

Revitalising urban public green space

Exploring lived experiences of teenage girls in socio-economically challenged neighbourhoods in Stockholm, Sweden, using Google Maps

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ABSTRACT

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Urban public green space is a core contributor to cultural ecosystem services in cities, comprising the non-material benefits that people obtain from contact with nature. Due to the many benefits that have been ascribed to it, green space has become subject to debates on justice about its fair distribution and equal opportunities to use it. Teenage girls living in socio-economically challenged neighbourhoods appear to belong to a societal group that is restricted in accessing green space, as well as having less opportunities to influence the governance of such space. Attempting to bring further light to these issues, this study utilises a phenomenological approach in which intersectionality theory is central. It aims to explore how intersections of identity markers, such as age, gender, and place of residence, interact with girls' lived experiences of green space. It does so by collecting first-person narratives in eight interactive and online interviews with the support of satellite, aerial and street view imagery provided by Google Maps. The result shows the great complexity of urban public green space as a place with room for both feelings of liberty and feelings of exclusion. The girls' narratives unveil how urban green is an important source for well-being and quality of life, and how connection with nature enables connection with loved ones, the community, and with oneself. Simultaneously, identity markers, such as age, gender, and place of residence, intersect into a synergy of exclusion for teenage girls to fully encounter urban nature. Feelings of urban public green space as a place occupied by others contribute to experiences of it as inappropriate and unsafe for girls to visit in certain places during certain times. This suggests how green space works as an arena for power relations, where the opportunities for girls to benefit from its free use and from cultural ecosystem services decrease under certain circumstances. Narratives and myths that green space is dangerous for girls paint a geography of fear; in which fear of becoming a victim of crime is expressed as a fear of *space*. This fear increases with preconceptions and self-images that girls are defenceless and weak. Furthermore, these experiences intersect with feelings that their neighbourhoods, and the green wherein, are framed adversely and neglected by planners, politicians, municipalities and the government. Still, the girls express great appreciation and pride over the voluminous public green areas in their neighbourhoods. Despite experiencing less power to influence, they have strong visions and aspirations to impact the design and function of urban nature, which indicates prospects for empowerment and revitalisation of green space. It is concluded that recognising lived experiences of girls is essential when working towards safe and accessible, but also lively and inviting, green space. Furthermore, it is argued that insights from intersectionality is valuable when researching use of green space, as intersectionality is a profoundly spatial concept; in which social categories articulate in relation to place and time, and where power and identity contribute at shaping experiences of green space.

Keywords: *Urban public green space, cultural ecosystem services, gender, intersectionality, power, lived experience, social- and environmental justice, environmental governance*

PREFACE

When writing this, the coronavirus pandemic is spreading across the world. People are isolated in their homes with little or no possibility to go outdoors. In Sweden, the measures have been softer and centred around appeals to social distancing. This has made it possible for people to spend time in outdoor environments, where green space can offer opportunities to maintain mental and physical health and social relationships while following the recommendations for distancing. As much as the pandemic has made this thesis challenging to write and conclude, it has also made evident to me the value of urban nature. Looking forward and eventually beyond the pandemic, keeping public green space accessible, safe and enjoyable for citizens to freely use ought to be a main goal for sustainable and resilient urban development and environmental governance.

This thesis has been conducted within the Department of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies at Södertörn University in Stockholm, Sweden. The exploration of the topic was conducted within the VIVA-PLAN research project, an interdisciplinary collaboration on sustainable spatial planning frameworks for engaging diverse actors and citizens in revitalising urban public green space in vulnerable neighbourhoods in Sweden and Denmark. The thesis work has been executed in autonomy from the VIVA-PLAN project.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly urbanised world, urban public green space enables connections between urban residents and the natural environment (Littke, 2016: 5; 168; Skärbäck et al., 2014: 180). Within scientific fields, such as environmental science, environmental governance and sustainable urban development, green space is researched as a core contributor to urban ecosystem services. Urban ecosystem services are understood to be the benefits people derive from the functioning of nature in cities (Cvejić et al., 2015: 11; Haase et al., 2014). Central to this study are cultural ecosystem services, comprising the non-material, socio-ecological benefits that people obtain from contact with nature. These include physical and mental health as well as sense of place, meaning places that foster feelings of attachment and belonging (Cvejić et al., 2015: 11; Haase et al., 2014: 413). Due to the numerous socio-ecological benefits that have been ascribed to it (Hartig et al., 2014), urban public green space has become subject to debates on environmental justice about its fair distribution and equal opportunities for urban citizens to use it (Jennings et al., 2012; Littke, 2016: 23; Wolch, 2014). This debate raises questions such as; Who has access to high-quality green space? Whose needs and values are acknowledged in the management and design of urban public green space? And ultimately, who benefits from the advantages provided by such space?

The present study explores urban public green space and the lived experiences of teenage girls (aged from 18 to 19) living in socio-economically challenged areas in Stockholm, Sweden. The justification for studying this societal group in relation to green space use is based on earlier understandings of power asymmetries in the use of public space. Uneven access to green areas and feelings of unsafety in public space are issues that are believed to weight particularly on girls and women (Anneroth et al., 2017; Beebeejaun, 2017; Jansson et al., 2013; Koskela, 2003; Listerborn, 2002; Sandberg & Rönnholm, 2016; Sonti et al., 2020; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). The World Bank (2020: 14) states that in general, cities work better for men than they do for women, girls and gender minorities. In addition, girls and women are often referred to as marginalised, yet often voiceless and thus victimised in issues such as access to environmental resources (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014: 421). The voices of girls and women in socio-economically challenged neighbourhoods have been argued to be particularly overlooked (Listerborn, 2008: 61). Some in fields of critical urban and environmental geography and planning, such as Anguelovski et al. (2020), argue that research

on justice in urban greening scholarship must materialise an intersectional understanding of gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic situation that considers the needs, fears, identities, and everyday lives of underrepresented groups. There is a need to engage with people's sense of place, especially those that have been neglected in spatial planning, recognising that their experiences must be considered in relation to access and use of green space, to overcome past experiences of domination and exploitation and make green spaces liberating for them (ibid.).

The importance of attending to girls and women in the governance of green space is clearly recognised in the United Nations 2030 Agenda goals about sustainable urban development:

By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities (UN General Assembly, 2015, target 11.7).

According to the UN, the world's countries should provide public green spaces that are safe, available and accessible by the year of 2030. Girls and women are identified as one of the groups that should be prioritised in this process. This brings about challenges on how to design and conceptualise safe, inclusive and accessible public green space from a gender perspective. The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning addresses these issues in the report *Gender equality on the agenda – Planning for a safe and equal society* (Boverket, 2010), providing guidelines for actors in urban development to recall gender issues in the design of society. Yet, in a later report covering Swedish municipalities green space planning including positive examples of green space governance, *Green Structure in the Municipalities* (Boverket, 2012), implications of gender are absent.

The present thesis attempts to create space for the voices of the identified underrepresented group to gain a deeper understanding of their movement patterns, perceptions and experiences with urban public green space. A central argument is that there is no objective truth or one-size-fits-all solution that can solve the challenge of creating safe, inclusive and accessible public green space for all girls and young women. However, there are reasons to believe that an important path forward is to include the viewpoints of girls themselves on what safe, inclusive, accessible and inviting green space is or could be. Hence, this thesis explores the relationship that teenage girls participating in this study have with the natural environment in which they live; both at present, in the past, and in the future.

1.1 IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The recognition that public space is experienced and used differently depending on gender, and that gender inequities intersect with urban planning and design, is gaining ground worldwide (The World Bank, 2020). Scandinavia is put forward as a region where gender equality is particularly well advanced. On the other hand, criticism from activists and scholars has been put forward for the one-dimensional focus on gender. This has been increasingly prominent as the countries during the past decades have seen fast growing immigration, having ethnicity put on the political agenda (Borchorst et al., 2012: 59-60; Sircar, 2019: 1265). The knowledge gap how to address multiple inequalities has been addressed by scholars across academic disciplines in Sweden, thereby increasing interest in intersectionality as an analytical tool (Sircar, 2019: 1265). To apply an intersectional lens means that human lives cannot be explained by single factors alone, such as gender. Rather, lived realities are shaped by different factors operating together (Hankivsky, 2014: 3). Despite the theory's growing recognition, it has been argued that the ways identity articulates and forms in relation to space and place are not sufficiently researched (Mollett & Faria, 2018; Valentine, 2007).

While distance to green areas is well established as being important for the potential use, Ode Sang et al. (2020: 1) state that experiences and movement patterns *within* green space based on social categories, such as gender and age, are still rather unexplored, despite that these have been shown to influence green space perception and use. Bell et al. (2014) and Hitchings (2013) have called for research of green space that employ qualitative methods that allow for explorations of lived experiences and complex personal factors which influence decisions to use or avoid green space. Understanding how different identity markers affect experiences of green space is valuable within the development of strategies for environmental justice with regards to cultural ecosystem services (Ode Sang et al., 2020: 11). Following this, this study acknowledges the need to explore perceptions, use and governance of green space in light of intersectionality, justice and power; and how identity markers, such as age, gender, and place of residence, might impact on opportunities to benefit from cultural ecosystem services that green space is understood to offer to urban residents. It understands social- and ecological sustainability as closely intertwined, where the maintaining of natural resources is done simultaneously as enhancing social- and environmental justice (Bradley et al., 2008: 70). Hence, this thesis works on an interdisciplinary task where public green space is examined from multiple angles, some environmental and some related to social factors and identity.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research objective of this study is to explore teenage girls' lived experiences of urban public green space through an intersectional lens. **The overarching research question** guiding this study is: *in the spatial setting of socio-economically challenged neighbourhoods, how do intersections of identity markers impact on teenage girls' lived experiences of green space and their opportunities to influence the environment in which they live?* To answer this question, an exploration of the following sub-questions is required:

1. *How do teenage girls experience, use and value public green space in their neighbourhood?*
2. *What contexts and settings influence the lived experiences that teenage girls have of public green space in their neighbourhood?*
3. *What future visions do teenage girls have of public green space in their neighbourhood?*
4. *What aspirations and opportunities to influence public green space in their neighbourhood exist according to teenage girls?*

Attempting to provide a more in-depth understanding of teenage girls being in green space, this thesis utilises a phenomenological research approach in which intersectionality is central. In phenomenological research the interviewees are asked about their lived experiences in terms of the phenomenon, in this case urban public green space, as well as the broader contexts that affect their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 79). This is reflected in questions 1-2. They aim to comprehend what the interviewees have experienced, and the reasons why they express certain experiences, reflections and meanings. Questions 3-4 further explore future visions that girls have of green space in their living environment, and feelings about their aspirations and opportunities to co-design their community and to get their perspectives heard in issues relating to policy-making, planning and green space governance. Doing so, the thesis adds a layer that can inform inclusive and sustainable processes ahead. It attempts to contribute to fields of environmental governance, sustainable urban development and environmental justice by a deepened understanding of how social- and environmental justice as well as social- and ecological sustainability is intertwined in urban environments.

1.3 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** provides the rationale for the research problem. It shows the positive relationship between urban public green space and health, well-being and social cohesion, as well as arguments about how access and opportunities to influence green space might not be available to all urban residents on equal terms. **Chapter 3** lays out the theoretical framework of intersectionality, gender performativity and spatial power relations and how they are employed as tools for understanding the narratives of green space, and the girls' feelings of being *in-* or *out* of place when engaging with it. **Chapter 4** argues for critical phenomenology as the best suited methodology for this study, as it aims to explore lived experiences in which the body marked by social categories is central. It outlines the data collection strategy and analysis processes and presents the interactive method of interviewing with the use of Google Maps, and how this method was employed to collect nuanced lived experiences of green space. **Chapter 5** summarises the collected data from the interviews using a narrative style that presents the data alongside analysis towards the theoretical framework. The data is presented in three themes focusing on feelings of being in- or out of place and aspirations and opportunities for social inclusion. Lastly, conclusions are drawn in **Chapter 6**, as well as policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

2 BACKGROUND: PUBLIC GREEN SPACE, WELL-BEING & JUSTICE IN URBAN SETTINGS

This chapter provides the rationale for the research problem and contextualises it to previous research. First, it introduces available scientific evidence of the positive relationship between urban public green space and health, well-being and social cohesion. In building on this body of literature showing the many advantages with urban public green space, questions of who benefits arise. Hence, this chapter further attends to issues of justice in terms of safety, inclusivity and accessibility of public green space. This study explores sites located in Sweden, and for this reason this chapter prioritises literature focused on the Western world and Scandinavia more specifically.

2.1 HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL COHESION

Concerns about diminished possibilities for human contact with nature; due to urbanisation, resource depletion and urban lifestyle changes, such as insufficient physical activity and chronic stress, have motivated research on health benefits of contact with nature (Braubach et al., 2017; Hartig et al., 2014: 207). Numerous studies have shown that urban public green space benefit not only the natural environment but can also promote mental and physical health and well-being of people (Cvejić et al., 2015: 13; Maller et al., 2005). The positive health effects of contact with nature can be seen for example by psychological relaxation and stress alleviation (Braubach et al., 2017; Bratman et al., 2012; Chiesura, 2004; Grahn & Stigsdotter, 2003 & 2010; Ulrich et al., 1991; Velarde et al., 2007), reduced anxiety disorder and depression (Maas et al., 2008, 2009), and increased opportunities for physical activity and direct physical health benefits in turn believed to decrease mental illness, such as stress, anxiety and depression (Braubach et al., 2017; Pretty et al., 2006). Maas et al (2008: 586) found that “less green space in people’s living environment coincided with feelings of loneliness and with perceived shortage of social support”. In addition, urban green often provides the primary contact with the natural environment for urban citizens, thus adding to environmental learning (Krasny et al., 2013). Positive health affects get stronger the longer the exposure to nature (Korpela, 2008), and the closer people live to public green space the more they tend to use it and benefit from it (Harrison et al., 1995; Schipperijn et al., 2010).

Urban public green space is important in cities due to the opportunities it provides for people to encounter nature, but also to meet each other (James et al., 2009: 69). The literature points out how urban public green space is important for social sustainability in urban neighbourhoods in various ways, especially when it is well managed, well-used and commonly accessible, both physically and perceptually (Alaimo et al., 2010; Hartig et al., 2001; Kuo et al., 1998). Urban public green space constitutes a meeting place that encourages use of outdoor areas and that brings people together. It has a central role to play in the formal and informal interaction between people and different groups in a community by the provision of space (Coley et al., 1997; Kabisch & Haase, 2014). Urban public green space has the potential to increase local identity (Brown et al., 2003; Gehl, 2011; Konijnendijk, 2008; Whyte, 1980), social cohesion, sense of community and neighbourhood vitality (Arnberger & Eder, 2012; Braubach et al., 2017; Chiesura 2004; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Peters et al., 2009; Raymond et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2004). All these factors can have positive effects on neighbourhoods by contributing to a sense of place and inspiring people to be more interested in the local environment; to work together to create safe, enjoyable and inviting public green spaces (Sampson et al., 2002). Early signals on the implications of the coronavirus pandemic show that in Sweden, people have turned to urban nature. These indications highlight that access to public green space is vital for urban resilience, as it provides buffering capacity for maintaining mental and physical health, social relationships and contact with the natural world (Samuelsson et al., 2020: 6).

