

”De är inte ute så mycket”

Den bostadsnära naturkontaktens betydelse och utrymme i storstadsbarns vardagsliv

av

Mattias Sandberg

Akademisk avhandling som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Handelshögskolans fakultetsnämnd vid Göteborgs Universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentlig granskning fredagen den 1 juni 2012, kl. 13.15, sal C-G.
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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis is to study children's contact with nature near to their homes, and to examine its meaning in an urban context. With a growing range of leisure activities indoors, lack of green space and with an increasing residential segregation, larger cities stand out as an especially challenging context for children to experience nature. Possible barriers to the direct experiencing of nature are one important focus in this thesis. The second important focus is the experiences and impressions that children have of nature near to their homes, and how it differs among children with various backgrounds and in different urban settings.

A time-geographical approach provides the overarching theoretical perspective providing a focus on time and space as fundamental resources for individuals in their performance of various projects. As a complement to time-geography, theoretical approaches of affordance, place attachment and phenomenology of the body are used to analyse children's experiences and impressions of nature close to home.

The empirical data is drawn from two studies each of which incorporates study areas with contrasting socioeconomic profiles, ethnic mixes and access to nature. A study of about forty ten-year-old children was conducted in two areas, one relatively affluent in Gothenburg and one poorer area in Stockholm with more residents with immigrant backgrounds. The main method for this study was semi-structured group interviews complemented by participant observation during a number of excursions. In a second study parents of sixty children were interviewed, half living in inner city apartments in Gothenburg and half in houses on the outskirts of the city. The two groups were similar with respect to ethnic background and level of education, but differed in terms of proximity to nature.

The study found that children with wealthier backgrounds, and especially where a majority have a Swedish background, gain more experience of nature, both close to home and further away, than the children from studied areas where a large proportion of the population are from immigrant backgrounds. Schools have a key role in enabling children to have encounters with nature when these would otherwise be limited. Children building dens in areas under pressure of being 'developed' defended these strongly, demonstrating how direct relations with nature can spur a moral response. Overall, children with a more frequent nature contact are seen as an exception and parents reported being outdoors more during their own upbringing than children today generally are. They regret this development although they become reconciled to this in the light of their children's engagements with other commitments, for example sport training. Patches of nature are particularly valued by the inner-city parents who also, however, stress the importance of second homes in the countryside for providing experiences of nature lacking in children's everyday life.

Keywords: children, nature close to home, urban, outdoor activities, hindrance, segregation, time, mobility

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Department of Human and Economic Geography
P.O. Box 630
405 30 Göteborg