

# Redefining the Idea of a Park

**LEAF India and MSA Collaboration**

*Parktopia- Group 22*



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## 0.0 Intent and Aims

### *Agenda*

The goal of this project is to critically redefine the idea of a park being an open void where human activity occurs, being stamped in areas of densely packed buildings. Parks in the current situation, are defined to mean a piece of land on which there are no buildings; plants and flower beds decorate them for aesthetic purposes. The existing fabric of parks follows a single template that if followed worldwide within which slight variations occur. The response to this notion of a park is to be critically analysed and de-constructed in relation to the public inhabiting the urban area.

What is the role of a park in its response to urbanity and more importantly toward the discourse of identity for the park itself and its users specific to geography, culture and context. A case study analysis will be undertaken involving existing parks and tested according to these categories. The outcome of the exercise and project will be highlighting the constituents of a park which responds to a typology with its focus on the socio-cultural, ecological, and economic roles the space invigorates.

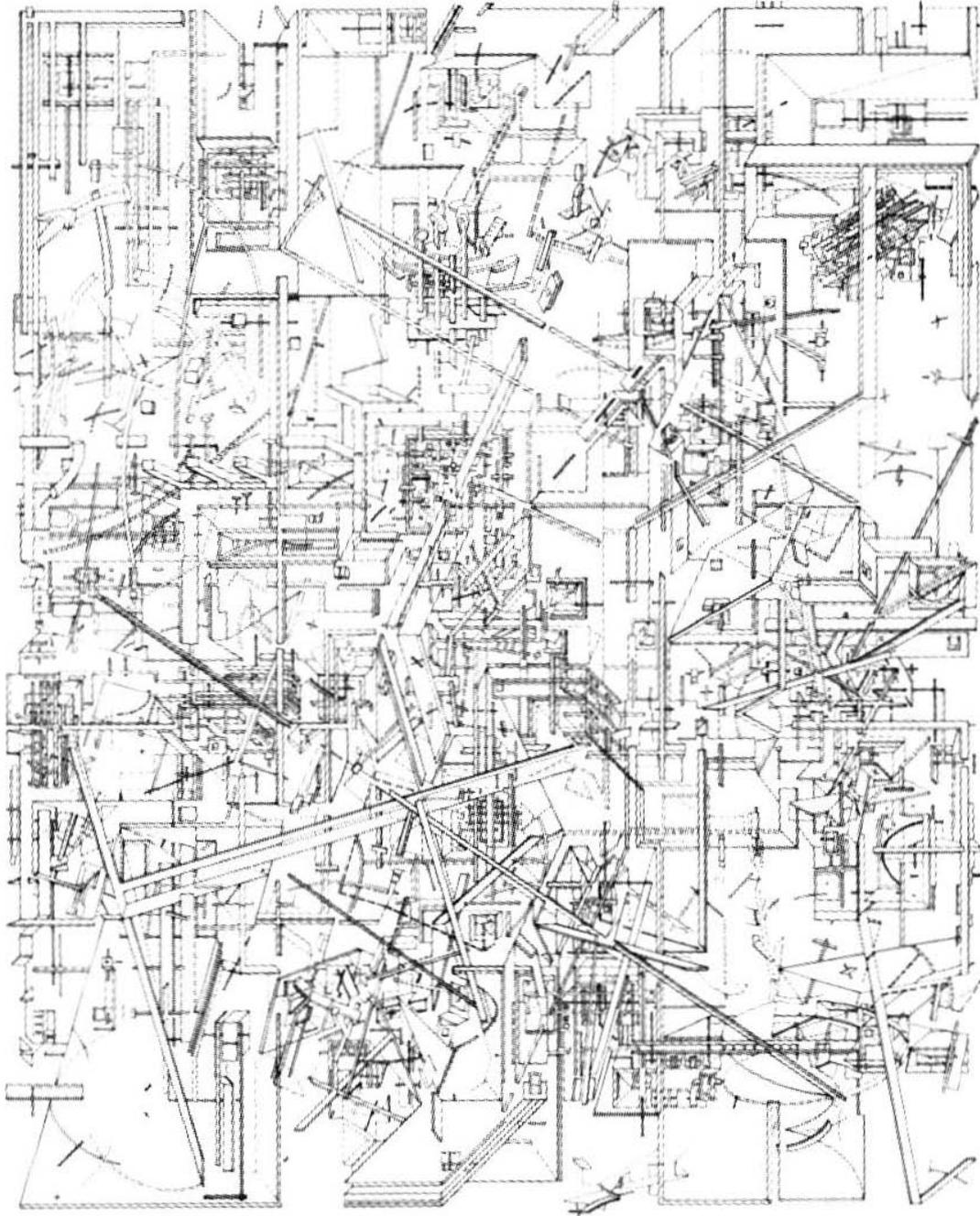
To inform park design and translate the typology to user relation – enabled through memory. It can invoke memories of the historical, social, cultural representation of a place brought into park design. For example, Mumbai is a maritime city – how does a park situated in Mumbai relate to its historical, and cultural reference?

Study on the existing literature between the concepts of spatiality and memory will be explored and commented on. However, existing literature is limited to scientific methods and processes. As each individual might be invoked by different memories through different spatial experiences and symbols, we use abstraction as a method with different sources such as songs, films to study the idea of parks and their representation in different cultures. Achieved by a number of students and interviews, we aim to see if there are similarities or differences between spatial memories of a park in various cultures through these findings.

Results are then diagrammed in an abstract manner using the same base for songs and films. To help with visualisation and representation we involve guest speakers such as Ray Lucas and Pandora Layton to capture this aspect of background study. The evident goal of this exercise is to highlight the uniqueness of the problem and cannot be approached by a one size fits all mentality. However, we aim to encapsulate the similarities and differences from interviews, abstractions and can act as one of the drivers for park design, in addition to existing literature of memory in architecture.

## 1.1 Introduction

*Expressionism*



*Daniel Libeskind Micromega Abstract Drawing*

**D**aniel Libeskind's image on top shows how he used abstraction as a way to communicate ideas. He successfully achieved this through expressing this with deconstruction. This example shows how we aim to deconstruct the park typology.

## *German Expressionism*

German Expressionism was an early twentieth century German Art Movement that emphasized the artist's inner feelings or ideas over-replicating reality, and was characterised by simplified shapes, bright colours and gestural marks or brush strokes. Artist Pandora Layton uses these techniques in her work, she fragments her paintings to replicate a stain glass window, which represents the historical value of the subject.

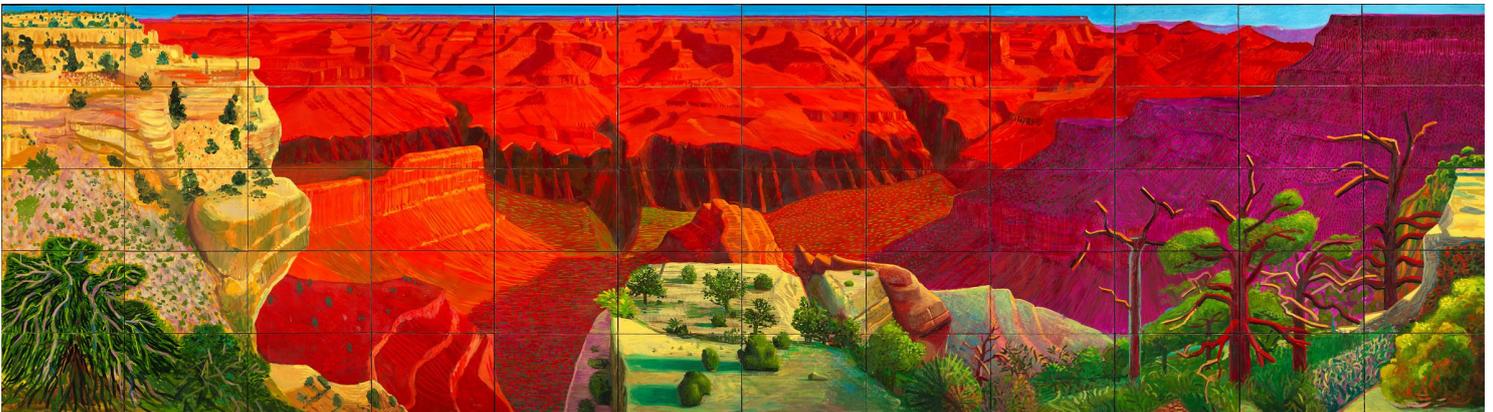


*Pandora Layton- King of the Park*



*August Mack- Landscape in Tegernsee*

David Hockney is an example of an expressionist artist who attempts to capture the grandeur of nature. He paints on multiple canvases to create extremely large works of art, and uses multiple perspectives to attempt to replicate the overpowering feeling of nature



*David Hockney's painting of the Grand Canyon*

## 1.0 Abstract ways of thinking

### 1.2 Abstract tasks

#### *Music*

The music task aimed to produce abstract images that were influenced by a song chosen by everyone individually. The students were asked to choose a song which they could relate to nature, and then draw how they felt when listening to it.



Figure 1- Honey by Raveena



Figure 2- River Man by Nilk Drake

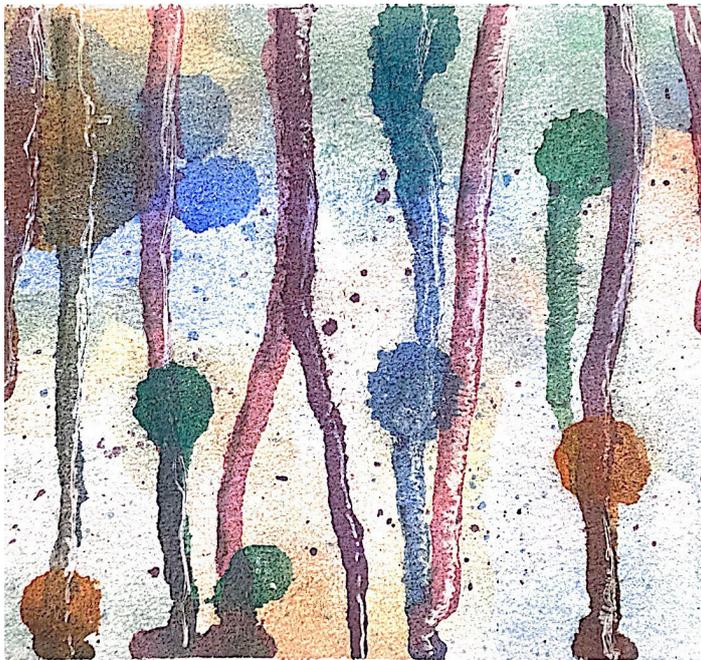


Figure 3- In Your Arms by Saib



Figure 4- Prin parcul argintat de luna by Doina Ganescu

This created a variety of different and interesting abstractions in which you can visibly see the emotions which the individual can feel when listening to their song.