2.2 SOCIAL- AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE GREEN SPACE

2.2.1 Perceived safety in outdoor environments

Perceptions of public green space as safe or unsafe influences the ways in which it is experienced and used. Thus, safety is a crucial feature that ensures that the benefits associated with green space can be achieved (Littke, 2016: 3). However, urban public green space has also proven to have negative effects on human well-being when being perceived as unmanaged or as dangerous places; increasing anxiety, feelings of unsafety and fear of crime (James et al., 2009: 69; Jansson et al., 2013; 127; Littke, 2016: 26). Research have found that gender identity can affect perceptions of public green space, as particularly people who identify as female feel unsafe, vulnerable and worried in urban nature, thus constrained in using it (Jansson et al., 2013; 129; Pillay & Pahlad, 2014: 169; Sonti et al., 2020: 3). Hence,

knowledge about how gender impacts on experience and use of urban green space, and how power relations between gender identities influence use and perception of urban space, is important when creating sustainable and resilient cities (Colding & Barthel, 2013: 156; Ode Sang et al., 2020: 10; Pillay & Pahlad, 2014: 169; Sandberg & Rönholm, 2016: 1755).

The physical character of green space is an important factor for perceived personal safety. Jansson et al. (2013) conducted a literature review using 46 sources on perceived personal safety in urban green areas. They found that female users of green space tend to avoid areas with poor lighting (or being outdoors at all after dark), places that feel untidy and not maintained as these might provide room for criminal activities, as well as closed or isolated places. Closed and isolated places, for example vegetation on both sides of a path, are often associated with fear of sexual violence as it evokes feelings of lack of control and less possibilities for overview and escape. Females are more likely to perceive green areas with a more naturalistic and wild character to be threatening, such as the forests and places with high density of vegetation, and are less likely to walk alone in woodlands (Jansson et al., 2013: 129ff). These feelings are complex as pristine and wild nature is simultaneously experienced as awe-inspiring (Sonti et al., 2020: 3). Green space that feel empty due to absence of people has also shown to elevate fear among women, yet women can also fear unwanted attention and sexual objectification when others are present (Sonti et al., 2020: 3). There are indications that fear limits green space use by the elderly more than for young people. Yet, the relationship is complex as studies also show that girls and young women have limited mobility outdoors, as young age increases visibility and in turn fear of harassment and gender-based violence (Jansson et al., 2013: 129; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020: 6). Additionally, the social construction of an area, such as the framing and reputation of that area, can also be of great importance for people's perception of an area as safe or unsafe (Jansson et al., 2013: 129).

Research has shown that much fear of crime is irrational (Pain, 2001: 900), as perceived personal safety is an experienced feeling rather than actual safety or risk (Jansson et al., 2013: 127). It is the result of complex relations between factors, such as myths about crime and traditional gender roles, that affect perception of, and access to, green space. Hence, perceived safety is affected partly by physical characteristics of the surrounding environment but also by social categories and psychological factors; such as seeing oneself as a potential victim, power relations between oneself and others, and situation in time and space as some places feel more

dangerous during certain times (Jansson et al., 2013: 127ff; Sonti et al., 2020: 3). Still, perceived unsafety and fear of crime is believed to lower quality of life, social interaction and use of public green areas the same way, or more, as actual crime (Jansson et al., 2013: 128; Koskela, 2003: 283, Pain, 2001: 911). As a result of perceived unsafety and fear of crime in public space, scholars suggest that people with female coded bodies often perform embodied safety work in relation to the use of public space (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). The safety work consists of strategies with the purpose to prevent being victims of crime, such as removing oneself from danger by reducing the amount of time spent outdoors, or those designed to minimise risk while using public space. The strategies show the ways women and girls routinely trade their desired lifestyle and freedom of movement in order to use public green space safely and without fear (Jansson et al., 2013: 128; Sonti et al., 2020: 3; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020: 5). One of the largest studies done on gender-based harassment in the European Union found that almost half of the 42 000 women participating in the study had limited their freedom of movement due to fear of sexual violence (FRA, 2014).

2.2.2 Social inclusion and accessibility of green space

Planning theory and practice has its roots in a tradition where planners have sought a universal approach that does not distinguish among persons based on social categories, group affiliations or differing values (Fainstein & Servon, 2005: 1). Bradley et al. (2005: 20) stresses how Swedish urban planning and policy is rooted in this modernistic and positivistic ideology, which has searched for the optimal or ideal city based on the idea that there is a single, unified public interest, thus overlooking power structures in society. Contemporary policy in Sweden increasingly recognises the diversity of needs and the importance of including urban citizens in governance processes and sustainable urban development (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2013). The dominant Swedish planning discourse has seen a great change from a top-down approach to a more collaborative and inclusive process, where decision-makers are increasingly expected to listen to and include the perspectives of the citizens. Yet, scholars have shed light on inherent power relations in participatory approaches of sustainable urban and environmental planning, in which there are unequal opportunities to influence and define what issues are relevant (Anguelovski et al., 2020; Bradley et al., 2008; Listerborn, 2008: 61). As mentioned above, voices of girls and women in socio-economically challenged neighbourhoods have been particularly neglected (Listerborn, 2008: 61).

The girls interviewed for the present study live in or have moved from areas built as part of the Swedish Million Program between 1965 and 1974. The Million Program was the largest housing and infrastructure investment in Swedish history, with the construction of roughly one million dwellings in the outskirts of cities. This was a solution to housing shortages due to urbanisation, industrialisation and intense international migration to Sweden (Molina, 2018: 27). Today, many of these areas, including the ones studied in this thesis, are labelled as *vulnerable*; a geographically bounded area that is characterised by a low socio-economic status in terms of high unemployment, low income- and education levels, and where high criminal activity can be identified. Another characteristic is that these areas are segregated based on ethnicity, where a majority of the residents have immigrant background (Underrättelseheten, 2017: 12). These areas are believed to be unprioritised by political reforms and underrepresented in the public debate, and with less resources to improve the living environment (Molina, 2018: 26; Underrättelseheten, 2017: 14). It has been argued that even though the Million Program provided housing for citizens, the policies also reinforced and maintained segregation and socio-economic differences, which shape the residential segregation and urban exclusion of today (Molina, 2018: 26f).

Due to the multiple benefits of green space, its availability and accessibility is increasingly recognised as an issue of environmental justice (Cvejić, 2015: 13; Kabisch & van den Bosch, 2017: 208; Littke, 2016: 23; Skärbäck et al., 2014: 180; Wolch et al., 2014: 234). One core concept in the literature on justice in relation to green space is the fair distribution of such space. The probe is that affluent and predominantly white communities in cities have easier access to green space, and that green spaces and amenities in low-income neighbourhoods are undermaintained, of poorer quality, sparser and smaller (Anguelovski et al., 2020; Braubach et al., 2017: 188; Byrne, 2012: 595; Haase et al., 2017: 41; Javaid & Habeeb, 2018: 4; Schüle et al., 2019: 2; Wolch et al., 2014: 234). Hence, providing equitable access to green space is an important goal of health-oriented and sustainable urban policies (Braubach et al., 2017: 188). However, it is not only the close geographic access of public green space that is framed as an environmental justice issue, but also valuation and satisfaction with such space (Wolch et al., 2014: 236). One study in Malmö, Sweden found that efforts to create and design public green space with the attention to the needs of local residents in low-income areas can be a tool to increase quality of life for people in these communities (Skärbäck, 2014: 184). This points to the potential of existing public green space in the areas studied in this thesis, and how environmental governance of such space can enhance social inclusion and environmental

justice. With this said, Johnston & Shimada (2004: 188) stress the importance not to exaggerate the potential with urban nature to increase well-being and health in socio-economically challenged areas. There is a danger of overemphasising reconnection with nature in neighbourhoods where people might feel that access to green space is not as significant or pressing as e.g., jobs, housing, crime and racism. Thus, it is of great importance to link the discussion of benefits of urban green space to wider societal processes (ibid.).

The girls in this study are 18 or 19 years old, meaning they are adolescents in the process of developing from childhood into adulthood. Age, as gender, is a social category that marks identity and expectations of certain behaviour. Young people are rarely seen as active agents of society, with the consequence that the perspectives of young people are underrepresented in decision-making (Ambjörnsson & Jönsson, 2010; Hil & Bessant, 1999). This is confirmed by Urban Development, a Swedish consultation agency specialising in sustainable urban development in socio-economically challenged areas. They state that young people's voices are underrepresented in spatial planning, and that they therefore miss out on public places designed according to their needs and values. In addition, young people rarely show up at participatory planning activities, making targeted efforts to reach this group needed if their views are to be included (Urban Utveckling, 2018: 7). A growing research field recognises the shortfall of sufficient methods to express the needs of young people in issues regarding spatial planning and placemaking, and work to find ways to include youth in ways familiar and secure for them (Derr et al., 2018). In Sweden, initiatives can be seen that involve actors from academia and practice and that work to include girls in decisions and designs affecting their living environments (see for example Urban Girls Movement, 2019; White Architects, 2017).

This chapter has presented previous research done about urban public green space and its importance for well-being and social cohesion, as well issues of social- and environmental justice in terms of safety, inclusivity and accessibility. It has shown that there are great societal challenges in making the benefits of green space available to all urban residents on equal terms. However, physical changes, participatory practices and more inclusive environmental governance can help change the patterns of unequal access to public green space (UN Habitat, 2015: 18). Offering equal access and participation regardless of gender, age, and place of residence can enhance social sustainability in cities, promote feelings of belongingness and empowerment, and consequently result in a wider use of urban green areas (Javaid & Habeeb, 2018: 4; Ode Sang et al., 2020: 10; Ostermann & Schrenk, 2009: 243).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERSECTIONALITY, PERFORMATIVITY & POWER

*The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves,
in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs,
the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space...
we live inside a set of relations.*

~ Michel Foucault

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework used to analyse the narratives collected in the interviews. The research questions selected for the present thesis are about the lived experiences of, but also in, green space. Thus, the ways in which contexts, settings and broader societal structures interact with lived experiences are of interest. Following this, the theoretical frame needs to be able to take in several factors and circumstances in order to get an in-depth and vivid picture of the complexity of everyday life and of human experience. Several theories are useful for studying connections between people and urban nature, for example those sprung from environmental sociology concerning interactions between societies and their environments, or theories leaning towards urban governance, participatory planning and placemaking. However, for its specific focus on identity, power and personal experiences and perceptions of green space, this study employs intersectionality theory as the frame to analyse and discuss how girls experience public green space in their living environment. This theory is judged to best explain the layers of identity markers that could affect movement patterns and perceptions of urban nature and green space. This choice of theory focuses on human experience, however, by adding geographical thoughts on the concepts of space and place to the framework, the central phenomenon that is urban public green space is simultaneously recognised.

This chapter begins with a brief disaggregation of urban public green space and continues with relevant variables within intersectionality theory, and how they are used in this study to understand lived experiences of green space. It concludes by outlining theoretical thoughts on space and place, applied to the overall framework to explore the narratives of green space and

how space works as an arena for power relations. In this framework, space is understood as constructed, gendered and powered, in turn influencing the girls' feelings of being *in-* or *out* of place when engaging with green space in their neighbourhoods. This chapter provides the rationale for critical phenomenology as the chosen research methodology for this study, presented in detail in Chapter 4.

3.1 URBAN PUBLIC GREEN SPACE: A MULTIFACETED AND DEBATED PHENOMENON

In this thesis, urban public green space is the phenomenon of interest. Since green space, in the words of Kaplan (1985: 161) “is an elusive phenomenon”, the next section disaggregates the concept in order to make it less intangible and to get a better picture of the whole.

Urban indicates that the green space exists within an urban setting. Cities and the natural world are seen as social and ecological networks, as the city is part of nature and nature is interwoven in the social life of cities (Benton-Short & Short, 2013: 5, Littke, 2016: 63). Hence, research that shapes the understanding of green space and sustainable urban development is much concerned with the various dynamics that is happening in the city. One example is the high-density “compact city” as the model for future cities in Europe. This places a growing emphasis on the need for more intensive development in urban areas, therefore raising questions about the role of green space and of nature conservation in this model (Cvejić et al., 2015: 8). Due to accelerating densification in cities and that much of unbuilt open areas and green space, often spontaneously used for local recreation and play, is considered “not yet built land”, Skärbäck et al (2014: 180, 196) stress the urgent need for research to identify what qualities of green space that are most valuable to keep or to create. This study identifies such qualities and concerns as expressed by teenage girls, in an exploration of how they value green space in their living environments.

Green is used both in planning practice and theory to describe urban environments that in everyday language constitutes “nature” in cities (Littke, 2016: 8). Urban green space is a multi-functional concept, which might be a reason that it is difficult to define (Littke, 2016: 8). Littke (2016: 9) summarised some of the numerous and diverse definitions of green space in available literature and found that the unifying characteristics is that it is set within urban boundaries and exists of some vegetation. This indicates the diversity and the vagueness of

the concept. In continuation, to define green can also be to define what green is not. The external environment is often characterised as composed by two distinct spaces: green space and grey space. Grey space is land that consists of sealed, resistant, hard surfaces, such as concrete, asphalt and constructions. Even though the two spaces are opposites in many ways, the juxtaposition of green and grey space is essential in cities (James et al., 2009: 66). This thought is occurring in this study, when recognising the transition between grey and green space as a factor that influence the girls' experiences and use of green space.

The space central to this study is not only green but also *public*. Public space is widely acknowledged as an essential urban feature and practice of everyday life in cities (Littke, 2016: 45). It is defined by the United Nations as a common good accessible for all to no cost, with the main purpose to contribute to the quality of urban life both for individuals and for communities (UN Habitat, 2015: 6). High-quality public space is recognised for its potential to produce environmental- and social sustainability, to benefit people in terms of their social, physical, and psychological well-being, enhance safety, generate citizen involvement and work as tools to create women- and age-friendly cities (Jian et al., 2020; 1; Un Habitat, 2015: 17-21). Classic works that have influenced the overall views on how to make public space inviting, lively and attractive all point to the importance to be able to stay, sit, eat, observe and meet in public space (Gehl, 2011; Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980). To create the potential for public spaces to contribute to the quality of urban life they should allow people to do more than just the minimal functional requirements, like moving through it (UN Habitat, 2015: 63). Hence, the key to high-quality public space is to enable diverse groups of visitors at different times to use and enjoy the place in various ways (Littke, 2016: 45).

The notion that public space is a common good is subject for debate, as there are different opinions among scholars on how to address the essence of *public* space. Conventionally, urban planning has thought of public space as static space accessible to all, such as sidewalks, parks and recreational areas, plazas, and other forms of green space and publicly owned outdoor areas. More recently, a growing body of research has argued that public spaces are neither fixed nor accessible to all. Rather, they are constantly in flux, created and recreated by residents themselves in various places across the city (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1894). Because the concept of 'public' can be continuously redefined, it is of importance to examine it in the context of a given group of people to whom space might be perceived as more or less public (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1895). Public space is often constructed on the basis of power

relations, with significant consequences for people's sense of place, as some are at greater risk of being made to feel out of place in public space (Koops & Galič, 2017: 45). In this study, the *perceived* publicness of space is applied when analysing the girls' experiences of green space in their neighbourhoods, in order to better understand their underlying decisions to use or avoid public green space.

The last part of the central phenomenon of study is *space*, a concept central to the theoretical framework. Before unfolding the spatial dimension, the next section will account for intersectionality theory, the understanding of power within that theory, as well as gender performativity. The concept of space will then be interpreted through the intersectional lens.

3.2 INTERSECTIONAL TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF GREEN SPACE

Exclusion based on gender interacts with other social categories, such as age, class, and ethnicity; a synergy in theory defined as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2002; Valentine, 2007). The term is accredited to American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). By centring the analysis on Black women's experiences, Crenshaw (1989: 139) criticised the mainstream feminist movement for its single-axis framework that only included the perspectives of white, middle-class women. However, the central ideas of intersectionality have long historic roots outside the United States. Scholars and activists across the world have produced work that places gender in relation to other structures of power, thus dealing with social categories, inequalities and the complexities that shape human experience (Hankivsky, 2014: 2; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014: 419). A core insight of intersectionality theory is *intersecting categories*. To apply an intersectional lens means that human lives cannot be reduced to single categories, as human experience is part of a larger picture (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014: 421). Hence, social categories are not isolated entities. Rather, they build on each other and work together, and certain intersections produce certain effects in certain times and places (Hankivsky, 2014: 9; Valentine, 2007: 13).

