Ulla Berglund

Neighbourhood Nature: Joy or Fear

Institutionen för landskapsplanering Ultuna
Samhälls- och landskapsplanering nr 16
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Preface

This report reflects research and reading conducted by the author during a long time – from the early 1980s up till today. It was my concern and confusion about an emerging ambiguity in attitudes to the green structure in the city that inspired me to write it. I wanted to sort out for myself and discuss with others, who might be interested in green space and town planning, what was/is going on with the appreciation of the nature on the door-step, the neighbourhood nature.

When following debate I found more and more negative opinions concerning the green spaces in Swedish towns. It seemed to me that this asset usually associated with nice things like beauty, health, peacefulness and children's play had got charged with more and more negative associations, to emptiness, ugliness and fear of crime. And this was not only in the critique of modernist housing projects. More so that the idea of nature as a prominent element in the city was questioned.

There was claimed that a city with only some small parks and no wild nature must be the most sustainable and most attractive one. Could that be true? Where are all the good things in nature gone, or are they really gone? If people still love their neighbourhood nature and make use of it, this is something I as a landscape architect should learn about and then tell others. If they don't, I must understand and handle that situation as well.

The report is an attempt to elucidate, at least in part, a complicated situation with many actors and different attitudes to life in the city. The text has got good response by colleagues in seminars, but showed hard to publish in all its length in a journal. In order to keep it as a whole I found this way for publishing. The writing started during my time in Södertörn University College, then financed by the Baltic Sea Foundation. However, changes have been made under ways until today.

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Ulla Berglund
Landscape architect
PhD (urban planning)
Assistant professor at the Department of Landscape Planning Ultuna
SLU: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Abstract
The almost self-evident appreciation of nature in the immediate proximity of urban living areas that has been attested to in much research on Northern countries, is today under threat. This has similarly been observed for the cases of two high-rise districts: Bredäng in Stockholm, Sweden and Mezciems in Riga in Latvia respectively, both of which have been investigated using qualitative methods. This article does not go into details of the studies but reflects on some results towards a background of different aspects relevant to urban life of today. Overall contact with nature seems to diminish due to modernisation and migration, both factors tending to cause loser attachment to place. In an era of time-space compression, cities throughout the "developed" world grow more alike and a dense urban structure tends to become the dominant ideal of planners and architects alike. City authorities sometimes regard nature within the city more as a space for new development than for recreation. The inhabitants, on the other hand, continue to claim green spaces being an essential component of their neighbourhoods although concern over poor levels of maintenance of such space and fears over the crime that it may harbour. The city nature of today can be said to be a cause of both joy and fear. Has this fear lead to a real loss of attachment to nearby nature among city dwellers? Or, might attachment continue to be strong but in need of new revitalising solutions within planning and management that can save a crucial quality for life and wellbeing? This article cannot answer these questions but aims to discuss them in the light of a broader context of urban and nature research.

Key words: Green spaces; Neighbourhood; Urban nature; Behaviour change; Fear of crime.

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Introduction: nature in city planning and debate

In a broad sense, nature is normally recognised as a desirable quality in cities. In this respect, nature is understood as including parks, gardens, street trees and flower arrangements as well as woods, meadows and water in its many forms. Attitudes towards the appropriate extent, configuration and function of nature differ over time, space and tradition. (See for example Tuan's (1990 [1974], p. 102 ff.) discussion concerning semblance of wilderness, garden and city-relationships.)

In the late nineteenth century, at a time when epidemic diseases and fires posed considerable threats in European cities, the planting and preservation of vegetation in parks, streets and private gardens was employed to make cities healthier and safer places. The joy of trees, flowers and fountains in public places was also noted, and parks were created for, or opened to the public to give the ordinary city dwellers opportunities for sound recreation. This can be seen in the layouts of reform projects from the early twentieth century.

In England the creator of the garden city model, Ebenezer Howard, wrote: "Now, there are few objects which the people so jealously guard as their parks and open spaces; and we may, I think, feel confident that the people of Garden City will not for a moment permit the beauty of their city to be destroyed by the process of growth." (1965 [1902], p. 140). Even the Austrian architect and writer Camillo Sitte (1982) [1909] noted the city dwellers' love of greenery and their demands for the provision of more green areas. In contrast to Howard, however, Sitte expressed concerns that less densely built cities might give rise to immense transport problems. In line with this concern, he advocated the idea that single trees and small parks could also create a feeling of nature, and provide the people with tranquillity.

Sitte and Howard, and Howard's architect Raymond Unwin, all propagated for the use of greenery in town planning. Whilst their respective solutions differed, they were in both cases fairly traditional, at least as compared to the modernist ideals that came to dominate town planning in the twentieth century. The ideologist and architect Le Corbusier wrote about sun, air and green trees as the "elementary causes of joy" in his book "La maison des hommes". In the new green cities of his vision, the trees – "the friends of the people" – would provide shade and a cool environment, inspire the poet, produce oxygen and offer protection for birds. The large-scale apartment blocks would be hidden behind the lace-work of trees. He offered to "make a pact with nature" (Le Corbusier, (1962 [1936] p. 40 ff.).

