

Estimating the Economic Value of El Goli Park in Tabriz Using the Choice Experiment Method

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, parks are considered one of the most important urban elements to achieve sustainability. Urban parks are public green spaces, which have recreational, cultural, and environmental aspects and provide services to different areas of the city. Not only is El Goli Grand Park of Tabriz one of the important entertainment centers of this city but also one of the important tourist attractions of East Azerbaijan province. Due to the importance and diverse services of this park, this study estimates the economic value of the various functions of El Goli Park in Tabriz using the choice experiment method and mixed logit regression model estimation. The data needed for the research was collected through field studies and completing questionnaires among 310 park visitors and citizens using a simple random sampling method. Based on the results, the total economic value of this park is about 8364.87 billion Rials, among which the recreational and the landscape value of the park account for 30 and 29% of the total value of the park, respectively. The results indicate that the welfare changes of the respondents significantly increase with the growth and improvement in the condition of each of the park functions. Therefore, investing in maintaining and improving the quality of El Goli Park can be an essential step in achieving the goals of urban sustainability and increasing the desirability and well-being of visitors and citizens.

Key words; Choice Experiment, Economic Value, El Goli Park, Urban Sustainability, Tabriz

1. Introduction

Urban parks and green spaces are essential aspects of urban recreational functions and have great strategic importance for improving the living conditions of today's urban communities [1, 2]. Such places in the urban environment improve the social and psychological conditions of urban residents and also have environmental performance such as air purification, wind filtering, reducing noise pollution, and improving microclimatic conditions [3]. Parks and urban green spaces have social, psychological, and environmental advantages that can also be noticed in terms of economics. Due to the recreational, aesthetic, and historical values of urban parks, they add to the city's attractiveness, increase the number of tourist attractions and create employment. Creating a healthy and constructive society is necessary for the continuation of economic progress and development, and this goal is possible if there is adequate coordination between the economic and welfare programs of the society. For this reason, it is necessary to implement environmental projects, develop green space, and create promenades and entertainment centers for spending leisure time in all places that accept urban and industrial civilization [4].

Humans need connection with nature in various fields and as a result, it is necessary to preserve its survival. Some of these needs are related to the human psyche and include categories such as beauty, alleviating violence, creating a peaceful environment, the rigidity of the artificial environment, and thinking. In recent decades in the world and Iran, the environmental economy and the movement

towards a sustainable economy have become widespread and the exploitation attitude towards nature has been limited. Therefore, planners and environmental experts are extremely concerned with valuing the environment and examining people's behavior towards environmental resources [5].

The acceleration of economic development in recent decades has caused excessive pressure on the world's environment and has caused irreparable damage to the nature of the countries. Therefore, the environmental effects of development patterns have gradually become more important and the main factor of economic transformation in rich countries has become environmental issues and their compliance. The new approach of the civilized world is the movement from an "economic environment" to an "environmental economy". It is an approach that emphasizes the need to strengthen and comprehensively support through cooperation and interdisciplinary interaction between natural resources and environment experts and elites in the economic field and politicians in the political field. It is also considered among the most essential tools for ensuring sustainable development, including urban sustainability experts. The economic valuation of environmental resources leads to discovering the demand curves of environmental goods and services and determining the value that humans place on the environment. The accurate economic analysis and evaluation of these resources is the basic condition for policy-makers and planners to make a change in the destructive use of environmental resources[6].

Experts in environmental economics emphasize that natural systems are multi-tasking blessings and their functions and valuable economic services for human life can be summarized in four cases:

- 1- They are the source of natural resources (renewable and non-renewable resources).
- 2- They produce a set of natural goods (views and amenities).
- 3- They are the capacity to absorb waste.
- 4- They are a system to support life [5 and 7].

Urban parks are part of valuable natural resources for urban communities, and the last three mentioned functions are part of the benefits of these valuable natural resources for the residents of urban areas. These parks are geographically within the cities and have recreational, entertaining, cultural, and environmental aspects and are divided into 4 groups: urban parks at the neighborhood scale, urban parks at the street scale, urban parks at the district scale, and urban park at the region scale[5 and 7].