*Fictive Literature*

There was a mixture of poetry and novels included in the selection of fictive literature. The responses reflect the emotional style of the writing, we can see the reflections between dark and light, that represent the notion that a park allows reflection.



Figure 5- *A Walk in the Park* by Travis Elborough

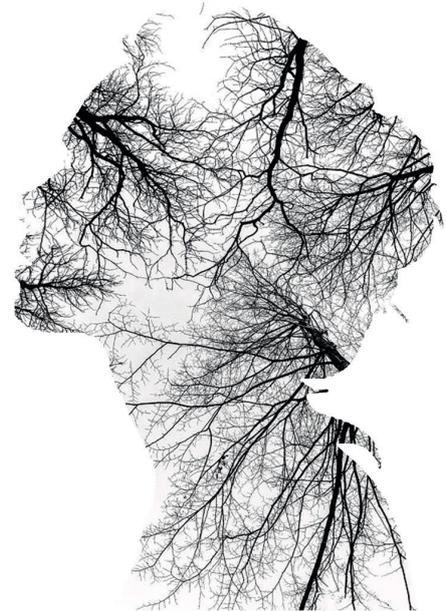


Figure 6- *Sudenmorsian* by Aino Kallas

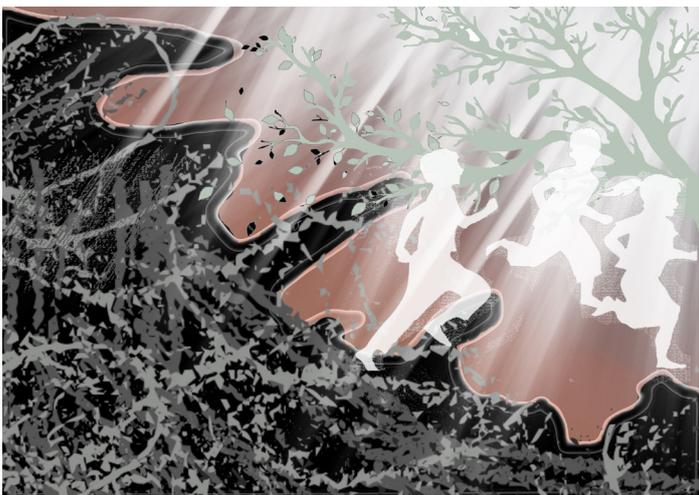


Figure 7- *In the Park* by John Koethe



Figure 8- *The Darkling Thrush* by Thomas Hardy

The final images all contrast in their responses, with an underlying theme of parks being positive catalysts for emotive reflection.

## 1.0 Abstract ways of thinking

### 1.2 Abstract tasks

#### *Social Media*

This task aimed to discover themes of how parks are used within social media, whether tied to local culture or a worldwide trend.

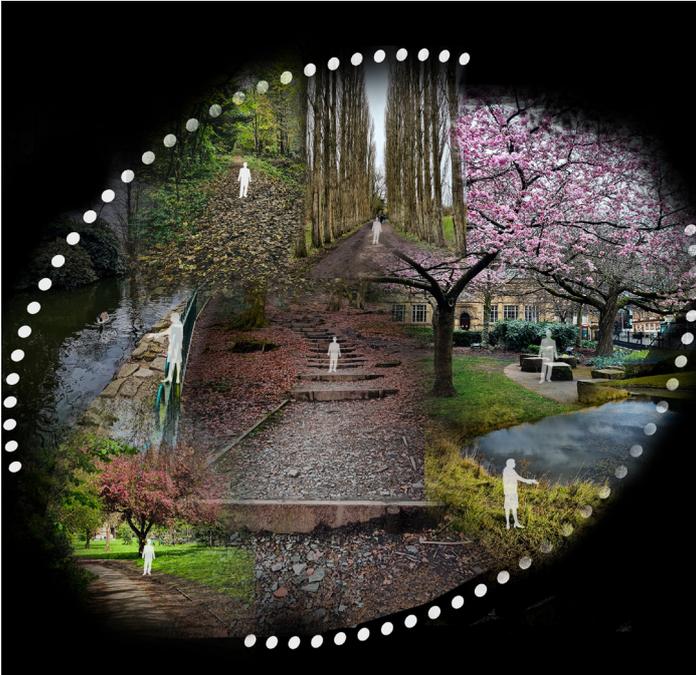


Figure 9

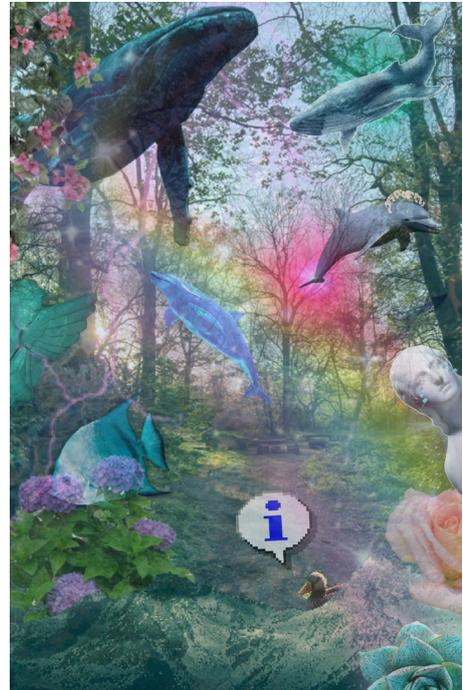


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

The students researched this, and found these trends to then discuss how to appropriately represent and capture them. Again, any medium was allowed and this resulted in successful abstractions of the way social media uses parks.

*Films*

After a lecture from Ray Lucas on how to analyse and understand films, we searched for films from our different cultures that include parks to see how they are used.

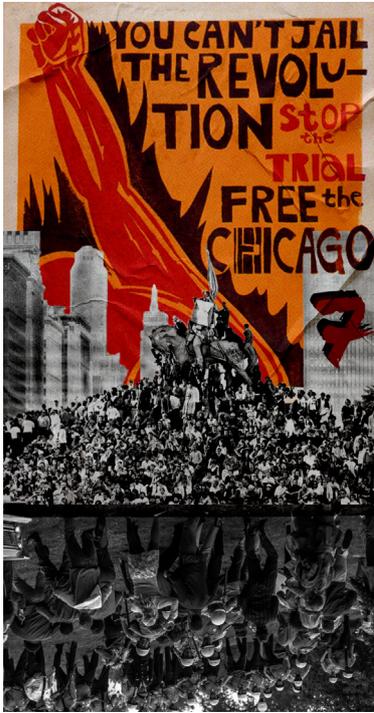


Figure 13- *The Chicago 7*

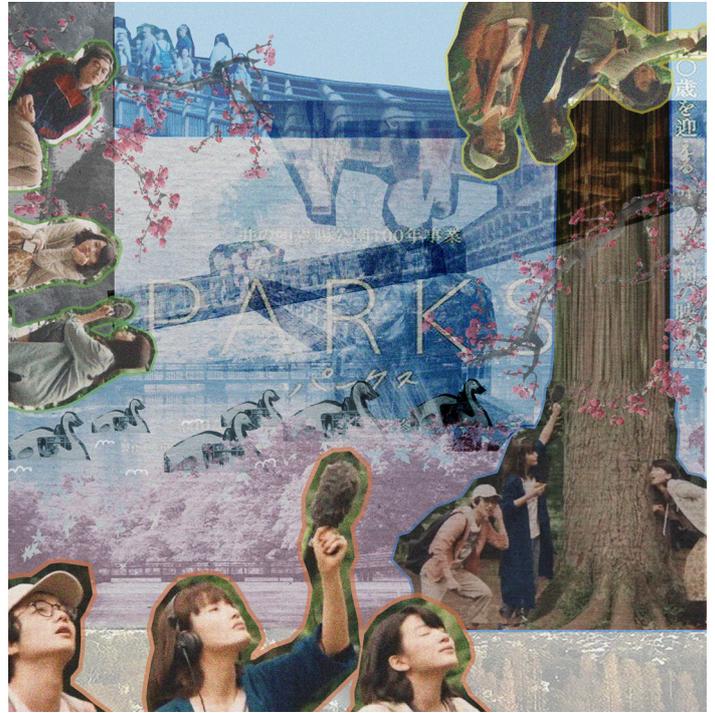


Figure 14- *Parks*

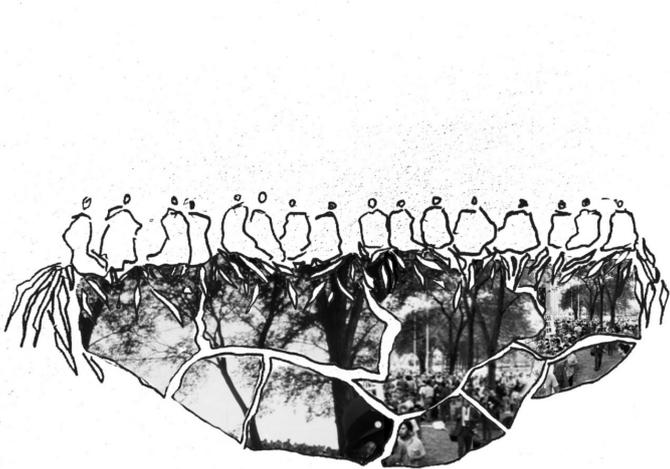


Figure 15- *The Chicago 7*



Figure 16- *Tom of Finland*

This was tough to find at first but once we did, the analysis was strong finding how varied its representation can be.

## 1.0 Abstract ways of thinking

### 1.2 Abstract tasks

#### *Park Visit*

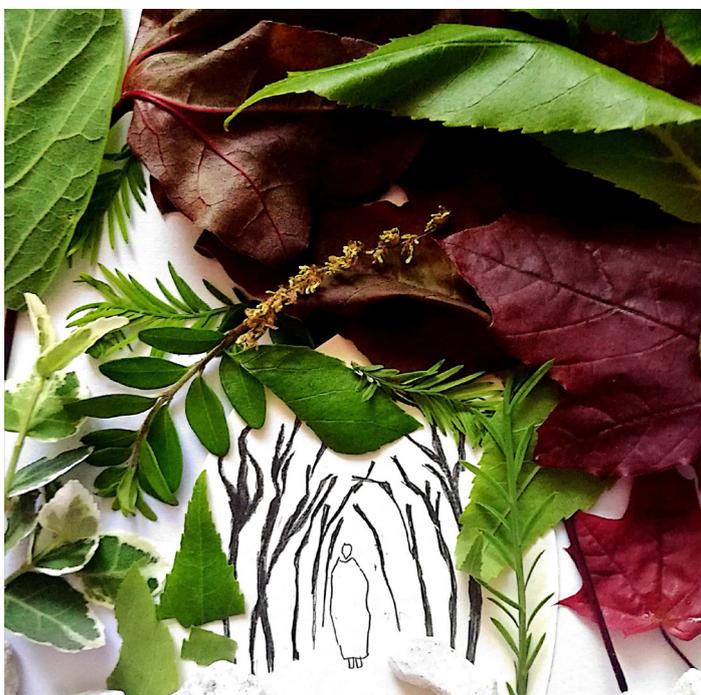
When analysing parks, it is important to have visits, and understand the impact they have whilst you're in that specific environment.



