Teenage experiences of public green spaces in suburban Helsinki
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Abstract

Research into the values and meanings of urban green spaces has increased in recent years mainly, in order to determine how much and what kinds of green spaces should be provided for urban residents to ensure their well-being and maintain various urban green space values. This article examines adolescents’ uses of, values for and relationships to local green spaces. A study was carried out in Eastern Helsinki, Finland, to test social value mapping among younger respondents. The other aim was to combine social value mapping with a document analysis to explore the valuations of local green spaces in depth. Place and affordance approaches were used for this purpose. The results revealed that the teenagers used and valued green spaces differently from adults, and that there were also differences between the genders. The adolescents most appreciated the beauty of the environment, tranquillity and opportunities for activity. The green space values were often associated with the places that enabled social contacts and activities. The methodological comparison revealed that social value mapping is more complete tool when maps are combined with qualitative data. The examination of local knowledge revealed place meanings and identities and situational uses of the green environment.

Keywords: Green space uses; Green space values; Local knowledge; Place; Social value mapping; Teenagers

Introduction

Public green spaces serve society in many ways, providing contact with nature and enhancement of well-being to the inhabitants (Korpela and Hartig, 1996; Chiesura, 2004; Tyrvainen et al., 2005, 2007). Their benefits are primarily determined by the quantity and quality of these areas as well as their accessibility (Tyrvainen et al., 2005). In recent years, several studies have been made of residents’ demands for green space. Research into young people and the environment has also increased in recent decades, as existing knowledge of teenagers’ demands for using public space has been inadequately considered (Travalou, 2003). As young people are usually more dependent on the local environment than adults, their local environment plays an important role in their environmental development and social identity (Lieberg, 1995; Depeau, 2001; Bell et al., 2003). It is an arena for their informal learning of practical, social, emotional and cognitive competences (Robinson, 2000; Bjarndöttir, 2004).

Being in nature is argued to be beneficial to an individual in many ways, also for young people (Ward Thompson, 2005). Research on teenagers and the environment has primarily focused on the uses of open spaces, rather than on green spaces in particular. Moreover, research concerning the activities of adolescents in leisure time which includes the uses of green space, has focused on the constraints and problems of...
use, such as damage and illegal activities (McMeeking and Purkayastha, 1995; Bell et al., 2003). In previous studies of green spaces, teenage attitudes towards public parks and woods range from having a good time to getting bored (Bell et al., 2003). The teenagers often like to explore the environment and to find a territory of their own and they may avoid the adult spaces, where the teenagers may feel themselves controlled, criticized or excluded (Lieberg, 1995; Massey, 1998; Bell et al., 2003). They also introduce new activities to green spaces, and some teenagers contest the conventional uses of open spaces. The adolescents' valuations of various green space types and characteristics have not been extensively studied.

This case study examines the uses of and values for green space of teenagers in Eastern Helsinki. This kind of local information has become an important source of knowledge in green space or land-use planning (Tyrväinen et al., 2007). In general, surveys have focused on the green space demands of the adult population. This is partly due to that fact that the adolescents are unwilling to respond to postal surveys. Examining adolescents' attitudes often requires often a separate study.

Mapping of local green space values

The method used for studying green space values from a spatial perspective, social value mapping, is a survey method combined with a Geographic Information System (GIS) tool to aid both land-use and green space planning (Tyrväinen et al., 2004, 2007). It is a tool designed to capture the valuations of local green space characteristics (aesthetic, cultural and health benefits) and to bring this information in systematic form to the decision-making processes. The strength of the method is that it presents, where the most valued green spaces are situated. The GIS based method connected with a survey was initially introduced in the regional and urban land-use planning of Stockholm region in Sweden. Sandberg and Ståhle (2002) used the concept of the sociotope, which parallels the biotope-concept. A sociotope is a place used, perceived and lived in by people. The theoretical background in Finnish case studies, is primarily based on environmental psychology and research related to studying park characteristics (such as Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Grahn, 1991). The social values of green spaces (e.g. space and freedom) were operated as conceptual constructs created for the GIS-based survey. This means that the researchers had formulated the names of environmental qualities that were inquired from the respondents (Tyrväinen et al., 2007).

