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## The use of a neighborhood park by visitors with different cultural backgrounds



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*“It takes generations of life in the cities to drive that nostalgia for country ways from the heart. I will never live it down, nor do I want to. I am corrupted to the bone with the beauty of this forsaken world.”*

J.M. Coetzee: In the Heart of the Country (1977)

## **Abstract**

As pleasant and healthy environments, parks should be open, multicultural places, with an easy access for all. It is not only the location of a park, but also its qualities that allow it to be used for desired purposes that make it accessible for people. The aim of this study is therefore to identify variations in the ways of the use of a park called Gubbaparken, (situated in Helsingborg, Sweden,) between different social groups, with specific focus on ethnicity.

According to the result of the study, the visitors carry out activities of different social and beneficial or profitable importance to them. Which activities are preferred most often, depends on whether the cultural values the visitors represent are predominantly collectivistic, individualistic, urban, rural, abstract, concrete, or what the persons age, level of acculturation, family situation or social status (such as advantaged or disadvantaged) is. According to the visitors of "Gubbaparken", it should provide possibilities for group gatherings, play and sports, social contact with new people, but also solitude and calmness and more stimulating visual experiences.

How these values form the visitors' ideals of an attractive park, and how the possibilities to activities correspond to these ideals, should be contemplated carefully when planning urban parks and green spaces.

**Key Words:** *Multicultural Society Planning, Ethnicity, Urban Park Use, Helsingborg, Sweden, Traditions and Green Environments*

## **Sammanfattning**

Parker är behagliga och hälsosamma miljöer. Därför borde de vara öppna, multikulturella platser, tillgängliga för alla. Huruvida en park är tillgänglig, beror inte endast på dess läge eller kommunikationer, utan även de kvaliteter som möjliggör dess användning för önskade ändamål.

Syftet med denna uppsats är därför att studera på vilka olika sätt en stadsdelspark, "Gubbaparken" i Helsingborg, används av olika sociala grupper, med särskild betoning på etnicitet.

Enligt undersökningens resultat används parken för aktiviteter av olika social, instrumentell och upplevelsemässig betydelse. Vilka användningssätt som föredras av besökarna till parken varierar beroende på om deras kulturella värden är dominerande kollektivistiska, individualistiska, urbana, rurala, abstrakta eller konkreta. Andra faktorer som påverkar detta är personens ålder, omgivningens kulturella påverkan på personen, familjesituation eller social ställning (såsom svaga eller starka grupper). Gubbaparkens besökare önskar samlingsplatser för större grupper, lek för familjer, möten med nya människor och sportaktiviteter men också lugn och ensamhet och mera stimulerande visuella och andra sinnliga upplevelser.

Hur dessa värden formar besökarnas bild av en attraktiv park och hur möjligheterna för aktiviteter motsvarar denna bild är en viktig aspekt att ta hänsyn till under utveckling av parker och andra offentliga platser.

## **Tiivistelmä**

Puistot ovat miellyttäviä, terveyttä edistäviä ympäristöjä. Siksi olisi toivottavaa, että ne olisivat avoimia, monikulttuurisia paikkoja, kaikkien käytettävissä. Mahdollisuus käyttää puistoja hyväkseen ei perustu ainoastaan niiden ihanteelliseen sijaintiin tai sopeuttamiseen esimerkiksi liikuntaesteisille. Myös puiston laatu ja kuinka tämä luo vierailijalle mahdollisuuksia käyttää puistoa hyväkseen haluamaansa tarkoitukseen on tärkeä tekijä.

Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on siksi tarkastella, mihin eri tarkoituksiin eri sosiaaliset ja erityisesti eri etniset ryhmät käyttävät kaupunginosapuistoa nimeltään ”Gubbaparken” Helsingborgin kaupungissa, Etelä-Ruotsissa.

Tutkimustuloksen mukaan vierailijoiden suosimilla toiminnoilla on eriasteisia sosiaalisia hyöty- ja elämyksellisiä merkityksiä. Mitkä toiminnot/käyttötavat ovat etusijalla vaihtelevat sen mukaan edustaako vierailija kollektivistisia, yksilöllisiä, urbaania, maaseutumaisia, abstrakteja vai konkreettisia kulttuuriarvoja. Tärkeitä tekijöitä ovat myös ikä, ympäristön kulttuurivaikutus, perhetilanne tai sosiaalinen asema (esimerkiksi heikot tai vahvat sosiaaliluokat). Gubbaparken – puiston vierailijat toivovat mahdollisuuksia ryhmätapaamisiin, leikkiin perheen parissa, sosiaaliseen kanssakäymiseen myös ennestään tuntemattomien ihmisten kanssa, urheiluun, mutta myös rauhalliseen ympäristöön, yksinäisyyteen ja aistielämyksiin.

Kuinka nämä eri kulttuuriset arvot muovaavat vierailijoiden kuvaa puoleensavetävästä puistosta ja kuinka toimintamahdollisuudet vastaavat näitä kuvia, on näkökulma, joka tulisi ottaa huomioon puistojen ja niiden käyttötapojen suunnittelussa.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is a degree project included in a one-year Master's Program in "*the Environmental Psychology of Landscape Architecture*", at the *Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences*. It is a contribution to the attempt to understand the diversity among the residents of present-day cities and the influence of this diversity on the use and formation of different spaces in a city. In particular, it is an attempt to understand how different cultural backgrounds determine people's relationships to something that all human beings are actually claimed to have in common, namely, a genetic attraction to green environments, and how different traditions form the uses of and stays in these environments. The case -study -part of this paper consists of an interview study among the visitors of a neighborhood park, called "Gubbaparken" in the city of Helsingborg, Sweden. The result is then being reflected on in relation to some previous studies about cultural values in general and about the uses of green spaces in particular. Also some social aspects of urban development projects are brought up.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Fredrika Mårtensson who helped me get to the point of my interest concerning the subject of this paper and came with important comments during the writing process. I would also like to thank the following persons: Fredrik Bengtsson, an ecologist at the strategic planning department at the city of Helsingborg, who put me in contact with Sabina Dethorey, a project manager for a development project at Dalhem district in Helsingborg, who gave me advice how to find some more interviewees, both of whom showed important interest for my study. Above all, I'm grateful to all the interviewees who let me interrupt their relaxing moments surrounded by the greenery and shared their experiences of "Gubbaparken" with me.

## **2. Background**

Urban parks and green spaces are good for human health and well-being in many ways, both directly and indirectly. Along increasing privatization and erosion of public space, as well as labeling of different neighborhoods, parks are also sometimes seen as some of the few remaining neutral places in cities – i.e. places where everybody is welcome. They are being used for many purposes, by many people with different backgrounds, for both active and passive recreational activities. Even only experiencing a green environment can have a relaxing influence on the visitor. Therefore it is important that everyone has access to green spaces of good quality. However, many of those studies that try to explain the meaning of “good quality” and “access” have been made in Northern European or Northern American context, focusing on the opinions of the majority population. Thus, it is probable that quality is not understood in the same way by the whole population, consisting of people with varying cultural backgrounds. According to Wood & Landry (2008), the social complexity of cities has increased but the management of parks has not followed this development. In some cases, even daytime, parks have even become areas to avoid because of increasing criminality and homelessness. It is more common, though, that parks are popular places but they are often planned and managed according to the traditions of the majority population. Consequently, it is possible that not the whole population finds parks as attractive or useful. Also Ståhle (2005) states that in order to have access to parks, it is presupposed that they have qualities one finds attractive. Therefore, in order to preserve parks as welcoming places, it is a challenge but a necessity for the developers of the society to gain information about the many preferences for park use and plan according to them.

