Community Well Being - DRAFT -

2024

Overview

Urban green space provides vital places for facilitating impromptu and organized social gatherings—spaces for playing, sharing, bumping into, and networking with others. This in turn is associated with reduced loneliness, improved social cohesion, a greater sense of trust in a neighborhood, a greater sense of place belonging to society, and prosocial behavior (caring for others). Strong social connections have been linked to improved health and well-being, including lower rates of depression and anxiety and higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction.

Interesting Information

Connection and Civic Engagement
- A number of studies have shown that in the presence of nature we are more likely to be generous, cooperative, and to exhibit positive attitudes and behavior. Communities where residents are immersed in trees and nature may be kinder and more compassionate (Piff et al., 2015).
- Participants in tree planting campaigns often engage in broader civic activities, reinforcing democratic values and community bonds (Fisher et al., 2015).
- Tree planting in Portland, Oregon was found to be associated with increased voter turnout in primary and general elections (Donovan, 2022).
- Cleaning up vacant lots, restoring parks, and creating community gardens are often markers of community resilience.

Family
- Green spaces can promote multi-generational social interaction. They can provide a place for older adults to engage in physical activity and socialize with others, which can help to combat feelings of loneliness and depression (Urban Forestry Toolkit, n.d.).
- Green space is associated with greater longevity in older people, and this is likely connected to the increased social interaction that is often associated with outdoor time for elderly individuals. They also provide places for parents and children to engage in outdoor activities and spend time together (Urban Forestry Toolkit, n.d.).

Place-making and Time
- Trees, green spaces, and nature enhance the quality of living space and the distinctness of the places we live in. Many cities use this in their official mottos – Raliegh, North Carolin is the City of Oaks and Atlanta is the City in a Forest of Trees (Beatley, 2023).
- Older trees connect generations and history. You can be next to larger older trees and know that generations of others have also been there (Beatley, 2023).

- Turning vacant spaces (lots etc.) into vibrant places that reflect a community's aesthetic and cultural values and strengths advance community centered revitalization. These efforts create a sense of community, pride, and ownership among residents. ("How Creative Placemaking Transforms Vacant Properties into Vibrant Community Spaces.," 2023).

Safety and Peace
- Neighborhoods with homes fronted with street trees experience lower crime rates, according to a study conducted in Portland, Oregon. The same statistic holds true for homes with large yard trees. These results hold for total-crime rates and specific property crimes such as vandalism and burglary (Donovan, 2010).
- A recent study in Philadelphia (Dengler, 2018) showed that transforming vacant lots in neighborhoods below the poverty line into parklike spaces or sprucing up them up with trash removal and mowing reduced overall crime by more than 13% and gun violence by 30%. Burglary and nuisance reports also fell in these neighborhoods by nearly 22% and 30%. Residents also used the spaces to relax and socialize 76% more than inhabitants near unmodified lots.

Community Gardens
- Community gardens allow for the creation of social ties and build a greater feeling of community. These connections help reduce crime, empower residents, and allow residents to feel safe in their neighborhoods (Munro, 2013).
- A community gardening program can reduce food insecurity, improve dietary intake, and strengthen family relationships. (Carney et al., 2011).

References

Beatley, T. (2023). *Canopy Cities: Protecting and expanding urban forests*. Routledge.

Carney, P. A., Hamada, J. L., Rdesinski, R. E., Sprager, L., Nichols, K. R., Liu, B. Y., Pelayo, J., Sanchez, M., & Shannon, J. (2011). Impact of a community gardening project on vegetable intake, food security and family relationships: a community-based participatory research study. *Journal of Community Health*, *37*(4), 874–881. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-011-9522-z

How creative placemaking transforms vacant properties into vibrant community spaces. (2023, May 18). *Community Progress*. https://communityprogress.org/blog/revitalizing-neighborhoods-how-creative-placemaking-transforms-vacant-properties-into-vibrant-com

Dengler, R. (2018) Feb. 26. This City fights crime with gardening: Picking up trash and mowing vacant lots makes Philadelphia, Pennsylvania neighborhoods safer. *Science.*

Donovan, G. H., & Prestemon, J. P. (2010). The effect of trees on crime in Portland, Oregon. *Environment and Behavior*, *44*(1), 3–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916510383238

Donovan, G. H., Prestemon, J. P., Gatziolis, D., Michael, Y. L., Kaminski, A. R., & Dadvand, P. (2022). The association between tree planting and mortality: A natural experiment and cost-benefit analysis. *Environment International*, *170*, 107609. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2022.107609

Fisher, D. R., Svendsen, E. S., & Connolly, J. J. (2015). *Urban environmental stewardship and civic engagement*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315857589

Munro, K. (2013, July 11). *The Many Benefits of Community Gardens*. Greenleaf Communities. https://www.greenleafcommunities.org/

Piff, P. K., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D. M., & Keltner, D. (2015). Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *108*(6), 883–899. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000018

Urban Forestry Toolkit. (n.d.). Vibrant Cities Lab: Resources for Urban Forestry, Trees, and Green Infrastructure. https://www.vibrantcitieslab.com/toolkit/