

Urban Forests, Quality of Life and Social Exclusion

Simon Bell
OPENspace Research
Centre
Edinburgh College of Art



Introduction

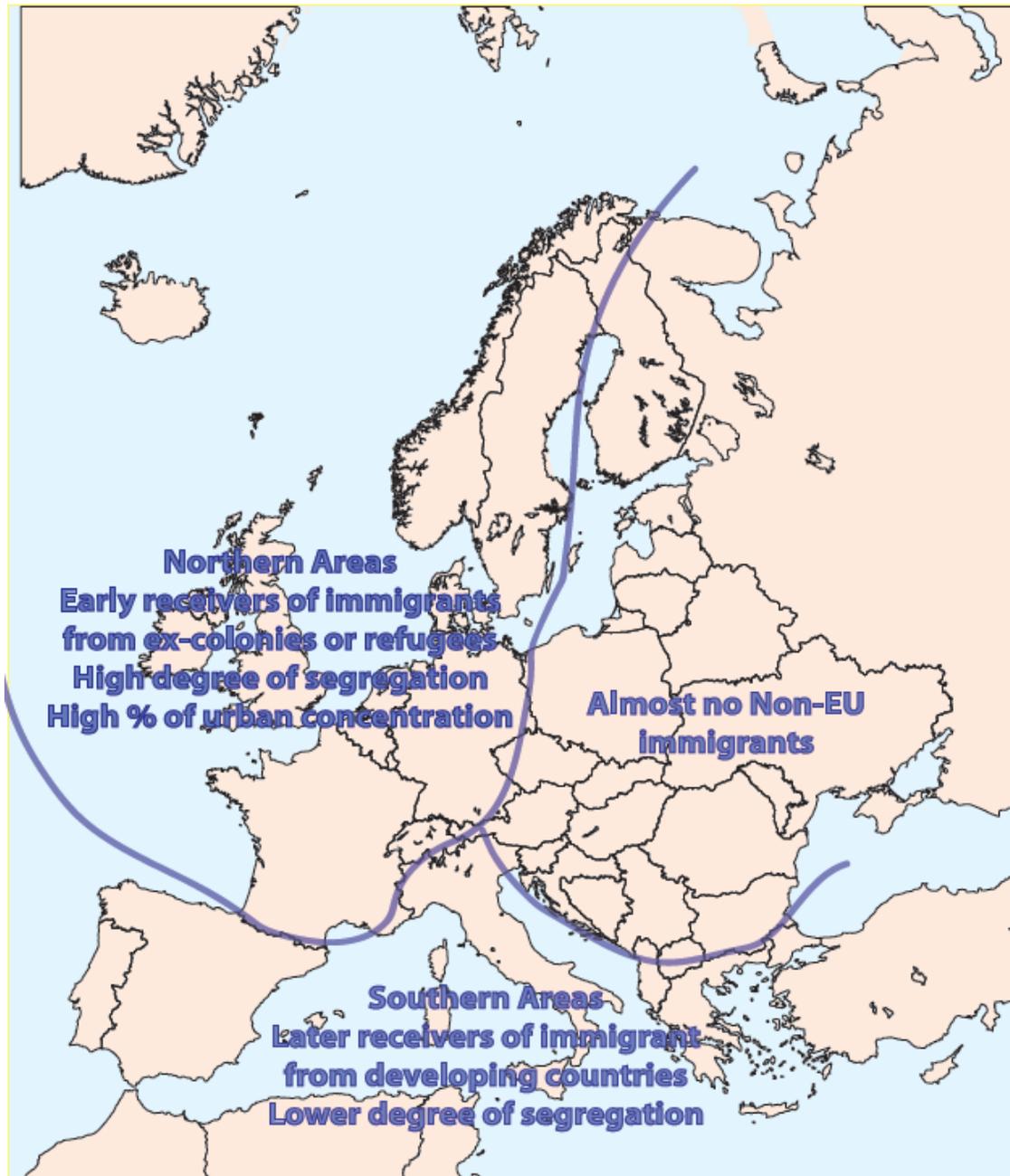
- Immigration from outside Europe will be the main driver of demographic growth in Europe over the next few decades
- Immigration leads to an increase in ethnic diversity, more in some countries than others
- Immigrants tend to go to countries where there are already immigrant communities and also countries which were imperial masters in the 18-20th centuries.











Where do immigrants live?

- Immigrants tend to live in cities
- They tend to live in deprived areas
- They often live in areas which become dominated by the ethnic group and from which the original native population move
- In some places they develop their own settlements.

Who are immigrants?