In today's urban world, all kinds of air and noise pollution threaten the physical and mental health of citizens but street parks have a role in preventing this problem. Currently, there are 134 parks in Tabriz, including 45 neighborhood parks, 53 street parks, 25 district parks, 7 regional parks, and 4 urban parks. According to the latest statistics, the area of green space in this city is 8,548 square kilometers, which means that the per capita of green space for the citizens of Tabriz is 5.6 square meters. In addition, the area of the parks of this city is 2,595 square kilometers, and for this reason, the per capita of the park for the citizens of Tabriz is 2.6 square meters. The per capita amount of green space in the country is between 7 and 12 square meters, and in other parts of the world between 15 and 25 square meters. According to statistics, Tabriz is the second city in the country in terms of the lack of green space, which causes an increase in air pollution and a decrease in the required oxygen, and as a result, the spread of various respiratory diseases. The ancient city of Tabriz, which was known as the city garden in the not-so-distant past, is now facing the challenge of a lack of green spaces and parks. [5]. It is necessary to do such studies due to the importance of the expansion of parks and the high value of city park services for increasing the vitality and health of citizens. Like any other environmental resource, urban parks are priceless, and the economic valuation of these resources will be an important step in correcting the attitude of people and planners toward these resources. Environmental managers can use the results of such research in planning and decision-making to find the best behavior for these resources. In this regard, the present study estimates the

economic value of the functions of El Goli Grand Park, which is one of the most valuable environmental treasures and urban attractions of Tabriz.

El Goli Park or Shah Goli Park is one of the most beautiful tourist attractions and recreational areas of Tabriz, which is located in the southeast of the city and 7 km from the city center. It was built during the time of Aq Quyunluha with an area of 70 hectares. Shah Goli Big Garden, known as El Goli after the revolution, has a lake with an area of 54,675 square meters and a depth of 12 meters, and a capacity of 720,000 cubic meters of water. In the center of this Tabriz park, a magnificent octagonal Kolah Ferangi mansion was built on 2 floors, which is used as a reception hall and is visible as a peninsula. This garden and its beautiful building have been registered as national history works in 1999.

In recent years, many studies have addressed the issue of valuing and estimating willingness to pay for environmental attractions, including parks. Amir Najad has estimated the protection value of Golestan National Park by using the users' willingness to pay. The results show that every household is willing to allocate 19.2 dollars of their income annually for the protection of this park. The variables such as income, education, and age of the respondent had a significant effect on this willingness to pay [8]. Haq Jo et al. [5] investigated the factors affecting the willingness to pay for neighborhood parks in Tabriz using the contingent valuation method and the Tobit model. They concluded that 69% of users are willing to pay an amount for using the facilities of these parks, and the average monthly willingness of each household to pay for these parks is 12,520 rials (about \$1.2). The results of the estimation of the Tobit model show that factors such as household income level, number of household members, gender, satisfaction with the social security of the park, and marriage of individuals have a positive and significant relationship and the variable of education level has a negative and significant relationship with the willingness of individuals to pay for the neighborhood parks. Haq Jo et al. [9] state that the total value of Arasbaran forests is about 4956 billion Rials, which includes information and habitat functions with 43% and production functions with 0.2% of the values of Arasbaran forests. In addition, non-use value at 34% and regulatory functions at 21% have the next ranks in the total value of forests. The results show a positive and significant relationship between the variables of education level, income, the index of people's views towards forests, and the number of annual visits of people with the willingness to pay for them. They also estimated the total economic value of Arasbaran forests using the choice experiment. Songram's study [10] in Thailand estimated the protection value of Marine National Park using the contingent valuation method and probit model. The results show that 79% of the studied people were willing to pay an amount for the protection of this park and each household is willing to pay 23 dollars of their income for this purpose. According to the results of model estimation, national and environmental motivations, and people's education level are influential factors in people's willingness to pay for the protection of this park. In another study, Haqjo et al. [11] estimated the total economic value of Arasbaran forests based on the contingent ranking approach. The data needed for the study were collected through field studies and completing questionnaires among 334 visitors and citizens of ten cities from the three provinces of East Azarbaijan, West Azarbaijan, and Ardabil with a multi-stage cluster sampling method. According to the selective approach, the ordinal-rank logit model is used in the research. The results of the study showed that the information and habitat functions account for the most at 71% and the production functions with less than 0.5% account for the lowest part of the values of Arasbaran forests. In addition, regulatory functions with 14.5%, and non-use value with 14% have the next ranks in the total value of forests. The issue of valuing urban parks in the planning and sustainable development of metropolises and Eel Goli Park is of great importance. Therefore, this study estimates the economic value of El Goli Park in Tabriz using the choice experiment approach.