The group studied in this thesis is selected foremost based on age, gender identity and place of residence with attention to socio-economic situation in the geographic living area. Following this, these specific intersecting categories, and how they are situated in time and space, are main issues of interest in the analysis of the girls lived experiences and use of green space.

As an analytical tool, intersectionality sheds light on how structures of power emerge and interact. Intersections of power exist in all relations on all levels, from institutional practices to individual actions (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014: 418f). Social categories in combination define what is normal or deviant and what to aspire for, ultimately being the fundament for inclusion or exclusion. However, these categories are seldom visible or explicitly referred to. Rather, they reflect underlying power patterns often viewed as natural differences (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014: 419). This way, power operates at discursive and structural levels to exclude some types of knowledge and experiences (Foucault, 1977). To this study, urban public green space is characterised as a site of political agency and contested power. One of the primary rights to the city is to be able to fully use urban public space in everyday life, as well as to participate in the decision-making surrounding such space (Tonkiss, 2005: 5). The ways intersecting categories and power relations affect these rights are analysed, with focus on the girls' reflections on their opportunities to freely use green space as well as possibilities to influence the design, planning and governance of such space.

Relations of power are often understood as experiences of *power over* others, meant as power inequality and oppression, for instance expressed as uneven resource distribution and social exclusion. However, they can also be *power with* others or with oneself, meant as power that involves people working together in order to regain resources, space and recognition, ultimately to re-claim power (Hankivsky, 2014: 9). This study proposes that since power relations exists in space, there is also room for empowerment within that space. Bookman and Morgen's (1988: 4) definition of empowerment as "a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining, or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular social context" is applied to highlight the constant possibility for power relations to change. When understanding social categories and the power relations between them as dynamic and changeable, it is also possible to imagine ways in which they could be different (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014: 422). Recognising that norms and roles are not fixed is of interest to this study, as it indicates that unequal power relations can change if illuminated and addressed.

3.3 GENDER AS CONSTRUCTED AND PERFORMED BY EVERYDAY ACTS OF THE BODY

By utilising intersectionality as the main theoretical body, this study recognises the importance to broaden discussions on equity to include more categories than gender alone. In

this view, gender does not hold the sole explanation of girls and women's experiences of public green space. Nevertheless, the importance of gender as an analytical tool is still prominent in intersectionality theory, and to this study. Hence, there is a need to explicitly define the concept of gender and lay out the theoretical understandings of gender that are applied in this thesis.

While sex has to do with biology, gender refers to the associations, stereotypes and social patterns that a culture construct gender to be. Yet, gender is frequently misunderstood as a synonym for "woman", thought of as stemming from essential biological differences between the sexes (Fainstein & Servon, 2005: 3). This thesis aligns with Butler's (1988) theorisation of gender as socially constructed, fluid and performed. Butler (1988: 520) argues for an understanding of gender which relies on a phenomenological approach of lived experience, and of the body as becoming gendered through historical ideas and constructions. In this view, gender is not a stable identity, rather it is constantly created in time and through the repetition of everyday acts of the body (Butler, 1988: 510). By this, Butler empathise that being born with a certain biological sex does not determine identity or behaviour. Instead, gender identity is continually learned and performed in order to fit into society. Furthermore, these socially constructed norms and identities about appropriate roles and behaviours controlled by biological sex can change over time. The category of gender is fluid and dynamic, and therein lies its power (Fainstein & Servon, 2005: 3). Because gender identity is constructed through acts, the possibility also exists to construct a different gender by a different act (Butler, 1988: 520). However, to challenge existing norms is not an easy task. Social expectations define peoples assigned gendered space, and the possibilities to change these structures are constrained by earlier experiences and conventions (Butler, 1988: 521).

The meaning of gender performativity to the present study is that the experiences that the girls' express are not mirroring static identities that can be explained by biological sex. Their identities and their experiences are not unchangeable, consistent or destined. Rather, they are affected by norms, earlier experiences and contexts. These thoughts are applied to show how the girls are expected to act in certain ways in certain spaces during certain times, and that their behaviour in outdoor environments are steered by earlier experiences and events.

3.4 SPATIAL POWER RELATIONS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BODY

This study adds a spatial dimension to intersectionality theory and gender performativity as a last piece of the theoretical framework. Despite that space is rarely conceived as constitutive of intersectional relations, it has been argued that intersectionality is a deeply spatial theoretical concept (Mollett & Faria, 2018: 566; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018: 549; Valentine, 2007). In this view, space is conceptualised as an arena where multiple social categories, power relations and processes of subject formation plays out (Valentine, 2007: 18). As Massey (2005: 10) argues, “identities/entities, the relations “between” them and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive”. This means that in addition to operating in the context of each other, social categories also articulate in relation to given places (their spatiality) and time (their temporality) (Anthias, 2013: 9f). This way, space has an important role in the exercising of power (Koskela, 2003: 294). This section attempts to capture the spatial and sensory dimension of how the girls value and perceive green space, thus develop meanings of such space. It unfolds the space – place dynamics, thoughts on space as constructed, gendered and powered, and how the body is central in these processes.

3.4.1 The construction of space into place: a world of meaning

The research objective of this study, experiences of green space, presume a relationship between the girls and the environment in which they live, thus a relationship between people and space. Space, as gender and other social categories, is understood in this study as partly constructed by the girls who experience it. Arguing that “(social) space is a (social) product”, Lefebvre (1991: 26) articulated a theory of space as socially constructed, which has been recognised as fundamental to understandings of space and place (Ejigu, 2015: 16; Hubbard et al., 2008: 5; Tonkiss, 2005: 3). In this view, places are contingent, multiple and contested, rather than fixed territorial units (Massey, 2005 in Hubbard, 2008: 6), and users of space participate in its making (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1894). By adding (social) to space, Lefebvre emphasised that space cannot be understood only as being physical (Ejigu, 2015: 14), yet not ignoring the physicality of space and the environment (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1894). Urban environments and the spaces therein, centralities of this study, illuminate the idea that things which are real are also imagined. The lines between the material and the ideal, the objective and the subjective, the physical and the perceptual, tend to blur in the spaces of the city (Tonkiss, 2005: 2).

Following the idea of space as constructed, many theories of place draw from phenomenology when emphasising lived experience as central in the making of place (Ejigu, 2015: 14; Stedman, 2016: 895). The general understanding is that space becomes place when it has significance to the person or the people who experience it (UN Habitat, 2015: 63). As expressed by Tuan (1977: 6), space is more abstract than place, and “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value”. Place thus represents a distinctive type of space that is defined by and constructed in terms of the lived experiences of people (Hubbard et al., 2008: 5). As such, places express a sense of belonging, a sense of place, for those who live in them, providing a locus for identity. When focusing on the experiential aspects of space instead of the purely physicality of it, it is highlighted that people do not live in a framework of geometric relationships, but in a world of meaning (Hubbard et al., 2008: 5; Tuan, 1977). Thus, *meaning* is what distinguishes place from space (Ejigu, 2015: 14), and “place” means different things to different people (Hubbard, 2008: 5).

Place meanings and sense of place is a fundament for this study’s understanding of the girls’ narratives and experiences of being *in* place. However, as important as the feeling of being in place is feelings of being out of place. Displacement, or non-place, has been conceptualised to understand the weakening or loss of meaning, resulting in *placelessness* (Relph, 1976: 6). Tuan (1974) applies the concept *topophobia* for ‘landscapes of fear’, pointing to senses of place that are not “positive”, such as the dislike or fear of places, places where one feels unsafe, and other undesirable feelings that space can bring. These thoughts relate to how space is gendered and powered, which is the next and concluding part of the theoretical framework.

3.4.2 Space as gendered and powered: towards critical phenomenology

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991: 194) poses the question “what body, precisely, are we talking about?”, referring to what body stands at the centre of his theory of space (Kinkaid, 2020: 168). Lefebvre’s theorisation of social space has been criticised by several scholars for not adequately answering this question. Kinkaid (2020: 168) challenges the notion that the subject in Lefebvre’s theory, that is the body, is abstract and unmarked by any

social categories. Kinkaid (2020: 168) stresses that “we must ask again, with and beyond Lefebvre, ‘what body?’”. This question has received little attention in traditional phenomenology, as lived experience has usually been understood as essences through a universal body (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1893; Simonsen, 2012: 15). Critical phenomenology seeks to revise phenomenology to include issues of various social categories, with attention to *which* and *whose* body it is that constructs space (Kinkaid, 2020: 167f). In this view, space is experienced and understood differently depending on the bodies that use it, steered by what is expected and affected by earlier experiences and historical situations (Kinkaid, 2020: 175; Tonkiss, 2005: 112). As shown above, this thought is vital in Butler’s phenomenological theory of the body as central in the construction of gender, as well as within intersectionality theory which recognises the importance to include more perspectives than gender alone.

Lefebvre’s (1991) theory has been re-encountered by several scholars to think about space as central to processes of social exclusion, with attention to gender, embodiment and power (Beebeejaun, 2017; Fenster, 2005; Johnson & Miles, 2014; Massey, 1994; Vaiou & Lykogianni, 2006; Yon & Nadimpalli, 2017). The thought that experience of space is gendered is influenced by Young (1990), who argues that the female’s body’s engagement with space is influenced by two factors; being a subject that constructs space, and simultaneously being an object in space. The latter distances the subject from the body and makes the female body more likely to be the target of judgements based on its appearance (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1893). In a similar vein as Tuan’s (1974) theorisation of *topophobia* or ‘landscapes of fear’, Koskela (2003: 295) conceptualises ‘the geography of fear’ when referring to embodied power relations in space. In this thought, space is partly produced according to fear-evoking experiences, such as sexual harassment, threat of violence or actual violence, limiting girls and women to freely move within the city. The gendering of space becomes particularly evident in this geography of fear, as girls and women’s fear of violence is manifested as a fear of *space* (Tonkiss, 2005: 95).

Power relations in space are also connected to geographic location and residence. Waquant (2007: 68) stresses that even societies in Scandinavia that have best resisted advanced marginality are affected by the phenomenon of disadvantaged and stigmatised urban housing areas, such as many of the Million Programs. Developing Goffman’s (1963) theory of *stigmata* to also consider place of residence, Waquant (2007) argues that suburbs with an alternative societal structure like the ones in this study face both external and internal

marginalisation. Waquant (2007: 67) applies the concept *territorial stigmatization* when theorising how some urban areas are being stigmatised “from above”, in the journalistic, political and sometimes scientific stereotypical framing of the area as dangerous. Following this, they are also stigmatised “from below” as residents in these areas are affected by the societal, political and medial discourses that diminish their area and its inhabitants, in turn creating fear, mistrust and uncertainty within the area. In Sweden, it has been argued that these one-sided and often alarming descriptions of single events, but also of people’s realities and lived experiences, point to significant knowledge gaps and a lack of nuanced societal analyses of challenged residential areas (Gerell et al., 2020). Additionally, Waquant (2007: 69) emphasises that labelling an area a lawless- or no-go-zone can have the effect of destabilising and further marginalising its occupants. Whether or not these areas are in fact decaying and dangerous matters little in the end, the prejudicial belief that they are sets off socially harmful consequences (Waquant, 2007: 68). Subsequently, the fact that the areas studied in this thesis are labelled as vulnerable simultaneously risk to further marginalise and stigmatise the people who live there. Territorial stigmatisation is used in this study to comprehend the girls’ perspectives on being inhabitants in an area that is labelled vulnerable and the consequences thereof, in turn how that intersects with their experiences and use of green space in their neighbourhoods.

This study aligns with critical phenomenology when attempting to understand the first-person, lived experience of green space; and how the body marked by social categories is central in the girls’ production of place. By analysing the role of space and place, emphasis is placed on the relevance of *context* for understanding intersectional dynamics of power structures (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018: 548). In addition, a spatial dimension makes it possible to move beyond theorisation about the intersection of categories to an illustration of intersectionality as lived experience and how it plays out in everyday practice (Valentine, 2007: 18). This study does so by exploring the girls’ narratives of their experiences in specific spatial and temporal settings through the course of everyday life. It attempts to illustrate how space works as an arena for power relations and identity formation processes, in which there are room for both oppression and exclusion but also for sense of place, liberty and pride.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & STUDY DESIGN

This chapter presents the chosen research methodology and study design of the present thesis. A qualitative phenomenological research methodology is utilised to view the everyday lives of teenage girls and the relationship they have with the natural environment in which they live. This approach influences the theoretical foundation as well as the data collection and analysis. This chapter begins by laying out the philosophical and epistemological orientations underpinning the study and the choice of research approach. It continues with the data collection strategy by describing the purposeful sample technique and the sample, the online interview method and how it was executed, as well as how I analysed the data. It concludes with critical reflections on limitations and ethical considerations.

4.1 CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY: A RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY OF SPACE

Phenomenology lies in the consciousness and the experiences we have of the world we live in (Relph, 1976: 4). Hence, the use of phenomenology as research approach is applicable when the objective is to describe a person's lived experience of a phenomenon. The idea is not to understand lived experiences as facts, but rather to unfold possible meanings and contexts where such experiences are situated. Phenomenology seeks to understand how and why specific feelings emerge when the studied subject experiences the investigated phenomenon (Johnson & Miles, 2014: 1897f). Key themes of phenomenology are subjectivity, embodiment and space (Kinkaid, 2020: 168), all central to this study as it explores personal experiences of embodied subjects situated in space. Critical phenomenology adds a dimension by examine how experiences of and engagement with the world is shaped by different bodies marked by social categories, and how they relate to broader power structures (Kinkaid, 2020: 172).

The philosophical assumptions underpinning this thesis point to a “relational ontology of space” (Kinkaid, 2020: 174). In this sense, spatial relations are created by subjects who are situated in and oriented towards the world. Space as well as place makes sense through the fact of embodiment, with reference to an oriented body. However, this philosophical orientation does not imply that space is entirely mental and constructed. Rather, it is a non-dualist ontology of the body and its environment, where space cannot be understood from the

dichotomies of subject/object or mind/body (Kinkaïd, 2020: 174; Simonsen, 2012: 16). As Tonkiss (2005: 150) expresses it, in relation to space in the city:

The relation between the stubborn materiality of urban forms and the subjective experience of urban space touches very clearly on the notion that cities and their problems are both real and constructed (Tonkiss, 2005: 150).

Drawing from the above, to apply a phenomenological approach means to combine objective reality with subjective experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 79). This study adapts this view between realism and constructivism by conceptualising space as simultaneously real and constructed. There is a physical environment that exists without human interpretation, and individual experiences are directed towards this object. The interest lies in understanding the phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective, with the assumption that the important reality is what she perceives it to be (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 30). To illustrate; an urban forest is real, but it is experienced and perceived differently by the people who walk in it. In turn, people have different visions of what a forest should be and what it should feel like. To create dialogue and heightening awareness of experience, especially experience that have been overlooked, can lead to a better understanding of the way things appear to someone else. These insights can develop practice and policies, as well as providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Barritt, 1986: 20; Creswell & Poth, 2018: 79): here public green space.