To all three of these classical ideologists within town planning, the public's positive perception of city greenery seems to have been self-evident. As such, it was supposed that people loved nature and that nature in the city would be of benefit to them. With today's European planning trend toward "compact cities" this is not at all the case. Today we are more likely to hear that "urbanity" or "density" is that which is missing in Nordic cities, and rather

fewer concerns over a lack of nature. Nordic planners frequently question the "surplus" of nature in cities. The compact city is thought to be more sustainable and more suitable for modern life. (Cf. Swedish Urban Environment Council, 2003.)

During seminars within and debate around "Stockholm at Large 1 and 2" – two exhibitions on urban planning 2001 and 2002 respectively, which attracted a considerable amount of attention, the value of the city's green structure was seriously questioned by architects and urban planners. The green structure was accused for containing a lot of rubbish green or left behind wooded areas, and by some it was suspected to be less useful for recreation than the street. Upon that the green areas were supposed to contribute to social segregation because they separate different neighbourhoods from each other. To create a more attractive outer city many speakers (but not those representing the green sector) proposed to build together the neighbourhoods of the outer city and make them as compact as the inner city, with only traditional, man made parks. Among the statements from Workshops held in "Stockholm at large 1" stood the following: "The most important quality of the city is the experience of people, many people. In order to obtain a high density of people a high density of houses is needed. High density is a prerequisite for social dynamics." (Ola Andersson, 2001; Stockholm at Large 2, 2002-2003) In the book summing up and evolving ideas from the exhibition we can read about green space as insulation material between neighbourhoods and people defending nature are described as pine tree talibans (Åhman, 2004).

Guidelines for access to urban green spaces

Guidelines that are worked out by the various authorities stand in sharp contrast to the ideas of architects and developers. Due to one of Sweden's official Environmental quality objectives named "A good Built Environment" spatial planning should be based on strategies for (among other objectives): "preserving and enhancing green and water areas in urban and suburban areas and ensuring that the percentage of hardened surfaces does not increase" (Naturvårdsverket, 2003). The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning has advocated the preservation of green spaces in a manual (1999, p. 35). They reproduce a vision propagated by the Nordic Council expressing the need for the provision of "good conditions for recreation". Such a vision argues that it should be possible for people to reach a district park (min. area 10-20 hectares) within 500 or at most 800 meters from their homes. Additionally, there should also be smaller parks within a walking distance of 300 meters. These standards are diametrically opposed to the alternative vision of "compact cities".

Similar guidelines, in accordance with earlier state guidelines, were employed in the city of Stockholm during the 1970s and 80s, but have thereafter been dropped. Today there are proposals for revised guidelines (Stockholms parkprogram, 2002), which have been under hard debate since more than one year. However, in the regional planning of the county of

Stockholm there are guidelines pertaining to access to green space in urban areas (Regionplane- och trafikkontoret, 1996, p.6). The guidelines mention, for example, that a maximum of 300 meters (6 minutes walk) from home to a minor park (0,6-3 ha) should be a planning target for urban areas. Bo Grönlund, architect and expert on "safe cities", questions this standard (although interpreted as 500 meters) and claims that the outer city should be built much more densely and more urbane if it is to become a safe as well as a stimulating environment. Grönlund proposes that nobody should have to live more than 500 meters from "a tight, lively urbane street" (interview in Dahlgren, 2000). These two goals are likely to prove difficult to bring together, especially in the context of the small scale building ideal that lies within the concept of "the safe city". (Cf. Grönlund and Schock, 1999.)

If we turn to the scene of the EU, a statement was prepared by a working group within the Expert Group on the Urban Environment. In the paper "Towards a Local Sustainability Profile – European Common Indicators" (May 2001) it is argued that: "Access to open areas /public green spaces and other public open areas/ and basic services is essential in a sustainable community for the quality of life and the viability of the local economy." It is proposed that the percentage of the population living within 300 meters (as the crow flies) of these amenities should be monitored. Their emphasis that the availability of open areas and basic services is of equal importance to the sustainability of cities makes good sense to me. It corresponds well to my experience of studying people's expectations concerning their neighbourhoods. For example, in a mail questionnaire in two Swedish towns, approximately 60% of the respondents (more than for any other options) judged "nature and greenery" as well as the provision of basic services in close proximity of the home as "important" (the highest level on a three grade scale) (Berglund and Jergeby, 1992). The minimum size of 5000 square meters (or smaller if shown to be a well used place) proposed by the EU group is, in any case, small compared to the Swedish standards mentioned above.

Finally we can compare with a proposed standard by Van Herzele and Wiedemann (2003). They underline the importance of access discussed in for example Berggren-Bärring and Grahn (1995) and propose 400 meters as the maximum distance from home to a local park. After "checking the appropriateness in the field" (towns in Flanders, Belgium) they concluded that one hectare should be accepted as minimum area for such a park "…instead of the area limit of two hectares included in most systems.".

