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Promoting interculturalism by planning of urban nature

Jaana Leikkilä, Maija Faehnle & Michail Galanakis

Abstract

Immigration in Finland has increased significantly in the last decades. The integration of immigrants and autochthonous Finns poses new challenges to the society. Nevertheless, the resulting cultural diversity creates opportunities for intercultural social development. According to previous studies, urban nature can benefit human well-being and it can also play a role in integration processes. However, the role urban nature can potentially play in integration is largely overlooked, and immigrants are rarely involved in the planning of urban nature. This paper presents the main results of a qualitative study carried out in Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland. The aim was to understand the role of urban nature in integration, and to address how the planning of urban nature can support integration and interculturalism. We found that using urban nature helps immigrants feel comfortable and enjoy their living environment. The interviewed immigrants were interested in getting information on urban planning, especially in

their own neighbourhood, and many of them wanted to participate in planning, although they were unsure of their right to do so, and access to planning processes appeared problematic in many ways. To support integration and interculturalism, urban planning should take the opportunity to enhance intercultural understanding. Adhering to culturally sensitive processes, and developing trust with local residents by taking their views seriously, can do this. Nature has the potential to inspire people to connect with one another.

Keywords: collaborative planning, green spaces, Helsinki metropolitan area, immigration, urban planning,

Introduction

Immigrants and people of different ethno-cultural backgrounds in increasing numbers in our cities have contributed to the diversification of urban culture and of the use of public space (Zukin, 1998: 825). In the Helsinki metropolitan area, as in many other metropolitan centres, increasing socio-cultural diversity pronounces the need to create planning practices that meet the requirements of groups with differing needs, interests and everyday practices. In a recent report it has been stated that in Helsinki the needs of different minorities for public services have not been studied properly and the planners of urban nature seems incapable of taking the diversity of these needs into account in public spaces, commercial quarters and streets (Comedia, 2010). In Finland, cultural diversity has increased rapidly as a result of the immigration during the two last decades. The history of Finland as a multicultural society is relatively new compared to countries like UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and US (see [Gentin, 2011](#); [Jay et al. 2012](#)). In Finland, therefore, we are at a position to be able to learn from international multicultural experiences, and accordingly form local policies. Most of the immigrants coming to Finland settle in cities, particularly in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In 2011, a total of 244 827 people

living in Finland spoke foreign languages (4.5% of total population), and of these 116 716 lived in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The most commonly spoken foreign languages were Russian, Estonian and Somali. (Statistics Finland, 2011) The cultural mix of people living in Finland thus differs from that of many other European countries in which e.g. Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds are more typical (Eurostat, 2011).

In shaping the future of culturally diverse cities, the notions of multiculturalism and interculturalism are useful, albeit not straightforward. Multiculturalism as a concept emphasises cultural differences, while interculturalism highlights opportunities arising from interaction between diverse cultural groups ([Wood and Landry, 2008](#)). In an intercultural society, affirmative interaction exists between different cultural groups and social actors – old and new immigrants and autochthonous people exchange different perspectives on life, thus shaping society through communication and action (Berry et al., 2002; Martin and Nakayama, 2007; [Wood and Landry, 2008](#)). We acknowledge the ambiguity of these concepts and the criticism they have received (see [Goonewardena and Kipfer, 2005](#); Sandercock and Attili, 2009). We do not argue that intercultural dialogue is an easy process; we do argue though that such a process should be recognized and facilitated to encourage social change for a sustainable future, in which the society makes the most out of its diversity rather than reproduces fragmentation (see [Wood and Landry, 2008](#): 14). We argue that – of different acculturation strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization – integration best supports interculturalism. Integration and conditions for interculturalism can be attained by building trust and mutual respect, valuing different identities and genuine co-operation ([Wood and Landry, 2008](#); Brock, 2009). Integration is a *two-way* process in which immigrants and autochthonous people negotiate, adjust and evolve. Integration is important for both immigrants and autochthonous people. In a society with intercultural aspirations the conditions of integration vis-a-vis the

politics of recognition must be constantly scrutinized and re-negotiated (Sandercock and Attili, 2009: 220).