2- Materials And Methods

Economic value as an instrumental value is related to maximizing human utility. This value is humanistic, which means that it is based on human beings and their preferences. It is possible to use market methods when there is a direct market for environmental goods and services. It is often not possible to use these methods due to the lack of a suitable market for many environmental functions. One of the best methods of estimating non-market services is the expressed preferences method [9].

The use of expressed preference methods has developed a lot in recent decades. These methods try to measure the values of willingness to pay directly. This preference approach depends on data obtained through direct questioning of respondents and their preferences. These methods include several valuation techniques, and their common feature is direct questioning of people about their possible choices in a hypothetical market. This approach includes contingent valuation methods and multi-attribute valuation methods such as choice experiments and contingent ranking. In this study, the choice experiment method is used. In this approach, the respondent is asked to choose among the different options of each series according to his preferences. For this reason, choice experiment data provides more information than other methods, and it is also more complicated than other methods. The choice experiment can create estimates of compatibility with well-being provided that the status quo option is one of the options in the series of choices so that the respondent can choose it if he is not interested in alternative methods [9, 11 and 12]. The implicit price of each attribute is the final rate of substitution between non-monetary and monetary attributes and can be calculated from the ratio of the non-monetary attribute coefficient to the monetary coefficient [12]:

$$M \text{ arginal WTP} = - \left[\frac{\beta_{\text{ non - monetary}}}{\beta_{\text{ monetary}}} \right] \tag{1}$$

The first and most important step in the multi-attribute evaluation, including the choice experiment, is designing the choice cards. For this purpose, the important characteristics of the studied source and the levels of each characteristic should be identified, and then according to these characteristics, experiment cards and questionnaires should be designed. The selected characteristics are practically selected by reviewing previous studies and interviewing a group of experts (target group). It should be noted that the price paid for the source under investigation is one of the investigated characteristics through which it is possible to estimate the willingness to pay. In addition, the levels of each attribute and their number are determined in exploratory studies, literature reviews, and interviews with the target group. The theory of statistical design is used to combine the levels and form suitable scenarios to present to the respondents. "Complete factorial design" is one of the methods used in this stage. Alternative methods such as "fractional factorial design" are also used due to the formation of a large number of compounds in this design, in which the number of possible compounds is greatly reduced. Table 1 shows the selected attributes in the field of valuing the services of El Goli Park in Tabriz. As observed, the functions of the park are divided into 5 characteristics of 3 levels. SAS 9.2 software was used to design choice cards. In this regard, 12 alternatives and 6 choice series were determined, which were placed in 2 blocks of three. Each choice series includes two conditions of relative and desired improvement of the environmental conditions and one option of the current situation. All levels have features that have been designed and provided to the respondents in accordance with the consultation with experts and park development plans.

Table 1- Features and functions of El-Goli Park and the studied levels

Property	The recreational	The view of the park (the aesthetic value	The function of reducing	The presence of sports facilities	The proposed
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	function of the park	of the park)	pollution	and infrastructure	price (Rials)
Levels	Critical condition	Critical condition	Critical condition	Critical condition	50,000
	Relative recovery	Relative recovery	Relative recovery	Relative recovery	100,000
	Desired state	Desired state	Desired state	Desired state	200,000