City nature and the inhabitants

Most Swedish towns and cities are indeed green. The total extent of "green space" often exceeds 30 percent of the town area (SCB, 1991). According to more recent estimates, however, this statistical category that includes parks, wooded land and other un-exploited land, is shown to be slowly diminishing. In the major cities of Sweden: Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, the

average amount of "green space" has decreased from 27,3% in 1980 to 24,8% in 1995 (Hans Ansén, SCB - Swedish Statistics, personal communication, 9 June 2002).

The greenness of these cities may be understood as having resulted from the late onset of urbanisation and the rapid growth of towns and cities during the last century, more especially during the decades following W.W.II. The layouts followed the then dominant modernist planning principles. There was also a plentiful supply of cheap land and, in many cases, also nature suitable for recreational purposes. Open-air recreation was, as noted above, regarded as healthy and was popular with the Swedish public. In Stockholm there was also a concerted campaign fought against overexploitation by park administrations even during the 1950s and 60s. Holger Blom, prominent city gardener of Stockholm for more than 30 years, wrote:

> "Now there are people who think that the city should be densely built and be intense. There you are supposed to make yourself useful, and when you then need to rest you shall have access to a second settling in a place suitable for recreation, whether this be in the vicinity of the city or in the Canary Islands. The reasoning falls on its own preposterousness. It is absolutely necessary to have daily and constant access to fresh air, sun and outdoor life, this especially holds for children. Parks are needed in the cities." (Blom 1969, s. 75, authors translation)

Today, old city parks appear to be highly appreciated by almost everyone, professional planners included, while the newer modernist green areas have a more dubious reputation. Prominent architects have, for a considerable period of time; blamed the "green deserts" for the "lack of urbanity" they are said to be causing. They are blamed for diverting pedestrian traffic from the streets onto separate paths and their space is seen as increasing distances between urban elements.

In England Gordon Cullen (1971 [1961], p. 133) wrote about "prairie planning", and in Denmark Jan Gehl (1971) blamed the large-scale, lifelessness and emptiness of modernist cities in a book that came to influence many Nordic planners. One of a number of problems is the lower priority attributed by city authorities over the last few decades to the maintenance of green areas than was the case in earlier times. The sad result is that many green areas in modernist town-districts are unattractive and of limited function. Large portions of such areas seem to be planned for and used mainly for transport functions.

This is of course not the whole truth. Inhabitants in the green outer districts of Stockholm, for example, often mention nature as the "best quality" of their neighbourhood. I was clearly and quickly told this when I asked about neighbourhood qualities at a public meeting in my study area Bredäng on the outskirts of Stockholm in 1999 (Berglund, 2001). The importance of greenery as a quality of both neighbourhood and town was also evidenced in studies carried out in the mid 1980s in two outer districts of Stockholm (Berglund and

Jergeby, 1989) as well as five years later in two Swedish towns (Berglund and Jergeby, 1992). Qualitative as well as quantitative methods were used and different aspects investigated, but all of the data pointed in the same direction.

The city planners in Stockholm often propose to raise urban quality in the outer districts by building in parks and small wooded areas. The planners want to "heal" the city by exploiting the in-between spaces, while the inhabitants want to preserve their free views over nature as well as the possibility to take relaxing walks and recreation (Berglund, 2001). The idea of the compact city seems to have little support in the outer districts where people are used to having nature practically on their doorsteps. Furthermore, if you live in a high rise block of flats, a common but unpopular type of accommodation in the modernist districts of Stockholm, the construction of new buildings on adjacent green space will probably not improve your situation but instead make it worse. It will lead to more car parking, motor traffic and other annoying factors, while positive effects relating to service provision or the environment itself are aspects that cannot be counted on. Ideally it would be possible to exchange some of the quantity of green areas with increased quality through upgrading or laying out new ones that are more suited to recreational activities than for transport uses. In practice there are many obstacles to this, not least economic and the low priority given to the interests of the existing residents as compared to the newcomers, the buyers. People are well aware of these problems, through media reports or by personal experiences, and they are therefore suspicious. This suspicion against proposed building projects is frequently labelled NIMBY-ism ("Not-in my-backyard"), by those who do not want to analyse the reasons people might have for taking on this attitude. (See further discussion in Burningham, 2000.)

Even today the public, the ordinary dwellers in different parts of our cities, like to have nature in the city and especially close to their homes. Whatever town planning ideals are in the ascendancy, it is evident that there is a firm desire for living nature to be considered. In a Danish study Attwell et al. (2002) found that nearness to nature was the main factor for choosing to settle in a new "town" outside Copenhagen, although the traditional urban structure and the good and varied architecture were the qualities especially stressed and successfully carried out in this project. In fact, during an earlier study (Berglund, 1996) when I asked architects about their own personal "favourite places" in their own towns, these places turned out to be substantially more green than urban. Within all investigated groups (architects, landscape architects and "ordinary" inhabitants) parks constituted by far the most frequently chosen place category, and recreational potential seemed to be the key quality guiding most choices. Around half of the "inhabitants" who answered an open-ended question in a mailed questionnaire, and a somewhat lower figure among the interviewed architects, directly mentioned nature-related aspects as essential for their choice. Many "inhabitants" simply mentioned that the place was beautiful. That people on the whole judge nature as aesthetically more attractive than urban elements is attested to in numerous studies carried out by environmental psychologists

(e.g. review in Herzog, 1989; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1993). The Kaplans note that the most common reasons for this judgement is that people "enjoy" nature or simply appreciate it for its "beauty" (ibid., p. 157).