The pilot study in Eastern Helsinki functioned well among the adult respondents. They were capable of indicating the local values of green spaces on the map and this information was possible to bring into decision-making (Tyrväinen et al., 2007). One future challenge that was stated was to collect information among different age groups.

Although the social value mapping approach (Tyrväinen et al., 2007) has influenced urban green space planning in the Helsinki metropolitan area, it has also been criticised for not presenting the experiences and knowledge underlying the maps (Van Herzele, 2005). This method could not incorporate the locally constructed meanings of green spaces which meant that local knowledge was inefficiently used. The located values, like space and freedom, remained anonymous on the maps. Therefore, the objective of this study was also to explore the green space values with other approaches that examine local people–place connections and local knowledge in more detail. The green space uses and values found in this article will be discussed in the light of place theories (Relph, 1986; Smaldone et al., 2005) and affordance research (Gibson, 1979; Kyttä, 2003) (explained in Materials and methods).

This study asks the following questions:

1. How do teenagers use local green spaces? Do these uses differ from adult uses?
2. What characteristics of green spaces are important to teenagers?
3. What values and meanings do green spaces have in the everyday lives of teenagers?
4. How do teenagers discuss green spaces, and what issues do they themselves raise?
5. How could social value mapping be informed by the other place-related knowledge?

Materials and methods

Case study area

The study area was situated in Eastern Helsinki, Finland, and included parts of five suburbs. The biggest suburbs which contain blocks of flats were Southern Kontula and Mellunmäki. The other two areas, Vartioharju and Mellunkylä, mainly contain single-family houses. The study area is approximately six square kilometres large and has around 20,000 inhabitants. At the time of the research, the public green spaces in the study area comprised of 195 ha. The types of green spaces in the region were: constructed parks and green belts, forest types, fields and meadows. The area was the same as that for the 2003 postal inquiry aimed at individuals aged 15–75 living in the area (Tyrväinen et al., 2004, 2007), thus it was possible to compare the current data with data from 2003.
Data collection

The scope of this study was to explore and understand the teenagers’ values and meanings of local green spaces in the context of their everyday lives. Mixed methods were chosen to address different aspects of the research design and different research questions (Brannen, 2005). The methodological purpose of the study was to elaborate the examination of green spaces as locally meaningful places compared to the previous GIS approaches which present green spaces as physical areas (Tyrväinen et al., 2007).

The case study consisted of two types of data: questionnaire responses collected from the local school and existing documents from one of the classes. The documents were chosen to represent qualitative data, and they had the advantage of being group opinions with a research-free origin. The researcher had no influence on the contents of the produced material and the pupils’ local perspectives and group opinions were expressed in a familiar school project situation.

The quantitative survey was the starting point. This part follows the tradition of user surveys, which usually make time- and context-free generalisations (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The document analysis examined how local environment appears to the adolescents in everyday life: as a familiar place with activities, routines, spatial practices and previous experiences.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed in the local secondary and upper secondary school (Helsingin yhteislyseo) in Kontula in autumn 2004. The sample size was 300 individuals. Of these, 105 were from secondary school (14–15 years old) and 195 from upper secondary school classes (15–19 years old). One teacher delivered and collected the questionnaires, which were designed to be completed within 1 h. Different parts of the questionnaire examined the use of public green spaces, social value mapping and favourite places. The last two parts were map-based tasks. The previously mentioned sections (8) were closed and four sections were open-ended (other green space uses, suggestions for development, favourite place descriptions and open-ended comments concerning the green spaces).

