

Valuing urban nature: heritage values of public parks and gardens

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This paper is concerned with heritage values assigned to urban parks and gardens. Urban green spaces provide spaces for the expression of cultural and personal diversity. The social and cultural values assigned to these spaces reflect attitudes towards nature and people's desire for contact with it. Besides, recent research has shown that people hold strong heritage associations with urban green spaces (Fish & Saratsi, 2015) which suggest that appreciation of these places extends beyond obvious aesthetic and/or recreational values. Yet, these values are not always directly reflected in current policy and practice agendas of valuing nature and they often disappear under the general category of 'cultural services'. However, heritage values assigned to green spaces, like any other kind of cultural values, are shaped by the perceptions and experiences of individuals, as well as wider inherited cultural/historical perspectives and identities and contribute to people's happiness and wellbeing. It is also true, that these values are not static; nature evolves and so do the feelings it evokes, as well as values change and vary between societies and individuals. Even more, this cultural heritage includes closely connected tangible and intangible values which should not be seen in isolation. Thus, alongside any research on the economic value of tangible heritage and its ecological and regulatory roles it is imperative to extend our understanding of the intrinsic values that draw individuals and societies towards these spaces. We need to appreciate, document and, preserve the heritage that matters to us all; the local and the visitor, the native and the new-settler, the young and the old. This research uncovers connections between nature and heritage and in doing so seeks to promote integration of this kind of heritage in relevant policy and research agendas. In addition it aims to illuminate the complexities of seeing heritage in nature by the means of visual arts.

References

Fish, R., Saratsi E., (2015) 'Naturally Speaking...' A Public Dialogue on the UK National Ecosystem Assessment. Final Report, CRPR, University of Exeter, Exeter. Available at: http://valuing-nature.net/sites/default/files/documents/NEA_Dialogue_Final_Report_final.pdf