Man-nature from a psychological perspective

As human beings we are in part nature. Mankind has also spent most of its existence on earth in natural settings and genetically speaking nature is that which we are adapted to. With this in mind, the biophilia hypothesis (Kellert and Wilson, 1993) suggests that we generally like to have nature around and that we feel at ease when we are 'in' nature. Ulrich (ibid.) notes that numerous studies have empirically shown that people of different cultures throughout the world tend to appreciate half open wooded landscapes and prefer "natural" forms to regular ones. The Kaplans write about "relatedness" and "feeling of partnership with the larger forces of nature" and state (in relation to compatibility): "it is as if there were a special resonance between the natural environment and human inclinations" (ibid. pp.193-195). Even if we are not in total agreement with the biophilia hypothesis, it might seem reasonable that human beings as living creatures also take an interest in and have feelings for nature as a symbol of life in different respects.

An enduring discourse among environmental psychologists concerns the restorative capacity of natural environments, within as well as outside of the city. Whilst there are a number of different theories, all support the conclusion that natural environments are, generally speaking, more favourable than urban or indoor settings for relaxation and recovery from negative stress or mental fatigue caused by the strains of modern city life (e.g. Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1985; Ulrich et al., 1991). A large body of research carried out in laboratories as well as in the field and employing different kinds of manipulations and methods of measurement, lend considerable support to the idea of nature being a generally restorative environment. The positive emotional effects (people become relaxed/gain positive feelings) are particularly evidenced in these studies. On the whole, the idea of the restorative potential of nature on mental capacity is also supported. A strong link between aesthetic preference and the positive emotional effects of nature has also been shown. (Cf. Hartig et al., 1991; Hartig et al., 1996; Herzog and Barnes, 1999; Kaplan, 1995; Ulrich et al., 1991.)

Joy, pride and comfort

Nature seems to represent a basic quality for people, including those living in cities – as a symbol, a place for viewing, for being and for acting in. Perhaps we can also claim that there exists a special Nordic attitude to nature as has sometimes been proposed by researchers within architecture and ethnology (e.g. Löfgren, 1989; Norberg-Schulz, 1986, p. 306). Loefgren comments on

studies on national heritage in Europe. While people of central and southern Europe tended to emphasise their historic built up heritage, Swedes instead pointed to their nature. In my study in Mezciems, an outer district of Riga in Latvia, I have met similar attitudes. The surrounding woods and small lakes are regarded by many – adults and school children alike – as the principle qualities and sources of pride in the area. The Latvian natural heritage is still used in poetry and songs at school. It is filled with myths and mystery. People take personal pride in nature and they willingly show it to guests from abroad although they do regret the mistreatment that it suffered during Soviet times. The joy of simple activities in nature such as fishing, swimming and gardening, often at an old family farm or summerhouse, were frequently reported as being essential sources of joy by ten-year-old school children in their compositions. In a similar manner, the school children saw their most desired future home as being a house in close contact with nature. For them, nature seems to serve as a link with the past as well as to the future (Berglund, 2004). Similar attitudes have previously been found in Swedish studies (e. g. Berglund, 1998; Nordström, 1998).

Joy, in the sense of the pleasant feelings of satisfaction that experience of nature and activity in nature can generate, appears so obvious that it seems to lack the need for much explanation. Ulrich claims that the results referred to above, i.e. that nature can diminish stress, tend to support the biophilia hypothesis (Ulrich, 1993). The Kaplans comment on the findings of different researchers that suggest that physical settings seem to be closely related to "life satisfaction" and that this is especially the case for people of low social and economic status. They conclude: "People feel more satisfied with their homes, with their jobs, and with their lives when they have sufficient access to nature in the urban environment" (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989, p.162).

The Kaplans conclusion is supported by later research. Kuo, (1998) suggests, for example, that vegetation around public housing can have positive benefits for people trying to cope with major life issues. Herzog and Chernick, (2000) found nature in urban settings to be a significant indicator of tranquillity. Tests showed that a relaxing walk after mentally fatiguing work resulted in higher levels of satisfaction when taken in a natural park than in urban settings (Hartig et al., 1991). Francis and Cooper, (1991) found that students of architecture tended to visit settings with vegetation and water to lift their spirits when they were feeling low or depressed. A Swedish study (Uddenberg, 1995, Appendix 1) supports these results. In this 94% of those answering to a mail questionnaire agreed with the statement: "Being in nature makes me relaxed and harmonic" and 92% disagreed with the statement: "I have no need for being in nature". In another study based on a mail questionnaire, most respondents related how "nature and greenery" was the far most desirable view from their home - as compared to people, playgrounds, streets/parking lots, and buildings (Berglund and Jergeby, 1992).