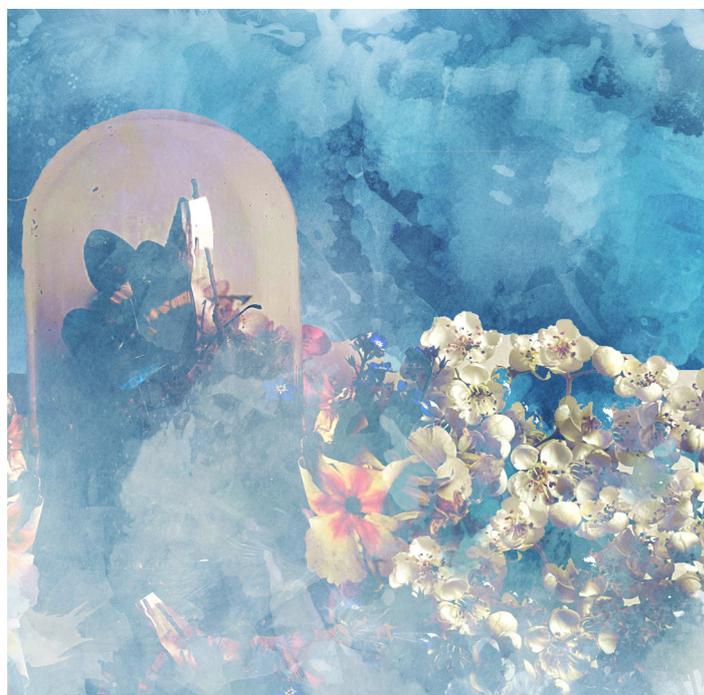
*Figure 17*



*Figure 18*



*Figure 19*



*Figure 20*

For this task, the students were asked to visit a local park, or green space, and take photos and collect artefacts which they felt represented their visit to that space. They were then able to create abstract images through any medium, such as paintings, pictures or sketches, using their artefacts to portray how they felt when visiting their park.

*Why does this matter to the Park?*

These studies are important, as each category represents responses to parks in different media or students' personal reactions to parks. Finding the common themes helps to uncover societies reaction to parks, and how they have become a standardised typology across the world.



*Figure 21*



*Figure 22*



*Figure 23*



*Figure 24*

Films do not usually show parks as a peaceful space, and music and literature celebrate the peace of a park. Social media has represented parks online as an uninteresting backdrop. Can we conclude the park typology is not considered in popular culture, and therefore needs to be re-defined to matter in society?

## 2.1 Interviews

### Abstractions

These abstractions are responses to some of the data and observations collected in interviews. The interviews have shown how people want to use parks in various ways that are sometimes not suitable.

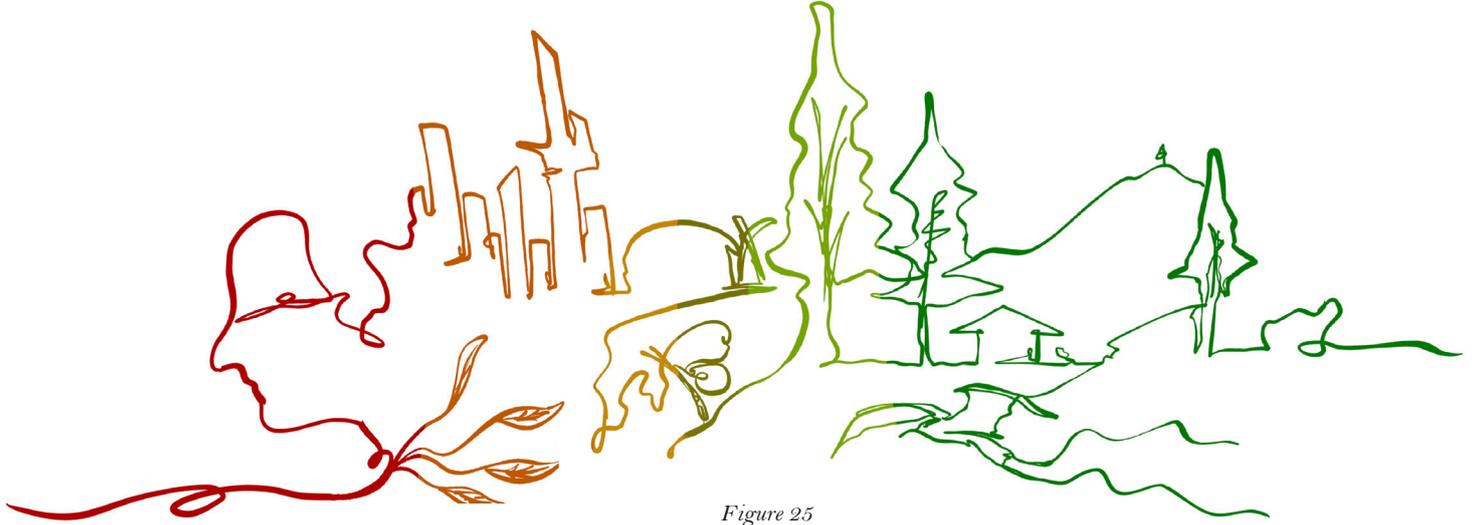


Figure 25

Amongst all the descriptive words people used for parks, 33% of them are emotional responses and 67% are physical. This suggests that people use parks mostly for their physical benefits such as the trees, greenery and water features.



Figure 26

Everyone agreed nature is important, or very important in parks, stating their perfect park includes a variety of plant life, dense gardens, plenty of greenery, and open grassy fields. Whereas only 21% of people believe water is an important feature in parks.



Figure 28

39% of the people interviewed declared going to the park alone as unlikely. Despite that, 52% of them conceptualize their ideal park as a space able to accommodate generally solitary activities (such as exercise). This statistic proves the existence of a dissatisfaction with the current design of parks and the way it relates to individuals as well as groups.



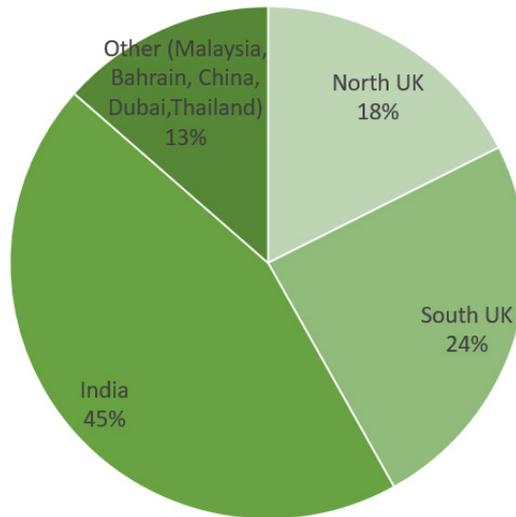
Figure 27

In the UK, 93% of the people are likely to go to a green public space to meet friends, with 71% of those being from denser areas, such as cities, stated that they would like a better connection with nature when visiting parks.

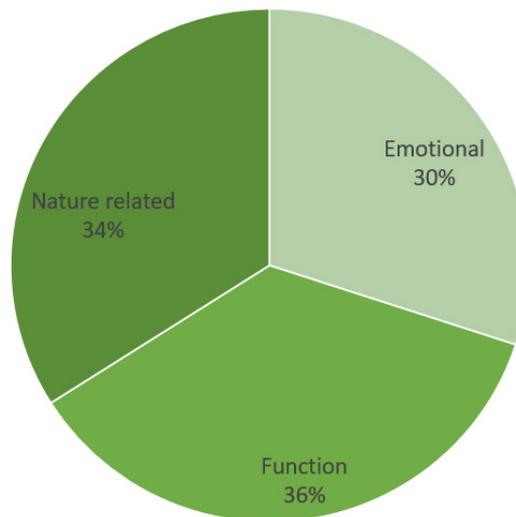
*Data*

We conducted an online survey to ascertain people’s responses to parks. The questions asked aimed to decipher how people respond to parks in terms of other people, and what physical attributes are desired.

Locations of interviews



What is a park to you? Responses

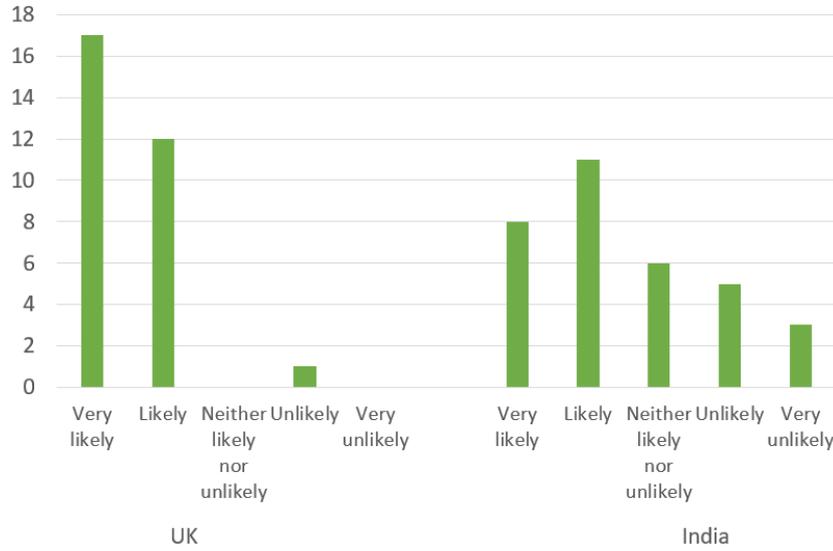


*30% answered emotional whilst the other 70% answered with physical properties.*

We had 74 participants from locations in and outside of the UK. The data has enabled us to test the theories of parks against empirical data. We have then created responses to these data sets, allowing us to come to conclusions about why the park typology must be re-considered.

