



Making friends in Zurich's urban forests and parks: The role of public green space for social inclusion of youths from different cultures

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ABSTRACT

Integrating the distinct cultures of foreign resident youths is a challenge for Swiss political and educational institutions. An empirical survey of pupils ($n=437$) and teachers in selected schools of the city and metropolitan area of Zurich investigated leisure activities in urban forests and public green spaces for their potential to facilitate social interaction between Swiss and immigrant young people. Patterns of socialising and making friends in these outdoor locations were found to differ depending on age, school level, gender and the percentage of immigrants in each residential area. Public urban green spaces were found to play an important role for children and youths in making contacts and friends across cultures, which is considered a prerequisite for social inclusion.

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1. Introduction

According to the latest census data, Switzerland has approximately 7.5 million inhabitants, of whom more than 20% are foreigners and 11% foreigners who have acquired Swiss citizenship (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2006). Since 1995, the Swiss population has grown only as a result of naturalization of foreign immigrants, and one-quarter of the non-naturalized foreign residents were born in Switzerland. Integrating foreign resident youths with their distinct cultures is a challenge for Swiss political and educational institutions. A lack of interest in the host culture as well as little or no socio-cultural identification with the surrounding environment are critical factors preventing social inclusion (Uzzell et al., 2002). Social inclusion means friendships, social contacts, joint activities, social networks, social support, cultural and national identification, and political participation (Friedrichs and Jagodzinski, 1999).

Hanhörster and Mölder (2000) found that intercultural communication occurred mainly in residential areas and that conflicts could be avoided by integrating different cultural groups through participation in joint activities and decision-making. People from heterogeneous social categories often make use of the same open free space (Seeland, 1999). Socialising in these spaces is important in promoting

the mixing of all kinds of urban citizens: it reduces conflicts, avoidance behaviour, ignorance and segregation (Nesdale and Todd, 2000; Mingione and Oberti, 2003; Johnston and Shimada, 2004). The overall goal of inclusion is that no one's culture be imposed on anyone (Centlivres, 1990; Ehret, 2002), since immigrants may resist if they feel pressured to integrate themselves.

2. Green spaces and social inclusion

Zurich, the economic centre of the German-speaking part of Switzerland, has recognized the importance of its public green spaces for an improved quality of life (Field, 2000). Its 80 parks and other green spaces together with urban forests make up 43% of the municipal area and are attractive to Zurich's young people. Furthermore, Zurich's forest schools have a long-standing record of outdoor environmental education, with a splendid reputation for the pedagogic approach. The municipal green space authority of the City of Zurich has conducted projects such as 'nature around school' to raise environmental awareness among young pupils (Brennecke, 2001). Classes take field trips to public urban green spaces and visit special schools located in the nearby forests so that children can explore nature outdoors and interact in a context that is different from the daily school routine.

Many of Zurich's immigrant youths come from warmer countries than Switzerland, and their attitudes towards open spaces are influenced by their families' background (Zeijl et al., 2000). In southern European countries or non-European developing countries, young people spend most of their leisure time outdoors.

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To understand and come to respect unfamiliar gender roles and develop friendships that cross the boundaries of ethnicity, nationality and creed, youths must meet their peers in surroundings that are accessible to members of all communities, without formal, financial or symbolic restrictions. A city's public green spaces – urban forests and parks in particular – are places where immigrant youths can meet their Swiss counterparts and build cross-cultural social capital (Warde et al., 2005); there are typically few other spaces in a city that allow the same easy access for all. Because there is more potential for social inclusion to occur in public green spaces than anywhere else (Van Herzele and Wiedemann, 2003; Parr, 2007), these places are widely recognized as conducive to multicultural encounters (Milchert, 1998; Glover and Parry, 2005). In recent years, attempts at integrating foreigners through urban green spaces have been made in Germany (Milchert, 1998; Müller, 2002) and the United States (Reuter and Reuter, 1990), using 'international gardens' where public participation and self-help groups play an important role (Ferris et al., 2001; Glover and Parry, 2005; Yuen et al., 2005).

To design public urban green space in an era of migration and globalisation, it is necessary to take into account multicultural patterns – those that cannot be ascribed to either the host or the foreign cultures (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1982). Data on the use and frequentation of public green spaces by distinct social groups can inform the appropriate design and planning of urban and suburban green spaces (Rossé, 1991; Emmenegger, 1998; Brühwiler and Gwerder, 2000; Germann-Chiari and Seeland, 2004).