- Mainly young people in search of work
- Refugees of all ages from war zones and politically unstable regions
- Family members of existing immigrants, joining once they are settled
- They mainly work in low-skill, low pay jobs unless they have been recruited for specific jobs (doctors, nurses etc)

Background to the research

- Ethnicity is in a period of dramatic transition, with a rising percentage of mixed-race populations and of younger people from minority ethnic groups.
- Evidence of income and race inequalities in access to urban green space is limited to only a handful of studies in the UK.

Background to the research

- There is a lack of research targeted at specific BME groups in relation to health indicators (physical, mental and social) and relationships with urban green space.
- Urban green space facilitates social integration and community cohesion, and may aid social policy in this area. However, research on this is limited at present.

Background to the research

- Most of the research on landscape has focused on rural contexts and lack of access; yet access to nature in deprived communities is mostly occurring in the urban and local neighbourhood context.
- There is a lack of in-depth investigation into deprivation, ethnicity and the quality and types of access to urban green space

Research projects

- Three projects 2006-2009
- Scottish Forestry Strategy – attitude of Black and Ethnic Minority (BEM) women (Jamaican and Bangladeshi)
- Ethnic minorities and urban green space in England - various BEM groups in England (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, black)
- Urban green space use by immigrants to Lisbon (Cape Verdeans, Brazilians, Ukrainians)

Scottish Forestry Strategy

- Qualitative research (focus groups), target groups including other minorities not captured in “normal” consultations.
- Group discussion on a range of aspects of forestry
- Recorded and transcripts analysed.

Findings 1.

- Positive associations with woodlands: trees, old trees, meadow, park, countryside, canals, waterfalls. Getting away from urban life, and a natural environment were seen as valuable
- Culturally, the awareness and use of woodlands appeared more related to experience of 'home' (in countries of origin), rather than to local Edinburgh woodlands.

Findings 2.

- There is a cultural difficulty for many from minority ethnic groups in including woodland visits as part of their life styles.
- Activities like going to woodlands, walking, or camping are most unlikely to be part of eastern cultures.
- The future generation is more likely to include woodlands in their lifestyles in a way similar to the rest of the local population.

Findings 3.

- Ethnic minorities considered themselves more at risk than others walking alone, and the countryside is seen as a more racist environment.
- *“As a black person you really don’t feel comfortable in the countryside”. “Most black minority people have always felt safer in the city centre, rather than out there near the forest or a wooded area”.*

Recommendations 1.

- There was a desire to have woodlands managed to keep a balance between an open and safe feeling and yet keeping it natural.
- Rangers would be popular, and there was enthusiasm for school children to be given more access.

Recommendations 2

- Information could be provided in minority languages and perhaps promote walking groups to encourage BME groups to feel confident using woodlands.
- Facilities available in the woodlands should allow use and activities that conform to BME groups' cultural practices





Ethnic minorities and urban green space in England

- Large project for CABE Space
- Included focus groups and questionnaire surveys
- Three main locations: Manchester, London, Midlands
- Explored different BEM groups in each place

Findings 1.

- What people get out of visiting:
- Relaxation, tranquillity, breathing space.
- Fun (dating, socialising, festivals, carnivals and events).
- Fresh air, freedom
- Exercise and sport.
- To play with children/grandchildren.

“We use them for seeing girls in the park, chill out from our houses ... football.”

“Feel the freedom, fresh air, you go like, you know, when you’re worrying about something ... lie down, sit down, just think”.

Young male Bengali participants, Oldham

Findings 2.

Barriers to visiting:

- Fear: anti-social behaviour, drugs, 'postcode warfare', 'gang land', personal attack, race issues.
- Dogs: fouling and fear of attack, particularly amongst BME women.
- Design issues: high perimeter walls preventing views in and out, vegetation, lack of lighting.

Findings 3.

- Vandalism: litter, graffiti, needles.
- Protocol specific to BME groups (e.g. gender issues such as nowhere for BME women to meet away from men).
- No facilities (particularly lack of facilities for young children and teenagers) and the removal of well-used and valued facilities (football and cricket pitches).

“There is no diversity of activities available in the outdoor places for the Muslim community. Our youth have different taste of activities than possibly other youngsters in the area”
female Pakistani participant, Wolverhampton

“We are living in a war – the war of postcodes”
female African-Caribbean participant, Hackney

- *“The empty space where we live ... proper big, no one does anything to it, they just laid grass on it, nothing is there.”* male Bengali participant, Oldham
- *“We don’t mix with boys, we need somewhere to go to be away from, our parents, somewhere just for girls.”* young female Pakistani, Oldham

Findings 4.