## 2.1 Interviews

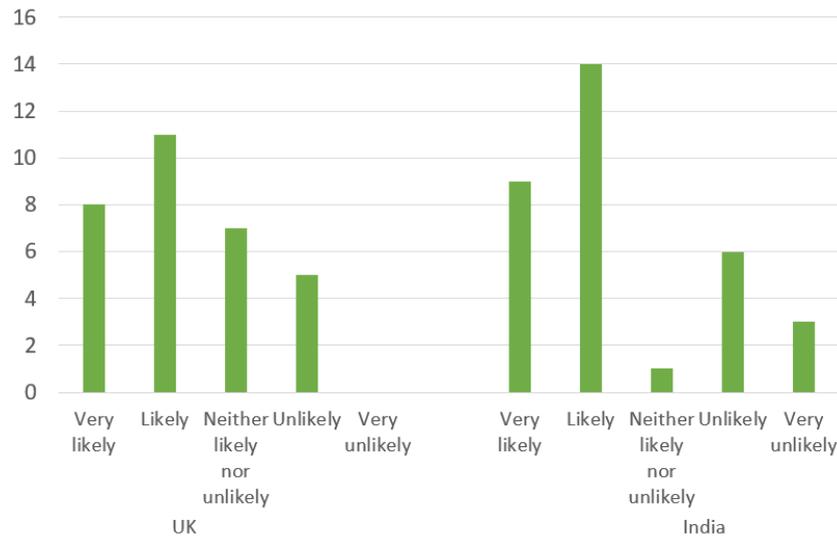
How likely are you to go to a green public space to meet friends?



*97% of people in UK are likely to meet friends in a green public space whereas only 70% of people in India, or hotter countries, are likely to meet up in groups.*

*More people in UK are likely to use parks as recreational areas.*

How likely are you to spend time in a public green space alone?

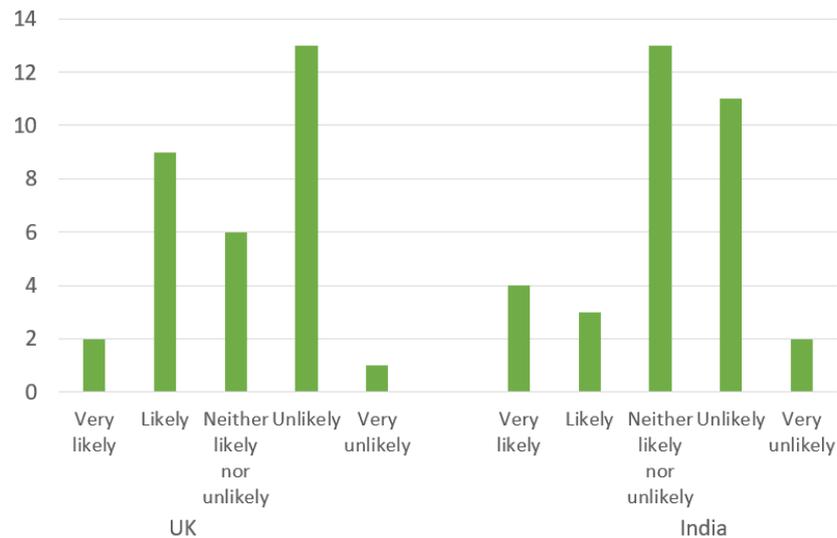


*24% of all participants are very likely to go to a park alone.*

*23% of younger participants are very likely to go to a park alone.*

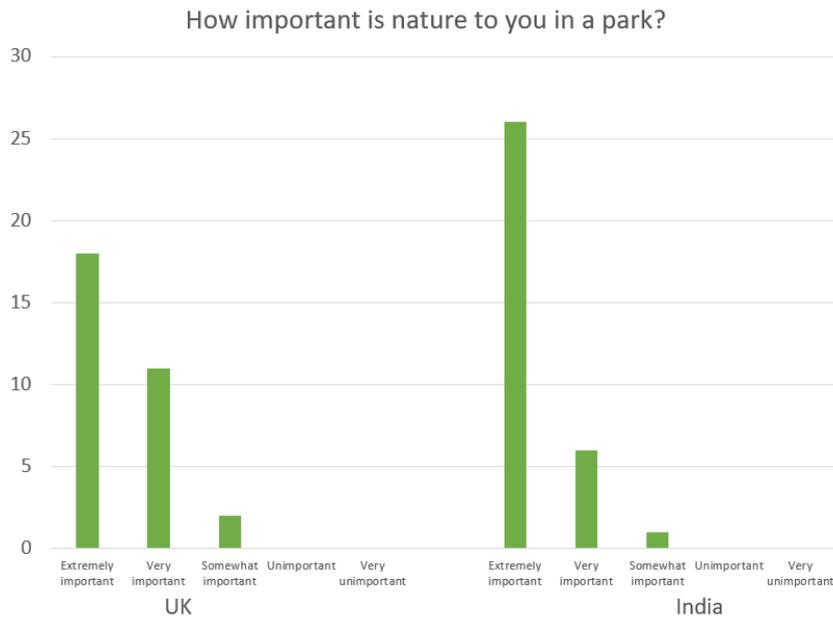
*43% of older participants are very likely to go to a park alone.*

How likely are you to experience anti-social behavior in your local park?



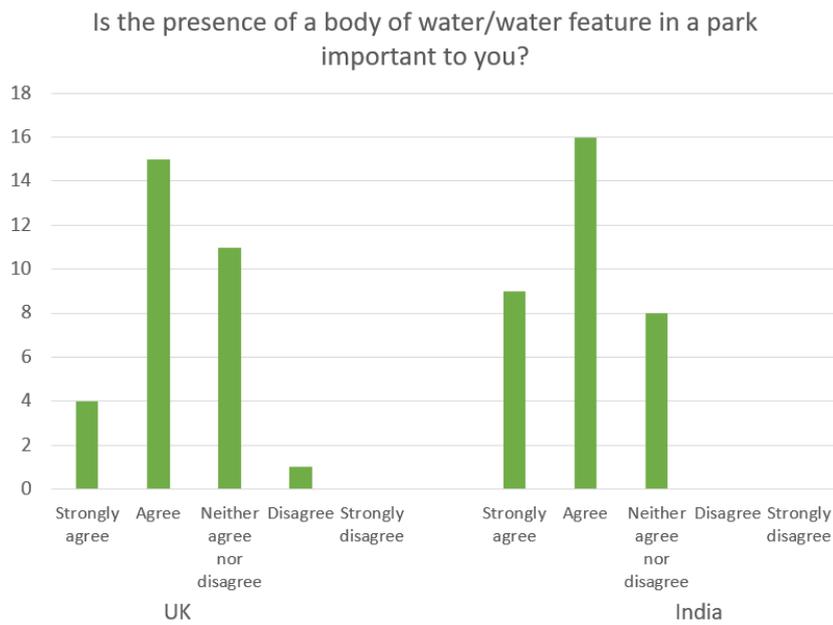
*42% unlikely to experience anti-social behaviour in parks in the UK.*

*35% unlikely to experience anti-social behaviour in parks in India.*

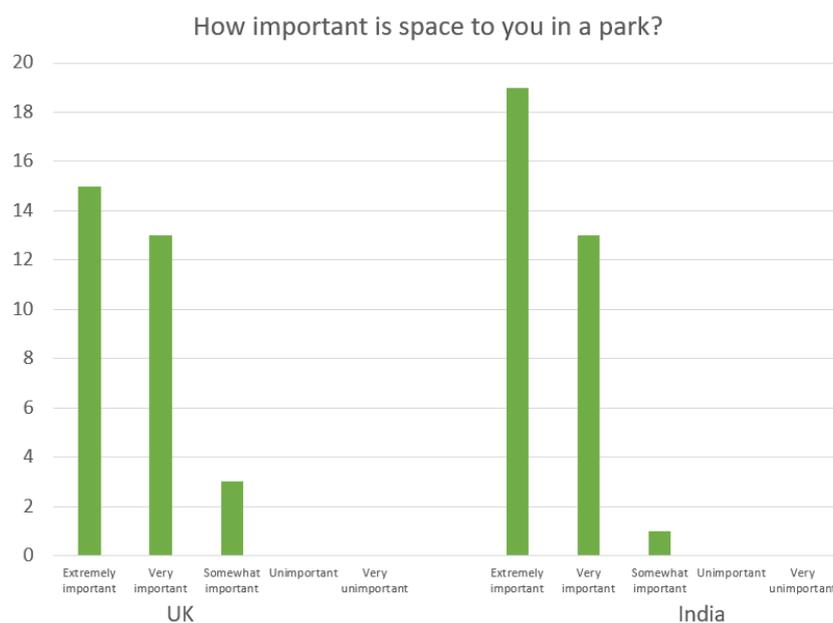


*As expected almost everyone interviewed believed nature was either extremely or very important to parks.*

*97% believed extremely important.*



*Similar to nature, people agreed space is extremely, or very important to parks; 90% agreed.*



*29% of those interviewed in India strongly agreed that water is important in a park, whereas only 11% did in the UK.*

