

Evaluation of parks in the Municipality of Galați, Romania

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Evaluarea parcurilor din Municipiul Galați, România. În contextul urbanizării accelerate ce reduce suprafețele verzi și amplifică provocările de mediu, parcurile devin tot mai importante pentru sănătatea populației și echilibrul ecologic urban. Scopul acestui articol este de a analiza rolul parcurilor urbane în cadrul Municipiului Galați precum și modul în care acestea sunt utilizate și percepute de către vizitatori. Metodologia de analiză a inclus observații de teren privind calitatea infrastructurii și nivelul de întreținere a parcurilor urbane precum și aplicarea unui chestionar privind caracteristicile vizitatorilor, motivele și tiparele de utilizare cât și gradul de satisfacție al acestora. Rezultatele au evidențiat că deși majoritatea parcurilor urbane oferă spații de recreere adecvate, unele nu dispun de condiții corespunzătoare pentru utilizatori din cauza întreținerii deficitare și a infrastructurii învechite. Concluziile studiului arată faptul că urbanizarea accelerată influențează calitatea și distribuția parcurilor urbane, fiind necesară o gestionare mai eficientă și investiții pentru modernizarea spațiilor verzi.

Cuvinte cheie: spații verzi, calitatea mediului urban, creșterea calității vieții, percepția vizitatorilor, Galați.

Evaluation of parks in the Municipality of Galați, Romania. In the context of accelerated urbanization, which reduces green areas and intensifies environmental challenges, parks are becoming increasingly important for public health and urban ecological balance. The aim of this article is to analyze the role of urban parks within the Municipality of Galați, as well as the way they are used and perceived by visitors. The analysis methodology included field observations regarding the quality of infrastructure and the level of maintenance of urban parks, as well as the application of a questionnaire addressing visitor characteristics, reasons for visiting and patterns of use, and their level of satisfaction. The results highlighted that although most urban parks provide adequate recreational spaces, some do not offer appropriate conditions for users due to poor maintenance and outdated infrastructure. The conclusions of the study indicate that accelerated urbanization influences the quality and distribution of urban parks, making more efficient management and investment in the modernization of green spaces necessary.

Keywords: green spaces, urban environmental quality, improvement of quality of life, visitor perception, Galați.

1. INTRODUCTION

Accelerated urbanization represents one of the most significant spatial transformations of contemporary society, having a substantial impact on the structure and functionality of the urban environment. The expansion of built-up areas and the densification of cities have, in many cases, led to a reduction in green spaces and to the degradation of urban environmental quality (Konijnendijk et al., 2013).

In this context, urban parks have become essential components of green infrastructure, contributing to the maintenance of balance between the natural and the built environment (Grădinaru, Iojă, Pătroescu, 2022). Urban parks are defined as delimited green spaces intended for public use, dominated by vegetation and, in some cases, by aquatic elements, fulfilling multiple roles within the urban structure (Konijnendijk et al., 2013). They do not function solely as recreational areas, but also as key components of the urban ecological system, playing an important role in mitigating the negative effects of urbanization, such as air pollution, noise, and the urban heat island effect (Bowler et al., 2010; Humă, 2022).

From an ecological perspective, urban parks contribute to the conservation of biodiversity within cities by providing habitats for numerous plant and animal species adapted to the urban environment (Cornelis, Hermy, 2004). Research indicates that, in certain situations, urban parks may exhibit higher biological diversity than other types of urban green spaces, becoming important areas of biodiversity concentration (Sorace, 2001; Carbo-Ramírez, Zuria, 2011; Aronson et al., 2017). At the same time, the vegetation present in these spaces contributes to improving air quality and regulating the urban microclimate (Konijnendijk et al., 2013; Yan et al., 2018). Urban parks also play a major social role, serving as spaces for meeting, recreation, and interaction within local communities. They foster social cohesion and provide opportunities for recreational and sporting activities, thereby contributing to the improvement of both physical and mental health among the population (Sturm and Cohen, 2014; Peters, Elands and Buijs, 2010). Numerous studies highlight that access to urban green spaces is associated with reduced stress levels (Dzhambov and Dimitrova, 2014), increased life satisfaction and the promotion of an active lifestyle (Liu et al., 2017). From an economic perspective, urban parks can enhance the attractiveness of cities, contributing to the development of urban tourism and to the increase in property values in adjacent areas (Colesca, Alpopi, 2011; Rabare et al., 2009). Well-maintained green spaces can become points of interest for residents and visitors alike, generating indirect benefits for the local community.

