 (2.7%)	2 (5.4%)	13 (35.1%)	12 (32.4%)	4 (10.8%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (13.5%)	18.154	0.006 **
No	25 (28.1%)	4 (4.5%)	13 (14.6%)	20 (22.5%)	15 (16.9%)	5 (5.6%)	7 (7.9%)		
Living with elderly requiring assistance									
Yes	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (33.3%)		
No	25 (20.8%)	6 (5.0%)	25 (20.8%)	31 (25.8%)	18 (15.0%)	5 (4.2%)	10 (8.3%)		
Housing type									
Apartment without garden	15 (19.5%)	3 (3.9%)	15 (19.5%)	22 (28.6%)	12 (15.6%)	4 (5.2%)	6 (7.8%)	5.195	0.951
Apartment with garden	6 (24.0%)	2 (8.0%)	6 (24.0%)	6 (24.0%)	3 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.0%)		
Detached house	5 (20.8%)	1 (4.2%)	5 (20.8%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (16.7%)	1 (4.2%)	4 (16.7%)		
Time to reach UGS									
<5 min	14 (25.9%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (22.2%)	15 (27.8%)	5 (9.3%)	2 (3.7%)	6 (11.1%)		
5–20 min	11 (16.9%)	5 (7.7%)	12 (18.5%)	16 (24.6%)	12 (18.5%)	3 (4.6%)	6 (9.2%)		
20–45 min	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	2 (28.6%)	1 (14.3%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11.008	0.528
Transportation									
On foot	17 (21.3%)	1 (1.3%)	17 (21.3%)	23 (28.8%)	10 (12.5%)	4 (5.0%)	8 (10.0%)		
By bicycle	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	3 (25.0%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)		
By car	7 (20.6%)	4 (11.8%)	7 (20.6%)	6 (17.7%)	5 (14.7%)	1 (2.9%)	4 (11.8%)		

Values are presented as frequency (percentage); * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

3.6. Overall Satisfaction Score and Weekly Time Spent in UGS

Stepwise regression on “weekly time spent in UGS” revealed that only one variable, “the presence of children aged 12 or younger”, remained as a significant predictor. The model was statistically significant ($F(1, 124) = 4.87, p = 0.029$), though with limited explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.038$). The coefficient for “the presence of children aged 12 or younger” was 0.4382, indicating that households with children reported a modestly higher weekly time spent in UGS compared to those without.

The “overall satisfaction score” revealed no significant predictors remaining in the model, suggesting that none of the predictors explained any variance in the “overall satisfaction score”. This suggests that after stepwise selection, there were no included variables influencing overall satisfaction.

A regression analysis examining the relationship between “weekly time spent in UGS” and “overall satisfaction score” showed no significant association ($F(1, 124) = 1.19, p = 0.277$). The model explained very little of the variance ($R^2 = 0.010$), suggesting that overall satisfaction does not significantly predict time spent in UGS. Thus, the assumed mediating effect was not observed.

3.7. Suggested Features in Future UGS

Analysis of suggested features in new green spaces reported clear priorities among residents (Table 6). Open areas shaded by trees received the highest first-priority selection (27.78%), and shaded paths maintained relative importance across all three priorities (11.90%, 12.70%, 11.90%). The priority patterns demonstrated a hierarchical structure of needs, from essential comfort features to recreational amenities. Although children's playgrounds showed high first priority (13.49%), their importance decreased as second and third choices. Conversely, some amenities gained importance in subsequent priorities, notably benches (6.35% to 13.49%) and picnic areas (1.59% to 9.52%), suggesting their value as complementary features. Basic infrastructure, such as parking areas and public toilets, received lower priority across all three choices, indicating residents' preference for recreational features over basic facilities.

Table 6. Priority ranking of desired features in new UGS.

Desired Features	1st Priority	2nd Priority	3rd Priority	Total Times Selected
Open area shaded by trees	35 (27.78%)	17 (13.49%)	10 (7.94%)	62 (16.40%)
Children's playground	17 (13.49%)	12 (9.52%)	11 (8.73%)	40 (10.58%)
Shaded paths	15 (11.90%)	16 (12.70%)	15 (11.90%)	46 (12.17%)
Benches	8 (6.35%)	17 (13.49%)	16 (12.70%)	41 (10.85%)
Ponds or small lakes	11 (8.73%)	4 (3.17%)	8 (6.35%)	23 (6.08%)
Fountains	8 (6.35%)	15 (11.90%)	9 (7.14%)	32 (8.47%)
Security cameras	7 (5.56%)	8 (6.35%)	11 (8.73%)	26 (6.88%)
Sports courts	7 (5.56%)	6 (4.76%)	4 (3.17%)	17 (4.50%)
Floral landscape	6 (4.76%)	6 (4.76%)	14 (11.11%)	26 (6.88%)
Fitness equipment	5 (3.97%)	7 (5.56%)	3 (2.38%)	15 (3.97%)
Public toilets	4 (3.17%)	9 (7.14%)	7 (5.56%)	20 (5.29%)
Areas for picnic or BBQ	2 (1.59%)	5 (3.97%)	12 (9.52%)	19 (5.03%)
Parking facilities	1 (0.79%)	4 (3.17%)	6 (4.76%)	11 (2.91%)

Values are presented as frequency (percentage). Total percentage represents the proportion of times each feature was selected across all three priorities.