Interculturalism, Planning and Urban Nature

Schultze (1992) analyses the role of public spaces for integration through four dimensions: structural, identificational, social and cognitive (regarding Finland see Hynynen, 2004). *The structural dimension of integration* refers to the access people have to common resources and main institutions of society, e.g. the political system (Schultze, 1992) Public spaces such as urban nature areas constitute a resource that should be accessible to all, including old and new immigrants ([Peters et al. 2010](#)). Access to the main institutions includes opportunities to participate in shaping the society and its resources through involvement in planning and decision-making system. Especially in diverse societies participation in planning and decision-making is a sign of the quest for democracy (see [Lefebvre, 2003](#)). *The social dimension of integration* refers to the interaction and relationships built in-between individuals and different groups. In accessible public spaces, people can see and meet each other, and it is where the everyday politics of recognition are played out ([Wood and Gilbert, 2005](#)). As Wood and Gilbert (2005) and Mitchell (2003) demonstrate, public space is a matter of design and practice and less of ownership. Therefore, the physical attributes of a public space affect the ways people use it and the social interactions that take place in it ([Whyte 1980](#); [Peters et al. 2010](#)). Public spaces play a significant role in building relationships, trust and mutual respect ([Wood and Landry, 2008](#)).

The identificational integration refers to the sense of belonging a newcomer feels in her/his living environment. Similarly autochthonous people must be able to develop a sense of belonging to the environment while this is used and changed by people with different

ethnocultural background. By using public spaces, we identify and develop affinities to them (Peters et al. 2010). We develop symbolic attachment and emotional ties, which are an expression of our identificational integration with the local environment (Jay and Schraml, 2009). *The cognitive dimension*, finally, refers to the integration through learning life skills (Schultze, 1992) that include, for example, distinguishing public from private spaces in the host society (see Rinkinen, 2004). Similarly autochthonous people learn about cultures and practices that are different from theirs and that shape public life. The four dimensions of integration are overlapping and interrelated. For example it is understandable that social interactions can contribute to the identificational integration by evoking feelings of being-at-home (Peters et al. 2010: 94). We argue that urban nature can facilitate all four dimensions of integration, as well as interculturalism (see Rishbeth and Finney, 2006; Bradley, 2009; Jay and Schraml, 2009). We understand interculturalism as a policy strategy that develops structural communication between different people and their cultures and spaces (see Castells, 2010). In an *Intercultural City* people appreciate difference and interaction, and cultures inseminate each other (SSIIM UNESCO Chair, 2012). For making cities intercultural, policy strategies and their implementation need to pay attention to the two-way processes of integration.

Internationally, the relation between integration and urban nature has attracted a growing interest (see Gentin, 2011; Jay et al. 2012; Kloek et al. 2012). Jay and Schraml (2009) studied the perceptions of Turkish, Russian-German and Balkan immigrants concerning urban forests and their integrative potential in Germany. They argue that urban forests can support identification by providing a link between the previous and current home country and a setting for interaction between forest users. Sheffield, Rishbeth and Finney (2006) concluded in their study of refugees and asylum-seekers, that urban nature can be a stimulating and enjoyable contrast to everyday routines, and the positive images and experiences related to the local environment can help

refugees and asylum-seekers to come to terms with their new lives. Immigrants interviewed in their study emphasized the role of learning and felt that gaining information about local nature and its meanings in the host country helped them to become familiar with the new living environment and find their own place within it. The role of urban nature has also been explored in a few integration studies in Finland (Tiilikainen, 2003; Rinkinen, 2004). Leppänen (2009) demonstrates that gardening promotes immigrants' creativity, self-confidence and independence. Having an allotment plot gives them an opportunity to grow familiar plants and maintain a connection with their country of origin (see also Ouis and Jensen, 2009: 135).

In this paper, we explore the intercultural potentials of urban nature in Helsinki, and how intercultural dialogue should be recognized and facilitated in the pursuit of sustainable urban development. The aim is to understand the role of urban nature in integration and to address how the planning of urban nature could be developed to support integration and interculturalism. After describing methods of data collection of our research in the Helsinki metropolitan area (see Leikkilä et al., 2011), we explore firstly the role of urban nature in the four dimensions of integration, and secondly we discuss the role of cultural diversity and integration in planning aiming to intercultural development. Finally we make recommendations on how planners, decision-makers and researchers could practice inclusion and facilitate interculturalism.

Methods

The data in our research in the Helsinki metropolitan area was obtained in 2010 with a qualitative approach based on thematic interviews, supplemented with written material from the City of Helsinki (City Planning Department, Public Works Department and Social Services Department) and memos from two group sessions. One of the group sessions was a meeting of Somali men in a language and integration course organized by a non-governmental organization

and the other a weekly meeting of Somali women, organized by the social department of the City of Vantaa. The written material included memos from public meetings and field trips with immigrants as well as documents on planning communication and survey data. Visiting the two Somali groups enabled informal discussion to take place on how the participants used nature and what they deemed important.