In municipalities with a pronounced industrial profile, such as the Municipality of Galați, the importance of urban parks is further amplified by the need to compensate for the negative effects of industrial activities and intense traffic on the environment and

population (Humă, 2022). Differences in the distribution, quality, and level of maintenance of parks can significantly influence the way these spaces are used and perceived by residents (Błaszczuk et al., 2020). The aim of this study is to evaluate the role of urban parks in the Municipality of Galați by analyzing both their ecological and social functions, as well as the way in which they are used, perceived, and appreciated by visitors. The study considers visit frequency, user satisfaction, the importance of green spaces for urban quality of life, and possible ways to improve them. The main objectives of this research are to analyze the characteristics and functionality of urban parks, assess their benefits for the local community, and evaluate visitors' perceptions regarding the quality of these parks.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study area

The Municipality of Galați (Figure 1) is located in south-eastern Romania, at the confluence of the Danube River with the Prut and Siret rivers. Its geographical position influences both urban development and the natural framework of the city (Anghel, 1980). This location gives the municipality a specific urban profile, with implications for the distribution and functionality of urban green spaces.

From a physical-geographical perspective, the relief of the municipality is characterized by low altitudes and landforms specific to plain and plateau areas, while the climate is temperate-continental, with hot summers and cold winters. These conditions emphasize the role of urban parks in regulating the microclimate and reducing thermal discomfort (Anghel, 1980; Humă, 2022). The hydrographic network is dominated by the Danube River and its associated floodplains, which influence the natural framework and local biodiversity (Oancea, Swizewski, 1979).

The natural environment of the municipality is specific to the forest-steppe zone and is complemented, within the urban area, by ornamental vegetation and deciduous tree species present in urban parks. These green spaces contribute to maintaining urban biodiversity and improving environmental quality (Oancea, Swizewski, 1979). From a socio-demographic perspective, the Municipality of Galați is characterized by a population that is diverse in terms of age structure, with a slightly declining trend over the last decade, associated with migration processes and economic changes (INS, 2024). The pronounced industrial profile of the municipality generates pressures on the urban environment, highlighting the importance of urban parks as essential components of green infrastructure, with a key role in improving urban quality of life (Humă, 2022).

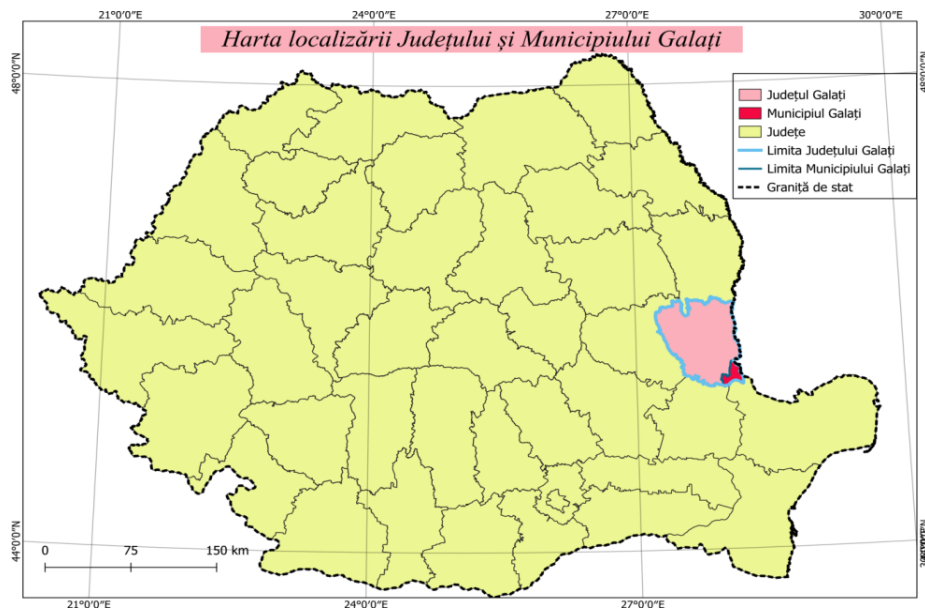


Figure 1. Location map of Galați County and Galați Municipality

2.2. Evaluation of urban park quality

The evaluation of urban park quality in the Municipality of Galați was carried out using a mixed methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to obtain a comprehensive overview of the condition, functionality, and patterns of use of urban parks. In the first stage of the research, a theoretical documentation was conducted through the consultation of specialized literature, which was used to define key concepts, to frame the study from a theoretical perspective, and to support the interpretation of the results. This stage provided the conceptual foundation of the analysis and offered a comparative framework for the evaluation of urban parks. In addition, an analysis of official statistical data was performed using information provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS). These data were used to describe the demographic context of the Municipality of Galați and to correlate population characteristics with the use and importance of urban parks.