For the social value mapping, the respondents were asked to identify areas with the following positive values: beautiful landscape, a valuable nature site, the feeling of forest, space and freedom, an attractive park, peace and quiet, opportunities for activities, a fascinating place and history and culture. Furthermore, they were asked to identify areas with negative values such as unpleasantness and scariness. The selection of these values is explained in more detail in Tyrväinen et al. (2007). The social values were presented as a one-page list, and respondents were asked to identify areas corresponding to each value by writing down the number of the area to which they felt the value applied. Respondents could also answer that a particular value did not exist within the case study area or that they did not know whether such a value existed or not in the study area.

In order to locate the information for the green spaces on a map, the returned questionnaires were saved in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The mapping results dealing with place-specific values of green spaces were transferred to the ArcGIS9 program. This process has been explained in a previous study (Tyrväinen et al., 2007).

Document analysis

Another data set consisted of documents already produced by one class of 8th grade pupils to establish the meanings of the local environment through the teenager’s own expressions and viewpoints. These documents, called Travel Guides to Kontula, had been produced as group projects in a media education course. The pupils and their parents gave their written permission to use this material.

The documents consisted of seven booklets of six to ten pages each compiled by male or female pupils (14–15 years old, 22 pupils), as no mixed groups existed. The guides included texts, maps and photographs (87) which were mainly taken by the pupils themselves, although some archive photographs were also used. The booklets were written in the style of a guide-book representing a positive image of the suburb. The texts and photos were read as environmental representations showing how the local environments were presented by the teenagers (Hall, 1997).

The mention of place meanings and identities of green spaces were particularly investigated. A place identity comprises characteristics that make areas recognisable (Smaldone et al., 2005). According to Relph (1986) place identity consists of three components: the physical setting, the activities and the meanings (memories, stories and experiences) associated with it. Gustavson (2001) also mentions distinction, valuation, continuity and change as dimensions of place meanings. The place meanings are subjectively perceived and constructed and they also become parts of people-place relationships through daily life. These aspects were explored in the documents with the following questions: did the adolescents mention the green spaces in their guides, how were the green spaces described, which characteristics made them recognisable, how were the green spaces used, and did teenagers mention special events or stories concerning the areas?
The question of green space uses for a certain purpose was also examined in more detail. The theory of affordances (Gibson, 1979) was used to examine what kinds of functional, socio-cultural and emotional properties the local green spaces afforded the teenagers (Clark and Uzzell, 2002; Kytta, 2003). An affordance is a transactional concept, which emphasises the fact that humans form an inseparable unit with the environment (Kytta, 2003). Similar to both approaches (place and affordance approaches) is that they emphasise the perception of environment through action and active participation (Heft, 2007). The data analysis for the mixed methods followed the process described by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003), which is called a mixed methods research process model (also, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). At the end of the results section, analyses of place identities and affordances of different green space types are compared with the social value map results.

Results

The respondents

All 300 questionnaires were collected on completion during class time. Some parts were more actively responded to (green space uses), some more passively (favourite places, suggestions for development). The questions on local knowledge produced limited responses, because half of the pupils lived outside the study area and were unwilling to evaluate the area, not even as a daily school environment.

Girls and boys were represented evenly, 144 of each. Twelve pupils did not mention their gender. The secondary school students were more active respondents than the upper secondary school students. The borders of the study area were problematic, because many pupils lived close to the study area, but not exactly in the area. Only 45% of the respondents lived within the study area, but 78% lived within one to three kilometres of it. More than half (58%) of the respondents, lived in blocks of flats and 42% in different kinds of small houses (response rate 68%).

Knowledge of local green spaces

The boys claimed that their knowledge of public green spaces was greater than that of the girls. As a whole, half responded that they knew their areas quite well (girls 46%, boys 48%). Twenty per cent of the boys claimed that they knew the areas very well, compared to 9% of the girls. A relatively poor knowledge of green spaces was reported by 37% of the girls and 28% of the boys. (Response rates: boys 87%, girls 75%).

