

WHY AND HOW DOES URBAN FOREST REPRESENT WILDERNESS

Eveliina Asikainen

University of Tampere, Department of Regional Studies, Pinninkatu 53 B, 33014 UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE, FINLAND, +358-3-3551 7950, eveliina.asikainen@uta.fi

Abstract

This case study shows that in certain circumstances urban forests can become strong representations of wilderness. The case, Suolijärvi forest is one of the main recreation areas in Hervanta, one of Finland's biggest suburbs with 30 000 inhabitants. The total area of Suolijärvi forest is about 163 ha, of which lake Suolijärvi comprises 26 ha. The forest has been managed as a recreation forest of the City Tampere from early 1970's and has been used for recreational purposes even before. The qualitative analysis of representations of the forest is based primarily on walking interviews with inhabitants and foresters. Triangulation with other sets of materials (newspaper articles, letters to the editor, planning documents, local anthologies and photographs) was used to evaluate the generality and qualitative variability of views represented in the interviews. As a result closeness and wilderness were the dominating expressions the citizens related to the forest. The representation of wilderness was constructed partly by the physical and ecological properties of the area and quite natural-like forest structure, but also depended on the social and historical context of Hervanta and more largely the societal changes related to forest suburbs in Finland. A special challenge to urban forestry is how to recognize local cultural meanings of forests and how to take them into consideration in planning and management.

Key Words

urban forests, representations, wilderness, urban forestry