## 2.2 Case Studies

### *Nawwars Park (Abu Dhabi)*

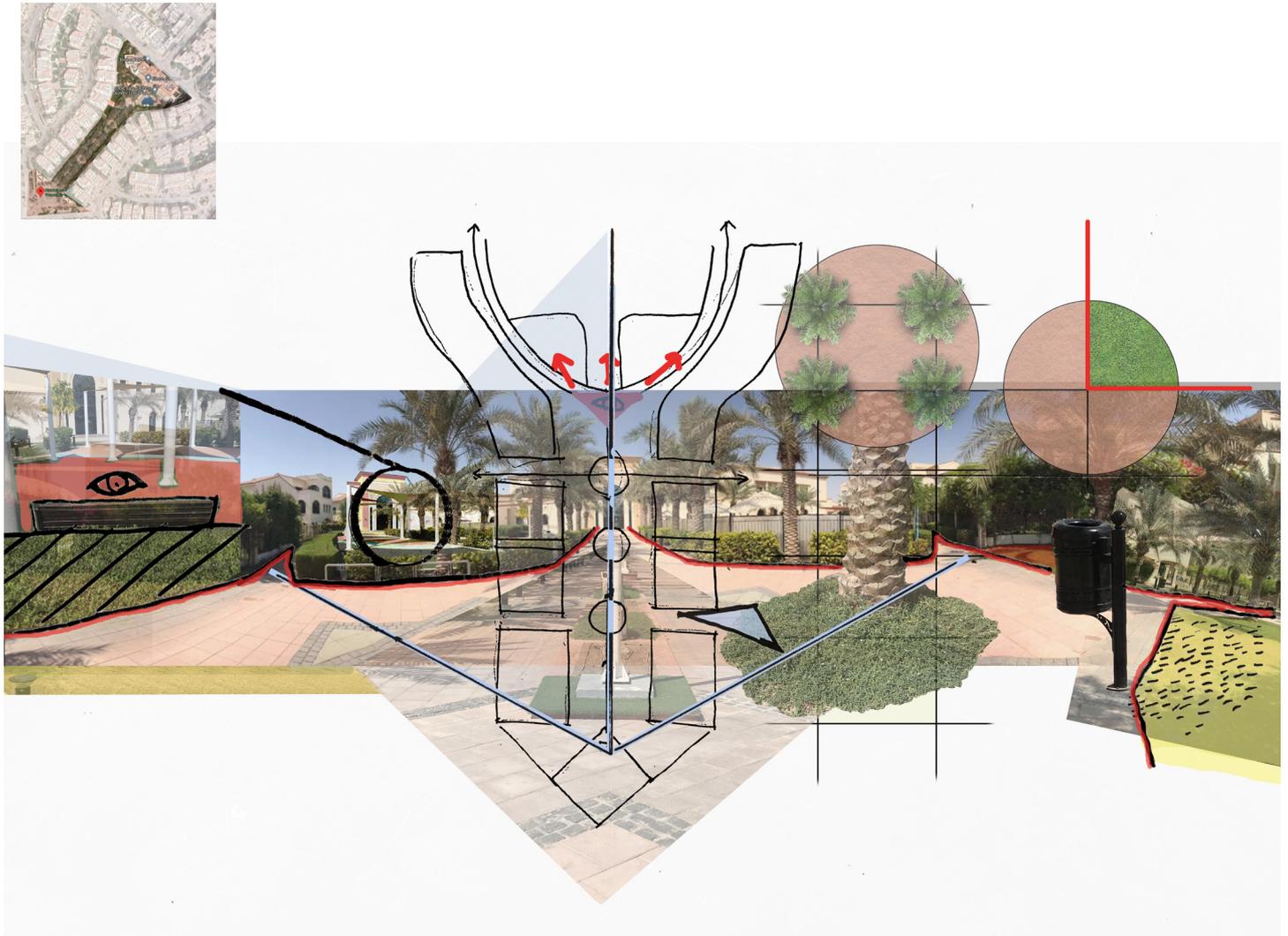


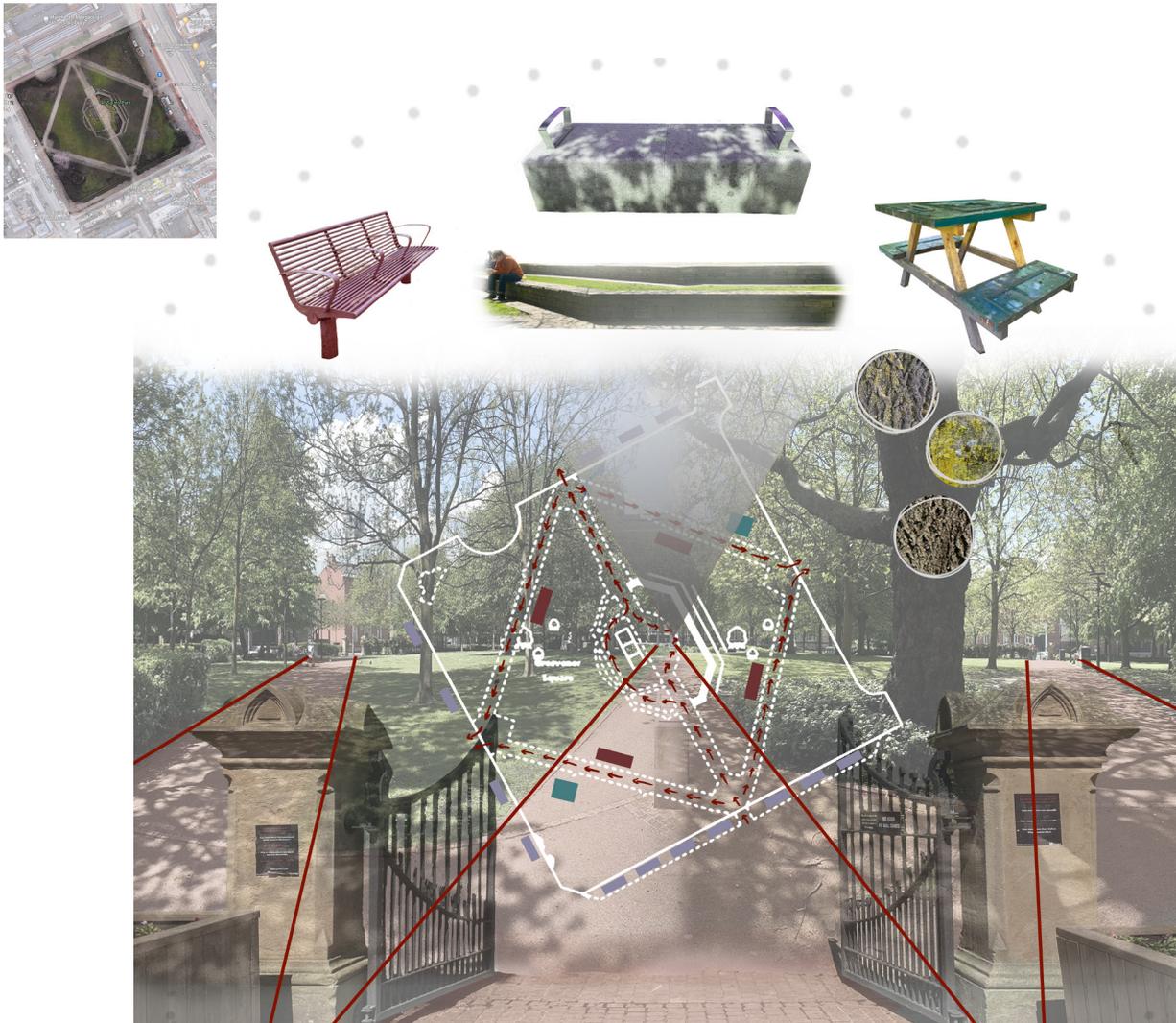
Figure 29

**T**his case study, situated in a residential community in Abu Dhabi, has limited access to its residents only. As illustrated on the site map above, the park connects the water feature towards the bottom and the clubhouse at the top.

**F**urther evidence of rigidity is seen within the geometric pattern on the footpath with its ends pointing and promoting movement away from the centre. Figure 29 also shows important observations such as the rigidity within landscape design due to the harsh borders of footpath in proximity to patches of grass.

**T**he park acts as an extension to the residents' gardens. It consists of defined spaces where activities occurs such as the Children's play area, and outdoor lounge spaces.

*All Saints Park (Manchester)*



*Figure 30*

All Saints Park is located next to one of Manchester's busiest street - Oxford Road. Its proximity to the Library and MMU Business School enables students to use this park.

Similarly, this park is also used as a connection to move from one part of the campus to the other. This occurs due to the rigid footpaths that encourage this transition. Areas of rest and pause are superficially located throughout the park by inclusion of benches.

Variety of types of benches are located on the perimeter of the park as highlighted in Figure 30. During our park visit, we observed people sitting in the centre of the park instead of benches allocated for this purpose, thus emphasizing the need of seating in the centre, as people prefer to sit in the open and enjoy the sunlight, as opposed to sitting on benches shaded by trees.

## 2.2 Case Studies

### *Whitworth Park (Manchester)*



Figure 31

Located near the University of Manchester area, the largest park of the three case studies. Compared to the other two case studies, vast green areas for the locals and students to wander is made possible. However, some areas within this park is designated for several activities: an exercise space with equipment and many sculptural artefacts scattered around the park.

In similarity to the other parks, the centre is designed to be a focal point. However, in this park one cannot access the centre but can move around and away from it. Whereas, in All Saints and Nawwars park the centre is accessible and visitors move across it.

The experience of moving through spaces is part of the unique experience in Whitworth. However, none of these case studies address historical or cultural references to their independent location. The park typology within these case studies is a void where some spaces are defined and human activity occurs.

## 2.3 Comparative Dialogue

The case studies lack a sense of place that can identify or significantly relate to the city its located in. Park design is to be focused on not just spaces but also places, loci. (Parker, 1997: 151) An approach to design that relates to the working spatial memory of the user, acts as a tool to preserve historical and cultural principles and values.

Ad Herenium, outlined in his treatise, the importance of a strategy that includes articulation of place through the use of mnemonic symbols. (Parker, 1997:147)

These symbols can act as indicators which make certain references to culture and history. For example, Mumbai being a maritime city can be invoked through the concept of memory. Certain symbols and the experience of movement within a park are ideas interrelated with each other. Kaplan (1978) suggests to achieve this it is necessary to have interrelatedness of immediately perceived elements, in this case symbols. In the case of a park design in Mumbai, water elements or symbols can relate to its historical significance. Thus, the use of water and how it is articulated is not purely for aesthetic reasons but also for historical reference.

Contrastingly, from our analysis of case studies, water is used for purely aesthetic reasons. Nawwars Park in Abu Dhabi has an elaborate water feature embedded within the footpath of the park. Due to the hot climate, water is seen as a luxury commodity and has been displayed in this manner. It acts as 'fascination' (Kaplan, 1989) a tool used to attract involuntary attention and engage with the park in a restorative manner. As the evidence from the interview data states, 29% of the respondents in India strongly agreed that water is an important element within a park in comparison to 11% in the UK. Within the UK, tools of 'fascination' differ from the warmer climates. From the case studies, Whitworth park engaged or 'fascinated' the users through defined spaces and activities such as sculpture stands and outdoor exercise equipment.

Differences occur between the literature on nature and parks versus the public opinion, as 97% percent of the respondents in the UK and 70% of people in India are likely to meet friends in a park. Therefore, people perceive parks as a social space. However, Kaplan (1989) and others view nature and parks as a restorative experience stating it is a place of escape that relieves stress and mental fatigue from our daily lives. In addition, we asked the respondents to describe what a park is to them, categorised into emotional and physical. Interestingly, only 33% recorded emotional responses which supported Kaplan's notion of a park being a 'restorative space'.

The majority, 67%, described parks in a physical sense and supported this through statements such as ‘allows dogwalking’, ‘space for children to play’, ‘space to play sports’.

Similarly, park design within case studies supports the interview data as Nawwark Park (Abu Dhabi) consists of well-defined areas for various activities to occur. Further evidence seen by interview data opposing the park as a purely ‘restorative space’ as only 24% of people are very likely to go and spend time in a park alone. This increases as 43% of older people are very likely to go and spend time in a park alone.