Discrete models - random utility

In classical microeconomics, the individual's choice is based on maximizing utility. This means that a person chooses the most beneficial option for him. In discrete models, this proposition is also used to determine people's choices. In this way that a utility function is assigned to each person and each option. A part of this utility function is clear for the researcher, which means that he can observe some of the influencing and constructive factors of a person's utility and explain the role of those factors. Another part of the factors involved in the person's choice is covered by the researcher and he cannot include them in his study. This article is the basis of the random utility theory presented by McFadden (1974) [9 and 13]. Therefore, the utility function of the n_{th} person for choosing the i_{th} option will have two components as follows:

$$U_{ni} = V_{ni} + \epsilon_{ni} \tag{2}$$

where the observable or non-random part is usually expressed as a linear function of explanatory variables and the random component is a random variable with a random distribution. Now, considering this random utility, when does a person choose option i ? A person chooses option i when the utility of choosing this option is greater than the utility of choosing other options, that is:

$$U_{ni} > U_{nj} \forall i \neq j \tag{3}$$

The above expression will be as follows if U_{ni} is rewritten according to the expression [4-6]:

$$V_{ni} + \epsilon_{ni} > V_{nj} + \epsilon_{nj} \forall i \neq j \tag{4}$$

U is a random variable, so we should talk about the probability of the above equality. That is, with what probability will the utility of option i be more than the other options? In other words, with what probability will the person choose option i ?

$$\begin{aligned} P_{ni} &= \text{prob}(U_{ni} > U_{nj} \forall i \neq j) = \text{prob}(V_{ni} + \epsilon_{ni} > V_{nj} + \epsilon_{nj} \forall i \neq j) \\ &= \text{prob}(\epsilon_{nj} - \epsilon_{ni} < V_{ni} - V_{nj} \forall i \neq j) \end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

The term $\epsilon_{nj} - \epsilon_{ni}$ is a random variable with a distribution function that is represented by $f(.)$ and the term $V_{nj} - V_{ni}$ is a certain value. In this case, the probability of selecting option i will be as follows:

$$P_{ni} = \int I(\epsilon_{nj} - \epsilon_{ni} < V_{ni} - V_{nj}) f(\epsilon_n) d\epsilon_n \tag{6}$$

The function $I(.)$ will have a value of one when the expression inside the parenthesis is true, and have a value of zero otherwise.

Solving the above integral is the main issue to obtain the probability of choosing the i -th option. The type of distribution function $f(\epsilon_n)$ should be known to solve this integral. The types of discrete models are different due to the different types of the distribution function ϵ and their covariance. For

example, the logit model will be normal if ε has a limit value distribution of type one and the zero covariance be between ε_{ni} . This model is the simplest discrete model and the zero covariance of the random component limits the use of this model in most problems. The following expressions are true for the simple logit model:

$$\begin{aligned}
 f(\varepsilon_{ni}) &= e^{-\varepsilon_{ni}} e^{-e^{\varepsilon_{ni}}} \\
 Cov(\varepsilon_{mi}, \varepsilon_{ni}) &= 0 \\
 Cov(\varepsilon_{ni}, \varepsilon_{nj}) &= 0
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{7}$$

The probability of choosing option i is obtained by placing the above relation in relation 7.

$$P_{ni} = \frac{e^{V_{ni}}}{\sum_j e^{V_{nj}}} = \frac{e^{\beta'X_{ni}}}{\sum_j e^{\beta'_j X_{nj}}}
 \tag{8}$$

in which V_{ni} is the observable or non-random part of random utility. The coefficients β'_i related to society are not known and should be estimated. The estimation method is based on the maximum likelihood. In this case, the logarithm of the joint probability function is first calculated using sample data, and then coefficients are obtained that maximize the joint probability function [9 and 13].

In the choice experiment models, the main assumption is using McFadden's conditional logit model, but the important point in explaining the conditional logit model is that the selection from the choice sets should follow the feature of independence of irrelevant alternatives (assumption IIA). This feature indicates that the relative probabilities of two options are not affected by the introduction or removal of other options. If the conditional logit model is estimated without considering this assumption, skewed estimates and incorrect predictions will be provided. Various statistical tests can be used to test the IIA hypothesis, among which the extended test by Hausman and McFadden (1984) has been widely used. In case of violation of the mentioned assumption that was also violated in the present study, the mixed logit model is used as one of the alternative models.

This study's statistical population includes 310 visitors of El-Goli Park and also citizens of Tabriz who were selected by simple random sampling method. It should be noted that the formula introduced by Orme (1998) was used to determine the number of sample members [14]. Finally, the Stata 12.00 software was used for data analysis and model estimation. The results of the study are reported below.