The epistemological perspective in this study recognises the girls subject to this research as experts, and knowledge is produced by listening to the interviewee's self-lived narratives about their living environments. Phenomenology stresses that only those that have the experience can communicate them to the outside world, thereby providing an understanding of an experience from those who have lived it (Mapp, 2008: 308). Hence, the academic interpretation of (social) reality lies in worldview of interviewees rather than researchers, planners or policymakers (Bryman, 2012: 410; Listerborn, 2008: 63). As a result, this study is conducted *with* the girls and not only *about* them, with the intention to include them in their own language. They are viewed as subjects who act and are actively engaged in meaning making. They are also subjecting to discourses, power relations and ideologies that might not be of their own making but nonetheless affect and constitute what they talk about and how (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 3), as well as what meanings they ascribe to green spaces.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

4.2.1 Purposeful sampling technique and sample

The data collection strategy was to gather self-lived narratives of green space that teenage girls who live in socio-economically challenged areas have. Hence, the study is focused not only on the phenomenon of interest, green space, but also on the people who experience it. For this reason, a purposeful sampling technique using criterion sampling was employed, with the intention to find interviewees who fit this description and can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 158). Contact with interviewees of interest, i.e., teenage girls living in certain areas, was organised by a high school teacher teaching Swedish as a second language at a high school located in Botkyrka municipality, Stockholm. The teacher followed the criterion in terms of gender identity, age and geographical residence¹ when asking students by personal written messages on the school's online platform if they were interested to participate in the study.

It was communicated in the original written message that an interest in nature, or that one spends much time in public green space is not needed, as long as one has some sort of experience of green space in one's local area that can be communicated in the study. The reason for this was to not limit the sample to people who possibly only have positive feelings of the outdoor natural environment, thus spends a lot of time there. The persons who reported interest stated their email address on which I got in contact and provided further information about the study. That communication also gave information about what is expected in terms of participation; approximately an hour long online interview about experiences, perceptions, use and future visions of public green space in their neighbourhood.

This process resulted in eight people who agreed to be part of the study. They are all female, 18 or 19 years old, and first, or second, generation immigrants. They all live in areas built as part of the Million Program and/or that are labelled as vulnerable, yet with close access to various forms of green space (see Table 1). Two of the interviewees (Tierra and Sana) have moved from areas that are labelled vulnerable (Hovsjö and Ronna), to Saltskog and central

¹ Information if residential areas are built as part of the Million Program is gathered from The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning's mapping of such areas (Boverket, 2020). Information regarding if the area is labelled as vulnerable is gathered from the Swedish Police's report on vulnerable areas in Stockholm (Underrättelseheten, 2017).

Södertälje, but to addresses built as part of the Million Program. Two of the interviewees (Maisha and Halimah) have moved from areas in Ronna built as part of the Million Program, yet to an area labelled as vulnerable (Lina). Overall, they all have experience of living in areas part of the Million Program and in areas labelled as vulnerable by Swedish authorities.

Table 1. Description of interviewees. These are not interviewees' real names.

Interviewee	Age	Residence	Nationality
Nahir	19	Alby	Swedish/Iraqi
Nedelya	19	Alby	Swedish/Bulgarian
Hazan	19	Bredäng (previously Alby)	Swedish/Turkish
Maisha	18	Lina (previously Ronna)	Swedish/Iraqi
Cala	18	Ronna	Swedish/Syrian
Tierra	19	Saltskog (previously Hovsjö)	Swedish/Iraqi
Halimah	18	Lina (previously Ronna)	Swedish/Syrian
Sana	19	Central Södertälje (previously Ronna)	Swedish/Iraqi

4.2.2 Online, visual and interactive interviews

Qualitative interviewing as research method was chosen with the purpose to obtain nuanced descriptions of the life worlds of the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews were completed

in the spring of 2020 and lasted between 35 and 75 minutes². Due to the current coronavirus pandemic, interviews were conducted online via the videoconference software platform Zoom Video Communications. Before starting the interview, the interviewees were given information about the study and its objective. Since green space is explored in this study as a phenomenon of everyday experience, a definition of green space was provided; emphasising that it does not only concern larger areas, such as forests or parks, but can also encompass lawns; green areas in-between and around buildings, such as apartment houses, schools and churches; public places and courtyards vegetated by grass, plants, flowers, shrubs and trees; alleys of bushes and trees and greenery along roads; activities, such as playgrounds or sports facilities in connection to greenery; allotments and community gardens; as well as the meadows, fields, mountains and greenery in connection to water.

Google Maps was used to visualise urban nature in the interview situation. Google Maps is a mapping service that provides publicly available satellite, aerial and street view imagery, as well as photographs taken by people who have visited various places. In the first step, contact was enabled with the interviewee in the online videoconference room, where technical aspects and video-conferencing mode was checked. Four of the interviewees chose to participate with the use of the web-camera. I used the web-camera from start to end. All interviews were recorded by audio and video with the recording function provided by Zoom. In the second step, Google Maps was accessed on my computer and put up as full screen. I then shared the screen with the interviewee, so that both of us could view the satellite imagery on our screens. In the third step, the interviewee was asked to specify her home address or home area. Both the interviewee and I were now able to see the geographic area and the green space wherein. This method was applied throughout the interview, with the purpose to serve as a visual and interactive tool that could be used both by me as the researcher and by the interviewee to talk about specific places, and to get an overview of the area spoken of.

The interview method was dynamic and generative, capturing multiple contextual dimensions by the use of online maps and imagery as a prompt. It allowed me as the researcher to ask questions about different areas and places and to get a comprehension of the geographic place, without having much prior knowledge of green spaces in their neighbourhoods. Additionally,

² A pilot interview was conducted to test the interview guide and the digital tool using Google Maps. It demonstrated the potential with the interview method, as the interviewee experienced that it made it easier to speak of certain places and to recall lived experiences of green areas.

it allowed the interviewees to visualise and recall sensory aspects of places and capturing in-the-moment experiences, not having to rely on memory recall. This might had been difficult without any visual tool, especially as the objective is to examine geographical places. The method also allowed the interviewees to be actively involved in the interview situation, by taking me as the researcher on a “virtual walk” through their neighbourhoods and living environments. This way, they were recognised as the experts and I was the person who learned about their neighbourhoods through their narratives and guidance. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate how it appeared on the screen, both for the me and for the interviewee.

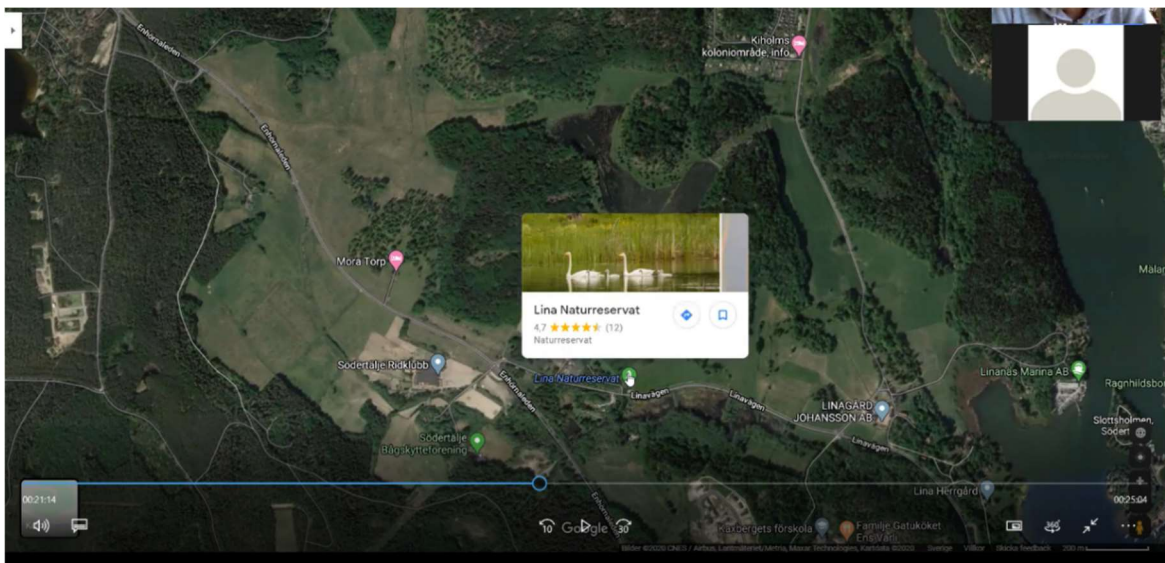


Figure 1. Shared screen from online interview (Image: Google Maps).

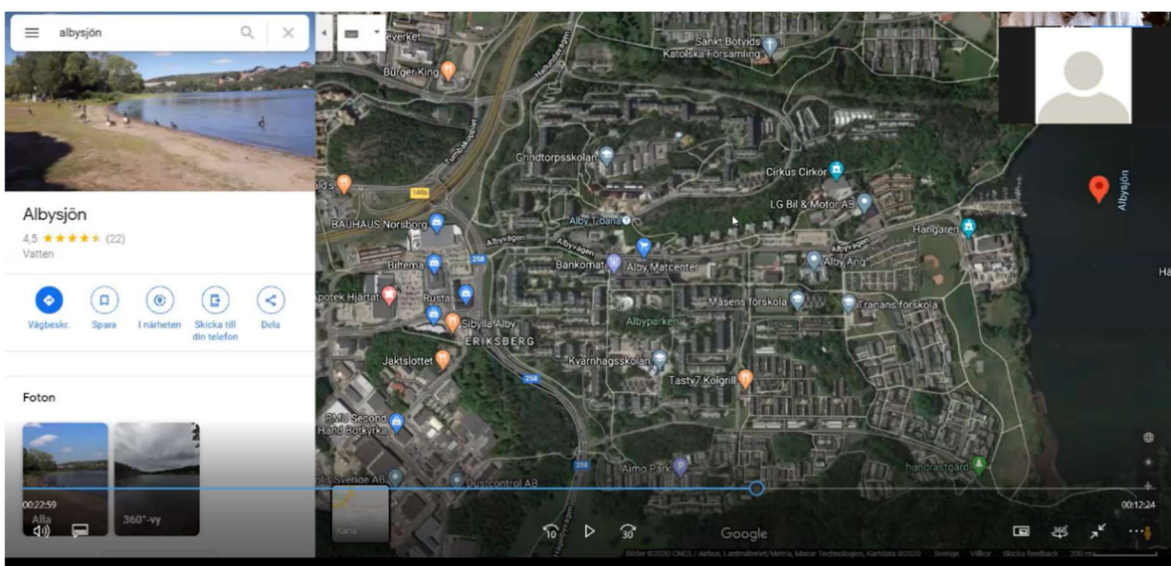


Figure 2. Shared screen from online interview (Image: Google Maps).

4.2.3 The interview procedure

All interviews followed the same structure as in the interview guide (see Appendix 1), yet due to the semi-structured method they also explored side-tracks that occurred. The interview guide was designed to reflect the research questions, in terms of *what* the interviewees experience and *in what contexts*, as well as their reflections on aspirations and opportunities to influence green space in their neighbourhoods. The interview procedure is outlined below.

The first part of the interview concerned more general questions about green space use and movement patterns. Considering the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic, the opening question intended to gather data on how the situation affects the girls' use and valuation of outdoor space. This is not specifically part of the research questions but is topical and of interest for the overall objective of this research, as the pandemic has drastically changed the living situation and movement patterns for people. The first part also opened for a first reflection about place by asking the interviewees what their local neighbourhood means to them.

The second part concerned places more specifically. The interviewees were asked to show places on the map with different meanings to them: 1) Green spaces they like, where they usually spend time alone or with others, which bring positive feelings, where they want to be; 2) Green spaces they dislike, where they do not want to be, places that feel insecure and/or unappealing, which bring negative feelings and are avoided; 3) Green spaces they would like to visit more, places with potential, but where they at present do not spend much time; and 4) Green spaces where they spent time as a child or as a younger teenager. The interviewees were asked to describe various places as precisely as possible in terms of what they experience, how they feel and how they move and act in public green spaces in different times and contexts.

The third part concerned questions related to identity and power and how social categories affect experience and use of green space, the interviewees future visions of green space, as well as their feelings about the possibilities and challenges for them to co-design their community and to get their perspectives heard in issues relating to spatial planning and placemaking. **Lastly**, the interviewees were asked about their experiences of the interview itself and how it felt to talk about their neighbourhood this way, using the satellite imagery.

4.2.4 Power asymmetries in the interview situation

The research interview is typically viewed as an institutional one-way dialogue, in which a clear power asymmetry exists between the researcher and the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 37; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012: 494). The interviewer usually initiates and defines the interview situation, determines the interview topic, poses questions, decides which answers to follow up on, and terminates the conversation. In turn, the interviewees might provide answers that they think that the interviewer authority wants to hear (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 37). The interview technique and the settings of the interview employed in this study helped to correct and overcome, or at least reflect on, unequal power relations and potential discomfort in the interview situation. This was partly done by utilising *collaborative interviewing* (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 38). With the support of visual imageries and the map, the interviewees and I created knowledge together.

The interviewees were informed prior to the talk that there are no right or wrong answers, and that the research interest lies in the interviewees feelings and experiences about issues discussed. As mentioned above, the collaborative and interactive interview technique allows the interviewees to be actively involved. It recognises them as experts of their experiences and feelings regarding their own neighbourhoods, where I as a researcher adapted a more contrasting role, taking the position of the “student”. Despite that I asked most of the questions, they are the ones with the knowledge; knowing where certain places are, guiding me towards them, picturing them and explaining them. Thus, they steered the narratives about places and experiences which during the interview resulted in a two-way dialogue.

The interviews were conducted online, which has potential to help correlate some of the power asymmetries between researcher and interviewee. The visual focus of the interview was taken up by the shared map on the screen, providing something to refer to and lay eyes on, instead of being positioned in front of each other as is usually the case in a sit-down interview. This way, appearances are not as much in the foreground. At the time, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the girls had undergone over a month of their schooling online, thus being accustomed to the format of online conversations and practice. The interviewees were also able to choose the location of the interview themselves, more likely to provide a safe environment.

4.3 THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS IDENTIFYING SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

As a first step in the data analysis interviews were transcribed in full. The recordings made it possible to experience the interviews once more, by viewing the interactive interview process at the same time as transcribing. This gave a deeper grasp of each interviewee's narrative and experience. Phenomenological thematic analysis drawing on Moustakas (1994) and interpreted by Creswell and Poth (2018: 201) was used to analyse the data. I developed categories of significant statements sharing an underlying construct, by identifying quotes that gave meaning to some portion of the data in the context of the research questions. I then organised and developed the categories of significant statements into broader themes. For each theme I analysed the interviewee's narratives about their experiences of green space. I identified characteristics of places with different meanings, focusing on feelings of being *in-* or *out* of place, and the contexts and settings that influence such experiences and feelings. I also identified narratives about future visions of green space and reflections regarding possibilities and aspirations to participate in the governance of such space, as well as how social categories influence such feelings. Each theme provides the foundation for interpretations in the light of the theoretical framework. As a last step, the data was analysed across themes to distinguish the essence of the phenomenon of urban public green space and how it is experienced by the girls subject to this research. In Chapter 5, the results drawn from the data is presented alongside analysis towards the theoretical framework and core concepts.

4.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

One limitation with the present study is the rather small sample size. This is a direct consequence of the coronavirus pandemic, that made it difficult to come in contact with potential interviewees. The original idea for this thesis was to conduct research in Ronna, Södertälje only, in collaboration with the VIVA-PLAN research project. The original sampling technique was to get in contact with girls living there through high schools in Södertälje. However, the invitation letter was sent out to all high schools in Södertälje one day before the policy decision to close schools. The geographical residence criterion was subsequently extended to include other areas, yet with similar characteristics as Ronna (socio-economically challenged areas built as part of the Million Program). This decision made it possible to complete the study, yet with a smaller sample size than first intended. With this

said, the intent with this phenomenological study is not to generalise the results, but to collect personal life stories and nuanced answers about how the interviewee's experience green space, hence understandings of their life worlds.