3. Aim of the study

A survey of Swiss and foreign pupils and their teachers was conducted to analyze the role that leisure activities in urban green spaces play in social inclusion. Personal friendships are considered a prerequisite of social inclusion and peaceful intercultural coexistence (Haug, 2003), and therefore the pupils were asked how they spent their leisure time, with whom they socialised and where they found playmates and friends. Their outdoor activities, the role of urban green space in their social life, and these places' potential for fostering social inclusion were the main foci of the survey. Relationships between age and gender and the frequency of visits and activities undertaken in urban green spaces were also investigated, as was the relationship between the length of residency in Switzerland and use of urban green spaces (cf. Wimmer, 2004). The survey was conducted in three quarters of Zurich and five adjacent communities – places that vary greatly in their cultural composition and the social status of their inhabitants.

4. Method

4.1. Procedures, settings and participants

The researchers visited various green spaces to observe the behaviour of youngsters and get a general impression of what occurred in these public areas. However, the observers did not use monitoring sheets to record the behaviours.

Classroom group discussions and semi-structured interviews were conducted to develop and pretest the questionnaire that was the main instrument for data acquisition. The questionnaire was tested with a sixth-grade primary school class of Zurich-Milchbuck. This version of the questionnaire was extensively discussed with the teacher and the pupils, who helped identify additional questions and fine-tune the questionnaire. The questionnaire data from this pretest were not used in the quantitative analyses presented in this paper; the results below come entirely from the main survey, which is described in the following paragraphs.

For the main questionnaire-based survey, schools in three quarters in Zurich and two communities located on the outskirts of the city

(Fig. 1) were selected for their ratios of foreign pupils. The quarter of Zurich-Aussersihl has a high proportion of immigrants, Z.-Wiedikon has a medium proportion and Z.-Hottingen a low one. Rüslikon is a wealthy community with a low proportion of immigrants, and Schlieren is predominantly inhabited by working-class people with a substantial proportion of immigrants belonging to the lower strata of society. The fourth and sixth grades of primary school and the second grade of secondary school were selected to provide a sample of pupils ranging in age from 10 to 17 (it was assumed that the questionnaires were too difficult to be understood by pupils younger than 10). The particular classes in those grades were selected as follows: in the city quarters, if there were more than two classes of the same grade in one school, the alphabetical order of the class teachers' names determined the selection; and in the outlying communities, the classes were selected by the local school authorities, who chose the biggest classes.

Two classes of each grade were selected for each surveyed quarter in the city of Zurich and one of each grade in the surveyed adjacent communities. Thus, altogether 24 classes and their teachers participated. The percentage of immigrant pupils in Zurich's primary schools in 2003 was 38.9%, and the average proportion of immigrants in all surveyed classes was 48.5%. As expected, the highest number of immigrant pupils was reported for Zurich-Aussersihl, with 81% (Table 1).

The survey asked 18 questions about the youngsters' use of leisure time and urban green space. Their peer groups, ways of making friends, and sociodemographic profiles were assessed. The survey of the pupils was complemented by a survey of their teachers to widen the perspective of the research. The teacher's separate questionnaire focused on the cultural composition of the class, preferred leisure activities of the pupils, and the role of urban green space in the curriculum. Teachers were also asked to judge, from their perspective, the potential that urban green spaces have for encouraging social inclusion.

The survey was well received by the 24 teachers and their classes. All the teachers filled out their questionnaires, and 437 (93%) of the 470 pupils returned completed questionnaires. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS Version 14.0. Statistical methods that were used include Pearson's product moment correlation, Spearman rank correlation, Mann-Whitney *U* test, Chi-square, and Kruskal-Wallis test.

An almost equal proportion of girls (49.7%) and boys (50.3%) returned completed questionnaires. The average age of the participants was 13.1 years (SD=1.9 years), and the median ages were 11 for the fourth grade of primary school ($n=138$), 13 for the sixth grade of primary school ($n=144$), and 15 for the second grade of secondary school ($n=155$). The number of returned questionnaires from each quarter and community as well as the respective figures for the selected schools in the surveyed quarters and communities is shown in Table 1. In each of the 24 classes, an open classroom discussion on the survey and related topics was conducted after the pupils had completed their questionnaires.