## **3. Aim**

The aim of this study is to identify variations in the ways people belonging to different user categories use and wish to use their neighborhood park, with specific focus on ethnicity.

The study questions are the following:

1. What social groups are using the park?
2. How are they using it?
3. How would they like to use it (if it was possible)?
4. How can the variations in park use be explained in a culture sensitive perspective?
5. How can variations in park use be taken into consideration when planning green spaces in cities?



#### **4. Method**

In the following chapter a description will be made of the set up of the study, how it was carried out, of the park in question and some implications of these factors for the results.

##### Interviewing

The material for this study is gathered by interviewing and observing visitors in a park that is popular among people with different cultural backgrounds. I conducted the interviews during five days in May 2008. I visited the park on both weekdays and on the weekend at different times of the day approximately between 10.00 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. I have interviewed 21 persons between the ages of 12 and 68 who were spending time or walking through the park. Since it's not a very crowded park, I went to meet the people I saw at different points, rather than standing at one point along the path, only talking to people passing me. Partly due to language problems, it soon turned out to be more difficult to interview older than younger visitors. Therefore I also visited a local group doing Nordic walking together. In this way I found three more persons to interview who sometimes use the park or had some other comments to my questions.

Since the aim of this study is to get new knowledge about a very specific theme, I preferred semistructured interviews to strictly structured or in-depth interviews. According to May (2001), strictly structured interviews demand that the questions are presented exactly the same way for every interviewee, with as little influence from the interviewer as possible, whereas semistructured interviews allow the interviewer to ask some follow-up questions, in order to develop and clarify the answers but without letting the interviewee to come up with totally new themes. This is a suitable method since I'm not producing statistics and do not only want to confirm or invalidate my own expectations but want to be open to new ideas on the topic. Furthermore, talking with people with different cultural backgrounds or different mother tongues may demand different clarifications of the questions from the interviewer's side. For my help on the field, I had an interview guide, consisting of eight main questions and three background questions, dealing with themes so as the use of the park, pros and cons of the park, characteristics of a favorite park, etc (see Appendix).

Making interviews was the main method of this study. Therefore I didn't have any observation guide with me on the field. However, watching people proved to be an effective way of understanding some patterns of the use of the park that I wouldn't necessarily have

noticed only by interviewing people. That is why I made field notes of the observations of the behavior and the use of the park by the visitors when relevant to the aim of the study.

### The Place for the Study

I conducted the interviews in a park called “*Gubbaparken*”, situated between two residential areas called “*Drottningshög*” and “*Dalhem*” in the city of Helsingborg, in Southern Sweden. According to the statistics published by the “*Official Statistics of Sweden*” and presented on the webpage of the city of Helsingborg, 38,4 % of the population of “*Dalhem*” has foreign background. By foreign background is referred to a person who was born abroad or whose both parents were born abroad. 7% of the population of “*Dalhem*” has an academic education longer than three years and the average annual income of 231.1 thousands of Swedish crowns. Of the population of the adjacent residential area, “*Drottninghög*” up to 60,7% has a foreign background, 8% has an academic education longer than three years and the average annual income of 217,9 thousands of Swedish crowns. These figures can be compared to those of the population in Helsingborg at large, of which 23,6 % has foreign background, 18 % has an academic education of three years or longer and the average annual income of 281.5 thousands of Swedish crowns (Helsingborgs stad 2007). To choose a park between the areas of “*Dalhem*” and “*Drottninghög*” was suitable since the population there is culturally diverse. Therefore it would be possible to gather a variety of aspects considering the subject of this study.

The park is a quite small neighborhood park with most visitors on weekends. On weekdays it is rather empty. There is a bicycle path leading through the park. On one side, there are two football fields (fig. 1), on the other side, there are some small hills (fig.2) a small birch grove (fig.1) and a small playground (fig.3) with some swings, climbing equipment, sand box, a table and benches. There are also four benches located along the bicycle path. The park itself is located close to some two-floor houses with balconies and a lot of greenery between the houses. Lots of young trees are surrounding the park and in the middle there is an open grass field (fig.4). At one corner there are rocks lined up (fig 5). For some years ago, the park had had a bad reputation and it had been a “no-go” place for most of the residents. Because of all the bushes it was shady, why there were a lot of hiding places and it was a popular place for

homeless people and people struggling with abuse problems. The park was renewed during the year 2007, by improving the lightning and by thinning out the vegetation



Figure 1. The birch grove, bicycle path and the football field.



Figure 2. The Playground



Figure 3. Greenery around the park. Grass field and a small hill



Figure 4. An overall view with playground on the background, adjacent to the hill. (Football fields situated on the right side of the picture).



Figure5. Rocks lined out at one corner of the park.

### Discussion

As mentioned, this park is situated between two residential areas, close to where people live, far from the city center. That makes it a part of an everyday environment and some people might not even notice that it is there. But having everyday experience of a place also allows one to generate some special knowledge of it, often that seen from a practical point of view: i.e. factors that make their everyday better or worse or influence their choices of daily routes or playgrounds. This might give answers that concern practical issues. It is also the residents' own park, in a way, which means that they know who is using it and how they use it and think it should be designed for them rather than for tourists for example. These same reasons might also make one happy with something that could be better. On the other hand, the recent renovation of the park might have functioned as a catalyst for people's thoughts. Having noticed that the park had been renewed might have made it easier to come to think of other possible changes. Some people who have lived there for a longer time could recall the earlier bad reputation that could still have an influence on their evaluation of the park.

By doing interviews in a park it is possible to meet people who use the park and who are interested in parks and might have some interesting opinions on the subject. The park being

present, they are more likely to be able to say their opinion of the place. On the other hand, this way of conducting interviews, compared with for instance a postal questionnaire, allows only those who happen to go to the park certain days and times to answer the questions. It also only allows people who know the same languages as the interviewer to answer the questions. There are probably also people, who would like to use parks but don't do it for several reasons. According to Wood and Landry (2008), even places that are open to all, or neutral, might be experienced exclusive by people who feel very marginalized or discriminated by the rest of the society. Thus, this method doesn't allow investigating how parks could be made available for those who don't feel they have access to parks at all. Also the social setting during the interviews might have influenced the answers. For instance, some interviewees visited the parks in groups. For this reason there was audience observing the interview situation who sometimes involved in the dialogue, which might have influenced the answers. According to Alasuutari (1995), in face-to-face situations, people wish to be seen in a positive light, which might also give answers different than those to an anonymous questionnaire.

## 5. Literature Review

The subject of this study has many aspects and can be investigated from many points of view. The previous studies considering multicultural park use that will be reviewed in the following reach from the philosophical aspect of the meaning of places, through the concrete differences in the use of park space by different cultural groups in the US, UK and Sweden and some of the theoretical underpinnings to those differences. In addition, some ideas on how a cultural aspect can be adopted by professionals working with the development of the society are reviewed.