Subsequently, field observations were carried out with the aim of assessing the general condition of the analyzed urban parks. The observations focused on the level of maintenance, the quality of infrastructure, the condition of pathways, the presence of urban furniture, recreational and fitness facilities, as well as cleanliness and accessibility. This stage allowed for the identification of the main dysfunctions and differences between parks.

A central component of the research consisted of the application of a sociological questionnaire (Table 1 and 2), developed using the Google Forms platform and distributed online through various digital platforms. The questionnaire was administered between 18 March 2025 and 4 May 2025 and collected a total of 52 valid

responses. It aimed to assess the frequency of park use, user satisfaction, perceptions regarding infrastructure condition and maintenance, as well as the identification of key problems and potential improvement measures suggested by respondents.

Table 1. Profile of urban park users

Nr.	Questions	Answer options
1.	Age of respondents	a. Under 18 years b. 18-30 years c. 31-45 years d. 46-60 years e. Over 60 years
2.	Gender of respondents	a. Female b. Male
3.	Occupation of respondents	a. Employed b. Student c. Economically inactive (household) d. Retired e. Unemployed

Table 2. Reasons and patterns of urban park use

Nr.	Questions	Answer options
1.	Preferred urban park	a. Mihai Eminescu Park b. Public Garden (Grădina Publică) c. Carol I Park d. Corneliu Coposu Park e. Viva Park
2.	Frequency of visits to urban parks	a. Daily b. Several times a week c. Once a week d. Once a month e. Less frequently
3.	Activities carried out in the park	a. Walking b. Jogging c. Reading d. Games/activities with children e. Picnics f. Walking pets g. Cultural events/volunteering h. Used as a shortcut
4.	Main means of transportation to the park	a. On foot b. By bicycle/scooter

		c. By public transport d. By private car
5.	Time spent during a park visit	a. Less than 30 minutes b. 30 minutes - 1 hour c. 1-2 hours d. More than 2 hours
6.	Preferred time of day for visiting the park	a. Morning b. Afternoon c. Evening
7.	Main factor influencing park choice	a. General atmosphere b. Available facilities c. Safety d. Cleanliness and maintenance e. Distance from home
8	Perception of cleanliness in parks	a. Very good b. Good c. Acceptable d. Poor e. Very poor
9.	Desired improvements in parks	a. More green spaces b. Better cleanliness c. More activities and events d. Improved safety and surveillance e. Additional sports facilities
10.	Importance of urban parks for health and well-being	a. Very important b. Important c. Neutral d. Slightly important e. Not important at all

3. RESULTS

The analysis of the respondents' profile showed that the age group 18-30 years was the most represented, accounting for 44% of the total responses. This group was followed by respondents aged 46-60 years (21%) and 31-45 years (19%). A smaller proportion of participants was recorded in the age group over 60 years (10%), while respondents under 18 years represented only 6% of the total sample (Figure 2).

Regarding the frequency of visits to urban parks, the results indicated that 29% of respondents visited parks several times per week. Daily visits were reported by 19% of participants, while 15% declared visiting parks once per week.