I would conclude that people derive a considerable amount of joy and satisfaction from nature in the city. This derives from experiences of beauty and wellbeing, but also from participating in pleasant activities and from

meeting and watching friendly people. This has been a finding of a large body of research, including my own recent (qualitative) research in Bredäng and Mezciems. On the other hand, I also found indications in these studies that positive experiences of nature in the city are under threat.

Modernisation, urbanisation and place attachment

Even though trees may grow to be very old and rivers and cliffs may last "forever", as with the case of man-made monuments, the signification of these "survivors" will not remain unchanged over time. Löfgren has noted this in his article (ibid.) when reflecting over a romantic park dating from the end of the eighteenth century, the symbolism of which was no longer understood by modern visitors. Today, even Nordic people live principally indoors and lead urban lives with less and loser contact with nature than was the case with our ancestors who, to a much greater extent, had to live with and from nature and nature-based production. With the more superficial daily or weekend contact with nature that is more typical of modern life, attitudes towards nature are likely to have become progressively more susceptible to different trends and modes, including those that are projected in the media.

Even if we accept the notion of biophilia instinctive feelings, the deeper culturally based understanding of nature, are weakening due to decreasing practical knowledge and a less obvious dependence upon nature. To some town-dwellers nature might seem more like a myth in fantasy games and literature than as experienced reality. Still, as far as I have understood, perceptions of nature seem to be generally more positive than negative. Otherwise people would not answer the way they do in the above mentioned studies, and, it may be argued, neither would advertisers so extensively use natural milieu in their pictures.

In the modern city we live among strangers. We are in many senses dependent on these strangers and whose good or bad intentions we can never be sure about. This causes an ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1990). With loser contacts to neighbours we also become more and more dependent on media and advertisements for information, even concerning our own town or neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is of little commercial interest and few things that take place there, acts of violence excepted, awake much interest among the media. So, if we do not live in the city centre, what we learn from media about our own and other neighbourhoods will more probably be about the things that should not happen than about the positive experiences one might experience, for example when taking a walk in the woods or the park. In the long run, such negative media coverage must affect the ways in which our neighbourhoods, including their green areas, are perceived. Such an effect – on themselves as well as on outsiders – was also stressed by some of my informants in Bredäng (Berglund, 2001) and strongly pronounced by immigrants in another low status neighbourhood in the Stockholm area (Blomqvist, 2003). The negative reports in the media and the subsequent

"labelling" of some town districts are well-known phenomena and a major cause for concern among those who wish to see a more balanced representation of our cities and of the life going on in different parts of them (Power, 1997; Van Kempen, 1994).

Here I would also like to include a note on neighbourhood attachment, an aspect that also relates to the discussion on urbanism. An extensive study of models for predicting neighbourhood attachment was conducted in neighbourhoods in different parts of Rome (Bonaiuto et al., 1999). The results from this study show the "multi-componential nature of the process of establishing positive affective relationships with the residential neighbourhood". The investigated aspects were; "contextual, architectural, social, and services", and a sample of the inhabitants gave their estimations of these indicators. A general conclusion was that neighbourhood attachment is significantly greater in neighbourhoods that are quiet, that have aesthetically attractive buildings, and where there are active social relationships. Attachment was lower in neighbourhoods that lacked opportunities, cultural activities, meeting places and green areas (ibid. p. 346).

In the urban culture of Italy, which in many ways is held up as an ideal by today's Nordic planners, the strongest indicator of neighbourhood attachment that was related to the physical environment was "quietness". As quietness is associated with relaxation and recuperation (as discussed above) and is a typical quality to be found in and adjacent to green areas, this result leads me to propose that peaceful, green and restorative spaces are more likely to be appreciated in a residential neighbourhood than the lively urban street with all its attractive cultural and commercial services. People prefer the latter to be situated at some distance from their residential neighbourhoods, even in the capital of Italy with a since long urbanised population.

Fear and concern about safety and orderliness

Fear of nature is as old as mankind, but fear today is not exactly the same as it was before. Fear of neighbourhood nature on the outskirts of modern cities nowadays rarely derives from ghosts, witches and other dangerous beings. It is much more likely to relate to violent and dangerous people or a fear of dogs. Blomqvist (ibid.), however, found that fear of wild animals like snakes and insects (beside "darkness" and dangerous people) seemed to make adults as well as children to diminish their use of nature close to urban settings. The same causes of fear also appear in my ongoing study on school children in the Sätra-Bredäng area. The children living in this district of mostly public housing seem to keep to a number of centrally located places. Such a tendency was observed in a study by Gustafson (2001), where the children of a public housing estate were found to use much less of the neighbourhood and its nature than was the case for children living in an adjacent home owners district. Previous studies carried out in two districts of Stockholm suggest that the children there had comparatively high restrictions to their outdoor

movements as a result of concerns over traffic as well as dangerous people (e.g. Berglund et al., 1985).