### Place and Meaning

That green surroundings are vital to people is a presumption stemming from the hypothesis that human beings have genetically determined preferences for natural views (Ulrich 1993). But, to capture the complexity of the subject, the natural scientific aspect has to be complemented by a sociocultural perspective. Williams & Carr (1993) stress the fact that a person is not only driven by his biological needs but is “*a social agent who seeks out and creates meaning in the environment* (Williams & Carr 1993 p.211)”. Certain kinds of environments are not only important for survival but also for social interaction. The same environment can have different meanings for different groups of people. According to Williams & Carr (1993), *a meaning* consists of the cognitions and emotions associated with an object or place. In their work “*The Sociocultural Meanings of Outdoor Recreation Places*” Williams & Carr refer to Gibson’s ideas who, as well as Eder (1993), distinguishes between *concrete meaning* referring to the function or affordances of a place and *abstract meaning* that is symbolic and mostly determined by a culture or an individual rather than being inherent features of an object or a place. In the same work Williams & Carr also bring up Yi Fu Tuan’s aspect to how an environment can be experienced, namely, directly through senses or indirectly through these symbolic meanings and processes. Understanding the symbolic meanings of parks and park use adds to the understanding of the complexity of cultural values that form the cities today.

### Studies of Park Use by Ethnic Groups in the USA and the UK

The use of parks and green spaces has been studied both in the USA and UK. The approaches to these studies vary and show somewhat varying results.

Gobster (2001) has studied how the Lincoln Park in Chicago is used by ethnically diverse visitors, which are Black, Latino, White and Asian visitors. The minority groups were more likely to visit the park in bigger groups of friends or extended families and participate in social activities and less likely to participate in sports activities, while the majority of whites preferred to go there by themselves or in couples and engage in sports activities. Loukaitou-Sideris (1995) has investigated park use in Los Angeles by Hispanics, African Americans, Caucasians and Chinese. Similar to Gobster, she found clear differences: Hispanic groups go to parks to organize gregarious group gatherings. They are also very active in appropriating the park space, adjusting it to their own needs. They consider the park primarily as a social space. The African Americans preferred to use the parks in peer groups, for organized group sports but they didn't tend to appropriate the space. The Caucasians most often went to parks by themselves and the most appreciated feature was the natural scenery. The Chinese were underrepresented in the park, probably due to the fact that the traditional American park design doesn't correspond to the aesthetics of the Chinese park ideal. Another study conducted in Chicago, Lincoln Park, by Tinsley et al.(2002) examined the use of parks by persons of 55 years of age or older with different ethnical or racial backgrounds (Hispanic, Asian, African American, Caucasian). They explain that African American and Caucasian cultures are individualistic. Thus, the members of these groups engage in individual oriented activities such as sports and exercising in small groups of friends or by themselves. Hispanic and Asian cultures are notably collectivistic. Members of these cultures are therefore likely to engage in park activities possible to conduct together with extended families or other larger groups (Tinsley et al. 2002).

Segregation between different groups also occurs in parks. Gobster (2002) reported that the park visitors who participated in his study can recognize certain locations where the members of their own cultural groups usually spend time. Also discrimination is experienced at times. This is supported by the study of Loukaitou-Sideris (1995) who found that different social groups who visit the park don't interact and that sometimes discrimination occurs against sports that are not traditionally American. Consequently, besides ethnical factors, the marginalization that often strains minorities can explain some of the differences. Lee (2001) has addressed this question by using a multiple hierarchy stratification perspective in studying how outdoor recreation participation by the population in Texas is affected simultaneously by the following social statuses: socio-economic status, ethnicity, age and gender. The study shows that if an individual belongs to several disadvantaged groups (f. e. poor, minority,

elderly and female) it is less probable that the person is going to participate in outdoor recreation activities while the single social status factors alone had less effect on this participation (Lee 2001). At Lincoln Park, however, some marginalizing factors, like fees, have been reduced, which indicates that racial or ethnical preferences also in part determine the ways the park is used (Gobster 2002).

Gómez (2002) has investigated the relationship between ethnicity and recreation participation by comparing earlier models developed around the subject. Through an analysis of these he found some key factors that affect a person's recreation participation, which are acculturation, socioeconomic status, subcultural identity, perceived benefits of recreation and perceived discrimination. On this basis he has developed the "*Ethnicity and Public Recreation Model*", according to which *acculturation* i.e. adopting some features of a dominant culture, for example language, determines one's socioeconomic status and subcultural identity. These two factors determine one's perceived benefits of recreation and perceived discrimination. One's recreation participation, then, is affected directly by socioeconomic status and subcultural identity, or indirectly via perceived benefits of recreation and perceived discrimination.

The studies made in an American context seem to deal with established minority groups. A British study by Risbeth and Finney (2005) examines the experience of urban green spaces by a group of refugees from some African countries and Afghanistan. Having only stayed in the UK for between 6 months and 2, 5 years, the concept or purpose of urban parks was not familiar to the group participating in the study. Yet, visits to green spaces turned out to be a positive contrast to the not so positive daily lives of refugees. It is not obvious, though, that new refugees want to visit parks on their own initiative. Some factors that encouraged them to visit parks were interest in plants, playing sports in a local group, local community festivals and possibility to mix in the crowd, to meet people, easy access – near to daily routes since in the city center it is easier to know how to behave, and park staff which make the visits safer. Discouraging factors were dogs, bad weather, and unfamiliarity with going alone, difficulty to take to places they had never been to before, and fear of standing out or doing something illegal.

#### Studies of People's Relationship to Green Environments in Sweden

In Sweden, the importance of green spaces has been widely researched from many points of view. Already in an early study, Grahn (1985) investigated the use of green spaces by



different organized groups and their priorities for park concepts or characteristics indicating the quality of the parks. In another study, Grahn (1991) focused on finding a pattern of certain park characteristics that would be particularly appealing to people. The analysis of the result of Grahn's study showed that different types of people discern and appreciate different characteristics of parks, according to their interests. Some groups of people identified in this study were people at different ages and people with different interests (Grahn 1991). In later studies the meaning of different park characteristics for people suffering from stress symptoms of different degrees (Grahn & Stigsdotter 2002) and people suffering from crises of different levels (Ottosson 2007) have been addressed. It has been clear, however that environmental characteristics such as wild and peaceful are of special importance for many of the people participating in these studies (Grahn 1985 and 1991). But, since the studies were carried out in Sweden, this might be a particular Swedish or Scandinavian preference (Grahn 1991). Whether a person's cultural / ethnic background is of importance for these results hasn't got as much attention as the other aspects.

When comparing the relation to nature or recreation areas of the Swedish population with that of some other groups, the history of urban development seems to explain some cultural differences. Daun (2004) and Sjögren (2004) explain that in countries where urbanization has taken place during many generations, the population has also developed a mental urban culture. This means that people are attracted by places where a lot of people meet and are keen to be seen by others. In Southern European countries, for example, it is not unusual to show dislike towards countryside and having to stay alone in the nature (Daun 2004). In the Swedish society, the mass urbanization occurred as late as during the 1950's. Consequently, a large part of the adult population still have some kind of a connection to the countryside, or at least positive feelings for the natural environments there. It is only among the youth generation of today, that a genuine urban culture is emerging (Sjögren 2004). Another historical explanation is the movement of the national romanticism of the 1800's, in connection with the creation of nation states and typical national symbols and national relationships to nature, the Swedish romanticizing the habit of spending time alone in the nature (Daun, 2004, Sörlin, 2004). This has also resulted in that the Swedish children are trained to develop a positive attitude towards outdoor recreation throughout the year (Daun 2004, Sjögren 2004).