The methodological approach and research method used in this study proved reliable in collecting authentic and rich data about personal life stories in terms of the phenomenon under study. Despite the many advantages proven with the interview method, it is an experimental method that differ from traditional interviewing. For example, the digital element could limit the possibilities to build rapport. Some of the girls chose to not have their web-cameras on, which possibly made them feel more comfortable, but may also have limited important visual or verbal signals which possibly interfered with rapport building and exploration of responses.

This study applied a deductive approach when selecting the studied group, limiting the sample according to the social categories of gender identity, age and geographical residence (later revealing categories about class, culture and ethnicity), thus to a very specific societal group. This approach was judged best suited for the limited amount of time available and to reach the research objective, as well as this being an explorative study investigating how to research intersectionality and green space use with an interactive method. When and if allowed more time and resources, thus possibilities for a bigger sample size, a more inductive approach could be applied. Then, important intersections of categories can be identified in hindsight, as there are many potentially interesting factors that could influence experiences and decisions to use or avoid urban public green space.

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to the interviews, the purpose of the study and the implications of participation was clarified via email. The interviewees also received a consent form, informing them about their rights, their anonymity, confidentiality regarding the treatment of data, and that they can withdraw from participation at any time. Informed consent was given by all interviewees. Before starting the interview, they were given the opportunity to ask questions about the consent form and was reminded that they can withdraw from the interview at any time. Consent had been given by all interviewees prior to the interview to record the interview by

video. Information was given that it was not mandatory to participate with web-camera, only audio. They were informed that during the interview they could interrupt and ask questions back at any time, and that I would put time aside at the end for any comments or questions they might have regarding issues discussed, the study in general, or anything else. Before ending the interview, they were informed that they can contact me at any time with any questions or comments they might have.

When conducting research including perspectives of gender, one risks reproducing gender roles and stereotypes. It is important to recognise as part of this research to not refer to or understand all girls and women as a unified group, or as inherently different from men and boys. Rather, gender is fluid and created and re-created continuously in society. The intersectional framework applied in this study is useful in that aspect, emphasising the diversity of human identity. Additionally, an important aspect in relation to gender is that scholars who argue that space is gendered, and that gendering has profound consequences for girls and women, often fail to include intersexed, non-binary and transgendered people who also experience oppression and exclusion in public space (Doan, 2010). I recognise the prominence of this argument, as the literature on public space, gender and power rarely appears to acknowledge gender minorities. The sampling technique used in this study also included non-binary people as well as transgender people who identify as girls, but no potential interviewee knowingly to the gatekeeper had this gender identity, and therefore the sample exists of people whose biological sex is female.

The girls in this study are chosen partly because they live in socio-economically challenged areas part of the Million Program. To avoid further stigmatising of the area or to reproduce stereotypes (territorial stigmatisation), I have not used certain stigma words, such as ‘no-go-zones’, ‘marginalised’ or ‘disadvantaged’, and I have sought to show respect and appreciation for the areas. It is important to consider that the girls might not view their neighbourhoods as marginalised and disadvantaged. The focus on first-person narratives are important in this aspect, as the areas are described by the girls as they experience them, and not from an external, outside perspective. This way, they are the ones who frame and picture the study sites, and the main objective is to describe them from their perspective.

In terms of reflexivity, I do have positionalities that need consideration. Coming from a position where I as a researcher believe that the voices raised in this study are important to

include in the governance of green space, I do hold normative views. However, an important notion is that to include these perspectives and to pay attention to these experiences does not mean that the experiences of others are silenced or ignored. The fact that this study is focused on a certain societal group does not diminish the right for all people to have full access to high-quality green space and possibilities to express themselves in relation to such issues. An additional positionality is that through my education and personal interests, I move within an environmental discourse in which contact with nature is frequently framed as important. Specifically, urban public green space has long had value to me. Growing up in five big cities, first in Sweden and later in England and Australia, I see the many ways that public green space has interacted with and influenced my everyday urban life. My experience and use of urban green space have changed over different ages and different places, and during different times of the day and year. Green space is and has been a source of well-being to me, providing opportunities to engage with nature. However, I have also experienced negative feelings when engaging with such space, feelings I locate to my gender identity for example expressed as fear of being victim of crime when moving in green areas.

In the process of conducting this study, I have continually reflected upon my preconceptions, in order to prevent my own frame to impact the study. In phenomenology, this is called bracketing, meaning that the researcher attempts to first acknowledge and then set aside her own perception of the world. This has been done for example by keeping a neutral tone in the interview situation, avoiding limiting the talk to a search for quotes that strengthen my worldview. I have kept focus on the girls' narratives and that the important reality is what they perceive it to be. It is their experiences that make up the fundament for the results, analysis and conclusions.

5 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF URBAN PUBLIC GREEN SPACE

In this chapter I summarise the analysis of the data collected which was done by means of thematic analysis. This was done with consideration of, and in search for, answers to the research questions selected for this thesis, as introduced in Chapter 1. The analysis of the data led to the identification of three overarching themes as outlined below. The rest of this chapter is organised in four sections, each focused on the selected research questions. In the fourth and last concluding section, the data is analysed across themes to distinguish the essence of the phenomenon of urban public green space and how it is experienced by the girls subject to this research.

5.1 LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BEING IN PLACE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF SPACE INTO PLACE

The way in which teenage girls value and experience urban public green space in their neighbourhood greatly impacts on how they use it. Questions number one and two seeks to gather data about this, and the first theme that was identified in the data collected is about sense of place and feelings of being in place. The theme is composed by two categories of significant statements that the girls have expressed in relation to what they experience in connection with urban nature, and in what contexts this occurs. The categories identified are: 1) Connection to others, and 2) Connection to self. These categories are described and analysed in the rest of this section.

5.1.1 Connection to others

The results reveal how the girls' highly value urban public green space and the services it provides in their everyday lives; being close to nature, reconnect with oneself in nature, as well as seeing and meeting other people in public green space. They value a mix of green spaces, such as parks, alleyways, green space in connection to water, playgrounds, hilltops, and green space in between buildings close to their homes³. The narratives are in line with the

³ Valuation of urban forests is more complex and is specifically analysed in the second theme.

work of Gehl (2011), Jacobs (1961) and Whyte (1980) as they show that inviting and attractive urban public green space provides possibilities to linger; to stay, sit, eat, observe and meet. Sometimes they engage in physical activities, such as skateboarding, biking or jogging, but the stories reveal how the use of green space mostly consists of walking around to find or return to different green places to sit, hang out, talk, eat, swim and listen to music. Both Nahir and Nedelya light up when telling me about Flottsbro, a large recreation area by the water in Alby, where they usually spend time in summer. Nedelya explains her feelings towards this place: “When I think of Flottsbro, just the word Flottsbro, I immediately think about summer, friends, music, picnic, barbeque, bath and sun. It’s always positive feelings there”. Cala, who has lived four years in Ronna and before that in Syria, jokes when saying that she only goes outdoors to eat Shawarma, candy-floss or ice-cream. She continues by correcting herself: “no, I love green areas. Give me a water fountain, pink flowers around it, a bench to sit on... and a shisha (laughs). That together with other people. I hate to be alone. I want someplace to sit where it looks and feels nice and with social activity all around. I always feel good, but then I feel even better”. This narrative shows how Cala constructs space (Lefebvre, 1991) into place by several sensory dimensions: smells and tastes from the shisha and visual elements of the flowers and fountain, which possibly also provide sounds of trickling water. In a similar vein, Tierra refers to the visuality of colours in nature as a source of well-being: “Colours, a lot of green, and the leaves in autumn when they get even prettier, that brings quality in life”.

The data collected indicates how the girls often make use of green space together with others and how this turns the urban green space into meeting places where they, and their friends and family, spend time socialising and relaxing. For instance, Cala’s narrative above reveals her understanding of a high quality public green space as a place where she can engage in social life. This perspective is intertwined in all the girls’ stories, as they show how urban public green space enables connection with friends, family and the community, thus green space functions as a medium for social cohesion. The narratives also reveal how the presence of people, the openness of green spaces as well as places that are light are characteristics the girls consider important for green space to feel truly safe, public and accessible. Appropriate lightning and openness make places less frightening, because it allows the girls to see what and who is there as well as being seen by others. This evokes feelings that they are less likely to be victims of crime, as they have a sense of control and an overview of the surroundings, and they are also visible to others. Nahir refers to this feeling when showing me a park where

she usually spends time with her friends: “It’s cosy, we usually sit there by the benches. You can be there. It’s a good place, there are often people there. It feels a hundred percent safer when there are other people there, especially children and families”.

The data collected points to the intersection between green and grey infrastructure, as the girls often voice the importance that public green spaces are close to grey infrastructure, such as houses and streets, in order to feel safer. Grey infrastructure in these narratives indicates the presence of other people, which in turn increases the possibilities to enjoy green areas. For instance, during the talk with Sana, she tells me about a place just outside her apartment, a mountain surrounded by trees. She asks if I want to see it and brings her computer to the window to show me. A large hilly, stony area with pine trees and birches appears right in the middle of the tower blocks that raise around it. Sana asks if I can see it, and adds: “I usually walk up there to watch the sunrise or the sunset... It is calming, and you can see almost the whole area from up there. There is a place to sit, like flat rocks. It feels very nice there, you can think without any stress and breathe fresh air”. She tells me that she is usually there with family members and not alone, but not because it feels unsafe but rather that she appreciates the company. The place feels safe because it feels open and is close to the apartment buildings: “you can look into the windows of my apartment up there, so it does not feel scary”. What Sana emphasises in her story, the closeness to grey infrastructure, is in line with many of the other narratives. For instance, Nahir speaks of a newly built outdoor area in Alby that she likes: “They have built an outdoor gym, and it has an ice rink, a soccer field, and there are a lot of places to sit, and lots of green like flowers and grass. Many young people are there, and a lot of girls. I think it is a safe place for girls, it’s an open and light area, there are houses and streets around, you can see people walking and cars driving by, so I think that’s why you feel safe as a girl to spend time there compared to space that feels more closed”.

For some of the girls, socialising and being outdoors offer moments when they can recall and cherish memories about lands where they or their parents came from or have cultural links to. For instance, Nedelya mentions the significance of green space for the interaction with other people, as she shows me a green area in Alby where she has a garden allotment with her family. She says that she always feels very safe and happy there. The context for these feelings relates to social cohesion, ethnicity, and culture. She excitedly tells me about this place of great meaning to her, pointing it out on the map: “I was born in Bulgaria, and if you compare Sweden with Bulgaria, there is more of a village-y feeling there, there is such a great

community there, everyone knows each other, you even have this village scent, someone has lit a fire, the children are sitting around... So, when I go to this allotment area, it's exactly the same. And that may be because most of them are Serbs. When you go there, you always smell this scent, someone might be making homemade jam, they literally pick up these big pots that they put over the fire and cook jam". Along the same lines, Nahir connects the positive and sensory feelings of being in urban nature to her homeland: "I think it's very cosy to sit in a park that have a lot of trees around. The smell of nature. There are a lot of forests and nature where I'm from, in Iraq. So, when I sit there and sense the smells from nature, it feels nice, because I remember my homeland". These narratives show how space is constructed and that place is distinguished from space by the meanings and values ascribed to it by the people who experience it. Additionally, Nedelya attributes her sense of place towards the allotment area as strongly related to the people who spend time there, a notion that points to the ways that users of space participate in its making (Johnson & Miles, 2014).

5.1.2 Connection to self

The narratives reveal how sense of place is created as a result of a space having importance to the person who experience it, as it is endowed with value and meaning (Tuan, 1977). The narratives of sense of place and being in place are often focused on social life and the use of green space to get together with friends, family, and the overall community. However, connection with nature and with green space is also illustrated in the stories as important when spending time with oneself. It comprises areas the girls like to visit to relax, study, read, think, and write. It is portrayed as therapeutic, calming and stress-reducing. Nedelya describes these feelings by saying: "At times when there are too many things going in in life and I feel like I'm getting crazy, then I feel like I have to go outdoors and have some time alone. Time alone for me is to spend time in nature, to appreciate the world once more. You feel much better when you see the green". In a similar vein, Hazan explains how she often takes a walk in the morning to sit by the water and think: "Nature makes me appreciate those moments more. Many people don't live close to nature, so I feel glad that I'm able to relax with my own thoughts". Maisha says that she does not spend much time in the forest, but when she does it brings her positive feelings: "I go there sometimes just for the beingness. It's alone time for real. It feels like therapy to me. Then you have some time alone, and I look around and think, it's really pretty after all. It feels healthy. I wish I spent more time in green areas,

but the environment is always there”. Halimah, who lives in Lina close to large green areas, tells me how she usually goes for a walk and sit by the lake: “I just sit there. It’s very calm. The air is pleasant. I feel better there. Sometimes I study, or write. If it’s dark I don’t want to be there alone, but when it’s light it’s better when I’m alone. Then I can concentrate better, I can think”. On the question what this place means to her, she replies: “In my life, a very calm place. I can go there every day. It is of great importance. I haven’ thought of it like this before, but I believe that anyone who go there will feel better”.

In the light of the coronavirus pandemic and the implications of that on possibilities to spend time outdoors, the importance of urban nature has become even more prevalent for the girls. Most of them are outdoors much less than before, and when they are, they tell me that they are feeling worried to get infected, as they have loved ones part of the risk group. Several of the girls report of realising the value of freedom in accessing urban nature and outdoor environments without worrying, which they have taken for granted before the pandemic. The narratives reveal that quality of life decreases as they feel locked inside, they get more tired and unfocused, and they do not see and meet other people as much. Halimah explains this notion by saying: “It feels like I long to get outdoors. To be in nature, to be with friends. It is now you realise, being stuck at home, that you have less access to that, to go out and enjoy the weather and to be together, I don’t how to explain it, but to be part of the community”. Along the same lines, Tierra underlines that her valuation of urban nature and the role it plays for her social life has increased: “Before we lived life as if we would never lose it, or lose the freedom of going out, being in nature, being with friends, and just breathe. These last months, everything has changed, it feels like life was turned upside down in one day”.

5.2 LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BEING OUT OF PLACE: POWER, PERFORMATIVITY AND PREJUDICE

Simultaneously as the results reveal the benefits and values the girls ascribe to public green space, they also show another side to these experiences. The second theme that was identified in the data collected is about lived experiences of being out of place in green space. The theme is composed by three categories of significant statements as expressed by the girls. The categories identified are: 1) Spatial power relations, 2) Gender performativity, and 3) Territorial stigmatisation.

5.2.1 Spatial power relations: perceived non-publicness and the geography of fear

The data collected indicates how public space can sometimes be perceived as non-public and inaccessible; partly due to physical attributes of space, and partly due to power relations in space, as it can be experienced as being occupied by others or as dangerous and inappropriate to visit in certain times and places. One of Tierras stories shows an example of how physical attributes influence her experience and use of green space. She tells me how she usually goes for walks, and guides me to a place she likes: “Do you see the roundabout? (see Figure 3). It’s a nice scenery from there, when you stand there you feel like the area is very open. I usually walk along this road to the left. I don’t go on the other side of the roundabout, to the right, because it feels closed and there’s a lot of trees. On the left side, the sun is shining, and on the right, it feels dark with high trees and high buildings, it gives me negative feelings”. Some of the girls explain how paths and roads leading to their homes have the characteristics of the road to the right, with high trees, bad lightning and a closed feeling. Since these paths are the only ones leading home, the girls are recurrently forced to take them, despite feelings of discomfort or fear.

