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CS377C: HCI Design Patterns – Borchers

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Assignment 2

Architectural Design Pattern:

## PICNICKING AREA

Recreational parks and open areas often maintain a collection of activity areas, from simple grass fields to softball fields to picnic tables that dot the landscape. This pattern provides one framework for versatile activity in a park or field area.

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**The picnic area provides people with a chance to both relax and interact in a wide-open area that could otherwise be bare and seemingly restless.**



Any park—almost by definition—has picnic tables in various locations. Let us delve into and examine the qualities that make picnic areas ideal for so much more than picnic tables or sitting units.

People come to parks, both public and private, to relax and enjoy their free time. Adults come to chat with friends, hold a barbeque, and perhaps dabble in some outdoor

games. Children go running about in grassy fields or scamper about on playgrounds. Visitors, then, have specific goals, in one way or another, to utilize the area for their enjoyment or entertainment. And a setup as simple as a picnic table along with an occasional barbecue pit and tree can provide a disguisingly adaptable place for public recreation. Without any such items, activity is surely possible (blanket to replace the table, for example) but a versatile method to balance the open space with useful structure is lacking.

The placement of picnic tables and pits and trees in relation to one another is key. Barbecue pits must be near tables to minimize the distance between those cooking and those eating, yet they must be far enough away to maintain a separation of airspace so that cooking smoke does not disturb activities taking place at the picnic table. Trees nearby should provide needed shade but not prevent visitors from getting some sunlight during part of the day. Variability for picnic tables is greatest because often times tables can be moved to desired locations; some, however, are solidly linked to the ground, which can be advantageous for designers who wish to create a more specific experience or environment.

Ultimately, however, the basic table is enough to establish a picnicking area. It is important, then, to realize that picnicking areas are not reduced simply to grassy fields. It is highly feasible that picnic tables are placed anywhere from patios to locations near lakes, etc.

Further, it is important overall to balance the picnic area with the available open space. Spreading the area out too far defeats the recreational purpose of the open space and minimizes the ability for a picnicking area to a hub of activity, while compacting the area too tightly is aesthetically awkward. The important quality to maintain is a sense of balance—of space and of overall involvement, where visitors are still part of the main frame of activity for the park or area while preserving a smaller circle activity on its own. The picnic area is without a doubt an important element of the recreation area but is ideally not an isolated component.

Therefore:

**Set out and arrange picnic tables and barbecue pits in parks to establish centers of activity where visitors can relax, take a break, chat with each other. Clearly establish the area as a small, contextualized unit within the greater scheme of the entire park, field, or recreation area.**