

Greenspaces of encounter

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Abstract

Greenspaces, such as parks/conservation areas, playgrounds and residential greenery, promote mental and physical health by providing psychological relaxation, stress alleviation, support for social cohesion and physical activity, and reduced exposure to pollutants and heat stress. For immigrant and newcomer populations, greenspace has the potential to further support health, well-being, settlement and integration by providing a familiar link to place, nature, reminders of one's country of origin and/or linkages to life in Canada. Further, greenspace can serve as 'spaces of encounter', promoting social interactions and cohesion across ethnocultural divides and cultural identities. The attachments to shared place can help migrants adjust to their new lives.

Greenspaces of encounter also enact a politics of belonging, which can involve negotiations and struggles over difference, and who belongs or feels welcome. The existing knowledge base has not given adequate attention to the lived experiences and perspectives of immigrant populations themselves, or how greenspace experiences may differ between those settled in urban or rural places (despite known differences in greenspace qualities, densities, accessibility factors, and/or level of exposure to xenophobia or prejudicial treatment). We contribute to these gaps through focus groups and interviews with immigrant populations living in a dense, highly diverse urban neighbourhood in Toronto, Canada, and an outlying rural community to explore immigrant perspectives on intersections between greenspace, immigration and well-being. We discuss issues related to encounter and inclusion, diverse greenspaces usages, and level of greenspace awareness. Findings are further complemented by perspectives from planners, developers and designers on how or whether current practice can better support diversity, inclusion and intercultural exchange.

Biography

Claire Davis has a Master of Applied Science in Environmental Applied Science and Management from Toronto Metropolitan University. Claire's research interests include community-based projects specializing in 2SLGBTQ+ community inclusion, immigrant settlement, and local mental health support provision -- all through the paradigm of urban wellness resource accessibility.

Sara Edge is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, and Associate Director of the Centre for Studies in Food Security at Toronto Metropolitan University. Sara contributes interdisciplinary scholarship on environmental justice, health equity, and sustainability in cities. Her work examines how environmental and social conditions co-evolve with the ways in which societies allocate power, (de)legitimize knowledge, and include/exclude in processes of decision-making.