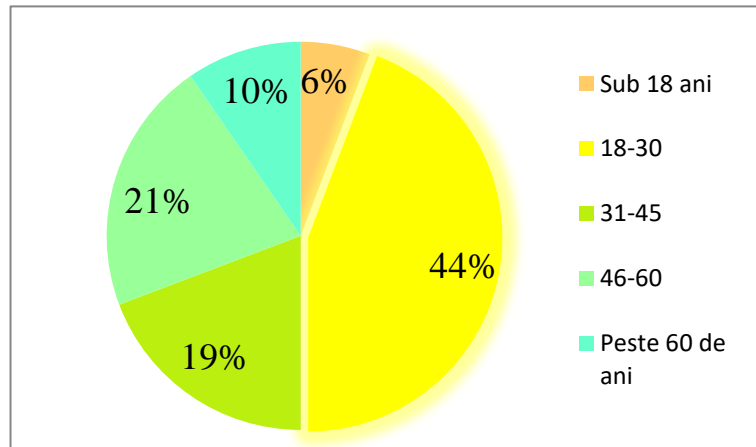


Figure 2. Age of the survey respondents

Monthly visits accounted for 14% of responses, and 23% of respondents stated that they visited urban parks more rarely (Figure 3). The most common activity reported by respondents was walking, which represented the dominant form of park use. Other frequently mentioned activities included walking pets and activities with children. Jogging, picnics, cultural or volunteering events, and the use of parks as shortcuts were reported by a smaller proportion of respondents, while reading was mentioned only rarely (Figure 4).

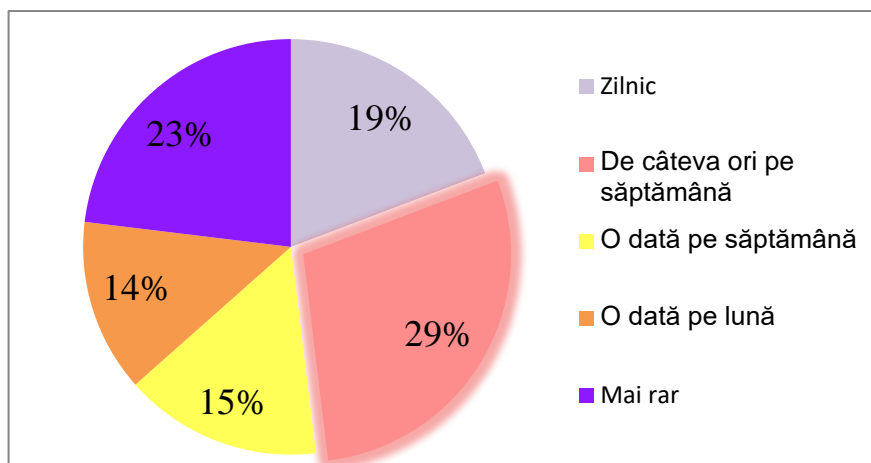


Figure 3. Frequency of visits to urban parks

The majority of respondents considered urban parks to be important or very important for urban life. A proportion of 47% of participants rated parks as important, while 29% considered them very important. Neutral perceptions were expressed by 22% of respondents, whereas only 2% indicated that parks were of little importance. No responses were recorded for the option “not important at all” (Figure 5).