By contrast, people living in or coming from some other countries where other circumstances prevail, sometimes associate nature or green areas with negative things. Some reasons for

these associations are that in many countries, green environments are not as comfortable or accessible as in Sweden. In some places there are also poisonous plants and animals, guerilla bands or some indigenous people living in the natural areas. Some cultures also lack the tradition of knowing species or describing nature in literature or the right of common access (Daun 2004).

Pedersen (2004) has interviewed female immigrants living in Malmö, coming from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. They explained that they have a somewhat different way of being, compared with many ethnical Swedes. They don't "organize" time for being alone and time for being in a company. On the contrary, they prefer to go to the recreation areas and parks in groups socializing as much as possible. "*You sing and laugh because God created nature* (Pedersen 2004)". The women also told about difficult memories associated with nature, for instance, during the war in Iraq, when important characteristics of the local nature were destroyed (Pedersen 2004).

In summary, some culture related factors for different ways of using green spaces found are collectivist or individualist culture, different visual or other sensorial preferences, the level of urban development, historical and nationalistic influence on a country's image, marginalization, social status, and familiarity with parks or the different associations that parks and green urban environments have for different people.

### Adopting a Cultural Perspective in Planning

To recognize different interests and prerequisites for the use of green spaces is not an easy task for the urban developers. Wood & Landry (2008) base their book "*The Intercultural City*" partly on Sandercock's principles of planning for diversity. Two of these appear to be particularly suitable in this context, namely that all residents of a city have two rights: The right to difference i.e. the specific needs of minorities or subaltern cultures are recognized and legitimized, and the right to the city i.e. the right to use public space. Thus, *cultural literacy* is a notion used by the authors to stress the importance of the ability to understand how different cultures influence or are influenced by the use of a place. Yet, it won't be possible for planners to acquire knowledge of every single culture. Rather, Wood & Landry propose for a continuous intercultural dialogue, communication with intercultural groups, preferably in intercultural spaces. Furthermore, when doing a development project in a city, the planners should continuously analyze their work through a series of cultural filters, which are the

following: Values behind the project, experiential quality (how the project is experienced by the citizens), observational quality (the visual signals of a project) and the relational quality (what linkages are created or prevented) (Wood & Landry 2008).

Another way to plan with a cultural perspective, suitable for green spaces is *sociotop mapping*, developed by the city planners in Stockholm. The notion of a sociotop is anthropocentric and can be seen as a complement to the notion of a biotope that is biocentric (Ståhle 2005). Thus, this method is used in order to gain sociocultural knowledge of a particular place on a neighborhood level. The focus of the method is how a place is being used in the particular culture of this specific neighborhood. This should be looked at from the everyday perspective (Stadsbyggnadskontoret Stockholm 2008). Instead of analyzing the concrete place, the experience of it and possibilities to use it for different purposes are of interest, in other words, to understand the *use value* of the place. Similar to the planning principles described above by Wood and Landry, a mix of dialogue with the residents and planner evaluation are crucial parts of a sociotop analysis as well. The first step is to map and demarcate all the “free areas” of the city, second, the uses and social values of these areas are evaluated by planning experts, third, these values are evaluated from the users’ point of view, fourth, the responses are analyzed and a number of use values, or notions for values indicating the quality of the places, is listed. The more use values are attributed to a place, the higher it’s social or cultural value. (Stadsbyggnadskontoret Stockholm 2008). Besides qualities, also the shortages of the places will be discovered. The sociotop map can therefore function as a basis for making a development plan for an area.

## **6. Important notions: Culture and Ethnicity**

The articles reviewed in the previous chapter can make the reader somewhat confused as to the many ways of categorizing the park users. Due to the different societies and immigration histories of US, UK and Sweden, different social groups are not referred to in similar ways. In the American articles cited above, it is common to name immigrant or minority groups by race. In the Swedish context, when specifying which group is being addressed, one usually refers to the country of origin of this group. According to Tinsley (2002) “race” is a scientific term which is used to distinguish between certain morphological characters in humans while “ethnicity” tells something about a group’s or an individual’s culture, language and history. In countries like Sweden with relatively small immigrant groups, and the biggest immigrant groups having their origins in the neighboring countries, ethnicity is the plausible term to use. Even ethnicity is a simplistic basis for determining people’s identities when people in most cases are members of several cultural groups (ethnic, organizational, professional) of which the ethnic one sometimes is of importance, sometimes not. Pfister (1993) is studying how ethnicity is defined by different disciplines and puts forward some questions as to whether ethnicity is defined by the socioeconomic environment and the constraints set by it for people or whether ethnicity is constant, a process or a role. Wood and Landry (2008) stress the importance of the diversity inside all communities, as well as the overlapping between them and cultural hybridities. Nonetheless, the same authors refer to Sandercock who explains that despite of the altering nature of culture or ethnicity one always views the world from some kind of a culture-influenced perspective (Wood & Landry 2008). Thus, the aim of this study is not to put people in rigid categories but to investigate different uses of green spaces that are not necessarily obvious without adopting a (multi)cultural perspective. When presenting the result of this study I refer to people having a background in a country where they were born, or sometimes in a country where their parents were born if it is obvious that this matters.

## 7. Result

Having interviewed and observed the visitors in the park, and analyzed the data, I could discern park users belonging to different groups related to the social constellation during their visits and their ethnic background. I have categorized the people I interviewed or observed in the park twice. First, I've made a rough geographical division in three groups, according to the countries of their origins. These are: Visitors with Swedish /Northern European background, whose countries of origins were Sweden and Poland, Visitors with Southern European/ Middle Eastern background, whose countries of origins were Albany, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey and visitors with Central- European background whose countries of origins were Hungary and Austria. Second, I've divided the visitors in groups according to the purpose of the visit and the social settings in which they visit the park. These groups are: *single families; extended families* or several families together; *dog owners; passers-by; other single adult visitors; other, mixed groups; exercisers* and *an old couple*.

### Visitors with Swedish / Northern European Backgrounds:

#### 1. Single Families

The Swedish single families said that they went to the park to have a rest for a while, to sunbathe, to barbecue, to play with children and to use the playground or play ballgames. One of the single families with Swedish background wished there were places where one could be out of the sight of the others.

#### 2. Dog Owners

The dog owners walked their dogs, often on the lead but sometimes they also gave the dogs the possibility to run and play off the lead. They walked their dogs several times a day. One dog owner also saw the park as a meeting point. One of the dog owners wished there were better possibilities to let the dogs run off lead, for example inside a dog enclosure. Another dog owner explained that children, especially children with background in countries where people don't usually have dogs as pets (for instance, Arab cultures) are very afraid of the dogs, which starts a vicious circle of children screaming at the dogs and dogs barking at the children, both of them encouraging each other to scream and bark even more. The dog owners were also more worried than others about the lighting of the park, which had been improved recently, but, according to a male interviewee, somewhat meagerly. In addition, one woman explained that when a light goes off, it will take exorbitantly long time to prepare it.

