

Local Residents' Relationship towards their Nearby Outdoor Recreation Areas

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Keywords: Outdoor recreation, quality of life, requirements, landscape management, survey.

Introduction

In the last decades, recreation has become a main aspect of people's quality of life (Müller 1999). It is assumed that especially opportunities for nearby outdoor recreation are of crucial significance for people's lives allowing them to regulate their physical and psychological resources (Hobfoll 2001, Fuhrer & Kaiser 1994). In contrast to residential areas, nearby recreation areas have so far been neglected in formal planning procedures. There is also only little empirically confirmed knowledge regarding the local residents' relationship towards their nearby recreation areas and the qualities people expect of such areas. To fill this gap we started a study aiming at answering the following questions:

- What are the expectations of the residents regarding their nearby recreation areas?
- Which factors influence the recreational use of specific areas
- Which actions regarding the improvement of recreation areas do the residents perceive as needed?
- In which form could the residents' requirements be best included in the planning of recreation areas?

Methods

We conducted the study in a district at the Northern fringe of the city of Zürich using methods of quantitative social science research. Therefore we sent standardised questionnaires to a random sample of

1000 local residents. The return rate of this survey reached 32%, and the achieved sample proved to be balanced in terms of socio-demographic criteria. In the questionnaire questions on the perceived quality of the interviewees' residential area were combined with questions focussing on the specific quality of four nearby outdoor recreation areas (attractiveness, use intensity, activities, participation in decision making). This survey also serves as a basis for a landscape development planning for this district, which will be started in the next months.

Results

The statistical analysis of the data revealed that the local residents of the investigated district generally appreciated their nearby outdoor recreation areas better than their more immediate residential areas. The proximity of the recreation areas proved to be more relevant for people's use of these areas than their attractiveness and explained a large amount of the variance of use. The requirements for attractive nearby recreation areas appeared to be highly diverse, and more determined by attracting than disturbing (i.e. urbanisation driven) characteristics. Astonishingly, considering the high use-density of these areas crowding did not appear to be a major challenge for attractiveness; much more disturbing revealed to be aspects such as littering or traffic noise. In spite of the high significance the recreation areas had for them, only a small part of the interviewees have so far participated in shaping their everyday surroundings. Interestingly,

most relevant for this abstinence was not the general disinterest in such activities, but people's reluctance to going out on a limb.

The results suggest that easy and quick access seems to be most important to maintain and improve the use and attractiveness of nearby outdoor recreation areas. Therefore measures to enhance nearby outdoor recreation should concentrate on improving the access opportunities from the residential areas to the closest recreation areas. To raise the attractiveness within the recreation areas, a better inclusion of the local residents into the planning of outdoor recreation areas is needed facing the diversity of requirements expressed. This can be reached best by offering them opportunities to express their wishes and ideas in a more private way, with interviews, questionnaires including spatial-explicit items (photos, maps) or discussions within "homogenous" groups (e.g. mothers, elderly people).

To base the so far neglected outdoor recreation planning on people's recreation needs, more research is required. In particular a better understanding of the function of nearby recreation areas for people's regulation of their physical and psychological resources is called for.

References

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