Therefore, a ‘one size fits all approach’ cannot be applied to park design as it does not cater to every person’s specific needs. This raises the question, should we cater park design primarily for people’s needs and wishes? In addition, Kaplan (1989) conducted a study where 40 scenes of different environments were grouped by different types of people. In the study, a park planner categorized them in terms of activities and their impact. Whereas, a botanist in terms of its species. Each of these specialists, groupings and their relationship to nature and parks differ. This difference is further exaggerated for people living in different countries, but park design remains constant and the formula is copied everywhere. For example, it is typical for benches to be placed underneath trees seen in All Saints (Manchester) and in Nawwars Park (Abu Dhabi). However, upon observation, people in Manchester decided to sit in open unshaded areas not designated for sitting.

*‘People react to what they experience in terms of commonalities, in terms of classes or categories.’  
(Kaplan, 1989: 20)*

If the park typology is to be redefined it has to be treated independently of program, function, and user relationship. The impact it makes on the location of the place is critical, in this case, as mentioned earlier it can be invoked through the sense of memory and symbolism.

Parker (1997: 150) states visual architectural thought makes abstract concepts more vivid and graspable. Similar ideology can be applied to spacemaking within parks using hierarchy and ‘organisation’ suggested by Parker to relate to spatial memory, whereas cultural and historical symbolism refers to the visual working memory of the user.

A final tool to aid redefining park typology and further reinforce this through spatiality and memory is ‘scope’. It is the sense that there might be more to explore than what is immediately evident. The ‘scope’ can be utilised to fulfil ‘fascination’. For example, gardening provides for various means of connectedness, some may experience in gardening a historical connection, a tie to former times and past generations through the act of gardening, as one may have been gardening through childhood with their parents and continuing this habit to adulthood.

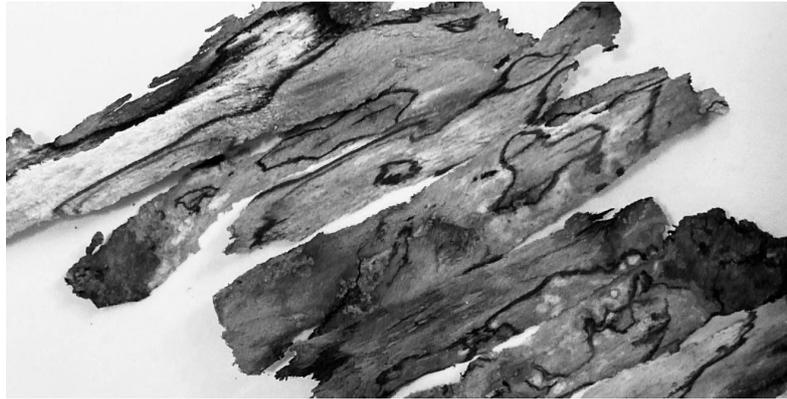
Redefining a park is purely dependent on the intent of the designer and his/her control of various elements that influences its typology independently and also its connection to the user.



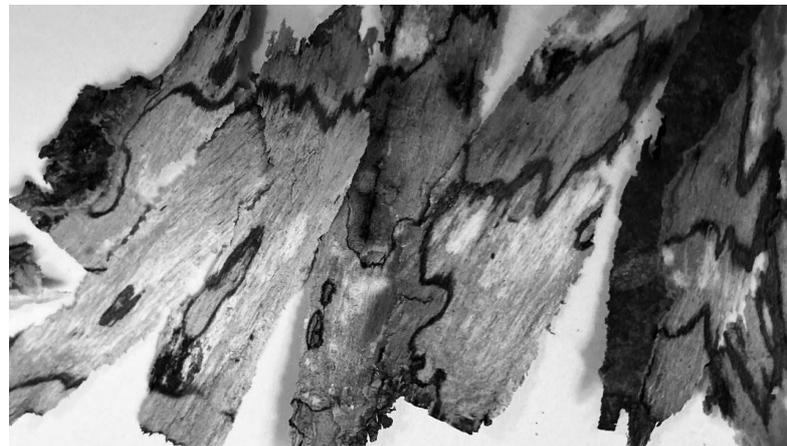
*Figure 32*

## 2.4 Conclusive Abstractions

*“Mind Machines”*



*The following images are expressions completed by individuals on their conclusions on the four analysis strands, literature, popular culture, interviews and case studies.*



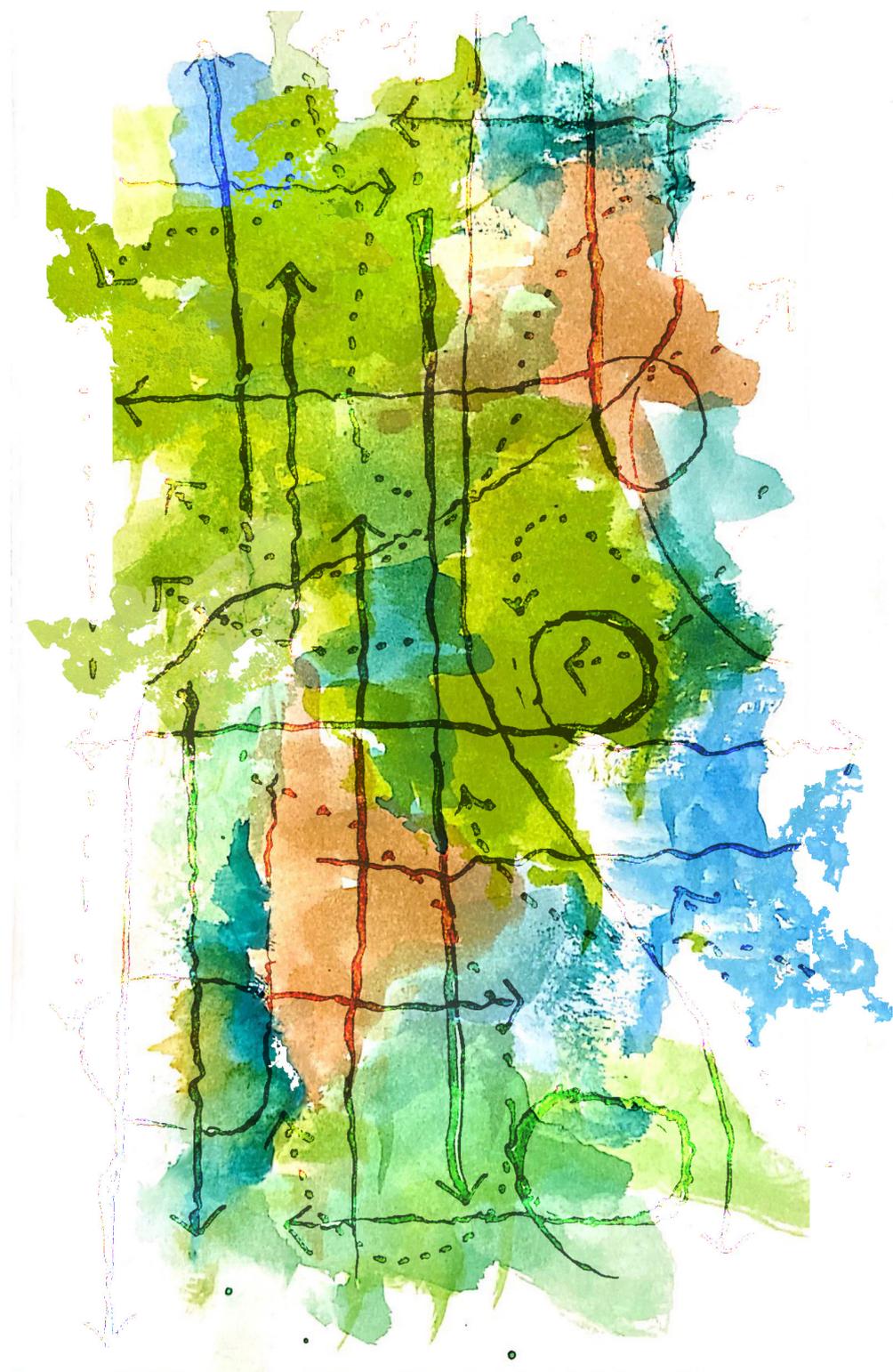
*Figure 33*



*Olga: This image is titled lungs of the city. It was inspired by interviewing family members from Poland. They drew my attention to another extremely important role of parks - providing clean air for cities with air pollution problems. Rather than designing solely based on activities or aesthetic preferences, we should focus on maximising greenery that helps to clean the air.*



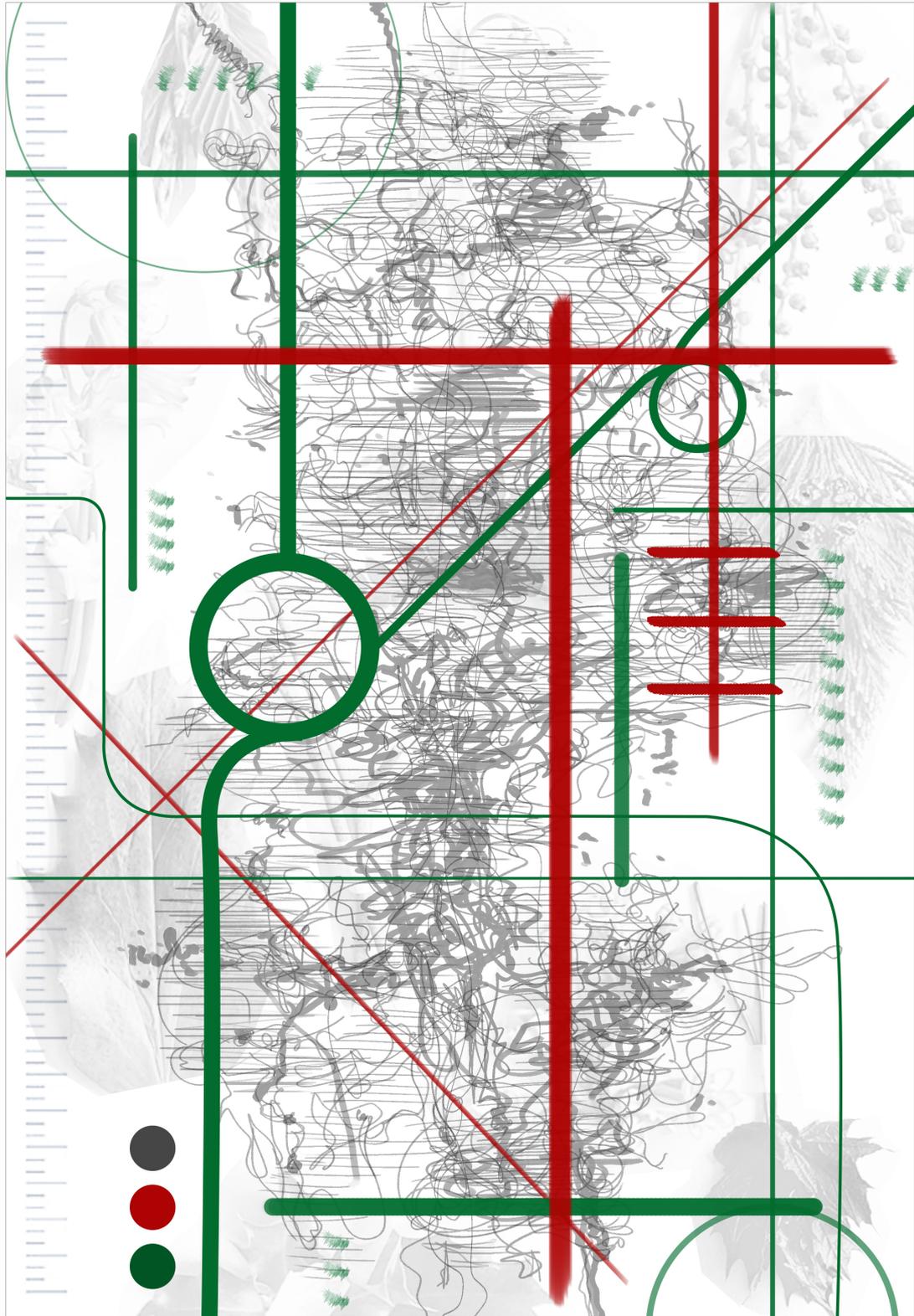
*Eva: Nature is the most prevalent element of the general park concept. The nature should act as a shelter. The state of the natural elements correlates with the emotions that people respond with when engaging with the space (a third of the responses are categorized as emotional).*



