

The role of the cultural background for nearby outdoor recreation behavior

Matthias Buchecker, Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL, Switzerland, matthias.buchecker@wsl.ch;
Degenhardt, B., University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland; **Kienast, F.** Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL, Switzerland

Introduction

Recent literature suggest that attractive recreation areas in the proximity of urban settlements are of particular importance as they motivate the residents for physical activity and allow them to recover from daily work loads (Degenhardt et al., 2011). In German speaking regions nearby outdoor-recreation is a very common term for activities in these areas. In other regions, in particular in those with Latin cultures, no such term exists so that it has to be circumscribed in a rather complicated way. This raises the question whether nearby outdoor recreation is a specific phenomenon of German culture, or whether it exists in a similar form in regions of Latin cultures too. In the international literature, nearby outdoor recreation is not an issue, and research on the influence of culture on outdoor recreation focuses on the use of urban parks or remote nature parks (e.g. Sayan and Karagüzel, 2010; Gobster, 2002).

Methods

With our study we wanted to find out which commonalities and differences in terms of nearby outdoor recreation can be found between residents with different cultural backgrounds. Based on a qualitative pre-study, we developed standardised questionnaires addressing a wide range of aspects related to nearby outdoor recreation. We then sent these questionnaires to random samples ($N = 1200$) of residents of three middle-sized peri-urban Swiss cities with a mainly German, French respectively Italian speaking population. The questionnaires also recorded the cultural origin of the respondents' parents, so that a fourth (cross-regional) cultural group could be differentiated: Respondents of South European origin. The response rates of the surveys ranged between 22% and 29%.

Results

Comparisons of mean values (ANOVA) revealed that in the Italian speaking study area, residents spent significantly less of their leisure time in the close to nature areas than in the other study areas, whereas their share of leisure time in the green space within the city was significantly higher than in the German speaking study area (see Fig. 1). Significant and systematic differences between the subgroups could also be found in respondents' outdoor recreation activities, their preferences of the area characteristics, their knowledge of the area, their preferred use of path qualities, and their outdoor recreation motives. Regression analyses corroborated that the cultural background was a much more relevant influence factor for diverse aspects of nearby outdoor recreation than gender, age or income. So health and restoration-related outdoor recreation motives could be explained best with the cultural background variable. On the other

hand, we could identify a number of shared features in the recorded outdoor recreation behaviour of the four cultural groups. So respondents from all four cultural subgroups showed very similar pattern of outdoor recreation activity, area, and motive preferences.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that in spite of the linguistic differences regarding the term outdoor recreation and culture-specific differences in nearby-outdoor recreation features, the respondents of all four subgroups and all three study areas exhibited a typical nearby outdoor recreation behaviour. This behaviour is mainly characterised by a high variety of recreation goals including health, restoration and regeneration of resources needed for work as well as a frequency / short duration of the outdoor activity. In the Italian-speaking study area, however, the respondents' access to the outdoor recreation areas appeared to considerably worse and the use of the nearby outdoor recreation considerably lower than in the other study areas.

These insights implicate that in particular in Italian speaking regions, but generally in regions of Latin culture, where the concept of nearby outdoor recreation does not exist in a linguistic sense, more efforts are needed to communicate the importance of nearby outdoor recreation and a high quality of the outdoor recreation areas around the settlements. These efforts may include the creation of a new simplified term for this form of leisure activity, but also the explanation of the important function of nearby outdoor recreation for residents' resilience towards stress in their daily work.

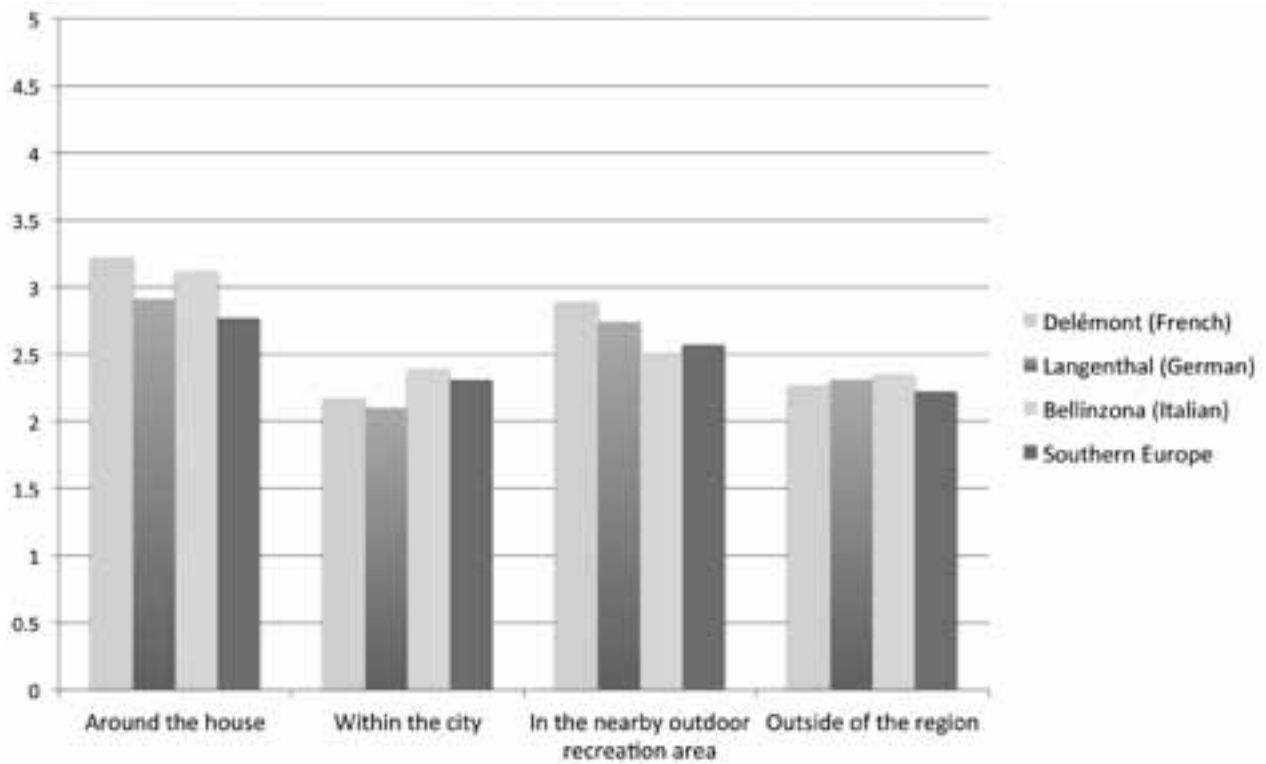


Figure 1. Mean values of cultural subgroups' share of leisure time spent in the green space of four different scales of their residential landscape (N=330). Scales: 1 = no time, 2 = little time, 3 = half of the (leisure) time, 4 = much time, 5 = the whole (leisure) time.

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