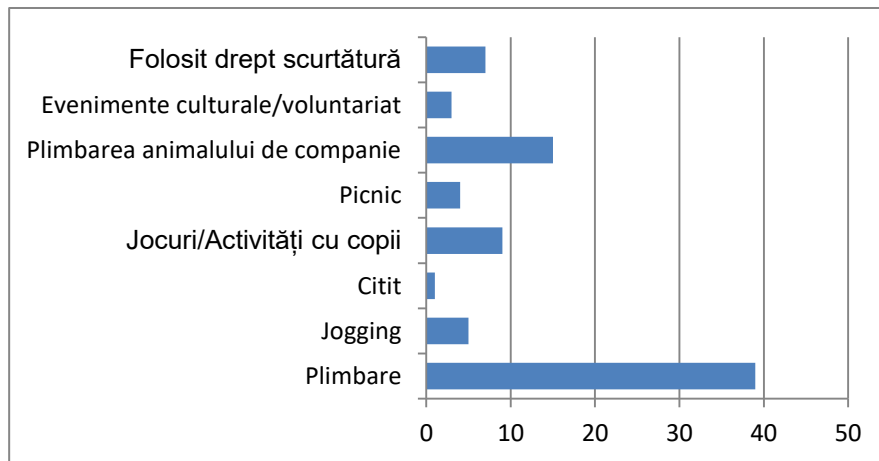


Figure 4. Ways visitors spend time in the park

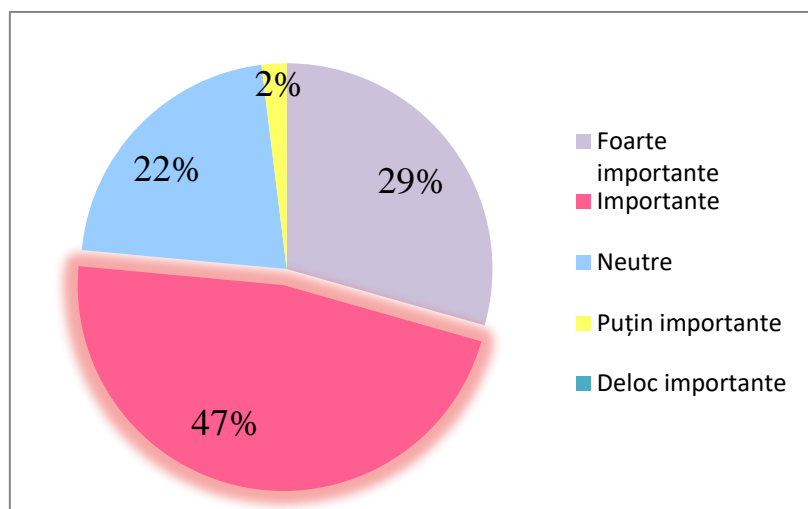


Figure 5. Importance of urban parks for health and well-being

When asked about potential improvements, respondents most frequently indicated the need for more activities and events within urban parks, followed by the expansion of green spaces. Other commonly mentioned aspects included improving cleanliness, increasing safety through better supervision, and the addition of supplementary sports facilities (Figure 6).

Field observations carried out in several urban parks revealed a series of infrastructural and maintenance-related issues. In some areas, irrigation systems were observed to affect the usability of park furniture, with water reaching benches during operation. The absence of protective fencing was identified in certain locations, posing potential safety risks, especially in areas accessible to children. Additionally, some zones were observed to be insufficiently maintained or inadequately arranged, with visible degradation of pathways and recreational spaces (Figure 7, 8 and 9).

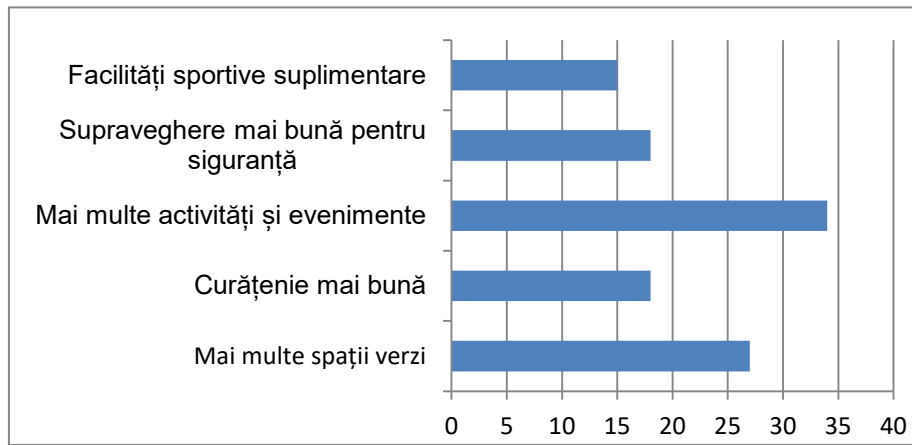


Figure 6. Improvements desired by park users

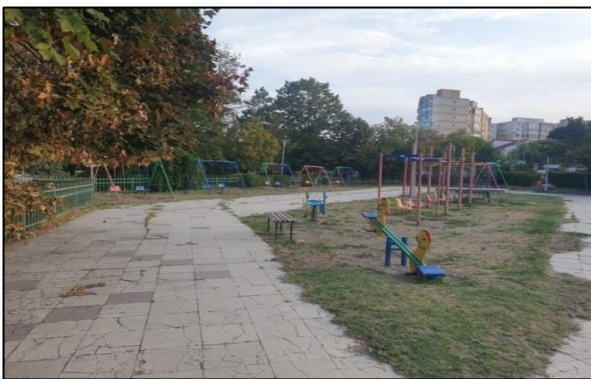


Figure 7. Degraded playground facilities



Figure 8. Unfenced lake posing potential safety hazards



Figure 9. Malfunctioning irrigation system

4. DISCUSSION

The results highlight the significant role that urban parks play in the daily life of residents in the Municipality of Galați, confirming their importance as multifunctional spaces that support both social interaction and individual well-being. The frequent use of parks, mainly for walking and light recreational activities, reflects the need for

accessible green spaces in a city characterized by an industrial profile and intense urban dynamics.