Results And Discussion

The summary of the statistical characteristics of some important variables of the study is shown in Table 2. It can be seen that the majority of the sample members are men with an average income of about 91,215 thousand rials and an average age of 45.4 years, who have an average visit of about 2 times a year. The index of people's view of El Goli Park measures the importance of this park in people's lives with 10 questions. Each question has been evaluated with answers from completely important (coded 5) to completely unimportant (coded 1). The average of this variable shows the relative importance of this park from the respondents' view. The respondent's education level variable is coded from 1 (illiterate) to 8 (doctorate). The average value of this variable indicates the level of university education among the majority of the sample members.

Table 2- Summary of some statistical characteristics of the studied population

Variable name	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
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Respondent's income (unit: thousand rials)	91215	29000	220000	1112.1
Age (unit: years)	45.4	25	74	6.52
Gender (1=male, 0=female)	0.63	0	1	0.542
Education level	6.1	4	8	1.3
Number of dependent members	3.22	1	6	1.1
Number of views	2.1	1	10	3.11
The index of respondents' opinions towards El Goli Park	4.1	2	5	0.59

As previously mentioned, the appropriate and default regression model in the choice experiment method is the conditional logit model. Therefore, the conditional logit model was initially used to estimate the value of the functions of El Goli Park, The Hausman test results show the rejection of the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives. As a result, alternative models of the conditional logit model, such as the mixed logit model, are used in the following. Table 3 shows the estimation results of the final mixed logit model for the features and functions of El Goli Park. The model with mutual effects was also estimated to infer the impact of individual influencing variables on people's willingness to pay, and the estimation results of both models can be seen in the table. The results of the table show that all levels of the park's functions have a positive sign and, as expected, the price feature has a negative sign (in the hybrid model, the result of its effects is negative). In addition, desired levels have higher utility compared to the relative improvement levels of each feature and function of the coefficients. The chi-square of wald with significance at 1% level shows the overall significance of the regression. The significance of the chi-square of the likelihood-ratio test (with a value of 241.8) at the 1% level also shows the superiority of the hybrid model over the standard model.

Table 3-Summary of the estimation results of the final mixed logit model of the functions of El Goli Park in Tabriz

Variable	Standard Model		The model with interaction effects	
	The coefficient value	standard deviation	The coefficient value	standard deviation
Width from the origin	2.4*	0.09	-0.59***	0.13
Special constant	1.62***	0.11	0.91***	0.11
Price	-0.00024***	0.0011	-0.000041***	0.0011
The relative improvement of the recreational function of the park	0.410 **	0.049	0.1644***	0.112
The optimal level of the recreational function of the park	0.284***	0.110	0.2304***	0.852
The relative improvement of the landscape of the park (aesthetic value of the park)	0.210**	0.067	0.1582***	0.092

The desired level of park landscape (aesthetic value of the park)	0.380***	0.033	0.1972***	0.052
The relative improvement of pollution reduction function	0.129***	0.038	0.1193**	0.066
The optimal level of pollution reduction function	0.361**	0.050	0.1459***	0.079
The relative improvement of sports facilities	0.111***	0.049	0.0877***	0.096
The optimal level of sports facilities	0.321**	0.068	0.1272***	0.076
Price × level of education	-	-	0.0042***	0.003
Price x income	-	-	0.00000006***	0.00000005
Price × index of the opinion of people related to Eel Goli Park	-	-	0.00011***	0.000029
Price × number of annual visits	-	-	0.00048***	0.000034
Log-likelihood: -1632.42 Wald Chi2 : 392.21***			Log-likelihood: -1825.13 Wald Chi2 : 581.42***	

*, **, ***: indicates significance at 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively.

As expected, the results of the table show that the relative improvement and desired state in all the features of El Goli Park positively affect people's willingness to pay. The alternative special constant is one of the measurable variables in the choice experiment and it indicates choosing each of the two improvement options (relative improvement or the desired states in the park situation), compared to the option of the existing situation by the respondent. The positive and significant effect of the special constant in both models shows that the implementation of protection plans, apart from their related features, significantly increases the utility of people. In this case, the respondents are willing to pay an amount for the improvement of the existing condition of the park. Based on the model with mutual effects, the variables of education level, people's income, people's positive view of El Goli Park, and the number of people's annual visits to the park also show positively affect people's willingness to pay for the improvement and maintenance of El Goli Park.