Uses of public green spaces

The data gathered from the teenagers were compared with the adult responses (Tyrväinen et al., 2007). In Eastern Helsinki, the teenagers used public green spaces less than the adults (Fig. 1). The girls used the public green spaces less than the boys. The seasonal variation was quite similar among both age groups.

The most usual reason for not using green spaces was participation in outdoor recreation in other areas. A quarter of the girls mentioned this reason as well as 15% of the boys. A low attraction to and a lack of interest in nature were mentioned by <10% of the respondents. A lack of time and crowded areas were mentioned by 5%.

What do teenagers do in green spaces?

The girls and boys reported uses that differed to a certain extent from each other (Fig. 2). For the girls,
walking was the most common use, but for the boys, all kinds of sports activities were more important. The boys also cycled and skateboarded more than the girls. The girls primarily either walked or hung around in green spaces. The adults were identified as active green space users, especially participating in walking and cycling. It can be seen that skateboarding is primarily a youth activity, while cross-country skiing is more of an adult activity.

The teenage respondents also stated what other activities they carried out in green spaces. Hanging around was the most common response. Green spaces were also encountered on the way to school and used in sport classes. Seven respondents mentioned drinking beer in public green spaces, mainly during the weekends. The respondents also mentioned driving a moped, roller-skating and playing basketball or tennis. (Response rates: boys 18%, 15%).

Suggestions for development

We asked the respondents to give suggestions for green space development. The boys (42%) gave twice the number of suggestions than those provided by the girls (25%). The girls desired new and more interesting walking tracks, hang-out spots and ice-skating rinks. The boys suggested better facilities for football, ice hockey and skateboarding. Opportunities for dog training, horse-riding and motor sport were also mentioned by the respondents.

Most used areas and favourite places

Local teenagers mostly used the green spaces in southern Kontula (Fig. 3), partly because the respondents lived there (49%). Another reason could be that
many regional sports opportunities are provided in the area. The green spaces in Mellunmäki were also reported to be used often (17% of respondents lived there). The parks around the single-family housing area were not used very much as fewer respondents (<5%) lived there. The respondents living in the neighbouring suburbs (outside the study area) reported the uses of their local parks in the favourite place section.

The teenagers mostly visited the green spaces close to their neighbourhoods. They did not actively use the main recreational network (in the middle of the map) as much as the adults did. The constructed green spaces were used more than nature areas. The characteristics of these types vary a lot (size, location and function). Of the most used areas, a constructed park was mentioned in 63% of the girls’ responses and 66% of the boys.

Only a few of the respondents had a favourite area: 28% of the boys did and of the girls only 18% specified such an area (response rates: boys 82%, girls 67%). Large activity parks were highlighted as favourite areas, but small and local green spaces also received sporadic mentions. The favourite place description frequently contained only a word or two: “a playing field”, “peaceful” or “a place to sit around and think”.

**Mapped green space values**

More than half, or 55% of the questionnaires returned, had mapping information filled in properly. The inadequate responses came especially from the pupils living outside the study area. The results revealed that the teenagers associate fewer areas with particular values than adults (Fig. 4).

The trend for the teenagers to assign or not assign values was quite similar to the adults. Frequent references were made to opportunities for activities, beautiful scenery, and space and freedom. The teenagers made fewer references than adults to the feeling of a forest, a valuable nature site and peaceful areas. However, the teenagers found constructed parks to be more attractive than the adults. Half of the adults stated that there were no attractive parks. It was difficult to place values on the importance of history and culture on both adults and teenagers’ opinions of green spaces. Both groups referred mainly to the areas with historical significance (ruins, cultural landscapes). Other cultural layers of land-uses are not very legible in the local landscape as the suburbs were built to the former forests and remote fields. Moreover, history and culture was not associated with the unofficial histories of suburban places (meeting places, new symbols, events, stories). The value fascinating place, was used for the first time in this study and it seemed a difficult value to associate with an environment. Negative values were also referred to less than positive ones in a similar manner as the adults.