The interviewed people were immigrants (n=19) and individuals working with immigrants in Helsinki (n=13). Persons working with immigrants were officials in urban nature or land use planning, a local official of the social services department, personnel of a play park and an allotment contact person of a local association. These interviewees were found by contacting officials working with culturally diverse districts of Helsinki, and by contact information found on district websites. During the interviews participants had the opportunity to express their opinions quite freely and the interviewer had the opportunity to tailor questions and adapt their order according to the interviewee. To facilitate mutual understanding, we also used photographs of urban nature in Helsinki. The eight photographs included various views such as the sea, a barbecue site in a forest, an allotment plot area and a park.

To learn about diverse meanings of urban nature for immigrants, interviewees were sought from diverse immigrant backgrounds. We found our interviewees by snowballing after initial contacts with city departments, cultural associations and researchers working with diversity issues.

Evidently, our interviewees were to a certain extent involved, or were at least familiar, with Finnish institutional settings and networks. Most of the immigrant interviewees (n=14) lived in Helsinki and the rest (n=5) in the neighbouring cities of Vantaa, Espoo or Järvenpää. The immigrants were from Russia (6), Belarus (1), Latvia (1), Estonia (1), Germany (1), Turkey (1), Iraq (1), Thailand (1), Uzbekistan (1), Italy (2), Zimbabwe (1), Nepal (1) and Israel (1). The

gender and age of interviewees and their countries of origin and length of stay in Finland are summarized in Table 1. In seven of the interviews, the language was Finnish, in three Finnish with Russian translation and in nine English. The length of the interviews varied between 30 minutes to 1 hour 50 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed by thematizing and theory-driven content analysis lead by the theories of integration and urban nature (Schultze, 1992; Hynynen, 2004; [Jay and Schraml, 2009](#); [Peters et al. 2010](#)) discussed above.

Table 1 here.

Results

Structural integration

With respect to the structural dimension, our interviewees with immigrant background stated that the abundance of urban public nature, and the way nature and city life are combined give an advantage to Helsinki metropolitan area. Located only a few meters from one's doorstep, or a busy road, nature in Helsinki was calming and relaxing. They described the environment as clean and well maintained, and they were generally satisfied with the access to nature in their environment, although some considered infilling limiting access to nature. One interviewee living in a single-family house area mentioned that nearby recreation opportunities were few and she needed a car to access recreation sites with her kids, e.g. ice rinks and places with nice walk paths.

All of the interviewed immigrants use urban nature rather actively and they see it as part of their everyday life. They walk, cycle, jog, picnic, fish, garden, pick mushrooms, play with kids,

participate in organized trips or just sit on a bench. In nature, many interviewees forget their problems, and feel more relaxed, healthier and happier:

In Helsinki I have learned from residents or workmates that it is good to go outdoors [...] when there is a really silent place and birds are singing, it's really good [...] with my husband we go, at least yesterday we went to Mustavuori forest [...] we go there and sit [...] immediately I feel that all the senses get activated, as it's a really silent place and we sit, without talking anything, and listening birds. [In the forest] I forget work issues [...] three times in my youth there was a war [...] it was very traumatic for us. And then... I forget these all. (a woman from Iraq)

Moreover, the immigrant interviewees and the individuals working with immigrants also mentioned some examples of how immigrants had expanded and changed the use of urban nature. They had noticed that heavy and loud use of barbecue sites by big groups, for example, was something not typical of autochthonous Finns, and that allotment gardening was particularly popular among immigrants. According to the contact person for the allotments, in some of the areas up to one-third of the users have immigrant background, most immigrants are less demanding than autochthonous Finns in terms of soil conditions, and have no problem using allotment plots that autochthonous Finns find unusable.