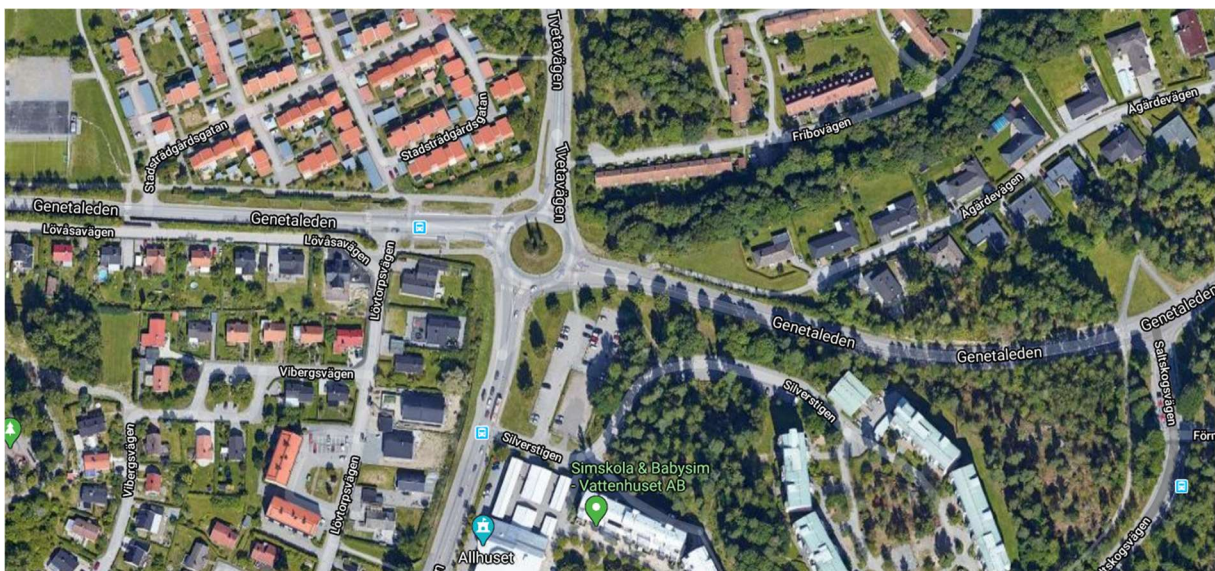


Figure 3. Screen shot of the roundabout and the two different paths (Image: Google Maps).

In line with Tierra’s story above, Nahir’s and Nedelya’s narratives about Flottsbro, the green recreational area in Alby that is highly valued by them, simultaneously serves as examples how green space can be perceived as inaccessible. The only trail that leads from Alby to Flottsbro is through the forest. Nahir shows the path on the map (see Figure 4) and explains

how it limits access to the place that she enjoys, and makes her feel exposed and with a loss of control of her surroundings: “The path to Flottsbro, it is a long forest path... Flottsbro is a lovely place, but this path often feels very dark, and then you don’t dare to walk pass there. You only dare to go there in summer when it’s light out. There are not many people there, and therefore, being a girl, you feel a bit scared. It feels closed and have limited light sources, so things can easily happen there without anyone seeing. You don’t know who could be there”. Nedelya contrasts and confirms this experience by explaining how she experiences this forest path as lively, with high movement and activity of people who bicycle, fish and exercise, thus it feels safe and pleasant for her. However, she adds that “it totally changes character when it’s dark outside. Then it gets scary to me”. The ways that social categories articulate in relation to given places (their spatiality) and time (their temporality) (Anthias, 2013) come across in these narratives, as is age and gender which articulate and intersect in the context of a given place and time. In this case, the categories of age and gender only get evident for exclusion when the space changes its character. Then, the space feels unsafe and inappropriate for the girls to be in, in turn influencing their access to and use of a green space they enjoy.

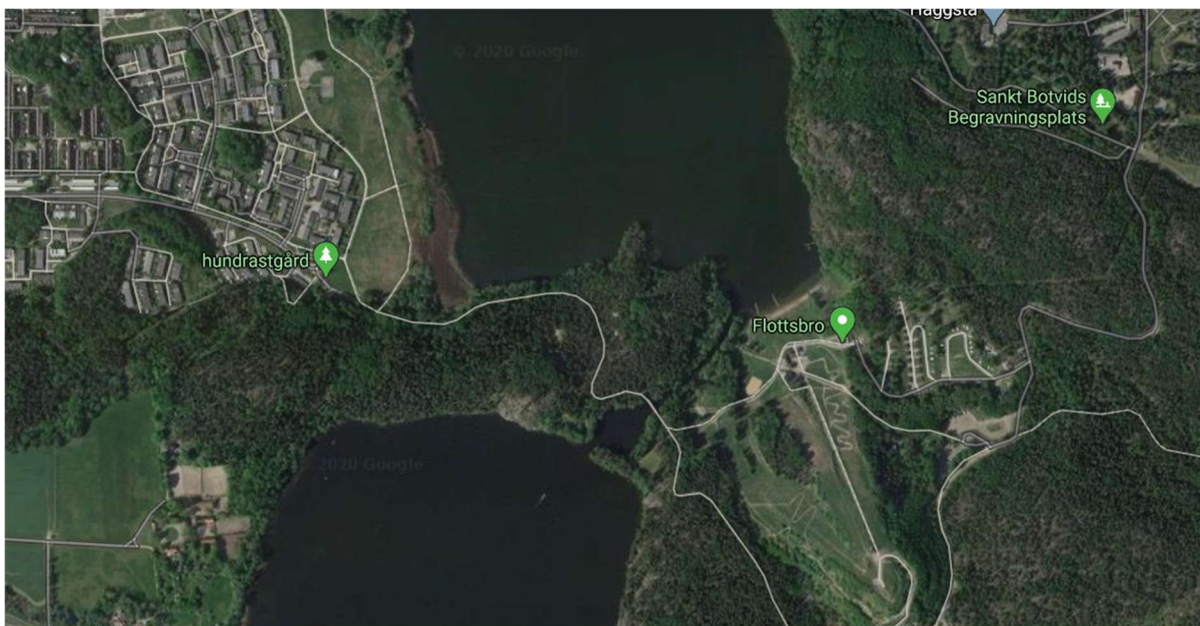


Figure 4. Screen shot of the forest path to Flottsbro (Image: Google Maps).

The girls’ narratives of green space indicate their understanding of a truly public and accessible space as an open and light space. The closed and dark nature of space, often referred to as the forest or groves, is associated with unpleasant experiences and feelings of being out of place. As Nahir puts it: “Bad things happen in green spaces that aren’t open. Of

course, things happen in open areas too, but mostly in closed spaces”. Along the same lines, Sana experiences the forest as a place where one is more exposed due to its disconnectedness: “You are more exposed in the forest, where it is dark, places that aren’t heard”. The contrasts in experience of spaces that feel open and spaces that feel closed is illustrated in the entirely different feelings Tierra gets from two green areas in her neighbourhood. Her narrative shows how the physical attributes of green space interact with feelings of liberty and control. She compares a green space she likes, a hilltop in Södertälje, with a place she does not like, a road close to her house that transitions straight into high trees and forest. She guides me on the map to show the place she likes: “Do you see the place a bit up to the right? Do you see the view? It is high up on a mountain. It is so nice there, very calming and green. It feels like you breathe a fresher air. You can almost see the whole city from there. It is so lovely to see all the buildings, factories and little houses, it is nice to see how the neighbourhood moves, to see the whole machinery. It is a very different feeling in other places where I feel more trapped. You feel small in those places, you don’t feel like you can do anything in the world. Whilst when you are in these places like the hilltop, it is big, you can see everything, it feels like there is a quietness in the world, that you can do something in the world, you can prove to yourself who you are. But in some other places, you feel small, it feels like others can take over your world or your life in a simple manner”.

There are contrasts and complexities in relation to the aspirations for open green space, as some of the girls do appreciate the physical attributes and feelings of more pristine nature and high, densely grown trees, such as the forest. Halimah describes her conflicted experience, touching specifically on the transition between grey and green infrastructure: “I have never really been in the forest, I’ve never thought of why... But it feels like the street suddenly becomes a wall of trees. I don’t think of it as a place I could go. But when I think about it, I would like to be there more, it feels like it would be nice and easy to be there, it’s beautiful and green. But one could work more with the forests in this area and make them feel like places where one can go, to make it feel more inviting”. In a similar vein, Nedelya tells me a story of a path she has to take to get home, through a green area with lawns, benches and densely grown trees. One of the sitting areas are usually occupied by men who barbecue and play loud music, or younger guys who sit around. She says: “When they are there, I feel like I have to hurry when walking pass. It doesn’t feel safe there. The trees are very close to the path, so it feels dark and cramped. Yet, they have already cut down some trees there, so you can see better what’s going on. I don’t think that feels good, because I love nature, the more

trees the better, who doesn't want more trees? That is how you should think. But I also understand how it increases security, like, if you walk here you can see if someone is there and make the decision to avoid the place and to walk a different path home". These narratives show how green space can increase feelings of unsafety and decrease feelings of control of one's surroundings. However, these feelings are complicated because they are not sprung from dislike of trees, forests and nature. Rather, they are a result of power relations in space and a perceived non-publicness, as the space is experienced as inaccessible, unsafe or as occupied by others.

The data collected indicates how public spaces are neither fixed nor accessible to all, but rather created and recreated by residents themselves in various places across the city (Johnson & Miles, 2014). One example that illuminates how space can be experienced as occupied by others, as well as how 'place' means different things to different people, is revealed in one of Nahir's stories of a green area she perceives as inaccessible and unsafe. The area spoken of is the allotment area in Alby that Nedelya included in her narrative of places she likes. This area is on the way to the Alby lake, and Nahir usually takes a detour "because there are a group of guys that usually hang out there, it's a big gang who meet there with their cars, and you don't want to pass there if you are on the way to the lake. As a young girl I don't dare to go there". The narrative reveals her perception of space as unavailable and non-public, despite it being a public space. The perceived non-publicness and inaccessibility is recurring in many of the narratives, often as an expression of outdoor space being experienced as occupied by men and boys, thus unavailable and inappropriate for girls. Most of the girls, part from Sana who lives in central Södertälje, experience that boys and young men are a much more common element in outdoor urban space than girls and young women. As Nahir experience it: "Outdoors in Alby, there are a lot of guys. Mostly guys. There are only a few girls that hang outdoors and in green areas here". Cala have the same picture of Ronna: "There are so many guys outside. I don't know why. But they just go out. I also go out, but not in Ronna".

The experience of boys and men as occupiers of space reveal an additional element in the girls' narratives of green space, namely that their bodies become objects as they engage with their surroundings (Young, 1990). The gaze of boys and men make the girls feel that they are present in a place they should be absent from if they want to avoid unwanted attention, uncomfortable feelings or fear. This is shown in their narratives as they express feelings of being watched while being outdoors. Maisha illustrates this by explaining the experience of

being observed when walking in outdoor space in Ronna: “It feels like you have eyes on you all the time, it is frightening and feels uncomfortable”. She continues by explaining how this setting influence her experience of the outdoor environment, both knowingly and unconsciously: “It affects how I feel when I’m outdoors. It affects me even when I think it doesn’t. Like, I instinctively avoid certain places and to go out in certain times, because I feel like I will be watched. I feel all the time like, I don’t want to...”. Halimah describes how the feeling of being watched makes her appreciate green space less: “When I was out walking in Ronna, I couldn’t think so much about the green. No. I couldn’t embrace the green, I was thinking about the feeling of walking”. These narratives reveal how space works as an arena where processes of subject formations play out (Valentine, 2007). As a consequence of power relations and intersecting categories, such as age, gender, and residence, the girls are being made to feel out of place and restricted in accessing outdoor areas.

The data collected indicates how urban forests and some parks are perceived by the girls as a prerequisite that makes violence towards young girls possible, due to the characteristics of being closed and dark spaces. Nahir thinks an explanation to why there are more boys and men outdoors is due to stories of green space as dangerous for girls: “I believe it’s a hundred percent due to that girls are more afraid to go out, especially in green areas. Because it happens a lot there. You hear every week that a girl was raped in a green area”. The perception that urban public green space is dangerous for girls is a recurring expression in the narratives. The statements in this category are numerous, indicating how deeply rooted the perceived connection between green space and violence towards girls and young women are. The concept of power, and how it operates at discursive and structural levels to exclude some types of experiences (Foucault, 1977), can be used to comprehend how stories and myths about green space limit the girls to freely move within such space. For instance, Tierra explains how her fear of green space is closely related to how it is framed: “I think the reason girls feel unsafe in green areas is because all the stories you hear. Like in this forest, there is like a cave there. And when you were little you heard so many stories about a man who took girls there, and it felt really unsafe when you already as a child heard that if you spend time in the forest as a girl, there is a huge uncertainty because things happen to girls there”. In a similar vein, Nedelya explains how she stopped visiting an area in the forest where she used to go for walks: “Not so long ago a girl was raped in that forest. After that, I felt that no, I won’t go there. Before I could go there with no worries, but I don’t anymore”.

This study suggests that narratives and myths that green space is dangerous for girls paint a geography of fear (Koskela, 2003; Tuan, 1974), which influences the girls' experiences and consequently their use and valuation of green space. Hence, space becomes discursively marked, resulting in placelessness and fear of places. If the girls have heard stories of crime towards girls and young women in certain green areas, they avoid these to protect themselves. This way, fear of violence is expressed as a fear of *space* (Tonkiss, 2005), particularly green space. It is foremost nature that feels dangerous, not people, which also shows in the stories of green spaces as being perceived as safer if they are close to grey infrastructure, thus people. Consequently, the geography of fear limits the girls to freely move in and fully enjoy urban nature. The feeling of being limited in accessing green space is described by Nedelya as lowering quality of life: "It feels sad. I am a nature lover, for someone who is not maybe it is not as bad... But for me who loves to be out in nature, to have time for myself, with music and fresh air, it is really sad that I have to feel limited due to things that have happened before... which are horrible things, and I feel they can happen to me too".

5.2.2 Gender performativity: psychological fear and outdoor safety work

The girls reflect on the reasons why they experience fear for certain green places in certain settings and times, concluding that this fear is often psychological. As Maisha explains it: "It might not even be insecurity and uncertainty but rather that you have heard so many stories, that really don't have anything to do with me, but that affects the mind in a negative that makes me really cautious. I do believe that women and girls are restricted in public space, but I also think that many exaggerate and create scenarios in their heads". Tierra also describes the experience of psychological fear for some green areas: "It comes from things you have heard and not so much on a real threat, mostly that things can happen because you hear they have happened before". Sana describes her behaviour of avoiding green space in certain times as something she has learned: "I have read so much about things happening to young girls in the forest at night-time, and I think you learn a lot from this, that being a girl in the forest at night-time is connected to danger, it becomes something you think of constantly". Along the same lines, Hazan also refers to feelings of unsafety in green areas as a phenomenon that is created and partly imagined: "The media greatly influence how you think. You hear a lot. Murder and rape that happen in the forest, in night-time. But it doesn't mean that this is true. I think it is a perception that has been created, that really affects the way that girls think and

behave”. In these stories, the geography of fear results in processes of gender performativity (Butler, 1988), as the girls movement patterns and behaviour in outdoor environments are steered by what is expected of them in relation to earlier situations and events, whether true or not. As Nedelya puts it, illuminating consequences of intersecting categories, such as age, gender and also place of residence, and how they interact with her performance of gender: “If I were a boy, I wouldn’t walk around thinking that someone could come and rape me. But as a girl, of course you focus more on that, because that is how society looks today. My behaviour is affected by the fact that I am a young girl, and also by the place I live in some sense”.