The only singular map presented here, beautiful landscape is discussed in the next section (Fig. 5). The green spaces characterised as beautiful landscapes were mentioned by over half the respondents. Less than 20% claimed that there was no pleasant scenery. The activity parks (Kelkkapuisto: 42 mentions, Sports park: 16) and green networks in the vicinity of the school were thought to be nice landscapes (Emännänpuisto by the school: 15 mentions, Mustikkamäki forest: 8). These are mainly constructed parks with some remnants of natural forest vegetation and younger woodlands. In the east, a farm landscape with pasture received some mentions (10). References were also made to small natural coniferous woodlands within the areas with single-family houses.

![Fig. 4. The values mapped by (A) the teenagers (response rate 55%, 168 pupils) and (B) the adults (421 respondents in a survey) in the same area. The fascinating place was not included in the adult questionnaire.](image-url)
The most valued green spaces by teenagers

Fig. 6 shows which areas were most frequently mentioned regarding different green space values. The synthesis map of the most highlighted green spaces was clustered, and the values were mostly found within the housing area. The activity parks and green networks of Kontula near the school were mentioned most often, but nearby cliffs which the adolescents prefer to use for hanging around were also popular. A forest near the school was found to be fascinating by many respondents, especially in regards to nature and historic values. The adults’ results were not as clustered, and covered a wider range of green space types. The adults mainly appreciated the same areas, though a farm landscape was the most favoured area for the adults. The negative values of green spaces were clustered in the same areas as the positive highlights: the activity parks received contradictory mentions, and the cliff areas were also thought to be scary and littered.

What are the most important green space values for teenagers?

The teenagers valued the same characteristics as the adults in the Helsinki metropolitan area: the beauty of the environment, peacefulness and activity areas (Fig. 7). Both genders appreciated quite similar values, but opportunities for activities were more important for the boys than for the girls. Apart from the most appreciated values, the girls also emphasised space and freedom. The teenagers also put forward some of their own descriptions, such as “lawn”, “sunny place”, “trees”, “cleanliness” and “unspoilt nature”.

Local green spaces in the teenage documentation

The travel guide documents placed the green space values and meanings in everyday contexts. The booklets only described the Kontula area where the school is situated. The main topics were central places, services, buildings and traffic connections relating to everyday living and leisure time activities. The shopping centre was very well represented in the descriptions.

The photographs and texts were used as material. The photographs were usually denotative, representing the chosen theme directly. They mainly presented scenes from familiar and recognisable places such as streets, the church and other landmarks, walking routes and parks. Many of the themes included green spaces: photos of activity parks (15%), skateboard park and spots (19%),
the surroundings of important buildings (13%) and cityscapes (5%).

The green spaces were mentioned in three contexts in the texts: (1) the greenness of the housing area as a quality of the area, (2) the green spaces as places for leisure and (3) the green spaces as important places. According to the local teenagers, Kontula is a close-to-nature area and nature is a valuable part of the local identity encountered in daily life: “Kontula has lots of large park areas and spaciousness.” The suburb was described as being small and cosy, although it is one of the biggest suburbs in Finland. The pupils also mentioned that the activities and services are at good distance and it is easy to move around.

Some of the green spaces had more specific references: “There are two parks in Kontula that are local sights: the Kesoil Hills and the Kontula sports park”. The most appreciated park was called Kesoil hill, a vernacular name that has lasted many teenage generations. The area was described as follows: “The Kesoil hill was a wasteland, but now it is the Sledge park of Kontula (official name), where one of the best outdoor skateboard parks is situated.” “In winter, you can see people, families, going downhill on sledges, snowboards, mini-skis or even big plastic bags.” (also Table 1).

The green spaces were usually described through the activities. Skateboarding was presented in many of the booklets. The popular hobby was also described by non-users, such as girls. The skateboarders also navigated unofficial spaces. Among the skateboarders these were called street spots. To find these, the local guide tells the reader: “If you just keep your eyes open, you’ll find a lot
of good street spots, like the legendary rail by the church.”
The boys’ booklets also present the sports park in detail (Table 1). Special events, such as visits by famous leagues, are important part of place history.