Besides access to environmental resources, the structural dimension of integration is about a newcomer's position in relation to other structures of the host society, such as work life, housing and political system (Schultze, 1992; Hynynen, 2004). Urban planning plays multiple roles in integration processes by shaping possible futures, but also as a structure itself; an institution that in an intercultural society cannot be exclusive ([Wood and Landry, 2008](#)). Many of our immigrant interviewees were interested in participating in the planning of their living environment, although they had doubts about their right to do so. Some of them felt that experts and people who have lived in Finland all of their lives are more knowledgeable and eligible participants. Only one of our immigrant interviewees, a woman from Estonia, had tried to influence an urban planning process. This interviewee has lived in Finland for many years and at some point found her way to a neighbourhood association. Nevertheless, that association had no

effect on the planning of local land-use as, in her words, *decisions are made by others, those who have money and power*. Other interviewees expressed their scepticism regarding the opportunities of people in general to influence urban planning. They had heard of cases in which groups of autochthonous Finns had had no influence, and thought that their opportunities to influence planning were non-existent:

I have realized that it doesn't help so much here, if they decide, they decide, like for example in Vuosaari, they are destroying the forest and making the houses and people are, all the local people are very offended and they are against it, but nothing has helped anyway, that means, it doesn't make any difference I think, me coming from very far and I cannot influence so much, if the local people living here for decades are not making any influence, how, what... me, I'm nothing, let's say. (a man from Nepal)

Social integration

The social dimension of integration refers to the use of urban nature as a social phenomenon.

Our immigrant interviewees used nature rarely alone and the reason for going to nature was not necessarily nature itself but the opportunity to spend time with their family and friends. One Somali woman, for example, defined her favourite place as "the place where these friends are". When we asked a man from Nepal, if nature had somehow helped him to adapt to and enjoy living in Finland, he referred to the social aspects of nature as a setting to meet friends. For him going to a park was a reason to get together with friends.

The immigrant interviewees appear to use urban nature above all for maintaining existing social relationships and not for creating new ones. However, some spontaneous interaction occurs between people sharing the same interests such as spending time with kids, a dog, or gardening. Gardening as an activity facilitates communication between people, potentially enabling them to get to know each other:

Allotment plot, yeah, there is, yeah, we got familiar with each other there a lot, yeah. I know a girl, woman, she has a plot there for twenty years already. Yeah, she has a lot experience, I always ask her about things and I tell husband, let's put it like that. Our neighbor, we are between two Finns, they have berries and we sometimes exchange own food with them. (a woman from Irak)

For our immigrant interviewees in Helsinki, socializing appeared to be an important activity in using urban nature. Pelkonen and Tyrväinen (2005), in turn, found that considering all the different functions of urban nature autochthonous Finns appreciate socializing the least. This finding is in accord with the results of Galanakis (2008) regarding public spaces in Helsinki. According to Korpela (2001), autochthonous Finns usually want to spend time in nature alone or alone amongst strangers. Our interviewees stated that by time, they had got used to the Finnish cultural trait of reticence:

it's eight years, that I know this culture finally and I started to get used to, now it's easier, because I understand people and why people are like this, and why they act like this and.. but it was very hard at the beginning, I have to say, I was of course missing... not so much the friends, but the way to be... the social relationship, yeah... it was kind of hard to understand... this kind of distance, that takes time to get friends, but also to be close to (a woman from Italy)

Identificational integration

With respect to the identificational dimension of integration, we found out that places that reminded our immigrant interviewees of their home countries helped them feel at home. Familiar plants evoked positive memories, as well as nostalgia:

I'm living in Vuosaari now, we have a small play park, there is a lot of these, these roses, is so much, I every evening go there to have a look, say privjet, say greetings (a woman from Russia)

Some of the immigrant interviewees missed certain features from their previous places of residence, such as mountains, waterfalls and the Mediterranean Sea. However, even if some features in Helsinki might have been similar to those in their home countries, our immigrant interviewees experienced such features differently. One interviewee stated that the shores in Helsinki are not like those in the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore he did not go there to relax as he used to do in Barcelona, his home city. Instead, he had started using urban nature in Helsinki for sports and socializing. This can be interpreted as a process of identificational integration in which one slowly recognizes opportunities to enjoy her/his new environment. Urban nature can thus support immigrants' identification with their environment by providing them something

familiar, such as roses for the Russian woman quoted above, as well as by stimulating processes of turning the new into familiar. By using the surrounding nature, newcomers can share the benefits nature provides – such as relaxation – feeling positive about their new environment and becoming emotionally attached to it. For our interviewee from Zimbabwe, for example, forests in the Helsinki metropolitan area had become important places for relaxation even though in his home country, forests were hunting grounds and places to avoid.