4. Discussion

For the purpose of creating more user-friendly and high-quality UGS in the Emilia-Romagna region, Italy, while making efficient use of limited land resources in the European context, we used a neighbourhood of an Italian city (Quartiere Marconi, Imola) as a case and developed a questionnaire survey in this study. Through comprehensive analyses of usage patterns, visiting motivations, satisfaction levels, and future suggestions, we focused on investigating perceptions and attitudes of residents towards UGS in order to understand both the advantages and limitations of existing UGS in the study area from users' perspectives. In general, our results showed interesting relationships between perception and attitudes of UGS and factors such as age, employment status, and living arrangements, which indicated that life stage seems to play a crucial role.

The analysis of socio-demographic characteristics revealed distinct generational patterns that potentially shape UGS utilisation. The 31–45 age group is characterised by high rates of living with young children and full-time employment. This suggests that their UGS needs might be particularly affected by the pressures from work or the responsibility for the family. The 46–60 age group showed a different pattern, taking the responsibility of caring for the elderly while maintaining career commitments, indicating different demands on their time and potentially different preferences for UGS [43,44]. The continuous rise in educational levels over the generations and the progression of marital status across age groups further reflect the evolving life patterns in modern urban settings [45,46]. These generational differences in family structure and daily responsibilities provide important context for understanding the varying perceptions and attitudes of UGS across different residents.

The most important motivation for UGS visits is to enjoy the natural environment, reflecting a fundamental human need for nature connection, which is one of the basic functions of UGS in the theory of green benefits [47,48]. However, this general preference manifests differently across family structures. It seems that families with younger children transform this nature interaction into social activities, demonstrating that UGS serve as leisure venues for families and children. The multiple functions of UGS, including providing both natural elements and social venues, deserve particular attention in UGS designs [49–51]. In the aspect of accessibility, the relationship between travel time and visiting motivation suggests that some residents might choose to travel longer distances for specific experiences, particularly nature enjoyment. A qualitative study in Reykjavik found similar results [52]. On the contrary, the nearby UGS seem to have become the choice for daily activities like physical activities. A study in Denmark indicated that individuals who perceive better access to local parks are likely to participate more frequently in physical activities within these environments [53]. The finding challenges the simple distance-based assumptions about UGS use and suggests that future planning should focus more on creating flexible and diverse UGS that can adjust different usage patterns. Unfortunately, simple accessibility or demographic-specific features are inevitably emphasised in many studies [54,55].

There are several barriers caused by problems with residents themselves or the UGS that exist to prevent residents from visiting UGS. A lack of time dominated across most groups, which reveals a most serious problem of urban life. All the residents who need to work or study, especially those with higher education levels, considered the lack of time as their primary barrier. It reflects the intense competition between work commitments and leisure time in urban life [56]. The fact that the lack of time limitation even bothers residents who spend less than 5 min on the way to UGS suggests that simple accessibility alone does not guarantee utilisation from another perspective. This points to a broader challenge: the competition between green space usage and other daily activities in urban life. A potential effective solution could be organising community activities in parks, such as regular parent–child events [57]. On the contrary, elderly residents showed different concerns, focusing on practical issues like public toilet availability or being prevented from visiting UGS by health problems. Notably, although physical distance was not a major barrier for most residents, the concerns about cleanliness and security among walking users highlight how the quality of both the journey to and experience within UGS can affect the utilisation of UGS [58,59].

The analysis of satisfaction and dissatisfaction aspects indicated how residents of different socio-demographics evaluate and experience UGS. The high satisfaction with accessibility across groups, combined with its low ranking as an aspect of dissatisfaction, demonstrated that the spatial distribution of UGS in the study area effectively serves the community's basic needs. This might be the potential reason why accessibility cannot be summarised as important in the analysis of usage patterns and motivations. However, the different satisfaction patterns between family and individual users highlighted how living arrangements shape UGS expectations. While families with young children showed high satisfaction with size and facilities but expressed concerns about maintenance and cleanliness, individual users focused more on ecological aspects such as greenery abundance. These findings suggest that while existing UGS successfully meets basic accessibility needs, the quality and maintenance of facilities, particularly for family users, and the richness of natural features for individual users represent areas for potential enhancement. This viewpoint was also proved in the residents' suggestions for future UGS planning, which indicates the importance of high-quality natural elements and scenery and user-friendly facilities for recreation, suggesting that successful UGS should integrate natural landscape

features as the primary framework while incorporating supportive amenities to enhance user experience and meet diverse recreational needs. Similar results can be found in existing research that evaluated quality by focusing on multiple features, such as facilities and amenities, aside from accessibility [60,61].