Social value mapping compared to other place-related knowledge

Social value mapping had been criticised, because the value maps do not reveal why the areas are perceived to be valuable. There are however at least two ways to interpret and inform social value maps based on the chosen approaches: as a part of qualities forming place identities (Table 1) and as part of affordances (Table 2).

Mapped social values compared to place identities

Table 1 presents how the social value mapping results and document analysis results were compared (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003). Place identity (Relph, 1986) was chosen to represent a construct of data integration of some of the most highlighted parks (Fig. 6). When used as an information tool for planning, social value maps represent the rigid characterisations of places as they provide place-specific information (Table 1). The table also shows the other kinds of place-specific knowledge: the place names, given meanings, physical characteristics and activities are part of place identity. This knowledge can be interpreted as insider knowledge that mainly local people have (Relph, 1986). The table gives a concise overview of the dimensions of place identities derived from the documents.

Social values integrated to affordances

Some of the park characteristics, especially the location and green space type, seem to influence their uses. The affordances enable us to study the uses and meanings of green spaces systematically (Table 2). The local green space types that were considered to have different kinds of functional, social and emotional meanings were the activity parks, the in-between spaces and the remote areas. Here, functional and socio-cultural affordances, and affordances for emotions were examined mainly based on the research of Kyttä (2003). The table represents a brief summary of the findings of the uses and meanings of different green space types and locations. As the affordance approach is used here only to interpret the results, the range of affordances is limited. The names of the affordances were created for this study. A wider selection of affordances concerning urban adolescents can be found in Clark and Uzzell (2002). In the table, functional affordances mean the activities in the green spaces derived from the survey and the existing documents. The social affordances are also derived from both sets of data. The social value maps are interpreted here mainly in terms of emotional (experiential, aesthetic) affordances. The different types of affordances appear simultaneously, as in the places experienced through, e.g. sociability and activities.

Discussion

The spatial information of the results concerning the green space values to the adolescents is the main concept discussed here. Brannen (2005) and Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) have listed various possible types of justifications for analysing and interpreting data by mixed methods. The aims here were to elaborate the findings of the social value mapping with place-related information. For instance, the responses the adolescents gave in the survey were elaborated by narratives embedded in their experiences. The results corroborated
the importance of certain areas. The highlighted areas on the maps were also the ones most mentioned by the teenagers in the documents (Table 1).

The green spaces were also given elaborated interpretations as places that are meaningful to the adolescents (Tables 1 and 2). The sports park and other activity parks were places for activities and social encounters for both genders, although they used the areas rather differently (Table 2). The pupils also pointed out some places for retreat and places for interaction (Lieberg, 1995) (Table 2). Along with the most popular areas, the adolescents mentioned various “invisible” green spaces, such as small woodlands that for the adults were mainly transitory areas or green elements in the housing environment. These nearby green spaces are often relaxing places to hang out with friends and provide a place to stay away from adult control and gaze (Korpela et al., 2002). Some littered and unmanaged areas were also called “beautiful and peaceful” thus indicating the adolescents’ sense of ownership and place attachment than noticeable scenic values (Korpela et al., 2002; Travlou, 2007).