### 3. Exercisers

People I saw / observed but didn't talk with were the exercisers (jogging or walking, biking) most of them looking very "western" or north European. The exercisers were jogging, walking or doing Nordic Walking.

### 4. Passers-by

A passer-by with a Swedish background explained he liked the park better before, when there were many old trees left. Another passer-by with Swedish background as well, explained that he would like to enjoy more varied vegetation and a view of water: for instance a pond or a fountain. Some other passers-by with Swedish backgrounds saw it as a negative thing that nothing was happening in the park nowadays. They also referred to how it was used before. For example, some dance evenings with dance orchestra and open air dance floor were arranged now and then and that kind of activities would be nice now, too. But they also said that during a long time, the park had had a bad reputation, which could scare visitors away. Therefore it should be thought of carefully, what kind of activities would be arranged there.

### 5. Other Single Adult Visitors

A female single-adult visitor with Swedish background was sitting at the table at the playground and eating sandwiches. A man with Polish background went to the park after having been stressed, to relax, get fresh air and enjoy the greenery. One elderly man with a Swedish background said he would do this if he had a helper with him.

Some visitors with Swedish background liked parks in the US and the Netherlands because of their exotic, imaginative vegetation and good service. Some other visitors with Swedish background also liked the bigger parks in Helsingborg, because of the size, closeness to the sea and better service. Two elderly men with Swedish background mentioned the old parks in the centre of the city, because of the old trees or because one could have cake and coffee there. A visitor with a Polish background told about a green space in Poland close to the sea where people could walk for a long time.

## Visitors with Southern European and Middle-Eastern Backgrounds

### 1. Extended Families

The extended families went to the park to spend time with other families, barbecuing, eating and drinking together, staying the whole evening. Some of the families belonging to this group were the most prominent in appropriating the place by listening to music and bringing their own garden chairs and big garden barbecues. A woman from this group explained she would never go to the park by herself. They also went to play with children and play ballgames and bike with children.

Some members of the extended families wished there were more benches so that several families or larger groups could sit together. A woman from an extended family argued that when being pregnant, it is not very comfortable to have to sit on the ground, especially not for a long time, as she often does, having many children to keep an eye on. According to a woman with Iraqi background, there should also be some toilets, not the least for children who spend the whole day in the park. A Syrian interviewee from this group also thought there should be more playing equipment and a bigger playground, reasoning that it only takes one family to fill the playground, resulting in that there is no place left for other families. Still one opinion was that there should be games or other activities also for adults so that adults could learn to know each other, too, and create a better feeling of togetherness in the park.

One woman with Syrian background told that it was nice to see how people come out after winter, smiling and talking to each other.

### 2. Passers-by

A young visitor with Syrian background explained he liked one park in that country because of the better possibilities to barbecue and play. A visitor with Turkish background liked a park in Turkey because there were more people and amusement but that it was also common with only “green” parks in Turkey.

### 3. An Old couple

I also observed an elderly couple who spoke a language I didn’t understand, (and who didn’t speak very much Swedish) and were wearing clothes elderly people with background in Middle Eastern countries often do. They came to the park two evenings in a row in the

weekend to sit on a bench, drink tea they had with them and watch people being active and having fun.

### Visitors with Central European Backgrounds

#### 1. Passers-by

A visitor with Hungarian background told that it would be nice to arrange some social events to bring people together and perhaps to have some music in the park, referring to the experiences she had had in some parks in the country of her origin. Also a visitor with Austrian background explained that in Wien and Berlin there are more people and more culture in the parks and that it is a positive thing that whole families go to parks together.

### Similarities between the Groups

When asking about whether the visitors would like to change something about the park, there were some general opinions. Many of the people I interviewed wished there were better facilities for the purposes they already used the park for. For example, a common wish for many people regardless their background or other use of the park was a possibility for barbecuing, without having to have their own, disposable barbecues with them. Some of the younger people with varying backgrounds wished there were possibilities for more sports activities than football, for instance volleyball or badminton. Many of the visitors with children, also with varying backgrounds and including some teenagers, explained they would like to turn the park moped-free so that they could let their children play more freely, without having to be afraid. They felt it was hard for both children and parents to react fast enough when the mopeds are coming along the bicycle lane close to the playground. The mopeds were also ruining the grass and the benches.

### Park Use Variation and Potential Conflicts

One of the most prominent factors behind the differences in park use is that in the social importance of the purposes of the visits. For this reason also the sizes of the groups in which people visited the park vary. For *the single families* it seemed to be important to spend some relaxing quality time within the nuclear family and to give their children a possibility to enjoy the playground and green surroundings. Similarly, *single adult visitors* seemed to appreciate the calmness and the beauty of the surroundings. For *the extended families*, the main purpose of the visit seemed to be to gather together with other families, acquaintances or relatives and spend the evening eating and drinking together. They also went there to let the children play. For the *exercisers* and *dog owners* the time spent in the park was an opportunity for some



time of their own to carry out individual, physical activities, to take care of their health and devote themselves to a free-time activity or a hobby of their own – as long as it was not seen only as a duty.

Some interviewees from every group explained that the green surroundings in general were important. For instance, a woman with a Syrian background and another woman with a Lebanese background told me it was a problem that there were not very many parks in the countries they came from. On the other hand, *single-family* visitors or *passers-by* with Swedish background stressed that when visiting parks it would be nice to enjoy the view of certain kinds of trees/vegetation, namely old trees or more varying vegetation whereas visitors from extended families and to some extent dog owners paid more attention to the facilities in the park.

Having discerned these differences, and observed the park for a while, it is also possible to define risks for some conflicts deriving from the varying interests of the park users. Some dislike between dog owners and children or other people who are not familiar with dogs or between dog owners and people playing ballgames can occur. In addition, the scarcity of sitting places as well as litter bins and a lack of a barbecue corner make the playground, where the most sitting places and the only benches together with a table are situated, an object for competition. Some extended families, using the park as a social place, the playground as a barbecue corner, and sometimes leaving lots of litter after them, obviously irritate some single families or single adult visitors who come to the park to rest and enjoy the calmness and the greenery and want to use the benches as well. Furthermore, small children, who are the “real” target for the playground, might be afraid of big groups occupying it, of which groups of teenagers (with mopeds) are the most liable to scare them away.

Consequently, many visitors would like to have adequate space or equipment for the many different uses and users of the park. At present, the visitors solve this by taking their own equipment to the park and in this way appropriating their own corners. Oftentimes, however people come to the park and to the playground at different times which means that mostly, everyone gets their turn on the playground if their aim is to play and not to have a barbecue party there.

## 8. Analysis

### The Park as a Symbol

Many persons in this study were attracted by the park or some other park because of the greenery. Even a man, who first said he didn't care about the park at all, later revealed that he missed old trees. Exactly for which reasons people appreciate the greenery varies, though, at least in part according to the cultural traditions shaping their everyday lives. Being not only biological but also social agents (Williams & Carr 1993), people evaluate the attraction and usefulness of the park according to the everyday activities determined by important cultural or subcultural values, by the social reality one lives in and how the park is suitable for these kinds of activities. Visitors to "Gubbaparken" devote themselves to different activities and modes of socializing such as gathering together with an extended family, playing on the playground with children or exercising by themselves. Both the social well-being of the community and the physical well-being of the individual person influences park use and the evaluation of it. Experiences as the relaxing effect of the greenery and fresh air or positive effect of a jogging tour, and memories of spending time there playing with one's children can influence how one evaluates the park at large.