Cognitive integration

The cognitive dimension of integration refers to processes of receiving comprehensible information. Not many of the immigrant interviewees got information about local urban nature and on opportunities to use it directly from official sources like city departments. Instead, personal social networks were the most important way to learn about recreation opportunities; friends, family members and workmates introduce ways of using urban nature. Several of our interviewees working with immigrants mentioned that the word of mouth was a reason for the increased popularity of certain activities among immigrants, like allotment gardening:

as a family found the allotment plots, so then they asked if there is one for his friend and one for his friend and friend and so there was a whole crowd of them [immigrants] who came there (an allotment contact person of a local association)

Immigrants' opportunities to use nature in ways that are somehow familiar can be hindered by the lack of experience and knowledge of local nature. Our interviewees described how urban nature could cause anxiety and fear unless routines and certain routes tame it. For example for some interviewees, forests in Helsinki apart from their positive aspects were also perceived as daunting places. This was the case when an interviewee was unfamiliar to forests and had no experience of using them for recreation. Moreover, people from different cultural backgrounds have different levels of general environmental knowledge ([Bradley, 2009](#)) and therefore particular uses can be impeded by the lack of ecological literacy such as little knowledge of local

species, biotopes and usable products such as edible plants (Lisberg Jensen, 2009). For example, interviewees mentioned lack of knowledge as a barrier for mushroom picking. A woman from Germany said that while she often used to pick mushrooms, ever since she moved to Finland she stopped because she doesn't have reliable information about edible species.

Making information on opportunities to use urban nature more accessible could facilitate newcomers to make use of various opportunities, such as mushroom picking for the woman from Germany, or gardening for the man from Nepal who wanted to but did not know how to obtain an allotment. Conversely, autochthonous Finns could understand and learn more by listening to immigrants talking about their associations, perceptions, and experiences of nature in Finland. Through our interviews it became clear what a big difference it made to the quality of life of some immigrant women when they learned how to walk with poles in the freezing Finnish winter. This active taming of the new environment not only helped them to cope with the slippery winter conditions, but also served as a means of empowerment enabling them to shift a negative experience into a positive one:

We have such a winter and... but if one can use a pole for example, or many tools if one can use of if one is taught, without language one can do things, that's why nature is very important [...] Correct information helps the integration process [...] but if one has incorrect information on a thing the adaptation process goes... slower... yeah. (a woman from Iraq)

Our immigrant interviewees expressed their interest in changes taking place in their living environment, and they wished for more information regarding, for example, urban development affecting nature areas. For instance, some expressed their concern about the construction of new housing on forestland and they were even determined to relocate if the nearby nature was in danger:

In the summertime in Estonia and Pärnu I walk every day about 20 kilometres on the beach and in parks, that is what I miss here... that's why we'll move away somewhere where there is more... near our house there will soon be no parks left at all, everything is cut, more houses are built ... you don't want to go outdoors so much, that's why I go to my daughter's place as there are more opportunities for recreation. (A woman from Estonia)

Many of the interviewees had got information about big planning projects from the local newspaper, but not about local projects. A man from Turkey recalled that while he receives the city planning review, which is delivered annually to all households, he finds it confusing and rather irrelevant to his living environment. He felt that the lack of communication and information is a big problem especially for immigrants, because without getting appropriate information, they miss on opportunities to ask questions and get more information about things to do in nature.

Aspects to be considered in promoting integration are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 here.

Planning Practices and Cultural Diversity

Besides land use planning, many cities shape their urban nature by strategic management plans, with a time perspective of at least ten years. In Helsinki, strategic area planning defines the management goals for green spaces and street areas of a certain district for a 10-year period. In the Helsinki metropolitan area, practices for involving immigrants in land use and green space planning have not yet been established; however, some initial steps have been taken. The practitioners we interviewed in the Public Works Department and the City Planning Department of Helsinki have realized that their participatory planning processes rarely reach immigrants, and that this is a problem. The Public Works Department usually maps the experiences and needs of users by means of surveys. In a few districts with considerable numbers of residents with foreign names, planning practitioners have sent questionnaires with cover letters translated into other languages such as English, Somali and Russian. This has been the case in the district of southern Vuosaari. Some of the residents with foreign names responded, but their answers were not

analysed separately as the amount of replies was too low, although the planning practitioners were interested in discovering differences between various language groups. As in strategic area planning in other districts, the department also sent information letters to local community associations at the beginning of the planning process. The practitioners we interviewed found that immigrants are not very well organized in this regard, and when such associations exist, their contact information is often unavailable or out-dated. One practitioner mentioned that after receiving several returned letters because of out-dated addresses of recipients with foreign names she is no longer keen on trying to reach immigrants.

