

Urban blue and green spaces for well-being of disadvantaged population groups

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Nature and water hold value for human well-being at different levels, and exposure to natural and built blue and green spaces enhances physical and mental health outcomes. Blue and green spaces in urban areas provide therapeutic services by promoting emotional attachment and identity, and relief from everyday stress while also offering regulating ecosystem services. The rapid pace of global urbanization and the increasing frequency and unpredictability of extreme weather events makes them ever more important to be considered in sustainable urban planning and decision-making.

Although the development of blue and green spaces has been pointed out as a promising strategy, all too often the most disadvantaged parts of the population, including elderly people and those in deprived neighbourhoods, miss out on nature's benefits due to a lack of such spaces nearby and additional barriers related to infrastructure, social stigma, and lack of involvement in urban planning processes.

We present case studies from the Netherlands and Kenya, conducted in the context of the Horizon EU project Well-being in a Sustainable Economy Revisited (WISER) which aim to understand the role of blue and green spaces for well-being and development, and in the context of the collaborative research between University of Twente and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on Co-designing Climate-Sensitive Blue and Green Spaces with Vulnerable Urban Populations which aims to counteract access barriers to green and blue spaces by considering the needs and preferences of disadvantaged population groups.

Based on mixed methods research, we explore how different disadvantaged groups and residents of deprived neighbourhoods perceive and are impacted by the qualities of the built and natural blue and green environment; and analyse how these environmental conditions can enhance people's subjective well-being. Through a participatory co-design approach, we include such populations in climate-sensitive urban planning processes supported by geoinformation systems (GIS), and artificial intelligence, which open up possibilities for visualizing and exploring potential changes to the city landscape.

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