The suitability of the park for one's interests determines also some meanings given to the places and to the situations occurring there, which according to Yi Fu Tuan in Williams & Carr (1993) are divided in *concrete* and *symbolic meanings*. Some *concrete* meanings given to "Gubbaparken" by its visitors are that it is above all an open public space and makes comfortable surroundings for several activities. As an open space there is enough place for activities one might not have at home, as big gatherings or place for dogs to run off lead or space and equipment for football. There are a couple of benches for resting and relaxing and playing equipment to entertain children. It can also be an important part of a jogging or walking route, perhaps a landmark in the landscape of many similar houses, or a place tempting people to go out. Considering the *symbolic* meanings, the park can *symbolize* social wellbeing or taking care of other people or one's social network for some, for example the extended families. The park can be a change in the everyday routines as it offers the possibility to watch people and nature. It can also symbolize physical health for exercisers, free-time, rest and calmness for single families but playfulness and party for children. It can also be a symbol for some time dedicated to oneself, sometimes flight from other people for single adult visitors.

### Alone or in a Company? Direct and Subtle Ways to Give Park Visits Social Meaning

Considering the result of this study, some similarities can be found to the Swedish study made by Pedersen (2002) and the American studies made by Gobster (2002) and Loukaitou-Sideris (1995), who found that groups with different ethnic backgrounds have different purposes with their visits to the park. For example, some members of those immigrant groups with background in certain, Middle-Eastern countries who I interviewed, often visit the parks with extended families occupied by socializing while the interviewees belonging to the majority group visit the park in small groups or with the nuclear family spending more time on walking and exercising or other more physical activities. For example, a woman with a Lebanese background from an extended family explained that they often went to the park together with four or five families and stayed the whole evening, another woman told that she wouldn't go to the park by herself and a third woman said there should be possibilities for adults to get to know each other. At the same time, a single adult visitor with Polish background went to the park by himself to relax after stressing activities as well as the exercisers and dog owners spent shorter times in the park by themselves. Obviously, people with different backgrounds all seem to enjoy many kinds of "activities" in different social constellations. Yet, Tinsley's (2002) explanation that some cultures are more collectivistic, and thus the importance of the time spent in a park in the first hand is based on the social interaction strengthening the community ties, and that other cultures are individualistic considering the main purpose of going to park being individual benefits, will to a certain extent apply to the use of "Gubbaparken", too.

This doesn't mean, however, that for example the visitors with Swedish background wouldn't put any importance at all to the social dimension of park visits. Jegerby (1996) has studied how Swedish people use public spaces and has also addressed the way how people go to parks and what are their expectations from these visits. She found that when, for example, taking a walk in a park, it is not very common that people actively seek for others to talk to but that they sometimes might meet somebody they could change a word with, which was a positive feature of the visit. Referring to Granovett, she explains that the social importance for them consists of something that Granovett calls *weak bonds*, by contrast to the single or extended families of my study whose social contacts in the park consist of stronger bonds between close relatives or acquaintances. Furthermore, instead of dedicating a park visit to close people one already knows, Jegerby (1996) explains that a park can also comprise a scene for making and developing some contacts around different phenomena experienced together with

other visitors. Therefore, the meaning of a park visit can consist of a *possibility* to make weak bonds to develop into closer ones. One of the dog owners saw the park as a meeting point, and as such it could be a place for dog owners to create contacts around activities with dogs. Also some of the passers-by with Swedish background mentioned some of the happenings that had been arranged in the park, for instance theatre, jumble sale or dance evenings that can be experienced together with others and function as a starting point for developing contacts. These opinions are in a way similar to that of the woman with Syrian background who suggested game events to make the park livelier. But, except for dancing, theater and jumble sale are activities creating open settings: One can choose to interact or not. Thus, the social intercommunication may well be central also for visitors who go to the park by themselves but the new bonds might still be created on an individual, rather than on a group basis.

According to Ulla Jegerby, some cultures are even notably rational and instrumental in their relationship with objects and places. Therefore it is important that there is a utility aspect to the use of the park, which, for example activities carried out at Gubbaparken such as jogging, walking a dog or raising children on a playground have. It is this kind of activities that from a utilitarian point of view are seen as appropriate everyday use of a park and the more collectivistic uses are rather accepted on special occasions, which also can be a factor influencing the differences in the use of the park between different groups.

#### Dissatisfaction and Minority and Majority Views

Loukaitou – Sideris (1995) also paid some attention to the underrepresented groups, which would be an interesting point of view also in this study. I didn't find statistics on all the nationalities represented in these residential areas, so I didn't find out which groups are not using the park at all. Yet, according to the result of the interviews, families from Sweden, Middle-Eastern and South East- European countries are well represented in the park.

The authors mentioned above bring up possible segregation and discrimination occurring in parks. "Gubbaparken" in Helsingborg is a rather small park why "geographical" segregation is unlikely to happen, but the groups don't seem to mix with each other. Not any direct experiences of discrimination were expressed by the interviewees but the facilities are undoubtedly planned for small families and small groups. The comment of the woman who explained that there is only place for one family at a time on the playground, highlights the different understandings of what a family is. Depending on the cultural values, it sometimes

consists of three, sometimes thirteen and sometimes of thirty persons. This is one area where the ideas of the planners and the users don't always coincide.

One important point of view is also what one is supposed to do in the park and for how long. According to Lee (2001), having several disadvantaged social statuses as to socio-economic status, ethnicity, age and gender, might weaken one's interest to participate in leisure activities. In principle, the park is open to everybody and there were definitely not less women or minority representatives there. However, the description of the pregnant woman from an extended family explaining the difficulties to sit on the ground, stresses the fact that being both female and belonging to a minority group, whose values and traditions might not be familiar to the designers of the parks does not directly hinder one from participating in the group gatherings but might make it more uncomfortable than necessary. Similarly, being an elderly or handicapped and representing a culture that highly values that kind of socialization might make it difficult not only to participate in leisure activities but also to be a part of one's cultural heritage due to the lack of suitable facilities.

In addition to segregation and discrimination, the question about the impact of the socioeconomical status of a person for his or her leisure activities is an aspect that has been discussed by, among others, Lee (2001). The average income of the population of the residential areas of "Dalhem" and "Drottninghög" is somewhat lower than the average income of the total population of the city of Helsingborg. But "Gubbaparken" is just a "normal" park with no entrance, or other fees. It is also situated in the between of two residential areas which means that it is not difficult to get to the park even for those who find it uncomfortable to use public transportation for different reasons or who only have time to make short visits. Many of the interviewees stressed that the close location of the park was a benefit and they were quite happy with the park in general, considering it being a small neighborhood park. Not everybody had the same opinion, though. When asking about favorite parks a woman with Lebanese background and a man with Iraqi background answered they liked this park and another park nearby while two men with Swedish background explained there are better parks to go to, including some parks in other cities and countries. Also according to a Swedish study made by Jergerby (1996), mentioned above, the experience value of a park and especially experience of beautiful surroundings is an important factor for choosing a specific park for visits. But visitors to "Gubbaparken" with different backgrounds may appreciate different experience values. As a social place, factors as close location and easy access might be more important than exclusive visual experiences.