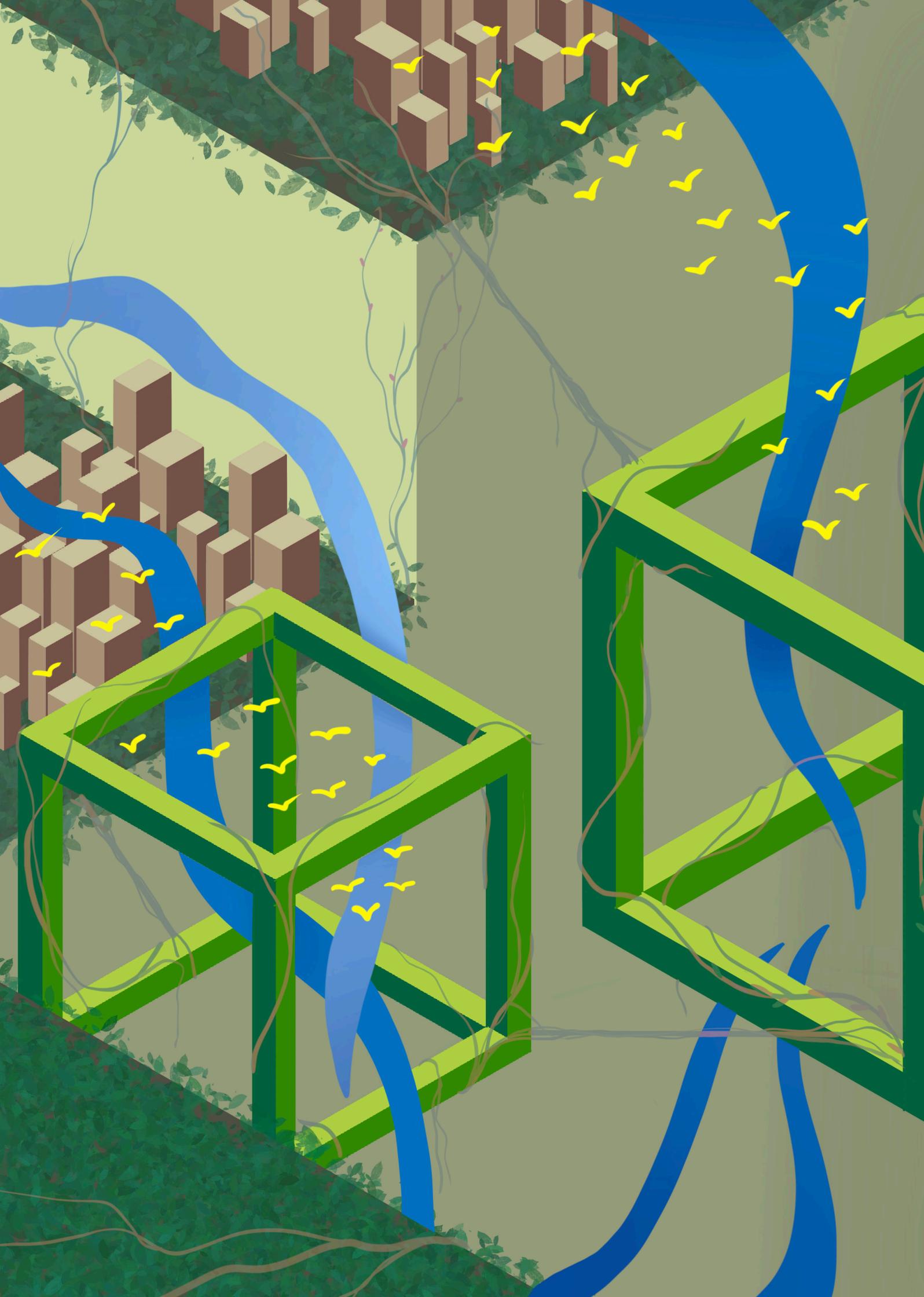
*Manika: Different pieces make up the entire jigsaw that the park is, from trees to grassland or water-bodies to pathways. There are various functions of, or within a park. In reference to the case study of Whitworth Park in Manchester, it can be stated that individuals consume the same space distinctly. For instance, a child might enjoy tiptoeing on the edge of a pathway. On the other hand, an adult might walk right in the middle of the same path. Therefore, various visual and spatial settings of the nature evoke different responses in humans.*

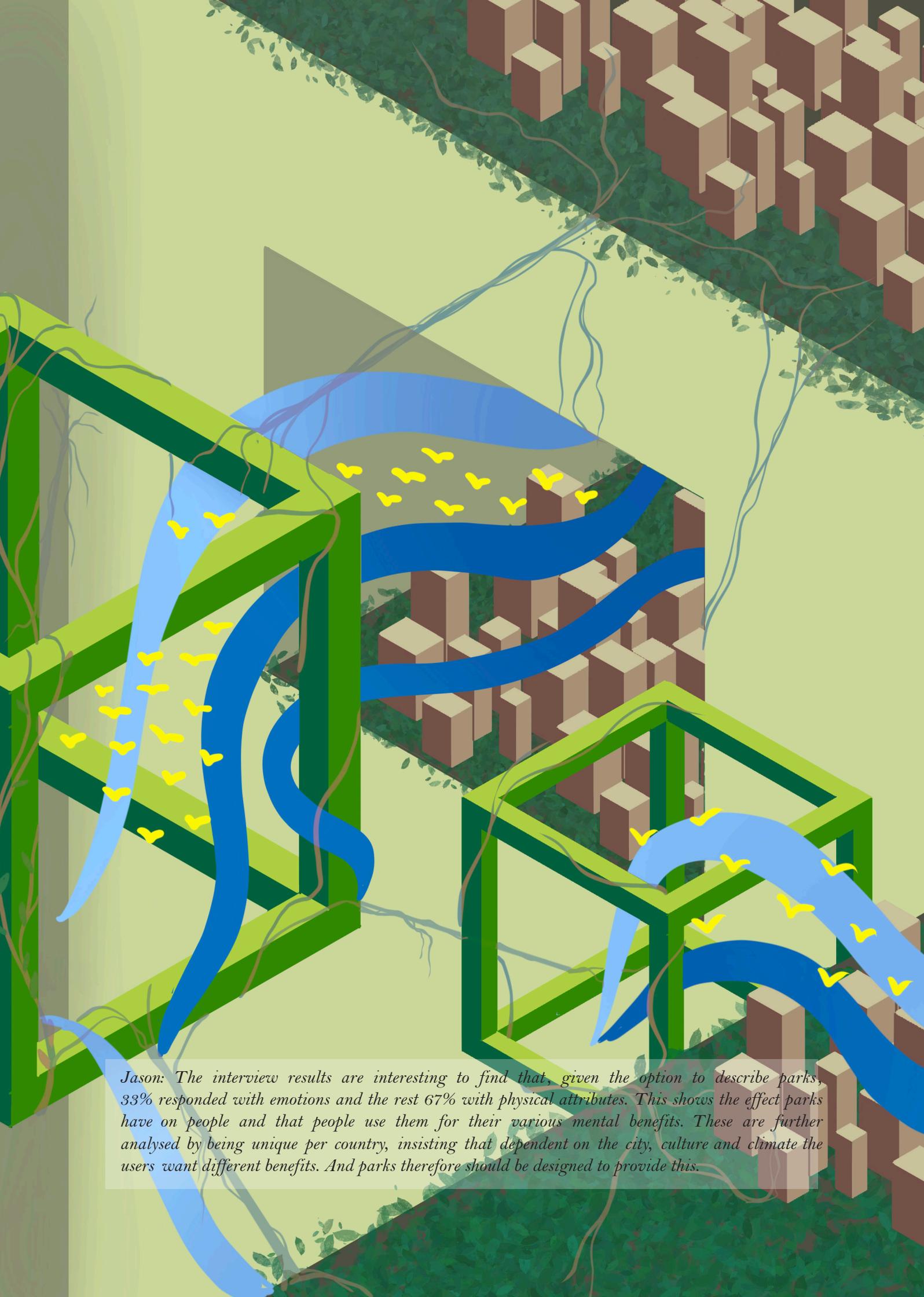


*Anjana: From the research and empirical data collected, I've come to the conclusion that people's response to a park is deeply personal. With respect to the data collected, a major observation derived was parks being represented as green open spaces which I've depicted in the abstract using different shades of green. Further research suggests how the presence of a stimuli is favourable in attracting more attention towards it. Here I've shown that with a shade of blue in the background representing a water body. However, the interview data responds with the stimuli not being a crucial factor for everyone making us question whether it is universally desired or not.*

