

Colourful recreation in green: Review of research on immigrants, greenspace and society

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Introduction

In various Northwest European countries immigrants seem to be under-represented in the recreational use of greenspace. Moreover, a ‘whiteness’ of staff of nature conservation organisations have been noted. As immigrant populations continue to grow, governments and nature conservation organizations in various West European countries start to recognize that immigrants’ recreational use and perceptions of greenspace are relevant for nature policy and management. Correspondingly, the number of studies on immigrants’ or ethnic minorities’ use and perceptions of nature is increasing. However, research is still limited and almost exclusively nationally oriented. This review aims to provide an overview of concepts and approaches used in Northwest European research on immigrants’ perceptions and recreational use of greenspace and societal aspects of migration and greenspace, and to discuss knowledge gaps and identify promising research directions.

Included in the review is both peer-reviewed research and semi-scientific research published between 1985 and 2010 (for an overview of all publications included, see Kloek et al., forthcoming). Four strategies have been used to search publications on greenspace, immigration and society: 1) searching scientific databases, 2) searching websites of nature organisations; 3) contacting five scientists from four countries; and 4) tracking references in found literature. The conceptualisation of greenspace includes both urban and non-urban green, from natural and semi-natural landscapes to the countryside and urban parks. Both studies on ‘immigrants’ and on ‘ethnic minorities’ are included in this review.

Concepts and Approaches Used

Three overarching themes can be distinguished in Northwest European studies on immigrants, greenspace and society (see Table 1). Within these themes various approaches exist. The first theme under which many studies on immigration and greenspace can be grouped is *recreational use of greenspace*. Three main conceptual approaches exist within this theme. Studies on ‘recreational behaviour’ focus on preferences for specific recreational activities and motives for recreation. In order to explain differences in recreational behaviour, a categorisation into socio-economic and ethnic-cultural factors is used. The approach of ‘social inclusion’ is concerned with providing individuals equal opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation. It mainly addresses frequency of recreation and perceived barriers to recreational use of greenspace. In the third approach, ‘access the greenspace’, GIS programs including data on demographics and the distribution of greenspace are combined to describe the access to greenspace by immigrants.

The second major theme in literature on immigration and greenspace is *perceptions of greenspace*. Under this theme two approaches can be distinguished. The ‘images of nature and

landscape preferences' approach studies the perception and appreciation of nature and environment on a cognitive, normative and expressive dimension. Based on these dimensions, various images of nature are distinguished, such as the wilderness and the functional image. In studies into 'embodied experiences of greenspace' the sensory, emotions and affects, (childhood) memories and place attachment play an important role.

The last major theme in literature is *social aspects of migration and greenspace*. Three approaches fall under this theme. Studies on 'national identity and rural racism' focus on representations of the countryside related to national identity and ways in which these socially constructed imaginings promote the 'othering' of immigrants. They also address issues of belonging and attachment to the countryside and point to exclusionary practices and rural racism. The approach 'interculturalisation of nature organisations' focuses on evaluating the outreach of nature organisations to immigrants and distinguishing challenges and key factors for success. The last approach, 'social integration', evaluates the contribution of greenspace to social interaction, social cohesion and social integration among immigrants and natives.

Country	Number of studies	Recreational use of greenspace			Perceptions of greenspace		Social aspects of migration and greenspace		
		RB	SI	AtG	INLP	EE	NIR	INO	SI
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Denmark	2	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	4	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	1
Netherlands	31	18	-	-	10	2	-	2	6
Norway	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sweden	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Switzerland	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
United Kingdom	65	6	14	3	5	11	26	13	1
Total	105	29	15	4	18	13	26	16	8

Table 1: Themes and research approaches per country. Some studies cover more than one research approach. Abbreviations: RB = Recreational behaviour; SI = Social inclusion; AtG = Access to greenspace; INLP = Images of nature and landscape preferences; EE = Embodied experiences of greenspace; NIR = National identity and rural racism; INO = Interculturalisation of nature organisations; SI = Social integration.

Knowledge gaps and promising research directions

Several knowledge gaps arise from this review. First, research has mostly been nationally oriented, empirically but also conceptually. The number of studies carried out strongly differ per country (see Table 1), with most studies being published in the UK and the Netherlands. Also the used approaches vary between countries. For example, 'national identity and rural racism' is only studied in the UK, while the 'images of nature' approach is especially used in the Netherlands. Borders seem difficult to cross: learning processes and cooperation of scholars across approaches

and countries are scarce. To ensure a more consistent use and development of concepts and approaches, more cooperation and exchange between scientists at an international level is needed.

Furthermore, a proper and careful reflection of the diversity of immigrant perspectives is lacking. Executed studies tend to ignore in-group heterogeneity and overestimate differences between groups, for example by focusing on aggregated groups. A broader ethical discussion is needed including considerations on how immigrant perspectives are reflected.

Lastly, links between themes, such as between recreational use and perceptions of greenspace, have not been properly researched. Moreover, many of the described studies lack an appropriate theoretical basis. Theoretical frameworks could help linking use and perceptions of greenspace and strengthening explaining factors.

To study immigrants' recreational use of greenspace more in-depth, we propose to use the concept *identity-in-context* as a theoretical starting point. Recreation is a realm in which people have, to a certain extent, freedom in time and choice. It therefore provides good opportunities to express and establish identities. People have various identities, ranging from social identities such as gender and ethnicity to personal identities. Which identity or cluster of identity is activated, is situationally dependent. For example, people can shift their ethnic affiliation from one ethnic group to another depending on the context. Activated identities are intertwined with ideas on which outdoor recreation behaviours are considered fun or appropriate and why. As identity-in-context is not necessarily nationally oriented; we argue that it can be a good starting point to build a comprehensive theoretical framework for the greenspace–immigration–society interface which enables and stimulates international cooperation of researchers and a crossing of the borders.

References:

Kloek, Marjolein E., Buijs, Arjen E., Boersema, Jan J., Schouten, G.C. (forthcoming) Crossing Borders: Review of Concepts and Approaches in Research on Greenspace, Immigration and Society in Northwest European Countries. *Landscape Research*.