

**INFLUENCE OF THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS  
OF URBAN OPEN SPACES ON RESIDENTS  
PERCEPTION AND USAGE: A CASE OF 'OLD TOWN'  
MOMBASA**

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**Influence of the Physical Characteristics of Urban  
Open Spaces on Residents Perception and Usage:  
A Case of 'Old Town' Mombasa.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

'Old Town' Mombasa is a densely built up historic area with inadequate public open spaces for recreation. Nevertheless, even the few existing open spaces are profoundly underutilized by the residents for recreational purposes. This discrepancy is what prompted the researcher to establish whether the physical characteristics of the open spaces have any influence on the residents' perception and their usage. The study is based on multiple-methods approach that entailed observation, interview, archival information and measurements in Old Town Mombasa. First the physical characteristics of the sampled open spaces and the residents' perception of the same were established. Then the analysis of the results through discussion established that there is a relationship between the physical characteristics and residents' perception. Consequently, the residents' perception of the physical characteristics influences the usage of these open spaces. The study findings indicate that the residents prefer: Large open spaces with low sense of enclosure; soft as opposed to hard spaces; perforated edges with complex built forms and interesting buildings around the open spaces; natural and varied floorscapes; diverse and well maintained soft landscaping; variety of urban furniture with sheltered benches; minimal vehicular traffic and parking; and secure and serene atmosphere. The study concludes that the findings can be used to regenerate the public open spaces into vibrant appealing sustainable developments while at the same time discourage illicit use. The recommendations include: enactment of legislation to regulate redevelopment of public open spaces; develop urban design policy that will guide preparation of development plans for all urban public open spaces; and involvement of all stakeholders in the regeneration of public open spaces. The study can be taken to be a model and tools based on community's perception that can be used to revitalise urban historic open areas to meet the residents' recreational needs.