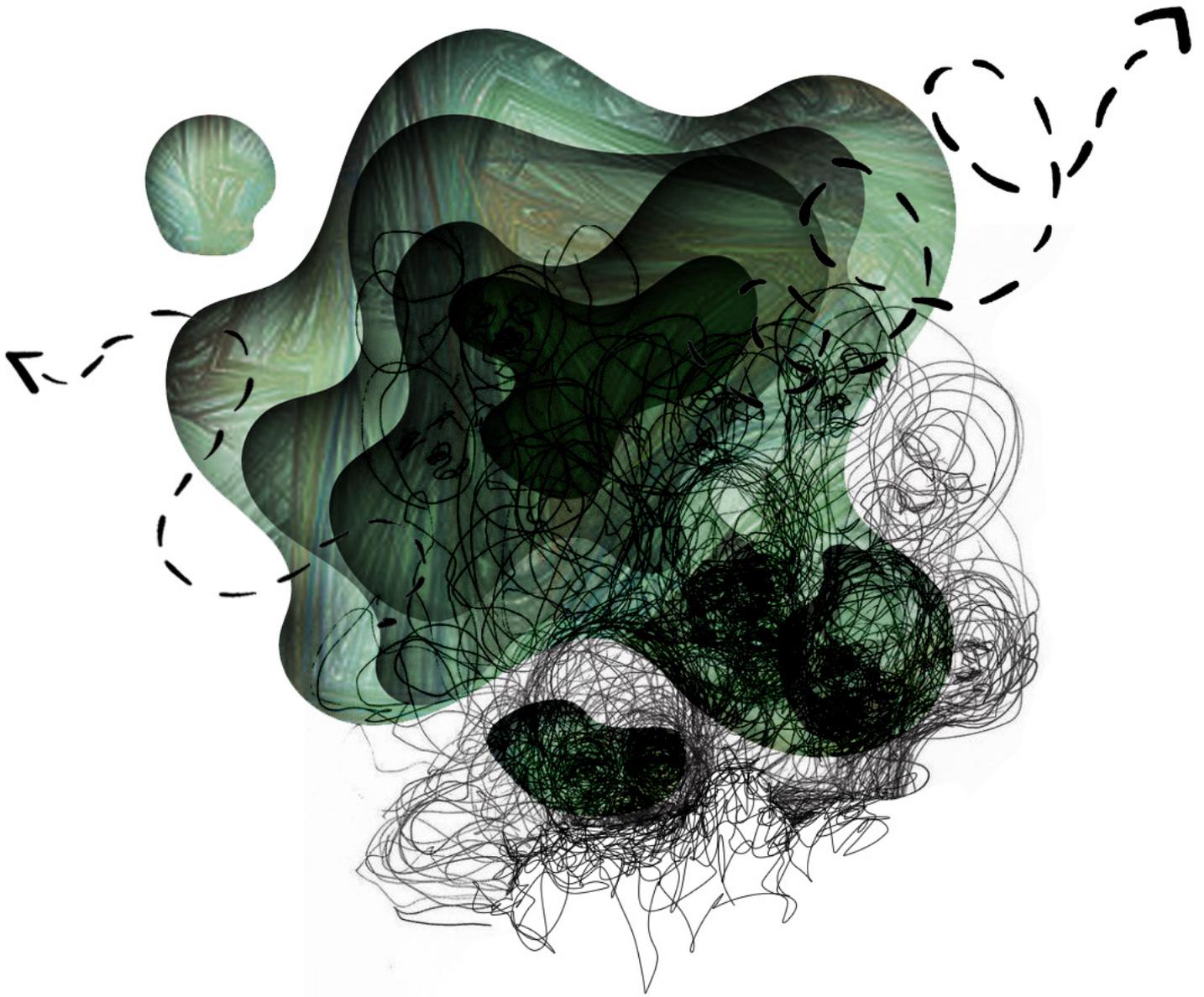


*Cin: This abstract piece represents the different journeys people experience in parks. Based on case studies of All Saints Park and Whitworth Park, some people consider parks as a reconnection to nature, some only think about parks as a shortcut. The green colour represents the journey which is designed by landscape architects and the experience they want park users to perceive. Using strong brush strokes and red colour, I tried to demonstrate anti-social behaviours. Last but not least, black doodle lines represent freedom and confusion in which people get to design their journeys when they visit parks.*





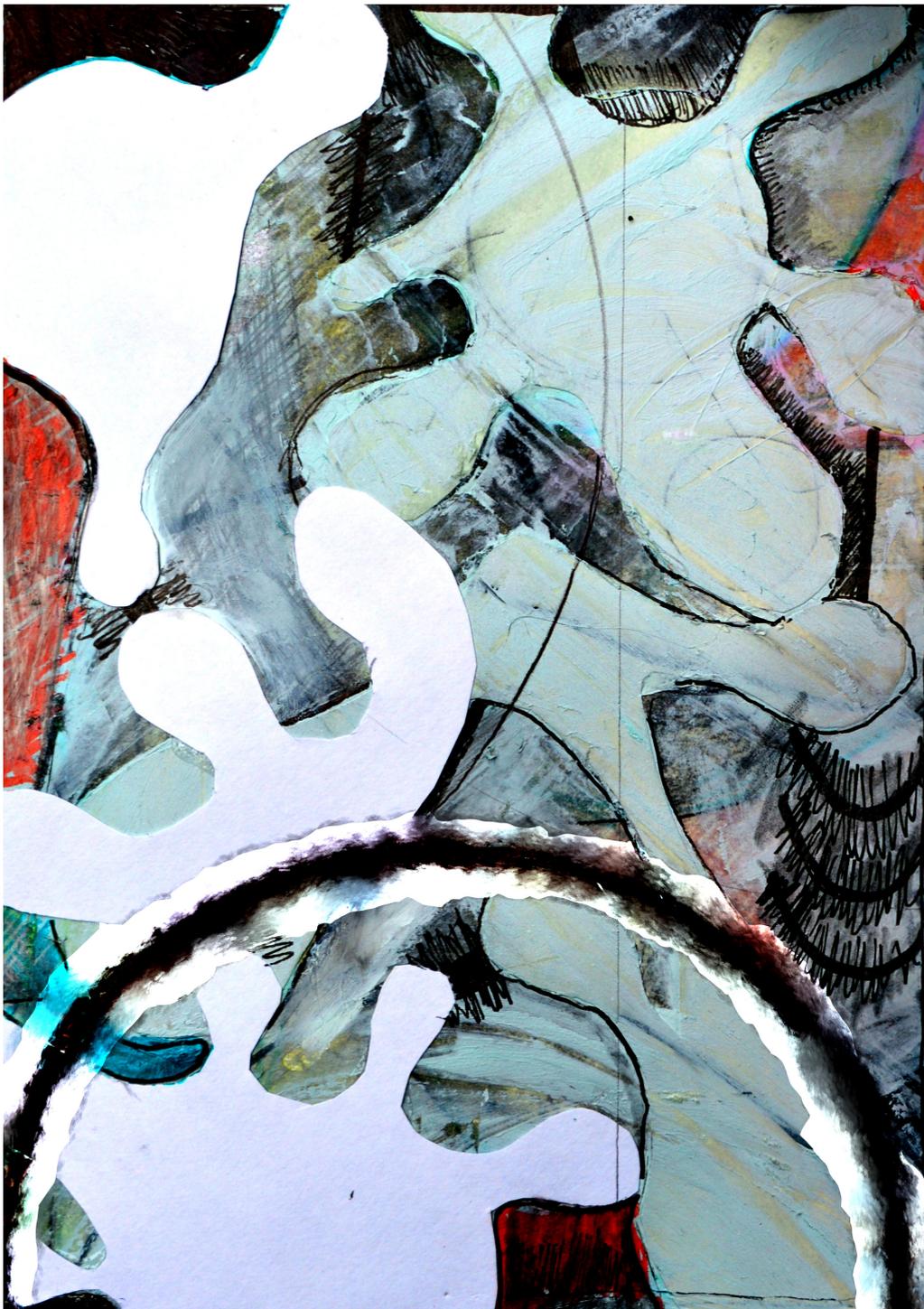
*Jason: The interview results are interesting to find that, given the option to describe parks, 33% responded with emotions and the rest 67% with physical attributes. This shows the effect parks have on people and that people use them for their various mental benefits. These are further analysed by being unique per country, insisting that dependent on the city, culture and climate the users want different benefits. And parks therefore should be designed to provide this.*



*Molly: A park offers the opportunity to escape from mental fatigue so I tried to represent this with the scribbles to represent the mental chaos. Using context from my case study of All Saints Park, I used the layers of the centre shape to create depth to represent how the non-traditional tiered walls in the centre are used more as seating than the designated benches spotted around and outside the park and I used the dashed arrows to convey the journey of people passing through All Saints Park.*



*Sofia: As a conclusion from my interviews, Finnish people preferred parks with pristine wilderness, where nature could flourish in its natural condition over carefully designed urban parks. As nature itself was considered to have a strong intrinsic value, the challenge for this piece of art was to create something by using nature as a part of the process to minimise my personal impact as a human on the piece of art. Therefore, I used rain as a tool to create this painting. I sprayed some paint over a foam board and placed it on my balcony while it was raining. As the falling water was moving the paints around, the final outcome is therefore entirely defined by nature and you can identify the single raindrops on top of the foamboard.*



*Joel: A piece considering boundaries and the balance of nature and man-made elements, such as paths, in parks. After noticing that a lot of the parks, such as the case study from Abu Dhabi and All Saints Park in Manchester, had problems with harsh borders and acted purely as corridors for pedestrians to cut through toward somewhere else, I wanted to describe a park without an overly forced direction of movement for users. Avoiding a constraining rigid layout, there is a heavy use of curved lines, lots of layering, and rough connections between forms, all hoping to describe a more loosely formed space that would be allowed to constantly develop, adapting to users needs as they arise, but aiming for all elements to be connected and in balance. Using more natural forms to provide spatial definition and moving around them, rather than cutting paths into them, would also help provide better green spaces for the people who said they wanted a better connection to nature in parks, in the survey.*

## 3.0 Conclusion

### 3.1 Overview

Through the analysis of various resources such as the representation of parks within songs, fictive literature, social media, and films. It enabled us to understand the role of parks within the existing framework of society. It highlighted the diverse meanings of parks that exist in various cultures that differ for every individual. As the aim of the project was to redefine the park typology, we must first understand it fully in order to suggest changes within it.

The interview data-set sample of 74 people further confirmed the need for a more personalised approach to park ideology and its function. Contrary to the existing research and literature studied assuming parks and nature as a 'restorative space'. The 'one size fits all' approach from any angle taken to relate parks to user becomes problematic as a result.

Therefore, if the park typology needs to be redefined, it arises the need for parks to be considered independent of their function, program and peoples individualistic wishes. Moving away from the type of park consisting of green open spaces with few seating arrangements and childrens play area. One method is the connection between spatiality and memory, invoking historical and cultural references to context the park is situated in. Ideas such as 'scope', 'fascination' and symbolism are tools through which park designers can make this connection,

The document through the analysis of personalised art, empirical data, analytical case studies and research aimed to encourage the dialogue of rethinking park typology and suggested ways of achieving this.



Figure 34

## 4.0 Appendix

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*All abstractions*