### Mixing Ethnic and Other Cultural Values

Besides socioeconomic factors, according to Gomez's (2002) "*Ethnicity and public recreation model*" even *acculturation* has an effect on a person's leisure habits. Amongst the visitors of "Gubbaparken", there were fewer differences between the answers given by youth than between the answers given by visitors at other ages. The younger people are interested in same kind of activities regardless of background, partly because of their age but probably also because of their participation in the local culture already from an early age, mixing with friends with many different backgrounds. Yet, youth from an extended family group that I met in the park also participated in the gathering of big families around a barbecue one Saturday evening, alternately socializing with the family in the park and the peer groups around the residential area thus mixing different cultural habits from youth and family cultures. Young people still at school are also dependent on their parents' socioeconomic standard, which plays an important role for their free time. In comparison, a woman from an extended family explained that she also liked to go to a forest sometimes because she was old and needed peaceful surroundings. Thus, it is not only the cultural or geographical background of a person that determines the preferred characters of an environment such as, for example, wild and peaceful, defined by Grahn (1991). Also other factors, like age, family situation etc can influence the preferences.

### The Park as an Urban Meeting Point and as an Escape

When interviewing people who had recently fled to the UK, Risbeth and Finney (2006) found that some factors enticing their interviewees to visit parks more often were among other things an easy access but above all different kinds of happenings allowing one to mix with the crowd and to meet some other people. I didn't meet any "new" refugees during my visits to "Gubbaparken" but those two women who thought there should be better possibilities for adults to socialize with new people had Hungarian and Syrian backgrounds. In part, this could be an expression for knowing how it is to move to a new country, not knowing anybody. It could also be a reaction to the fact that especially as a foreigner, it is rather hard to get into the Swedish society and to get to know people but also that alienation and loneliness is a growing problem among the population as a whole. But this kind of statements can also indicate the level of urbanization of the culture of the cities where the women were brought up. Daun and

Sjögren explain that the longer the historical and physical urbanization process of a city or a country has come, the more urbanized is also the “mental” culture of the inhabitants of the area and the keener they are to see and to be seen by other people. These two women wished that there were possibilities for people to meet each other and to be seen. Even the old couple who I guess comes from a Middle-Eastern country and an “older” culture came to the park to watch other people whereas a Swedish interviewee explained it would be good to have some places where one could be out of sight of everybody else. Yet, in order to avoid polarizing the subject and the differences, also some other aspects should be mentioned: One visitor with Iraqi background explained it was nice that it was calm in the park even if they were in big groups whereas some visitors with Swedish background told that the park would be less boring if there were some happenings such as dance orchestras. Nevertheless, remembering the fact that a considerable part of the Swedish population still are urbanites of the first generation, also outdoor dance evenings are a remaining way of amusement used to be arranged in the traditional farmer societies. This habit maintains ties to countryside lifestyle.

This aspect is interesting but it cannot only be limited to cultural differences between countries or continents. Also differences between rural and urban populations inside a country do matter. Nordström (2005) has studied rural and urban residents’ and especially children’s modes of becoming attached to a place. She also found which factors are important for rural and urban residents’ forming of their experiences of environments. According to Nordström (2005), children from countryside seem to think in much more concrete terms than children from cities. Also people in general with rural background pay more attention to concrete objects such as natural elements in their environments and use these as a criterion for liking a place while people with urban background appreciate a place higher, the better possibilities there are to make social contacts. Nordström explains that also the life style and thinking patterns of the parents of a person is influencing this view, which might explain why many of the interviewees with Swedish background in this study, not having many urban generations preceding them, point out vegetation being of special importance. Another point of view is whether concrete, abstract or social preferences of a person adapt only to a certain type of environment, for example parks, or to just any kind of environment. Also Jergeby (1996), mentioned above, who studied Swedish people’s use of public spaces explained that in the city (Stockholm) people enjoy going to a city center in order to be among other people and that it actually is important for them to be seen by others. According to my study, the interviewees who come from countries where an urban culture is prevailing see this

phenomenon also as a part of a park visit. But do people representing a less urban culture see a park as similar to a city centre and expect the same kind of behavior at both places? Or is a park, even when in a city for a person with a less urban background rather a substitute for countryside or natural environment where another kind of behavior is preferred?

#### Using the Stories of the Visitors as a Basis for Further Development

According to Wood & Landry (2008), people's right to difference and to public space is crucial for supporting a multi-cultural city development which means among other things that different cultural values are acknowledged equally. This is of course an ever-provocative statement. Although the use of parks is not usually considered to be an especially delicate subject, the result of this study shows, however, that even park use determined by certain values can be experienced disrespectful by some other people representing some other values and giving some other meanings to the park. An example of this is the playground in "Gubbaparken" that the visitors want to use as both resting place and a place for a barbecue party. For this reason some people can also find the park an inappropriate place to go to. Yet, the study made in "Gubbaparken" also shows that sufficient facilities for the different uses could, in this case, diminish some possible sources for irritation.

Therefore, to be successful in planning for diverse use, an evaluation of the planned projects through cultural filters is suggested by Wood & Landry (2008). This is an analysis that begins by finding out which groups will be concerned by the result of the project and which possible perspectives they could have. In this case these are the different groups of visitors using "Gubbaparken", dealt with above. These groups' understanding of the values, visual signals and the impact to different relations caused by the planning projects made in the park can be analyzed by considering if the people represent for example collectivistic or individualistic values, urban or less urban values, instrumental or less instrumental values, children, families, youth and how they see on safety and vegetation. For example, by putting up facilities for only small groups might represent unfamiliar values for some but would not cause any reaction among other groups. Alternatively, by putting up too much facilities or in a wrong way could be experienced being against the values of silence or peacefulness. Furthermore, that only certain kinds of values are taken into consideration but not others can also have a negative influence on the relations between the users of the park or between the users and the planners.



Ståhle's (2005) method of sociotop mapping can also be used to estimate the cultural values of a place but it has a slightly different focus, namely on the particular place and the particular culture of that place rather than the varying cultural habits of the different groups. This is also a useful perspective since it indicates that a study made in one location is not necessarily adaptable to another place, even if the population would seem to be similar to the other place. Of course, general understanding of cultural complexity as that found in "Gubbaparken" and other parks described in the studies reviewed earlier serves as a basis for developing projects but in addition to this attention should also be paid to the specific place. This perspective stresses the importance of a dialogue with the residents (and between) specific to every residential area in order to understand how the place is experienced by the residents and what are its shortages. The descriptions that show that there is no sense of togetherness, that it is scary for small children, too open for some people and uninspiring for some and that it is a special park for families are facts that one doesn't find out if one is just concentrating on the concrete objects found in the park. Additionally, also the diversity of use values given to "Gubbaparken", such as play, relaxing, socializing, being on a scene, spotting people, following seasons and doing sports and other exercise is better understood after a dialogue with the users of the park.