My conjecture is that in all of the places referred to, feelings of being unsafe may result in a reduced degree of interest for using neighbourhood nature in "low status districts" that are known to have some social instability. This is also what Lindsay (1999) suggests when trying to explain the low use of a centrally located part of an urban greenway compared to parts leading through safer neighbourhoods.

In Bredäng it seems not uncommon that even adult women restrict themselves from walking alone in the adjacent wooded areas, even during the daytime and even if they wish to get out of the house for some exercise. There is no longer the attitude that: "it will not happen here", on the contrary, and as someone directly related: "if it happens there in Tensta [another outer district of Stockholm], it might happen here as well". This, and similar comments, were made about cases of rape and other sexual crimes that, perhaps not surprisingly, seemed to especially alarm young women. As such, one's own neighbourhood is not regarded as a safe home place where everyone is known and where nobody will harm you. On the contrary, it has become a place like all the others, filled with strangers and people who one cannot trust. The findings of a quantitative study by Ivarsson (2000) can be mentioned as an example indicating an overall feeling of insecurity in the neighbourhood of Bredäng. It shows that almost 50% of the respondents in the Skärholmen-Bredäng area reported that they avoided walking alone outside after dark.

In the case of Mezciems in Riga, attitudes that I found relating to risks in the neighbourhood are largely contradictory. These ranged from no worry at all to high levels of fear that had resulted in an extreme level of protective control of children. Some people related the changes that had taken place since the Soviet era when the police had been highly visible everywhere in the city and the control of errant behaviour stringent. Whilst this may have been perceived as annoying in other respects, it may have resulted in less concerns over violence when walking in the neighbourhood, as indeed one of my of my informants directly reported. The fairly new situation with no police visibility in the neighbourhood and with homeless people and youth gangs hanging around has lead to feelings of insecurity among residents. Another factor that was missing during the Soviet era was the reporting of crimes in the media, something that is now common in Latvia, while the image of a good and safe society of the socialistic system previously was to be promoted. (Cf. Berglund, 2002.)

These speculations are drawn from results of a largely qualitative study, but which also included questionnaires answered by some 100 school children's (10-15 years of age) concerning their attitudes to the neighbourhood. On the whole, the children expressed satisfaction with the neighbourhood, they named few places they disliked and rarely made any mention of dangerous or unpleasant people. Although some parents really worried about safety in the neighbourhood, most of the children reported that they, with or without permission, used places in the surrounding nature

without adult company. This kind of use was also confirmed through observations. (Berglund, 2004) (None of the children in Mezciems mentioned fear of animals like snakes and insects.)

There are potentially many explanations as to why these children use the neighbourhood nature more extensively than is suggested in Swedish studies of high-rise housing estates. One explanation might be that this place represents quite a normal housing situation in Latvia. In spite of its somewhat degraded appearance this is not a segregated district with a bad reputation but is instead a fairly stable place. Compared to the Swedish situation, life on the whole might be judged as being less safe in Latvia, and attitudes therefore may be different. It seems that aspects pertaining to personal safety are not focused upon in the Latvian media to the extent that is the case for Sweden, and, as such, might alarm fewer people. With a low indoor living standard – around 20 square meters per person – that is more comparable with the circumstances in Sweden during the 1950s, the need to be outdoors to escape stressful situations and reduce conflicts is apparent. With many more 'friendly' people around, the "bad ones" are less frightening. The greater need to spend time outdoors may act to block thoughts of risk or unease and allow the more positive experiences to gain ascendancy when expressing attitudes to the green environment near to home?

In my Bredäng study some of my informants told me that they "have decided not to be afraid" about walking through the forest to the shore of the lake. These informants, three middle aged women and one elderly man, valued this place highly, and two of the women also told me that they wanted to be there to make younger women and girls feel safer. In a manner of speaking they guarded the place. Because of their strong motivation, they had made a conscious decision not to give in to eventual feelings of being unsafe.

Research done by American environmental psychologists shows that for urban settings the issue of safety and security is very salient. Drawing on the findings of a number of studies, Herzog and Chernick (2000) conclude that natural elements may act to increase concerns over safety when they are viewed as possible hiding places for criminals, while more open urban natural settings show a positive relationship with perceived safety. They also point to the importance of tending nature.

> "Neatness means that a setting has been cared for, and it implies the ongoing oversight of a caring agent. Such settings encourage a sense of orderliness and security. Not surprisingly, research suggests a clear relationship between lack of setting care and fear of crime and perhaps a weaker relationship between lack of care and actual victimization." (Ibid., pp. 30-31).

The role of neatness, especially for people living in low status areas, was similarly stressed in a study by Kaplan and Talbot (quoted in abstract in Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989, p. 265). Here black residents of an inner city district of Detroit clearly showed preferences for having trees and nature nearby.

Neatness was judged important by 89% of the respondents. The results suggest that the attitude of these black urban residents reflected concerns about orderliness, safety and visibility. Kuo et al. (1998) came to a similar conclusion when studying attitudes in a public housing development in Chicago. Here, basic landscaping in the form of planted trees and well-maintained lawns appeared to have beneficial effects on preference to place as well as sense of safety. The overall role in dominant American culture of neatness and order as "signs of sociable human intentions" in yards etc. is demonstrated by Nassauer (1995). It might be stated that neatness reflects care and belonging – the opposite of the neglect and abandonment that often characterises stigmatised neighbourhoods.

