The extinction of nature experiences in children’s connectedness with urban nature

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Abstract

Cities are man-made habitats which design often impedes human beings to interact with natural elements. The extinction of nature experience occurring in the urban landscape of Stockholm is empirically assessed in this study. The spatial conformation of the city is then set in correlation with the impact that the experience of urban nature has on children’s emotional and cognitive affiliation with nature. We hypothesize that five years old children who have had four years of access to urban nature experiences during their outdoor preschool activities develop a higher capacity to connect with nature than those who have had their access nearly extinguished by spatial constraints. Two strictly selected groups of children (n = 27) were interviewed in-depth on their degree of affiliation with nature and their social environment studied and controlled through interviews with parents and teachers. The two groups resulted significantly different. Children who regularly experienced urban nature develop significantly higher emotional and cognitive affiliation with nature than children who did not. This speech will discuss our results in relation to sustainability challenges of the near future. A harmonious management and development within the biosphere relies not only on how much humans comprehend the limits of natural resources, but also on how capable they are to emotionally appreciate non-human life. Following from the results of this study, urban design is likely to leave a significant mark on how nature is perceived and assimilated in one’s life. How humankind chooses to design the natural qualities of its most common habitat has the potential to favor a mindshift towards sustainability with profound and extensive consequences. The abstract is intended to be part of the session ”Urban environmental stewardship”. The abstract and the related work could also be presented in other relevant sessions.

Keywords: connection with nature, reconnection with the biosphere, urban nature, children, extinction of experience, urban design, mindshift

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