The girls explain how they develop strategies related to the use and movement in urban public green space. These strategies involve avoiding certain places during certain times, not being alone when spending time outdoors, taking detours next to roads where people can see you, not walking through green and deserted areas, not wearing clothes that could be perceived as sexually provocative, always being on the phone when walking alone, holding keys in one’s hand, lowering the music in the headphones or not listen to it at all, constantly looking over the shoulder to see if you are followed, and more. The repertoire of strategies the girls use while moving outdoors, and in green space more specifically, is sometimes influenced by feelings of one’s own responsibility to avoid sexual violence. Hazan thinks that a common attitude is that it is the girl’s responsibility to avoid becoming a victim of crime, with the consequence of a restricted use of public green space: “If something happens to a girl, there will be rumours. I don’t know how to put this... But, if something happens like rape for example, you might get a reputation of being a whore. So, in a way you are partly afraid of getting a reputation, which might prevent you to go out in nature in the first place. To not go out is one way to avoid it... These are things that I think about, that you get judged based on your behaviour, and if something happens, it is your fault. It is really a very strange way of thinking...”. The repertoire of strategies shows how the girls perform safety work (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020) when using public green space. The perception about safety, and who’s responsibility it is that they are safe, seems to be influencing the strategies they put up. While some of the strategies allow for some access to green, however still affecting well-being and opportunities to enjoy green space, some of the strategies completely alienate girls from urban nature. The repertoire includes staying inside, avoiding being victim of crime but also minimising the risk of being the subject of rumours. As a consequence, the girls safety work and their repertoires of strategies decreases the amount of time they spend outdoors, despite willingness to do so.

The safety work can be seen as a consequence of the geography of fear, but also of the girls' self-image as being vulnerable. The narratives reveal how the girls see themselves as weak and defenceless due to biological sex and age; that girls can't run as fast or protect themselves from danger. This pattern can also be explained by gender performativity (Butler, 1988), as the meaning of being a girl is constructed and re-constructed within a culture that holds certain associations, stereotypes and social patterns of gender, in turn influencing on girls' behaviour and self-perception. As Maisha puts it: "It feels like girls are weaker. This might sound wrong, but what if something happens? You always keep in mind: don't forget this, don't do this, don't do that...". Halimah also agrees with this picture: "There are differences between men and women. Men can take better care of themselves... women don't have the same strength as men... So, women start to fantasise more... If something happens, what do I do?". In a similar vein as Maisha and Halimah, Hazan expresses an image of difference in strength between girls and boys: "I think girls are weaker and more vulnerable. Boys will be alright because they have the strength and more power. As a girl, you can't protect yourself the same way". Hazan continues by suggesting how her self-image of being weak limits her use of green space: "When you feel like you are not able to protect yourself, you get these thoughts that you shouldn't go out. You doubt it".

The data collected indicates that the girls' experiences of public green space and the use of such space has changed in the transition from childhood to adolescence. It reveals a transition into a different spatial awareness as age and gender intersects and the body becomes gendered through assigned roles. When they were children, they experienced a sort of fearlessness. Most of the girls spent more time in green areas when they were younger⁴, and do not recall being scared or limited but only positive feelings of playing outdoors with friends and family. Tierra explains how this fearlessness changed with age: "When you were a child and spend time outdoors, you were always with someone that took care of you and made you feel safe. This changed when you became a teenager. You began to hear and understand that it is dangerous to be out alone. I still go out alone, I am independent. But it comes with feelings that I must think more and take care of myself". Nahir too experiences that the fear of being victim of crime has increased with age. She says: "As a child, you don't think of these things,

⁴ Contrasts to this can be seen in Sana's story as she explains that she grew up in Iraq during the war: "I can't compare experiences in Sweden with the ones in Iraq that has war. My memories from that time, they are from the same period, when the United States invaded Iraq. Of course, it didn't feel safe to play outdoors". Halimah and Cala, who grew up in Syria, recall spending almost all waken time outdoors, but that there were few, or none, green areas in their neighborhoods.

you are not as familiar with the news”. Nedelya is on the same track when attributing her experience to changing circumstances as one grows older: “Something has happened, because when I was a child, I didn’t care, I was outdoors all the time. I think that what has changed in my way of thinking is that I understand more. When my mom used to tell me not to go out because it’s dangerous, I didn’t understand. But the older you get, the more you understand that things happen to girls. Then you become more like... No, stop, don’t go out”.

The narratives show how social expectations, assigned gender roles and self-perception define the girls assigned gendered space, and their behaviour in outdoor environments are steered by earlier experiences and incidents. This indicates how gender identity is continually learned and performed (Butler, 1988). The perception of the vulnerable and targeted girl, told to the girls by their parents and/or by the broader society like the news or popular culture, is in some sense a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the girls correct their behaviour and experiences in public space according to this narrative as a way to protect themselves. They express that their bodies sometimes do not belong, and that they are expected to act in certain ways in certain places during certain times. If they do not and something happens, one risks being blamed for acting outside of what is expected of you according to your gender role. This way, success in safety work is an absence of what could have happened (Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020: 8). One cannot feel achievement when it works, one can only be blamed when it does not. However, contrasts to these findings is seen in the narratives, for example in a story told by Cala who lives in Ronna. She illustrates a performance that challenges what is expected of her: “There are usually fires right outside my gate. But it doesn’t make me feel unsafe. Even if it’s burning and the space is occupied by a lot of guys, I still go out. If I were scared, I wouldn’t go out. You can fear those guys. I’m not. They are only kids”. This performance shows that biological sex does not determine identity or behaviour. Because gender is constructed through acts, the possibility also exists to construct a different gender by a different act.

5.2.3 Territorial stigmatisation: feelings of neglect and residential prejudice

Narratives that green space is dangerous for girls, preconceptions and self-images of being defenceless and weak as well as safety work in public space, increase in the intersection with place of residence. The girls’ perceptions of green space in their neighbourhoods are influenced by feelings that these are unprioritised and neglected by planners, politicians, the

municipality and the government, hence unsafe and uninviting. They describe that many green areas feel dirty and messy with garbage, piles of old branches or old materials from construction work. Maisha describes the forest in Ronna: “It’s not that it feels inaccessible, it just feels very dirty. The last time I went for a walk there, there were broken bottles everywhere, a shirt that was torn... It felt like no one looks after it, which is too bad, because you should be able to walk in the forest, they should be cared for”. Tierra connects experiences of green space that are not cared for with feelings of insecurity: “When it’s not cared for, it’s not as nice to look at, and then it also becomes unsafe”. Cala, who lives just by the forest in Ronna, tells me how she never spends time there because: “there are usually fires there. There are always fires in Ronna. The forest and the cars are burning. It’s chaos. I usually call the cops, but they never show up, or it takes a long time. I don’t think they care about the people who live here. I don’t know why”. Along similar lines, Nahir refers to feelings of neglect when describing green areas as abandoned: “The green areas could have been lovely if they were cared for. It feels like they are just left behind... In Alby, no one looks after the forest. It feels like it is the people living in the suburb that have to take care of it, and not the state or the government. We need a greater commitment from the rest of society”. When telling me about the forest path to Flottsbro, Nedelya adds: “If we would tell a politician about this, that many people feel that this path is unsafe, I feel like they would have no clue what we were talking about”.

The scenario that enjoyable green space like Flottsbro becomes inaccessible because it intersects with other green areas that are perceived as non-public, is seen in another of Nedelya’s narratives about a green space she likes, which is the Alby lake. The closest way there is a path through the forest, which she describes as follows: “It looks very empty, like no one takes care of it. And as you see in the map, this is the main path to the Alby lake, which makes this path very important, because the Alby lake is so nice, there are ducks you can feed and one can sit on the benches there and relax. But on the way there, it feels like no one has been there in 50 years, so I feel that I have to take a long detour instead of that path”. In turn, Nedelya connects this to priorities between green and grey infrastructure, touching on the debate of urbanisation and nature conservation: “The politicians might say that they care for the Alby lake, but I feel that they prioritise building things instead of caring for the green areas. Absolutely, we need more homes, but that is not a reason to pretend that the Alby lake doesn’t exist, like nature, the parks, the children and the women doesn’t exist. If you can lay all this time and money on new buildings, I feel like you can do the same for green areas, like

the Alby lake and Flottsbro. Make them more accessible and inviting so people can be there”. The girls’ narratives about the experience of green space in relation to residence reflect how territorial marginalisation (Waquant, 2007) occurs both externally and internally. Negative framings of the suburb from the media and overall society, stories of their neighbourhoods as dangerous, feelings that decision-makers and politicians do not care about their communities and that green areas in their neighbourhoods is perceived as abandoned have the consequence that people living in their neighbourhoods, including themselves, feel less encouraged, limited or even scared to go out. Nedelya explains this notion by saying: “This picture that people create of the suburbs, it makes people not want to go out. The place where I live is famous for being dangerous, when it’s dark you just shouldn’t go out. This fear makes it hard for people to go out and appreciate how beautiful and green it is here. When bad things happen, people automatically stop going out, people become limited”. Nahir expresses how the feelings of neglect for her neighbourhood affect her use of green space: “I think I would have behaved differently outdoors if I lived in another area. No one cares for Alby. I feel like areas in the city are more cared for. And I feel that Alby is a place that needs to be cared for. Because there are so many people in Alby that would love to spend more time outdoors, in green areas, also at night, to be here... I feel that the priorities the government makes need to change. Alby should be a place where one can go out without feeling scared and insecure”.

Contrasts is seen in the narratives between the study areas, as some of the girls have moved from one place to another. It is evident that some areas, like Alby and Ronna, are particularly perceived as dangerous, especially for girls and young women. Maisha moved from Ronna to Lina some years ago, and despite it is only a road between her last apartment and her current one, her experience has completely changed: “Even if I live like two minutes from Ronna, it’s a completely different environment. It’s very calm. I feel safe. In Ronna, I didn’t feel as safe. It was safe in a way because there were always people out, but at the same time I always felt eyes on me, it felt uncomfortable to be outside”. Halimah, who has also moved from Ronna to Lina, has the same experience, which she ascribes to the green space in Lina that feels cared for: “I feel a greater calmness now. Lina is a very pretty area. It’s very green, with many flowers. Everything is green and pretty. You can just go outdoors and take a walk between the buildings and it’s very nice. I don’t have to think so much, and it is easier to appreciate the environment and the green”. She attributes her experience partly to a discursive image of Ronna as a place that affects how one thinks: “People talk a lot about Ronna. And they say it’s scary and not safe there. So, maybe you get that thought, and you begin to think, will

something happen? Then, you will feel scared. And you start thinking like that all the time”. Sana, who now lives in a Million Program in central Södertälje but used to live in Ronna, describes the difference between the two areas: “I’m never in Ronna anymore, but I lived there when I first came to Sweden. There’s a big difference between different areas in Södertälje. This area is calmer and looks much nicer. The green areas in Ronna are not as cared for as the ones here”. Maisha articulates her experience of the change in these areas: “Unfortunately, there are few people who want to live in the Million Program today, and I think it’s because most of them are in these suburbs that feels dangerous and not cared for... I think it’s sad because many years ago, the Million Programs were very popular and only richer people could afford living there”.

Part from feelings of neglect and residential prejudice, the stories also reveal feelings of pride for the voluminous green areas that according to the girls hold great potential. Despite the challenges both Nedelya and Nahir believe that Alby stands before, the stereotypical framing of their neighbourhood as dangerous and as a no-go-zone is an image they do not fully recognise or agree with. Nedelya says: “If you look at the papers, they usually describe the suburbs as a horrible place. I cannot agree. I do agree there are things that need to change, but the good things are never mentioned”. Nahir confirms this picture: “People mostly bring forth the negative aspects of the suburbs. Only the people who live here are able to see the positive sides. But someone who doesn’t live here often wants to misunderstand and to criticise”. Nahir continues, looking at her neighbourhood and the local environment from above on the satellite map: “You see when looking at this map, especially when you zoom out, that it is incredibly beautiful with so much green. People come from the city just to spend time in the green areas here. It is a wonderful place in that sense”. In a similar vein, Nedelya attributes her pride for her neighbourhood to the many green areas: “It really is very beautiful. It’s forests and trees and flowers. It’s the reason I want to go out every day”.

5.3 FUTURE VISIONS OF GREEN SPACE: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE POWER TO INFLUENCE

As the first two themes relate to rights to fully use urban public green space in everyday life, this theme deals with rights to participate in decision-making and design of green space as a means of social inclusion. Question number three and four seeks to gather data about this. This third theme is composed by significant statements revealing the girls’ aspirations to

influence the governance of green space. However, their opportunities to articulate future visions of green space come with great challenges, as a consequence of intersecting categories and power relations. This is described and analysed in the rest of this section.

The narratives reveal that the girls have great aspirations to express their voice and to influence and co-design green space in their neighbourhoods. The ways in which they want to express themselves varies between narratives. Some identify as people who like to talk and express themselves in conversation. Some want to write, some want to record films, and some want to participate in workshops. It is emphasised that existing green space in their neighbourhoods has potential, but that the function, management and design of it need to improve. Nedelya expresses her aspiration to be a part of the change as sprung from her high valuation of green areas, and the claim to feel safe when using them: “I love the green areas here, but they could be better. I would like to talk about how I experience green space in my neighbourhood. Even if I feel, oh lord, it’s not my thing, cause’ I can be a quiet person. But when it comes to these things, I want to talk, because I know it could improve things, and also decrease the risk for something happening to me or other girls. As long as I experience that there are risks in green space I will stand up for these issues”. Despite aspirations to have a voice, few of the girls have participated in activities aimed to co-design green space. As Maisha says: “I have never participated in any decision-making because I haven’t been requested, but of course I want to be a part of the development, because I live here, and I want it to be as good as it can be. I care about this neighbourhood”. Tierra tells me how she felt when being asked to participate in this study, stating that: “I really wanted to participate because no one has ever asked me about these things before, about my area, and I feel that my area needs this attention in many ways, because there are a lot of people who want to spend time outdoors, but they don’t”.

As the narratives show aspirations to have a voice, they also reveal how social categories of age, gender, ethnicity and residence position the girls with the feeling that they have less power and possibilities to influence green space governance, based on the intersection of certain identity markers as fundamental for exclusion (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). Sana attributes her experience of having less power to influence to the intersecting social categories of age and ethnicity: “I don’t feel that I would be listened to, because 1) I’m young, and 2) I’m an immigrant. If I were Swedish, people would have listened more to what I have to say”. Halimah expresses a feeling that voices like her own are missing in issues regarding how

outdoor environments are experienced, by saying: “You don’t see or hear much from young girls who live in the Million Program”. The stories also reveal feelings of exclusion based on intersecting categories of age and gender. Maisha says: “I’m unsure that my voice would be heard, since I’m young and I’m a girl. Some might view me as a person with no knowledge and no experience”. Hazan too expresses an experience of having less power due to age and gender: “If I’m in a room with mostly grownups, who knows what they’re talking about, then I wouldn’t feel comfortable talking. Then it would feel like I’m wrong and they’re right. I think many young people feel this way. This would also be the case if there’s only young guys in the room, then I would think an extra time before talking, as a young girl alone in the room”. Contrasts to this can be seen in some of the narratives. Halimah articulates that she would feel comfortable to talk to anyone about these issues, regardless who they are. She believes they would listen because she is a young girl herself, thus in a position to communicate first-hand information about the experience of green space and how it can improve. In a similar vein, Cala says: “If I wanted to air my opinion, I would just do it. I’m not ashamed. But it is difficult to imagine how things could be different”.

Future visions concerning physical attributes of green space as expressed by the girls specifically emphasise a wish for green space to be designed with more attention to the needs of young people. The most common activity to walk around and sit and talk as mentioned in the first theme is not necessarily self-elected, as it becomes apparent in the narratives that there are not many options in public green space to engage in in their neighbourhoods. For this reason, the girls express that it can be difficult to use public green spaces in the studied areas. Nahir, for instance, expresses feelings that she would be out more if the outdoor environments offered more to people of her age, expressing a sense of placelessness (Relph, 1976) towards the living environment: “I am not outdoors in green areas as much as I feel one should. There is not much to do as a young person in Alby”. Along similar lines, Sana says: “It is difficult to know what to do outdoors in green areas. I usually go out and sit somewhere with a friend. If I had a choice, there would have been more things one could do, more places to be”. The lack of places to spend time result in more time spend at home or at restaurants and cafés. As Tierra expresses it: “It results in that we go out to sit at cafes, and that is not a proper outdoor activity, you don’t use the green, you don’t move your body”. Halimah has the same experience: “There are not many green areas for young people, especially girls. Mostly we sit at home, or at cafés. I know so many girls who sit at home, but who wants to be out”.