This pattern of use suggests that urban parks function primarily as spaces for relaxation and stress reduction rather than for intensive or specialized activities, which is consistent with findings from other studies on urban green spaces in highly urbanized areas. The dominance of walking as the main activity indicates that residents value parks as safe and pleasant environments for low-impact physical activity. This preference can be explained by the accessibility of walking to all age groups and its compatibility with the existing infrastructure of most parks. At the same time, the relatively lower engagement in activities such as jogging, reading, or cultural events suggests limitations in park design, available facilities or programming, which may reduce the diversity of park use. The results therefore point to a functional imbalance, where parks successfully meet basic recreational needs but are less effective in supporting a wider range of activities. The high perceived importance of urban parks emphasizes their role in maintaining quality of life, particularly in an urban environment affected by pollution, traffic, and limited natural areas. This perception aligns with the ecological and social functions described in the literature, where urban parks contribute to improving air quality, regulating the microclimate, and providing opportunities for social interaction. In the case of Galați, these functions are particularly relevant, given the city's industrial background and the associated environmental pressures. Urban parks act as compensatory spaces that mitigate some of the negative effects of urbanization, reinforcing their strategic importance for sustainable urban development.

Despite their recognized importance, the identified issues related to maintenance, safety, and infrastructure highlight existing management challenges. Field observations reveal that deficiencies such as poorly maintained facilities, inadequate safety measures, and dysfunctional infrastructure directly affect user experience and may limit the full potential of these spaces. For instance, problems related to irrigation systems and the lack of protective fencing indicate shortcomings in park maintenance and planning, which can reduce comfort and increase perceived risk, especially for vulnerable users such as children and elderly people. These aspects underline the gap between the perceived value of parks and their actual condition in certain areas. The demand for more activities, events, and green spaces suggests that residents expect urban parks to evolve beyond their traditional role as passive recreational areas. This expectation reflects broader trends in urban planning, where green spaces are increasingly designed as active social hubs that support community engagement and diverse forms of recreation. In this context, the results indicate that improving park management, diversifying facilities, and organizing regular activities could enhance both the attractiveness and functionality of urban parks in Galați.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while urban parks in the Municipality of Galați fulfill essential ecological and social roles, their effectiveness is strongly influenced by the quality of infrastructure and maintenance. Addressing the identified issues through targeted investments and more efficient management strategies is essential for maximizing the benefits of these spaces and ensuring their long-term contribution to urban sustainability and quality of life.

Despite the relevance of the obtained results, this study presents certain limitations. The relatively small number of respondents and the online distribution of the questionnaire may influence the representativeness of the sample. In addition, the analysis is primarily based on users' perceptions and field observations, without incorporating the perspectives of specialists in urban green space planning and management. In view of future research, the study could be extended by integrating the opinions of experts in urban green space planning and landscape management, as well as by applying the methodology to a larger sample or to other urban areas for comparative analysis.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Urban parks represent essential elements of the urban landscape in the Municipality of Galați, playing a key role in improving environmental quality and supporting residents' well-being. The findings of this study confirm that urban parks are widely used and highly valued by the local population, functioning as accessible spaces for recreation, relaxation, and everyday physical activity in a city characterized by an industrial profile and significant environmental pressures.

The analysis highlights the multifunctional character of urban parks, which contribute not only to recreational needs but also to social interaction and urban ecological balance. Parks serve as inclusive environments that accommodate users from different age groups and support a variety of activities, with an emphasis on low-impact and passive forms of recreation. This underscores their importance as components of urban green infrastructure that enhance the overall quality of life.

At the same time, this study reveals that the effectiveness of urban parks is closely linked to the quality of infrastructure, maintenance, and safety conditions. While these spaces are perceived as important, deficiencies related to outdated facilities, insufficient maintenance, and safety issues limit their full potential. Addressing these aspects is essential for improving user experience and ensuring that urban parks can adequately respond to contemporary urban needs.

Overall, the results indicate that urban parks in the Municipality of Galați have significant potential to support sustainable urban development if integrated into coherent management and planning strategies. Investments in maintenance,

infrastructure modernization, and the diversification of park functions can enhance their role as key elements of the urban environment and strengthen their contribution to environmental sustainability and social well-being.

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