The City Planning Department has tried to involve immigrants in some land use planning processes via workshops and public meetings. During drafting the partial master plan for the western side of the district of Meri-Rastila in southern Vuosaari, the department organized one public meeting in Somali and another in Russian, in collaboration with the Department of Social Services. The Department of Social Services had contacts with immigrant residents in Vuosaari, and during the partial master planning process it also organized a walk with immigrant families in the area and collected their views in a memorandum that was then sent to the City Planning Department. The memorandum included the finding that immigrants would be interested in participating in, for instance, a wiki-planning workshop in which ideas would be discussed with the help of scale models. The City Planning Department, however, used only conventional methods such as public meetings and a planning exhibition. According to a planning practitioner, the meetings produced some understanding of the needs of Somali and Russian-speaking residents, who however, discussed mainly their concerns of everyday life and not so much the planning issues the meetings were supposed to address. The planning practitioner pondered that the way these residents were informed about the meetings may have been misleading.

Translation services are greatly appreciated when planning authorities want to instigate participatory processes; however, translation services as such are not always helpful if the necessary resources are not allocated to ensure high standards. According to the experience of the Helsinki City Planning Department, the success of meetings organized with the help of a translator depends greatly on the quality of the translation. Especially in the Somali meeting, the short and simplified translation hindered the communication of the planners and the other participants. Moreover, many participants reacted negatively to the presence of local media, and cultural misunderstandings also occurred; a photographer wanted to take photos of the participants, even though many Somalis found this invasive. A short newspaper article published afterwards provoked a wide discussion on the online forum of the newspaper. A large number of people with negative attitudes towards immigrants got irritated and sent plenty of emails to the planners with inappropriate and racist comments that hardly contributed to the planning negotiations. One of the planning practitioners thought that the ways to share information about such meetings should be more focused and media presence should be avoided.

Discussion

Our results agree with those of previous research according to which the use of urban nature by immigrants facilitates their identification with their current living environment, and creates opportunities for social interaction ([Jay and Schraml, 2009](#); [Peters et al. 2010](#)). The results suggest that in some cases using nature collectively creates opportunities to meet other people, as is the case with allotment gardening. We did not, however, find support for social integration through actually making friends in nature (cf. Seeland et al.'s study on young people in Zürich, 2009). Immigrants use urban nature for maintaining existing social relationships rather than for creating new ones ([Jay and Schraml, 2009](#); [Peters et al. 2010](#)). Our results suggest that for intercultural development in Finland, the Finnish preference for less interaction (Korpela, 2001;

Pelkonen and Tyrväinen, 2005; Galanakis, 2008) may be a specific challenge. In accordance with Whyte (1980) and [Peters et al. \(2010\)](#), our research demonstrates that in order to stimulate social interaction within urban nature it is important to allow and facilitate diverse activities. In Helsinki where planning land uses is strict, allowing for more diverse activities could translate into alleviating the over-regulation of public spaces whilst removing barriers for using urban nature more creatively. For example, instead of allowing gardening only on specific sites and banning walking and playing to protect grass, city authorities could take people's use of their environment as a starting point, and welcome their ideas to use various sites for picnicking, gardening, playing etc. Our immigrant interviewees expressed their appreciation of familiarising walks in nature and learning about allotment gardening that would support relationship building and mutual understanding.

With regard to structural integration, our results suggest that access to urban nature, as a common resource, is important because using urban nature had helped at least some immigrants interviewees in feeling comfortable and enjoying their living environment. Structural integration through access to planning processes appeared problematic in many ways. At least some immigrants are interested in participating in planning and planners are interested in involving them; however, constructive collaboration is still lacking. In Finland, planning practice is, at least at the moment, challenged by the divergence of public opinions on whether immigrants on the whole are welcome (Haavisto, 2010: 21). The negative reactions in the case of the meetings in Meri-Rastila show that interaction may actually be far from the ideals of positive intercultural interaction and collaborative learning. Since people from various cultures have not yet had possibilities to get to know each other, raising diversity issues may aggravate differences and promote passivity rather than contribute to building positive relations ([Putnam, 2007](#)). Planners willing to collaborate with immigrants may also lose their interest if attempts to reach them do

not lead to their participation. For new immigrants, platforms for discussing topics such as urban nature and outdoor activities can potentially provide more positive ways to be in contact with authorities, than merely applying for a housing permit. Such opportunities must be effectively nurtured with cultural sensitivity and certainly not impeded by intrusive photographing. By fostering intercultural interaction, collaborative planning can enhance mutual understanding and knowledge-sharing between diverse population groups, authorities and other actors. Intercultural interaction also has the potential to generate new ideas related to the environment, its use and planning (Martin and Nakayama, 2007; [Kondo, 2012](#)).