The low number of favourite place responses may be the result of asking a good question in the wrong situation. A short questionnaire is probably too passive a method of finding information about the subject, whereas the group projects, where the pupils could express themselves in their own terms, contained many

Table 2. Affordances of the local green areas regarded from the girls’ and boys’ perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Description of affordance</th>
<th>Green area type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional affordances</td>
<td>Boys Play (football, ice hockey, tennis, basket ball, etc.), Place to hang out</td>
<td>Activity parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place to hang out, places to shape, take over (skateboarding, parkour)</td>
<td>In-between spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place to hang out, physical adventure (younger teens), drinking, sometimes to shape environment (rubbish, graffiti, fire places)</td>
<td>Remote areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls Place to hang out, a temporary place to visit</td>
<td>Activity parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place to hang out, walking, a temporary place (less showy exploration or shaping than boys)</td>
<td>In-between spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place to hang out, physical adventure</td>
<td>Remote areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural affordances (affordances for sociality)</td>
<td>Boys Place for interaction, show off and watch others, place to be part of the local ambiance</td>
<td>Activity parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place for retreat (often with friends)</td>
<td>In-between spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place for retreat (often with friends), be free from control of adults and peers</td>
<td>Remote areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls Place for interaction, place to be seen and watch others, place to be part of the local ambiance</td>
<td>Activity parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place for retreat (often with friends)</td>
<td>In-between spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place for retreat (often with friends), be free from control of adults and peers</td>
<td>Remote areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordances for emotions</td>
<td>Boys Place for self-expression (sports, hanging out), place for young people (non-contested place), festivity, pleasant and beautiful scenery, sunny place, peace and quietness, restoration</td>
<td>Activity parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One’s own space, niche (sense of belonging), restoration, peacefulness, place near home, easy access</td>
<td>In-between spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fascinating place, scary area, adventure, access takes effort</td>
<td>Remote areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls Place for meaningful activities (walking, hanging out), place for youth (non-contested place), festivity, pleasant and beautiful scenery, sunny place, peace and quietness, restoration</td>
<td>Activity parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One’s own space, niche (sense of belonging), contacts with nature, restoration, peacefulness, easy access</td>
<td>In-between spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fascinating place, scary area, adventure, contacts with nature, access takes effort</td>
<td>Remote areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In-between spaces take many kinds forms depending on their physical characteristics, location and land use. Here three types of green spaces are included: pocket parks, transitory areas (green corridors) and borders between built areas and parks.

Remote areas here mean means and cliffs that teenagers visit less frequently, but the areas are often for “real retreat” from adult control and everyday spaces.
descriptions of the places that they most appreciated. Kaivola and Rikkinen (2003) have also discussed the idea that teenagers prefer not to discuss their favourite places as the subject is probably too personal for them.

Urban nature and green spaces have positive characteristics in the opinions of teenagers (Ilmonen, 1991; Chawla, 2001). In Eastern Helsinki, green spaces were seen to contribute to the city image and the overall pleasantness of the district. For the teenagers, the green spaces were above all, social places although some of them enjoyed also solitude. This contrasts to the adults, who did not emphasise the role of green spaces as a meeting place (e.g. Tyrvainen et al., 2007).

The pupils indicated the green space values from more nearby environments than the adults. The neighbourhood green spaces are mainly narrow woodland strips and play parks which do not attract adult population. For the teenagers, peacefulness and the feeling of a forest were often descriptions of these in-between areas of the neighbourhood. For adults, these values were found only on the large recreational areas. The social value mapping method directs the responses to the leisure time context compared to the other dwelling aspects (e.g., scenery from window) (Tyrvainen et al., 2007). The mapping responses are given based on the green space uses. The teenagers used locally the neighbourhood spaces, whereas the adults used the recreational areas for their outdoor exercises. The aspect of mobility could be discussed here. In Finland, children and teenagers are quite free to move independently through the city area outside their homes (Korpela et al., 2002). The teenagers in this study reported also the visits to the other city districts as many activities take place there (Keskinen, 2001). The local uses were connected to the current supply of desired activities for the teenagers (formal and informal).