In line with what has been expressed in the earlier themes, the girls wish for more green spaces to hang out, places to sit, to perform various physical and social activities, sports and outdoor gyms, places and walking tracks that are open and light, places that feel cared for and clean – places that show that decision-makers and planners spend time and energy with the ambition to increase green space use among young people, by making it more useful, safe and accessible for them. The girls believe that these changes would make them want to spend more time outdoors. Halimah believes that if more resources and effort were put into green areas, they would simultaneously feel safer: “Then more people would go out, more children would want to play outside, and that would reduce some of the problems, it would feel safer”. In a similar vein as Halimah, Nahir explains her experience of increased safety after the renovation of a park in her neighbourhood: “It made me feel like it wasn’t forgotten, that it’s being cared for. It made me feel safer. Green areas should be cared for so that people want to spend time there, and then they would feel safer”. Nedelya has a similar experience, as she tells me a story of a tragic incident that occurred in a park close to her home: “A guy was shot there some years ago. When that happened, no one went outside, no one dared to go there. But last year, they fixed this place, they renovated the children’s pool, they made benches and sitting areas that look really nice, and more and more people went back there. If I were to go out on my balcony now, I would hear the kids playing down there”. Nedelya relates back to the allotment area and how important that is for her sense of place: “They could try to make green space in Alby a bit nicer, maybe get people to do what we do in the allotment area, that makes people want to go there, also in night-time. Open it up a little bit and create more movement of people and more things to do, so it feels nicer and also safer to be outdoors”.

Part from future visions concerning physical characteristics of green space, the narratives also touch upon more abstract feelings and experiences of such space. Many of the girls have a vision and an aspiration to be able to spend time outdoors wherever and whenever they feel like it, without having to think about their behaviour or what is expected of them. Nahir says: “I am a good example of how girls are restricted in outdoor space. I want to be able to spend time outdoors at night, but I don’t because it doesn’t feel right”. Nedelya too has this experience: “I’m sure that I am not the only one, especially being a girl, who value the green space here and who wants to be outdoors, but feel restricted”. To change these patterns, the girls empathise the need for a shift in the figure of thought and how these issues are being approached. They believe that there needs to be an increased attention to these issues, particularly in school through education, as well as more room in society for girls and women

to articulate the ways green space can feel accessible, inclusive, safe and inviting. As Nahir puts it: “They need to inform girls that they care about their opinions, that they are aware of their situation, that many don’t go out”. Hazan stresses that “there needs to be education around these issues. It’s important that girls are given a voice in society. Perhaps then others would better understand how it feels to be a girl using green space. Maybe it is difficult to fully understand if you haven’t lived it”. In addition, Sana stresses how it is important to include girls and young people in socio-economically challenged areas: “It feels like people with the power to change things are white, and older, and mostly men, and that they don’t live here. And, one needs various perspectives to reach the best solutions... So, the decision-makers need to show interest for girls and for young people living in these areas, because they are the ones who live there, and they are the future”. Tierra believes that public green space should be planned more with attention to girls, emphasising that it wouldn’t have any negative consequences: “If that could make girls feel safer outdoors, it wouldn’t hurt anyone else”. Sana too reflects on the overall consequences of including implications of gender in planning, as boys and men are also victims of crime in outdoor environments: “It is often boys and men that endanger girls and women, but boys and men are also victims of crime. I think that if it felt safer for women to be out in green areas, it would feel safer for men too”.

Social inclusion and participatory activities can create empowerment (Morgen, 1988) among urban residents, support power between people (Hankivsky, 2014), and enhance opportunities to use and enjoy outdoor space (Javaid & Habeeb, 2018). This is demonstrated in one of Nedelya’s stories, as she recalls a time when she initiated an activity with the aim to increase outdoor use in her neighbourhood. It concerned the courtyard outside her apartment, which was empty, with no playground, no sitting areas, and almost no green or no flowers, and no one spending time there. She asked the person in charge for the outdoor areas if they could create something outside. She tells me that: “He thought it was great that someone wanted to do something about the neighbourhood, especially a young person, and shortly after we sat down with the other kids in the building and planned it together. We built a swing, got a small water fountain, a large sitting area with a roof, a small cabin, and we planted a lot of flowers and green. I remember thinking that I wanted to feel secure when spending time there. And it really did feel that way. And I remember, after that, people started spending time outside, and organising activities outside, there were barbecues once a week, we organised playdates with all the kids in the building. It really did make a difference”.

5.4 GREEN SPACE: WHERE EXCLUSION AND FEAR COEXIST WITH WELL-BEING AND LIBERTY

The essence of the experience of urban public green space as expressed by the girls across themes can be summarised by one quote, spoken by Nahir: “That forest path is lovely to walk on, but it doesn’t feel safe”. Nahir’s experience reveals the many contradictory feelings that the girls have expressed, showing the great complexity of urban public green space as a place with room for both feelings of liberty and feelings of exclusion, discomfort and fear. The narratives combined unveil how green space is an important source for well-being and quality of life for the girls, and how connection to nature enables connection with loved ones, the community, and with oneself. Simultaneously, feelings of public green space as a place occupied by certain others contribute to experiences of it as inappropriate and unsafe for girls to visit in certain places during certain times. Green space is often experienced as a place that increases the risk of getting unwanted attention, being objectified, and possibly becoming a victim of crime. These experiences decrease feelings of joy, freedom and liberty for the girls as they access green space, and decrease their opportunities to feel sense of place.

The stories reveal how feelings of being in place and experiencing sense of place is less affected and guided by intersecting social categories. When describing full freedom and liberty in green space as shown in the first theme, the girls do not explicitly mention identity markers as influencing these feelings. In these moments, they are allowed to just exist and move freely. Expressions related to identity are much more visible in the second and third theme. Being out of place and experiencing less power to influence decision-making often depends on intersecting identity markers, such as age, gender, and place of residence; and how they articulate in relation to spatial and temporal settings. Exceptions to this can be seen in the stories where culture identity and ethnicity increase feelings of being in place, such as the experience of the allotment area and of recalling one’s homeland.

6 CONCLUSIONS & WAYS FORWARD

The research done as part to this MSc thesis demonstrates that identity markers, such as age, gender, and place of residence, intersect into a synergy of exclusion for teenage girls to fully encounter urban nature. This shows how green space works as an arena for power relations, where the opportunities for girls to benefit from its free use and from cultural ecosystem services decrease under certain circumstances. The girls' stories reveal how they are made to feel out of place, restricted in constructing green places with meaning to them. Narratives that green space is dangerous for girls paint a geography of fear; in which fear of becoming a victim of crime is expressed as a fear of *space*. This fear increases with prejudices and self-images that girls are defenceless and weak. Furthermore, these experiences intersect with feelings that their neighbourhoods, and the green wherein, are neglected and framed adversely. Still, the girls express great appreciation and pride over the voluminous public green areas in their neighbourhoods. Despite experiencing less power to influence, they have strong visions and aspirations to impact the design and function of urban nature in their living environments, which indicates prospects for empowerment and revitalisation of green space. If green space and social categories are constructed, they can be reconstructed. If green space is an arena for unequal power relations, there is room to reclaim power within that space.

Safe green space. This study finds that physical attributes, such as proper light sources, open places and places that feel cared for, have the potential to increase perceived safety for girls. Yet, the reason why girls avoid green space cannot be explained by environmental attributes alone. This study suggests that, as others have argued (Jansson et al., 2013; Pain, 2001), perceived safety is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by the physical environment but also by individual factors (age, gender, residence) and psychological factors (power relations, gender roles, territorial stigmatisation). Experiences of the forest is a good example, as it is described as a place where the girls want to spend more time, but also as a space that could allow for “bad things to happen”. The girls' stories reveal how they are aware that their fear is influenced by other factors than actual risk or danger, and how they have learned that some places are dangerous. Hence, experiences of green space go beyond physical planning, to more abstract, discursive processes of power that produce moments of exclusion for girls, which need amendments from many angles. To uncover and challenge preconceptions that girls are defenceless, and that green space is dangerous for girls, are important ways forward.

This thesis reveals great challenges to recall both social- and ecological sustainability in cities, and how to retain natural green areas while taking into consideration how they can be experienced as threatening. The complex dual role of pristine and wild urban nature, as valued but also feared, shows the need for knowledge on how it can be revitalised to improve well-being without reducing other ecological benefits (Jansson et al. (2013: 128). This study suggests that green areas should provide a diversity of options, functions and combinations to attend to the different needs and preferences of a wide range of people, and at the same time sustain natural resources, biodiversity and ecological and biological functions. To increase safety and use of green space does not mean reducing or limiting urban vegetation. As suggested by the girls, one way to increase use of green areas is to increase their attractiveness thus incentives for use, and to establish a presence of people in green areas. As fear of the forest and some green areas has been learned, it can also be “re-learned”.

Accessible green space. Public space is defined by the United Nations as a common good accessible for all to no cost (UN Habitat, 2015: 6), and research on environmental justice and public green space has focused on physical accessibility and the fair distribution of such space (Wolch et al., 2014). The implications of this study show that it is essential to also recognise the *perceived* publicness and accessibility; as green areas can feel non-public and inaccessible even when they are public and geographically close. This study understands the practicality for policy-makers and planners to understand all public space as static and fixed: if it is public, it is public. However, it argues in line with earlier findings (Johnson & Miles, 2014) that the publicness of space is constantly in flux, created and recreated by residents themselves in various places across the city. Nearness to urban public green space is not automatically equal to environmental justice. The planning, governance and analysis of green space must consider the relationship between people and place, informed by insights that the way bodies move in space is affected by identity markers and broader power structures.

Inclusive green space. The geography of fear, as illustrated in this study and elsewhere (Koskela, 2003), shows how girls feel restricted in public green space. For this reason, the gender-equal city is often synonymous with the safe city (Sandberg & Rönnholm, 2016: 1755). However, this study argues that a sole or a dominant focus on safety within gender-equal environmental planning and governance risks to divert focus from the creative and visionary futures that girls have of their living environments. By exploring girls’ future visions of green space, this thesis adds a layer on how public green space could feel not only

safe, but also inviting, lively and inspiring. This study argues that safety does not necessarily precede liberty. Making the presence of girls in urban space a more common thus expected element have the potential to generate feelings of safety. Hence, this study claims that inclusivity is especially important in the United Nations (2015, target 11.7) goal of creating safe, inclusive and accessible green space for girls. Sustainable governance of green space and associated issues are to be solved by practise and academia, but also need to recognise the expertise and local knowledge of people, particularly those that have been overlooked. Urban nature, especially in smaller scales not as steered by regulations, can work as experimental and innovative spaces to promote social inclusion, empowerment and well-being. Moreover, the stories shared by the girls indicate how green space can work as a model for integration, since experiences of it unveil comforting feelings and memories of one's homeland.

This thesis has conducted research that illustrates intersectionality as lived experience, and indicates the potential of the theory to study the complexity of human identity and decisions to use or avoid public green space. It also demonstrates how intersectionality is a profoundly spatial concept; in which identity markers articulate in relation to place and time, and where space has an important role in the exercising of power. The findings drawn from the nuanced life stories told by the girls contribute with novel insight to fields of environmental justice, sustainable urban development and environmental governance about the ways in which power and identity contribute at shaping lived experiences of urban public green space, in turn how it is valued and used. This study has proven the value of researching social categories as complex identity markers and not only as demographic variables in statistical tests. Identity can influence the likelihood to access green space, in turn opportunities to benefit from cultural ecosystem services. Moving forward, to explore lived experiences of people who are geographically and politically isolated is a way to illuminate, but also transform, injustices that play out in public green space across cities. The method used in this study proved valuable in understanding how green space is experienced. Further research can work with this method in an even more creative and visual way, focusing on future visions and how users of space can participate in its making. As a last note, this thesis emphasises the value of raising attention to young people, as they are the ones that will live in, and shape, sustainable living environments. Identifying and recognising their local expertise and encouraging their creativity is essential when working towards safe and accessible public green space and social- and environmental justice in cities.

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7.1 INTERVIEWS

- Nahir (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (15th of April 2020)
- Nedelya (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (15th of April 2020)
- Hazan (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (15th of April 2020)
- Maisha (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (16th of April 2020)
- Cala (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (16th of April 2020)
- Tierra (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (16th of April 2020)
- Halimah (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (17th of April 2020)
- Sana (pseudonym). Interviewed by: Blomquist, E. (20th of April 2020)

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide (originally conducted in Swedish)

General questions about green space:

Q 1. On the coronavirus pandemic: has it effected the time you spend outdoors? Has it changed the way you value being outdoors?

Q 2. How long have you lived in X? What does X mean to you as a place?

Q 3. Where do you usually hang out in your neighbourhood? How often are you outdoors? In what time?

Q 4. How would you describe the green areas where you live? How do they look? What experiences do you have of them? What meaning do they have to you? Does it differ depending on type of green?

Q 5. What do you usually do in green areas? What can you do? Are you in green areas mostly on the move, or can it be an optional activity?

Q 6. Are you together with others or alone while you spend time in green? Who are you with? Who else are outdoors in your area? Who do you usually see in different places?

Q 7. Are you satisfied with the time you spend outdoors in green areas?

Interactive interviewing using Google Maps satellite imagery:

Show on the map: green spaces you like, where you usually spend time alone or with others, which give you positive feelings, where you want to be

Q 8. What does it look like there? What do you like about this place? What do you usually do there? What feelings do you have when you are in this place? Who else are in this place?

What would you say affects positive feelings for a place? How could this place improve even more?

Show on the map: green spaces that you dislike, where you do not want to be, which feels insecure or unappealing, which give you negative feelings, which you avoid

Q 9. What does it look like there? What do you dislike about this place? What feelings do you have when you are in this place? Who else are in this place?

What would you say affects negative feelings for a place? What could be improved about this place?

Show on the map: green spaces you would like to visit more, but where you at present do not spend much time, places with potential

Q 10. What does it look like there? Why do you want to spend more time there? What could be improved with this place? Who else are in this place?

Show on the map: green spaces where you have spent time as a child or as a younger teenager

Q 11. What does it look like there? What did you use to do there? How do you feel about this place today? Did you spend *more* or *less* time in green space when you were younger?

Future visions, identity and power:

Q 12. How would you want green space in your local area to look like? How could they be improved? What would you prefer to be able to do there? What function should green space have?

Q 13. Does green space where you live feel safe? What is needed to make green space feel safe? Is there a difference in different types of green space? Does it vary depending on time of day/year?

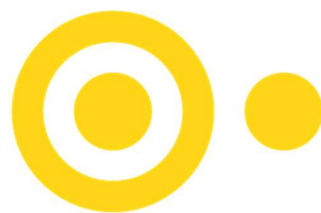
Q 14. Do you think the green space in your neighbourhood feels accessible (easy to get to/inviting?). How would you describe accessible green space?

Q 15. Does who you are as a person (your identity) and/or where you live affect your behaviour outdoors in public space, and your use and experiences of green space in your neighbourhood?

Q 16. Have you ever participated in an activity related to spatial planning and the design of the outdoor areas and green space in your neighbourhood? Have you ever been told about such an event?

Q 17. Would you want to be able to affect and to be a part of the design of green space in your neighbourhood? If so, how would you like to participate and to share your experiences? Do you feel like your voice would be heard in relation to spatial planning and the design of green space?

Q 18. How did it feel to talk about your neighbourhood this way? How did you feel about the use of the map in the interview situation?



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