Constructive deliberation on planning issues requires building trust (Burayidi, 2000; [Putnam, 2007](#)); in other words, building trust is necessary for urban planning to successfully facilitate integration and interculturalism. It may be difficult for planners to inspire immigrants to participate if the latter realize that even autochthonous people have little influence. Lack of understanding the actual role of participation leads to frustration for both the participating public and planners, and the risk of frustration is higher with stakeholders who are not familiar with the planning system and public involvement. Planners must therefore provide participants with reasons explaining why their contribution is needed and what the ultimate use of their input will be. Furthermore, our finding that some immigrants are uncertain about their right to participate suggests that attention should be paid on how newcomers get information about their rights and responsibilities. We recommend that authorities collaborate with established immigrants who keep contact with newcomers, therefore re-enforcing existing networks and facilitating the building of new inclusive and empowering ones.

An approach worth experimenting is for planners to meet diverse stakeholders where these are: in day-care centres, schools, shopping malls, play parks, and cultural and community centres.

While a questionnaire may reach well-integrated and perhaps highly educated immigrants, the diversity of perspectives is better captured with more open approaches in which people can demonstrate their concerns and ideas in their own ways. Visual and concrete tools, such as photos and scale models, can help in avoiding certain problems with language. Here, the expertise of local immigrants and people who already work with them is crucial.

To envisage planning in an increasingly diverse city like Helsinki, examples from cities with a long experience on diversity can be useful points of reference. In Vancouver people of some 'silent' Asian groups started to participate in planning only *after* the planner went to meet them in their own neighbourhood centers. In these informal discussions, the planner talked about planning and introduced the forthcoming workshops, as well as received input about how these workshops could be relevant to the local residents. (Faehnle, 2010: 60). In Surrey, one of Vancouver's neighbouring cities, the extensive Taiwanese population participated in local recreation programmes only when the city officials invited the community leader to collaborate. Authorities understood that many Taiwanese people distrusted Canadian authorities because of their unfortunate experiences with the Taiwanese government (Faehnle, 2010: 60).

In the Canadian province of British Columbia in the city of Richmond interculturalism has been an official strategy and work plan since 2002 (Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee, [2011](#); Good, 2009: 180). The City of Richmond decided to facilitate, not lead intercultural relations by providing know how and human resources to enable various community groups to mobilize and build coalitions to address intercultural relations. This way the city manages to create opportunities for communities to take ownership of the policy and make use of the possibilities it opens for development. The case of Richmond in British Columbia builds on a

model of governance and planning that is more open, less over-regulated, and aspires to grass-root initiatives.

Planning for diversity is often challenged, as at least initially diversity generates passivity among people, autochthonous as well as immigrants ([Putnam, 2007](#)). In Finland it is easier to complain to authorities than to take initiatives and discuss possible solutions. Planners in Helsinki receive complaints from residents for the intense use of barbecue sites by certain immigrant groups. As a result the city has reduced the supply of firewood and closed down some barbecue sites. In Toronto, active residents use opportunities to bypass legal obstacles and authoritarian rigidity and appropriate public spaces like urban parks making them more relevant to the local communities. One such initiative that has been attracting a lot of attention is the regeneration of Dufferin Grove Park in West Toronto, by “Park Friends”, a group of activists and volunteers. The regeneration altered the character of the park using means of management as well as design and created a precedent for park activism and community engagement ([Barnes and Sharpe, 2009](#); Galanakis, 2012).

Planning well-equipped barbecue sites in Helsinki may very well be a good starting point for concrete collaborative and intercultural approaches. Local groups, associations and planners could co-design experimental, people-led, and cross-cultural processes to shape urban nature. Local resident associations could organize open 'welcoming walks' in which different users would tell about their cultures and ways to use local nature areas. Such walks could take discussions further in workshops in which residents could brainstorm together with planners in addressing barbecuing as well as other challenges regarding the use and management of urban nature.