One typical feature of parks is "mystery", an aspect that research has shown to have a strong correlation with preference. Here, 'mystery' relates to the situation whereby an observer lacks a total overview, there is more to see if one move's around a place. However, while 'mystery' may be a cause of pleasure and relaxation in an environment that is perceived as safe, where this is not the case it may give rise to feelings of danger. This is discussed in studies by Nasar and Jones (1997) and Herzog and Miller (1998) respectively. Herzog and Miller also refer to the findings of Kaplan and Talbot (Kaplan and Kaplan, ibid.) that black residents in the inner city were more fearful of wilderness areas than was the case among whites who were living in the suburbs.

These findings, which have also spread to architects and city planners, will impact upon planning practices even in today's Sweden. The simplest solution is to simply diminish mystery – and thereby risking beauty and joy – when planning parks etc. in those neighbourhoods that are judged as being less safe. Jane Jacobs once proposed (1961, p. 229), that a complete avoidance of parks in these kinds of neighbourhoods is to be preferred as they only give rise to danger. The residents living in the least popular neighbourhoods would then probably lose the quality of nature contact and thereby also lose access to positive and healthy experiences in the close proximity of their homes. As such, fear may cause the loss of a source of pleasure that is accessible in other neighbourhoods.

Migration

It takes time to get to know a place, to make it home. Nowadays many people move fairly often, sometimes long distances and between places that vary considerably, not least concerning nature. For example in Bredäng, which was built nearly forty years ago, I did not meet any adult person who was born there. Still, some had lived there for twenty or thirty years. Even people who had lived there for more than ten years complained about not feeling at home. This might be explained partly by architectural aspects (i.e. unpopular, impersonal slab blocks) and partly by the fact that the different groups (mostly middle aged and elderly Nordic and younger immigrant families

from distant countries respectively) did not socialise and in many cases suggested the existence of some animosity. These are problems that affect many districts on the outskirts of Stockholm and in its high-rise suburbs.

The newcomers are blamed for littering, for being noisy, sometimes frightening, for not taking care of their children etc. Immigrants on the other hand, sometimes express dislike over things that Swedes do as well as fear of racism (cf. Blomqvist, ibid.). This tense situation affects outdoor life. One fairly often encounters suspicious stares when one is out and about – in the shopping centre in Bredäng as well as at the beach. This contrasts to the situation in Mezciems, as well as to experiences related in previous studies. Immigrants in Bredäng are occasionally accused of bad behaviour in nature and at the bathing areas. They may be seen in big, noisy groups, for example having pick nicks in the evening, whilst Swedes may prefer a quiet walk and contemplative rest at spots overlooking the water.

In a North American study it was stated that new immigrants from South America tended to have a somewhat different attitude to nature than naturalised or native-born persons. For example, "respecting the forest" was not to the same degree connected with norms of how to use the forest but more to experiential aspects of being in the forest. This study, as well as earlier findings, also: "seem to support the importance of seeking to recreate in areas where other recreationists have compatible social definitions" (Carr and Williams, 1993, p. 33 ff.). A recent Swedish study in another part of Stockholm (Ericson, 2001) found that immigrants were less frequent users of a partly forested recreation area than non-immigrants, and also that the ways in which they used the area tended to be slightly different.

Mezciems, my study area in Latvia, is somewhat younger than Bredäng, and was built about twenty-five years ago. Even so, most of the people that I met had lived there for a long period of time and young people had often been born there. This can to a large extent be explained by the housing policy during the Soviet era. The attachment to place was very evident. Although many dissociated themselves from the built up areas, nature seemed to mean a lot in peoples lives and was frequently used by ethnic Latvians as well as Russians and other nationalities. I could not observe any typical differences between groups and one had to be close enough to hear the language people were speaking in order to differentiate between groups. There is, however, rhetoric about differences, although one that in my opinion is exaggerating the discrepancies in the behaviour that might be observed.

I will end here although much more could be said concerning how migration (not only across country borders) relates to a lack of knowledge and understanding of places as well as of nature, and of favourite places often being situated somewhere far from where one lives today. The less we know the more easily we become scared of both human beings and things that we do not understand. The possible experience of joy can to some extent also be dependent on knowledge and familiarity with a place and its nature.

Conclusions

In places where residents do not really feel at home and do not trust each other, fear is fairly likely to affect the way in which the outdoor environment is used. The need to be on one's guard tends to make people fear not only darkness itself, but also all the things that diminish the overview. Consequently, whilst nature might be generally perceived as "the best quality" of a certain district, people may still wish to remove any wooded areas on the way to the centre, or the bushes surrounding the little park. An appreciation of nature is not unique to Nordic or Western cultures. It seems to exist everywhere even if the way we use and "respect" nature may differ. Perhaps the attitudes of professionals to nature (in a broad sense) in city planning vary more with place and time than is the case for the public.