This study's findings, however, should be interpreted within certain limitations. First, the survey was conducted in a specific urban context during a single season, which might affect residents' perceptions and reported behaviours. For instance, the high priority placed on shaded areas might reflect seasonal weather conditions, and preferences might vary across different times of the year. Second, while the presence of children emerged as a significant predictor of weekly UGS use, the relatively low R^2 value suggests that other unmeasured factors, such as personal habits, weather conditions, or specific site characteristics, might play important roles in determining usage patterns. In connection, the cultural heritage and the consequent different mother tongues could have influenced questionnaire and urban planning perceptions [62,63].

The lack of significant predictors for overall satisfaction scores, coupled with the absence of a correlation between satisfaction and usage time, raises intriguing questions about how residents evaluate green spaces. This finding challenges the intuitive assumption that higher satisfaction leads to increased usage, suggesting that UGS utilisation might be more strongly influenced by practical constraints and lifestyle factors than by satisfaction levels. This disconnection between satisfaction and usage merits further investigation, particularly in understanding how to translate positive attitudes into actual utilisation.

Future research could benefit from several expansions of this work. Longitudinal studies tracking seasonal variations in UGS usage and preferences would provide more comprehensive insights. Additionally, quantitative investigations might help unpack the complex relationship between satisfaction and usage, particularly exploring why time constraints persist even among residents living close to green spaces. Studies incorporating objective measures of green space quality alongside subjective perceptions could also enhance our understanding of the satisfaction–usage relationship.

For urban planners and policymakers, these findings suggest that successful UGS development requires more than just providing accessible green spaces. While basic comfort features like shade and seating emerge as priorities, the varying needs across demographic groups indicate that a one-size-fits-all approach may be insufficient. The challenge lies in creating spaces that can simultaneously serve multiple user groups while maintaining the essential natural characteristics that draw people to these spaces in the first place.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, due to the lack of labour and sources, the sample size was relatively small ($n = 126$), which may limit the generalisability of our findings. Second, the survey was conducted in a specific urban context during a single season, which might affect residents' perceptions and reported behaviours. For instance, the high priority placed on shaded areas might reflect seasonal weather conditions, and preferences might vary across different times of the year. Third, although the questionnaire effectively captured qualitative insights into residents' perceptions and attitudes, the lack of Likert-scale measurements for individual UGS elements prevented a more detailed quantitative analysis of factors affecting user experiences. Fourth, our tentative analysis of the mediation effect showed the presence of young children was a significant predictor of weekly UGS use, and the extremely low R^2 value suggested that other unmeasured factors, such as personal habits, weather conditions, or specific site characteristics, might play important roles in determining usage patterns. The lack of significant predictors for overall satisfaction scores, along with the absence of correlation between

satisfaction level and usage time, raises some questions about how residents evaluate green spaces. This finding challenges the intuitive assumption that higher satisfaction leads to increased usage, suggesting that UGS utilisation might be more strongly influenced by practical limitations and lifestyle factors than by satisfaction levels. This disconnection between satisfaction and usage needs further investigation, especially in understanding how to translate positive attitudes into actual utilisation. These limitations point to the preliminary nature of this study within a broader research agenda. Future research should incorporate objective measurements using tools such as the Public Participation Geographical Information System (PPGIS) and ENVI-met to analyse spatial characteristics and environmental performance of UGS. PPGIS could capture spatially explicit community preferences and usage patterns through map-based surveys [64,65], while ENVI-met simulations would enable the assessment of urban microclimate conditions that influence user thermal comfort and experience [66,67]. This integration of participatory spatial tools and environmental modelling would complement the subjective evaluations presented here, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between UGS qualities and user experiences.

5. Conclusions

This study found that residents' perceptions and attitudes towards UGS were primarily shaped by their life stages and household patterns rather than scattered socio-demographic factors. The early middle-aged group and middle-aged group, characterised by family-caring responsibilities and career commitments, showed distinct preferences for social activities in UGS, while individual users focused more on nature enjoyment and relaxation. These varying perceptions and attitudes potentially affected by usage patterns suggest that successful UGS planning requires attention to both high-quality natural elements and user-oriented facilities. Even though the study area shows good accessibility, the quality of UGS depends more on the integration of aesthetic natural features and well-maintained recreational amenities. Urban planners should, therefore, move beyond simple proximity-based approaches to create flexible spaces that can satisfy the diverse needs of residents of different life stages while maintaining the essential attractive natural characteristics at the same time.

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