In Finland, research of participatory planning is currently underway, as is research on cultural diversity. Our research increased our understanding of what it entails to deal with diversity in planning. We recognize the need for, and wish to encourage, more in-depth knowledge on how people with different ethnocultural background experience, value, and use their living environments, as well as an understanding of the kind of participation they find appropriate regarding planning. In obtaining knowledge on their experiences, values, practices and preferences one cannot but closely and respectfully collaborate with local people and groups ([Galanakis, 2009](#)). Urban nature as an integrative platform must be studied in more depth, opting for both quantitative and qualitative data that would include immigrants as well as autochthonous people. Through such studies we would also be able to identify group-specific barriers that keep certain people from using and enjoying urban nature (see Jay et al. 2012: 9).

It is a matter of choice for planners whether or not to reach out groups that are one way or another excluded. Political goodwill is necessary for planning practices to get the support needed, particularly for practitioners to collaborate with each other across administrative and disciplinary borders. Political will is in addition necessary for setting and applying requirements for public consultations within planning processes, as is the case in Toronto, Canada (see Frisken and Wallace 2002: 264). Discussions about if, why and how immigrants should be involved in planning would be enriched by sharing examples of the benefits of such involvement for integration and for a better output of the planning process. Sharing experiences, understanding people and their cultures and creating a city that encourages people to get together result in a positive intercultural paradigm. Planning urban living environments in collaboration with the widest possible range of population groups is an opportunity cities should not miss.

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Table 1. Gender, age, and length of stay of the immigrant interviewees in Finland, and interview language.

Gender		Age (years)		Length of stay (years)		Interview language	
Female	14	20–30	2	1–5	6	Finnish	7
Male	5	31–40	8	6–10	4	English	9
		41–50	4	11–15	7	Finnish / Russian with Finnish translation	3
		51–60	3	16–20	1		
		61	2	21+	1		

Table 1. Gender, age, length of stay, and country of origin of the immigrant interviewees in Finland, and interview language. *[alternative, according to the suggestion by the reviewer]*

Gender		Age (years)		Length of stay (years)		Country of origin		Interview language	
Female	14	20–30	2	1–5	6	Russia	6	Finnish	7
Male	5	31–40	8	6–10	4	Belarus	1	English	9
		41–50	4	11–15	7	Latvia	1	Finnish / Russian with Finnish translation	3
		51–60	3	16–20	1	Estonia	1		
		61	2	21+	1	Germany	1		
						Turkey	1		
						Iraq	1		
						Israel	1		
						Uzbekistan	1		
						Italy	2		
						Zimbabwe	1		
						Nepal	1		
						Thailand	1		

Table 2. Summary of the aspects of promoting integration from structural, social, identificational and cognitive perspectives, based on the results of the study in the Helsinki metropolitan area, and opportunities and challenges based on literature (Berry et al. 2002; [Wood and Landry, 2008](#); Brock, 2009; Sandercock and Attili, 2009). The table suggests issues for researchers to consider in contributing to the understanding of linkages between urban environments and integration processes, and for practitioners **in** promoting integration by the planning and management of these environments. The aspects of promoting integration are presented by the three perspectives of integration as an acculturation strategy (Berry et al. 2002): integration occurs if immigrants and autochthonous people *adapt* themselves to each other and immigrants adapt themselves to their new environment, but in contrast to assimilation, immigrants are also able to *maintain their own cultures*. Essential in integration is also interaction by which people *influence* each other and *society*: only with this active role can people be a part of the two-way integration process.

	Structural	Social	Identificational	Cognitive
Adaptation	Using opportunities provided by local nature: e.g. walking, fishing, relaxing in nature areas	Interaction between immigrants and autochthonous Finns: opportunities for activities that people can do together	Identifying with the local environment: enjoyment by appreciation of local attractions	Learning about local nature and opportunities to use it
Maintaining ones' own culture	Using nature in familiar ways	Interaction with people from own culture: maintaining relations by socializing in nature	Finding similarities with previous living environments, e.g. familiar plants	Using and sharing knowledge about own culture
Influencing society	Participating in planning	Building relations with people across cultures	Cultural identities shaping the diversity of the society	Sharing knowledge with others in the society

Opportunities	Urban planning enriched with knowledge from diverse groups	Positive relations between diverse population groups	Valuing different identities	Collaborative learning about opportunities brought by cultural diversity
Challenges	Unequal access of diverse groups to societal structures, including planning	Cultural prejudices	Contradictory expectations about identification	Lack of understanding of preconditions for successful intercultural communication