## 9. Conclusions

In summary, the answers to the study questions are the following:

1. The park users I interviewed were in different social constellations, with different ethnic backgrounds and had different intentions with the visits. The following user categories were found: Single families many of which had Swedish background, extended families who had Albanian, Iraqi, Lebanese and Syrian backgrounds, dog owners, who also had Swedish backgrounds, passers-by who had Austrian, Lebanese, Swedish and Turkish backgrounds, single adult visitors who had Polish, Swedish backgrounds an old couple, who, according to my guess, had a Middle Eastern background, and other groups who had Hungarian and Syrian backgrounds. Still one group consisted of the exercisers who, also according to my guess, had western background.
2. The single families went to the park to have a rest, to barbecue, to sunbathe, to enjoy the surroundings and to play on the playground. The extended families went to the park to socialize, eat and to play with children. The dog owners' aim was to give their dogs some exercise and entertainment, passers-by were walking through, single adult visitors were relaxing, eating, the old couple was watching other people, the exercisers were exercising. Others came to the park to sit and play on the playground
3. Among almost all groups there was someone who wanted to have a place with barbecue facilities and someone who disliked the mopeds and wished to forbid them in the park. An interviewee from a single family wished there were places one could be out of sight of others. Some interviewees from extended families wished there were facilities for bigger and varying groups and for longer visits. Dog owners mentioned the lack of a place where dogs could run free. Passers-by with different backgrounds mentioned different things: Younger ones wished better sports possibilities, passers-by with Syrian, Hungarian and Austrian backgrounds mentioned the possibility to meet and see other people and passers –by with Swedish background often mentioned the quality of the vegetation and service and one of them even suggested open air dance evenings that had been popular in the park before.
4. The most prominent differences regarding the use of the park by the persons who participated in this study were the varying social importance of the visits and the varying time spent for one visit. For these reasons they also had varying needs for park facilities.

The reasons for these differences can be identified as, among other things, different basic cultural values of the visitors. Because of these values the visitors give different concrete and above all different symbolic meanings to the place and to the visits to the place. The importance given to meanings such as social wellbeing, being a part of a social group, physical health and time for a person's individual interests depends on how important the collectivistic or individualistic characters of the cultural values are for the visitors. Also the level of urban character of the cultural values of a person, both mentally and regarding to the surroundings, can have an influence on what people wish to experience in the park. Furthermore, age, the level of acculturation and representation of several disadvantaged social groups are factors that determine a person's life style and expectations of the surroundings.

5. When planning for different users, the cultural values prevailing among the visitors should be mapped and these values should be paid equal attention to. When planning a project it should be analyzed how the result of the project is experienced from the different perspectives of people who would be affected by the result. The ideal goal for multicultural planning would of course be to avoid violating, or at least ignoring the different values. Still one aspect is that of every place being unique and that every place has its own, place –specific culture. That is why a multicultural dialogue with the residents of every place should be a crucial starting point for a development project of a society.

## **10. Discussion**

This study deals with, to a large extent, the variation of activities people with different cultural backgrounds are interested in carrying out when visiting a park. Consequently, also park design suitable for certain activities is being stressed. This is of course a result of the study questions, formulated to be easy to be answered by people not prepared for being interviewed. Besides activities, also the question whether there are some differences in the preferences for the quality of the vegetation or the appearance of the park or other sensorial experiences is equally important. This aspect of the subject is being illuminated to a little extent by the answers to the questions about the characteristics of the favorite parks of the interviewees and the characteristics they would like to add to the park where the interviews were made. But only rough differences were found –that visitors with Swedish background more often mentioned the quality of the vegetation than for example visitors with background in Middle-Eastern countries. A study concentrating on the quality of the vegetation in parks, rather than activities, would probably give some more nuanced information about whether there are some cultural differences concerning the appearance and sensorial experience of park environments.

Another comment to the delimitations of this study is concerning the groups of people interviewed. The mode of conducting the interviews – talking with people visiting the park – only allows investigating the interests of those people who already use the park (and who happened to visit it the days during which I was carrying out the interviews). Thus, this study is not addressing those people who do not visit the park. For this reason it is not possible to get any information about whether there are certain groups who do not use the park and about the possible reasons for this, or whether something could be done to make the park more attractive for several people. In order to gain this information, another kind of studies could be made, for example interviewing residents visiting other locations of the neighborhood or by an interview questionnaire sent to people's homes by mail.

Then, there is the subject of the values determining how the park is used and evaluated, which is followed by the question about how these values should be taken into consideration. When asking what facilities or qualities people wish to have in parks, the result consists of a long list of suggestions. Especially when the target of the study is a rather small park, it soon becomes clear that it would not be possible to realize all ideas without risking the image of a park changing to something else than that of a park. Or, would it? This question is central to this

study as it deals with the possible definitions of what an urban park or an urban green space is and which facilities do and do not belong there. As the result of this study shows, this is a subject that can be discussed back and forth. Therefore, a dialogue with the users of a park might not always give unambiguous directions for the development of a place as a lot of people are saying different things, sometimes opposing each other. The results of this study might contribute to understanding of park use on a multicultural basis, but some other definition problems become current, such as what is the distinction between an urban park and an amusement park or between a park and a fitness center. These results show how the increased urban complexity should be taken into attention in the planning of urban parks as well as other areas. To make this possible, a deeper understanding of this complexity is necessary as well as the understanding that it is the complexity and many parallel norms together that make a postmodern society rather than there being a main direction and exceptions. Thus planning projects should be based on equal investigation and appreciation of these norms rather than making random presumptions.

This is an important aspect since some of the interviewees explain that more or better facilities, for example for sports, would entice more people to the park. More people, then, increases the feeling of safety since the more varying people are attracted to the park, the safer and more open it is experienced by several people. But it can also be questioned whether it really is the facilities for activities that are the most important factors making a park attractive and above all, making it a place for everybody. The provision of possibilities for different activities can also result in that there is always somebody that is being ignored. One part of the attraction of parks is in fact that it is a changeable space, not fixed for any particular activity allowing the visitors to occupy an empty space and themselves make it a place of their own, suitable for one's own uses, even if it is just temporarily. After the previous visitors' removing their traces the same space is free for anyone else to be used for some other purposes. In a way, this is the very character of a space that makes it a place for all and a neutral place in the modern cities becoming more and more privatized and categorized. Still, remembering the fact that depending on whether one's social status is considered advantaged or disadvantaged, everyone doesn't have the same conditions for adjusting a place after one's needs/requirements. Consequently, one of the challenges for the developers of park life would be how to preserve a park as an adjustable place and at the same time keep updated on the desirable use values of it and, on the basis of this information, enable the visitors temporarily to make the park a place of their own.



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## Appendix: Interview Guide

1. How do you like this park?

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2. What are you doing here today?

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3. What do you usually do here? Please name some examples?

example\_\_\_\_\_

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example\_\_\_\_\_

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example\_\_\_\_\_

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4. Is there something you like especially much about this park?

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5. Is there something you dislike about this park?

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6. Would you like to change the park somehow? (appearance, activity facilities)

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7. Do you have a favorite park somewhere?( Sweden or abroad?) What is it like there?

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8. What can you do there?

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Questions about your background:

10. Were you born or brought up in another country than Sweden? Which one? What about your parents?

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12. Which year were you born?

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13. What is your occupation?

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