Modern life affects the use of neighbourhood nature negatively. The differences in the everyday use of nature between two outer districts in Stockholm and Riga respectively, are noticed in my studies. In Riga one can still witness a more outdoor lifestyle of the kind I can remember from decades ago in Sweden, a time when we also lived more densely and also had fewer computers and other advanced "amusement-machines" at home. On the whole, even young school children in Riga seemed well acquainted with the place and its natural settings and most of them seemed to be allowed to move around fairly freely. Experiences from studies in Stockholm suggest more restrictions for children and also more self-restrictions for women in the use of parks and wooded areas. There is no evidence to suggest that the investigated district in Stockholm is more dangerous, but information in the media about unpleasant things happening in the region is commonplace in Stockholm and it is something about which people talk. In Riga, as far as I have understood, this kind of information is not as common, or at least it is not raised in conversation very frequently.

Migration is something that is characteristic for our time and which especially influences life on the outskirts of big cities. Here, in the not too popular high rise districts; people who are strangers to each other often live in close proximity of one another. If there is little interest in socialising with others, there might be a tendency that parks and recreation places function less successfully as arena where the "weak ties" that keep a community together can be generated and maintained. On the contrary, in my Stockholm study I could notice a tense situation and some negative talk about the behaviour of people of other ethnic groups in the courtyards as well as at the beach. New comers "did not know the rules", and those who had lived there for a long time no longer felt at home. Such things were related to me even if I found little evidence of immigrants behaving incorrectly, maybe just somewhat differently.

When it comes to the differences observed between the two neighbourhoods in Stockholm and Riga respectively concerning attachment to and use of the nearby nature, my conjecture is that the fast accelerating modernisation of life conditions in Riga fairly soon will drive us more alike.

Migration and segregation as well as influences from West and Central Europe on personal life styles and urban ideals, I guess, will influence both cities to move in the direction of something like a European standard.

If migration remains high and modernisation continues to raise our living standard, and if the municipalities fail to allocate more money towards the maintenance of the public environment, then, I believe, many of the green areas in the Nordic cities are in big trouble. The users may come to have less knowledge of place and of nature. The neighbourhood nature will continue to deteriorate and will be less able to compete in terms of beauty and safety with private places or places situated further away from the city. People who can afford to will move to such places in order to avoid litter, vandalism, and ”unpleasant” or “anaesthetic” people and instead experience cleanliness, well-maintained greenery and “nice people”.

There are many decisions that need to be made concerning how green or how urban our cities ought to be in the future. These will for example be about quality of life as well as other aspects of sustainability. My argument is not that it would be better with fewer but better green areas, and neither am I arguing that all green areas should be preserved. I would say, however, that we have to accept that people living in the city today, spend less of their time outdoors and have lower levels of trust in each other. If we, the planners, want them to spend more time outside – for exercise, for play, for contemplation, for the promotion of health etc. – we have to find solutions whereby the places that are provided are attractive. This means a need for places where joy outweighs fear, and where beauty, not ugliness, is that which signifies nature even where it is close to where people live. Finally, perceptions of nature as “the best quality” of many urban neighbourhoods mean that all parties involved must share the responsibility of handling this resource with care.

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SLU
Institutionen för landskapsplanering Ultuna
Samhälls- och landskapsplanering nr 16

”Det bästa hos staden är i alla fall naturen”. Så löd DN-journalisten Kerstin Vinterheds förvånade slutsats efter en undersökning av ett antal svenska städer i jakt på urbana kvaliteter. (särtrycket ”Staden”, DN, 1990)

Gäller ännu bilden av stadens park och natur som ”det bästa”? Efter att ha arbetat med djupstudier av ”utsatta” ytterstadsmiljöer i Stockholm och Riga och tagit del av senare års mediediskussion om stadsform, trygghet mm har jag här försökt sammanfatta och reflektera.

Det är ganska uppenbart att värdet av natur i staden är alltmer ifrågasatt. I mediedebatten används beteckningar som ”Skräpnatur” och ”gröna barriärer” om det som utgör stadens gröna struktur. Parkerna beskrivs ofta som mörkrets och rädslans platser – särskilt i stadens periferi.

När man talar med boende i dessa stadsdelar framstår fortfarande ofta naturen som det bästa. Där finns problem som dålig skötsel och känslor av otrygghet, men också stora kvaliteter som människor vill ha kvar i staden. Den här texten försöker belysa såväl diskursen om grannskapets natur som tillståndet i praktiken - i en nordisk kontext med referner till internationell forskning.

Rapporten baseras på författarens forskning under en längre tid och inom olika organisationer. Den berör såväl sociala aspekter som gröna värden i stadsbyggandet och ingår i forskningsfältet hållbar stadsutveckling vid institutionen för landskapsplaneriing Ultuna.

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Institutionen för landskapsplanering Ultuna
Box 7012
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Ansvarig utgivare
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E-post: lpul@slu.se
Besöksadress: Ulls väg 28 B

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