- Definitions of “green space” varied by age but not culturally.
- An urban green space is a restorative place to retreat and relax, offering breathing space from the stresses of everyday life, a theme across all cultures and ages.
- Across all groups and ages, the desire for safe play and activities for young people was most frequently expressed as key provision for urban green space.

Findings 5.

- Across all groups and ages, the biggest single barrier to accessing urban green space is safety, both in terms of the physical environment (dense overgrown vegetation, lack of lighting) and the threat of others (gangs, drinking and drug use).
- There is a need to recognize the diverse needs of BME groups, particularly young people and the need for sport and separate gender zones.

Urban green space use by immigrants to Lisbon

- PhD research project by Eva Silverinha de Olivera at ECA
- Focus group and questionnaire survey
- Relates use to specific green spaces in the city









Findings 1.

- Ukrainians and Brazilians had higher levels of use of outdoor spaces (over 50% would use an outdoor space at least once a week).
- The lowest levels were among the Cape Verdeans (over 50% would use an outdoor space just once a month or rarely) and a small percentage (3%) claimed they never use an outdoor space.
- The majority of the Portuguese (71%) said they would use an outdoor space on a weekly basis.

Findings 2.

- The majority of Ukrainians (86%) use outdoor spaces all year, independently of the season and weather.
- Brazilians tend to use it more during warmer seasons such as summer (32,2%) and spring and summer (18,6%). The same tendency can be seen among the Cape Verdean community: summer (37,5%) and spring and summer (31,3%).

Findings 2.

- Among the three immigrant groups, the majority of the respondents answered they usually visit an outdoor space “with friends from their home country” or “with family members”.
- This shows they are not very assimilated into Portuguese society

“I believe that a Cape Verdean, here in Portugal, feels very close to his culture. If you want to dance you have a disco; if you want to speak, you have people that speak your language; if you want to eat, you have a restaurant; if you want to listen to music, you have places. He’s very close to his culture.”
(Cape Verdean)

Findings 3.

- Among the three groups “**lack of time**” was stated as the main reason for not visiting outdoor spaces more often.
- “Being **too tired**” was the second reason stated by all the groups.
- Economic reasons such as “**don’t have money**” were also referred by the Brazilian and Cape Verdean communities.

“Free time is sparse. We hardly have it... we have to study. I don’t know... we need to give attention to our children because... poor them... they also need it. Well...from time to time there is a cultural programme.”(Ukrainian Woman)

“We are so tired that... it’s not even pleasant to go for a walk.” (Ukrainian Woman)

“The end of the month is when we have money and we can all go out. Till the next payment almost everyone doesn’t have money so we have to stay at home. It’s always the same thing.” (Brazilian)

Findings 4

- All groups like places with green, trees and above all water.
- Ukrainians are fond of the forest
- Cape Verdeans love the sea – they are from islands.

“A space has to have water nearby It can be the beach, a lagoon, a pond” (Brazilian)

“I really like the forest or the countryside fields. But it needs water: river or sea... in fact: any type of water” (Ukrainian)

“My island is volcanic, it’s just rocks and no green (...) but it has been raining a lot during this year, and my cousin told me is beautiful, everything is green!” (Cape Verdean)

Findings 5

- Brazilians and Cape verdeans want to play music in the spaces – their top demand – followed by barbecues or outdoor cafes
- Ukrainians prefer picnics and barbecues
- Sports comes 3rd or 4th on the list

“I do outdoor exercise or go for a walk, but then... I like to stop in a place... an outdoor café (esplanade), have a break, drink a coffee and I’m ready again” (Cape Verdean)

“My ideal place has to have music” (Cape Verdean)

“Yes, I like a place where I can do a fireplace. Then we grill the meat and afterwards we have a party” (Ukrainian)

- *“...you can’t have loud music in the car. It’s difficult the use of spaces. In Brazil the disco business is not doing well anymore. Each person who has a good car installs a sound system, which is even louder than the disco. Then, he goes to a space, open the car’s doors and everyone starts to drink and you already have a party.”*

“ - Every time we want to make a BBQ, we put the music on and then... there comes the police knocking on the door. It is always the same thing.”

But do you know where I do my BBQ? In Monsanto [an urban forest in Lisbon]. It's wonderful to get together with all my friends.”

(Dialogue between two Brazilian women)

Conclusions

- Immigrant ethnic minorities are likely to increase, especially in the “Atlantic” countries in future.
- Different ethnic groups have different cultural, and religious backgrounds which tend to mean that they use – or do not use – green spaces and urban woods in different ways from the natives of the host country.

Conclusions

- We are only now beginning to focus on what these differences mean for planning and design as well as management
- As well as the design and planning aspects there are issues of information, promotion of green areas to members of ethnic minorities

Thanks for your attention