Using equation 1, the willingness to pay the average individual monthly, annual, and general (considering the total population of the province about 4640000) for each of the features and functions of El Goli Park is shown in Table 4. As observed the value of the recreational function and the value of the sports facilities of the park are the most important and the least important features, respectively.

Table 4- The results of extracting and ranking people's willingness to pay for the features and functions of El Goli Park using the choice experiment test method.

Features and levels	The relative improvement of the park's recreational	Desired level of the park's recreational function	The relative improvement of the park's landscape	The desired level of landscape	The relative improvement of pollution reduction function	The optimal level of pollution reduction performance	The relative improvement of sports facilities	The optimal level of sports facilities
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	function							es
Willingness to make individual monthly payments (ten rials)	4011*	5620	3890	4812	2910	3560	2140	3104
Willingness to make individual annual payments (10 rials)	48132	67440	46680	57744	34920	42720	25680	37248
Willingness to pay overall based on the statistical population (ten billion Rials)	223.291	312.922	216.595	267.932	162.028	198.220	119.155	172.831
Average two-level annual WTP (10 billion Rials)	268.107		242.263		180.124		145.993	
The share of each	32		29		21.5		17.5	

function				
Rating of features	1	2	3	4

* All willingness to pay is located in banks or confidence coefficients calculated by the Krinsky method.

Based on the results, the total economic value of El Goli Park in Tabriz is about 8364.87 billion Rials, which only includes provincial visitors. It should be noted that the value of the regulatory functions of the park was not calculated in this study. In addition, the results of the table show that two recreational functions (32%) and the natural landscape of the park or the aesthetic value (29%) are the most important functions of the park for the respondents. On the other hand, sports facilities were the least important function for the respondents with about 17.5%.

4 - Conclusion

One of the most important elements of a sustainable city is green spaces and urban parks. In recent decades, the environmental economy and the movement towards a sustainable economy have become widespread in the world and Iran, and the exploitation attitude towards nature has been limited. Therefore, urban environment planners and experts pay much attention to valuing the environment and investigating people's behavior towards environmental resources. El Goli Park has always been one of the most valuable recreational centers and green spaces in Tabriz. Therefore, the present study estimates the economic value of this park with the multi-attribute approach of the choice experiment. Parks are public services, therefore, their economic valuation is a significant step for urban planners to make correct policies and implement conservation programs.

According to the results, most of the respondents are willing to pay an amount for the implementation of any type of plan for its protection, regardless of the conditions and characteristics of the improvement of each option regarding the functions of the park. This issue indicates the existence of the potential capital of people's aid to protect and create any kind of improvement in this park, which makes the need for proper planning to extract these financial resources even more obvious.

On the other hand, the prioritization of the functions and values of the park shows that the recreational value and the value of the park landscape are among the most important functions of the park. This event can be a way for planners to prioritize the improvement of the park's environmental conditions. The improvement of recreational conditions and tourism and commuting facilities, in addition to increasing tourism income and spending these earnings to invest in the park, can take an important step to increase the utility of consumers. A similar result can be expressed for the improvement of the pollution reduction function and sports facilities of the park.

According to the positive and significant relationship between the income variable and people's willingness to pay, improving people's income conditions can help improve the urban environment. In this regard, appropriate policies and job creation programs with policies to support urban green space programs can improve the conditions of urban parks.

The variables of the number of annual visits and the level of education of people showed a positive relationship with the respondents' willingness to pay. Therefore, it is suggested to increase tourism facilities and create educational and research facilities for visitors.

There is a positive relationship between the attitude index towards El Goli Park and people's willingness to pay. Therefore, improving the level of people's awareness of the many features of this park and the activities of environmental non-governmental organizations is aimed at increasing the awareness of people in the community about green spaces and the urban environment. It is considered

to be an effective factor in increasing the awareness of society and the positive view of the people of the society and finally the willingness of people to pay for urban parks.

Finally, the high and significant value obtained for El Goli Park (more than 8364 billion Rials per year) shows the importance of this urban environmental treasure. In this regard, it is necessary to increase investment, increase the attention and planning of officials and allocate a budget to preserve and improve the status of this valuable resource of the urban environment.

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