Novelty and nostalgia in urban greenspace: refugee perspectives

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Aims

The paper investigates migrants’ perceptions and experiences of urban greenspaces.

Methodology

The Viewfinder Project used innovative participatory and visual [photography] methods over 12 weeks including visits to 10 greenspaces in Sheffield.

Key issues

The paper describes and discusses the methodological approach, first impressions of visits to open spaces, ongoing independent visits and the implications of the research for

understanding the role of visiting greenspaces for experiences of integration and belonging. The paper discusses how and why the participants engaged or disengaged with local greenspace in the short and medium term. In particular, the importance of memory and nostalgia in participants' experiences; the significance of plants; the novelty of visiting British 'parks'; and the role of greenspace in enhancing the quality of life of immigrants are explored. Recognition of landscape elements or characteristics can provide a conceptual link between former and new homes. However, for this refugee group many physical and psychological barriers must be overcome if the full benefits of urban public open space are to be realised.

Conclusions

Public open space can play a role in providing a positive impression of the local environment, and meaningful participation in it can be a useful component of integration into a new society.

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