The social value mapping has been accepted as an informative and usable method within green space planning in the Helsinki region. The strength of the method has been the applicability and legibility of the results: map evidence of the perceived green space values that both the planners and the public can discuss. Considering the place meanings of the green spaces, social value mapping as a single method is a rather rough-scaled tool (Table 1). When examining the place characteristics of green spaces, the dimensions that remain unseen in social value maps are the unofficial histories of places and other processes that create place meanings and identities (Tables 1 and 2) (Smaldone et al., 2005). For the adolescents, the stories (about play, fun, hassle, etc.) are often connected to places that they occupy, and in their creation of new places. This knowledge can complete the social value maps with the place meanings experienced by the teenagers or other groups. This kind of place research provides a rich understanding of complex, intangible phenomena that do not readily lend themselves to objective measurements (Manzo, 2005). When planning a local survey, this phase would require another collection and analysis of local knowledge. The investment would give an advantage to achieve deeper knowledge of local green spaces at the same time when collecting other measurable information.

The affordance approach was suitable for the analysis of green space meanings, because the adolescents’ own environmental descriptions were based on the activities and opportunities of the environment. Another spatial affordance study has been executed among local children of their environmental uses. Kyttä et al. (2003) asked the children to show on a map where they performed different activities (internet-based study). The children’s activities were calculated from the individual map responses. In this study, the activities and their locations were derived from the survey and the document material. The advantage of affordances is that they are also possible to examine in spatial form (Kyttä et al., 2003) and this approach could also be combined to the social value mapping in the future. The different genders used the areas differently and also discussed the areas differently. The boys expressed the uses of space and a sense of ownership more clearly than the girls (also Clark and Uzzell, 2002). The girls’ use of green spaces was more difficult to locate from this data and they seem to wander around more than spending time in one place.

Conclusions

The study indicated that the teenagers used suburban green spaces less and rather differently than adults. Still, although the number of visits was fewer among the teenagers than among the adults, it seems that teenagers use the green spaces in more diverse ways: for daily trips, for hanging-out with friends in various places and hours, and for exercise and activities. These aspects often remain unseen, because they are still rather seldom discussed and sometimes excluded from green space policies. Nowadays, one reason for the decline of green space uses is that many youth activities take place indoors (Keskinen, 2001). Some responses also indicated that the local green spaces did not attract some of the teenagers.

Young people have various kinds of green space preferences. The teenagers appreciated the good quality of the parks, but in addition, the most modest areas were also cherished when they provided particular places for the teenagers (Lieberg, 1995). In general, scenic values, peaceful environments and places for activities were the most important values. Apart from these, sociability seemed to a major value (also Travlou,
The location, facilities and physical characteristics of the green spaces influenced how the adolescents used the areas. In this study, it was possible to classify the local green spaces according to their situational uses: the activity parks as social and active areas, the in-between spaces as places for spontaneous and informal activity, and the remote areas as somewhat adventurous and fascinating places. These findings also illustrate some of the teenager-place relationships in suburban Helsinki.

The methodological comparison indicated that not only the visual and sensorial characteristics of green spaces are important to the teenagers, but especially how the green spaces function as part of daily life providing places for recreation, relaxation, social contacts and challenges. The teenagers particularly expressed the green space meanings through their usability for different purposes. In addition, the green spaces contained personal and shared memories that influenced how they were appreciated as places. Many valuations were connected to place histories with symbolic values which the local teenagers also produce themselves. Including this knowledge in the green space plans would help to preserve the authentic place meanings of the local environment compared to the universal designs of green spaces that do not recognise these meanings (Williams and Stewart, 1998; Gustavson, 2001). The social value mapping as a singular method would not recognise these characteristics either.

Green space planning processes currently highlight the adult perspectives on green spaces, as surveys and public meetings still concentrate on these age groups. In many areas, teenage perspectives are still in danger of remaining unrecognised. Although, the Finnish teenagers have been reported to have become more mobile and city centre-oriented in their activities (Keskinen, 2001), the nearby green spaces close to where they live are important to the local teenagers. The so called fourth environment between the school, home and a playground should be reserved for teenagers (Matthews and Limb, 1999). There is a good supply of recreational networks in the area, but these were mainly adult spaces. The question which this study poses is: How can we improve these areas for adolescents?

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