5. Results

5.1. Duration of residency in Switzerland

The questionnaire did not ask for the nationalities or specific foreign backgrounds of the pupils because this might have drawn their attention to the nationality-centred aspects of their identities. Instead, pupils were asked whether they had always lived in Switzerland or had moved to Switzerland either recently or some years ago. Altogether, 33% of the pupils reported that they had moved to Switzerland either recently (5%) or some years ago (28%); the remaining pupils stated that they had been born in Switzerland. According to the teachers' assessment, 49% of the pupils had

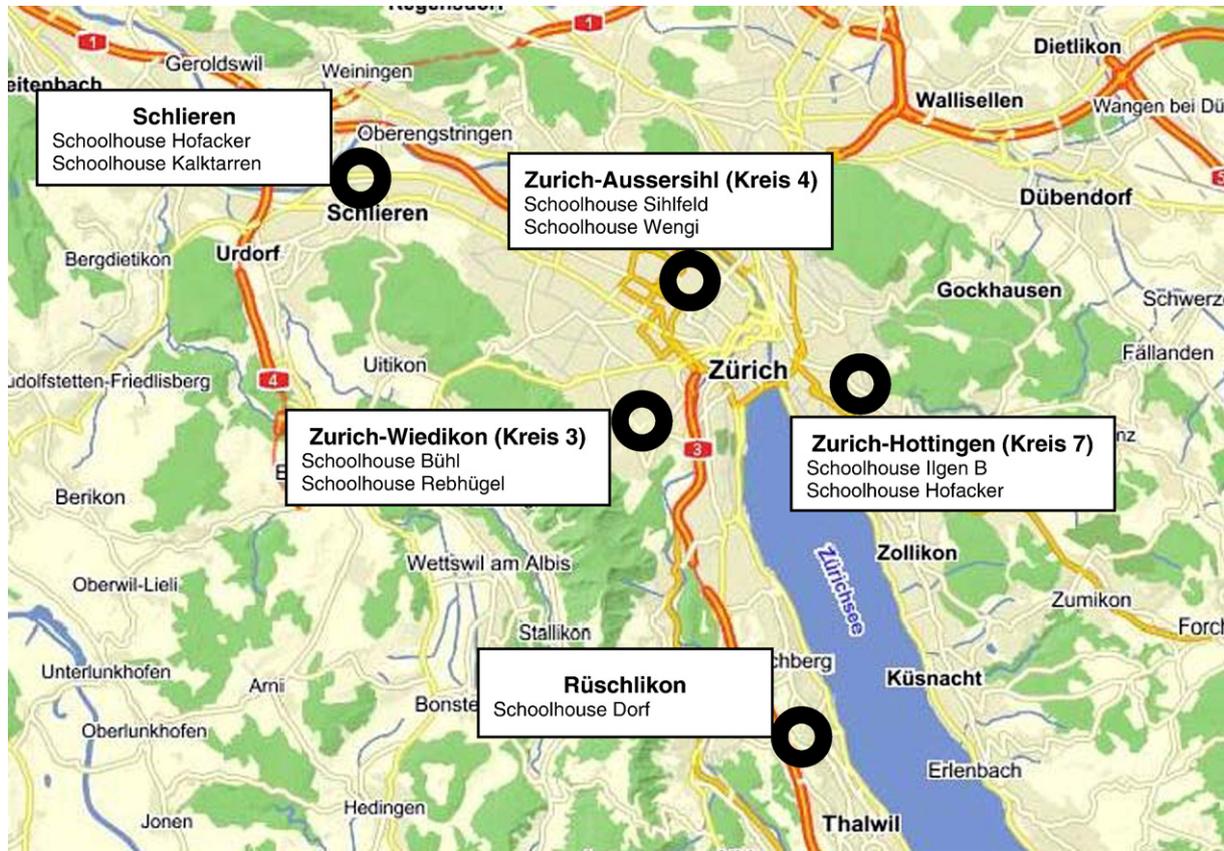


Fig. 1. Zurich.

immigrant backgrounds. As can be seen in Table 1, the percentage of immigrant pupils in the city quarters and communities as reported by the school administrations was similar to the figures reported by the teachers. The percentage of pupils reporting that they had moved to Switzerland correlated highly with the percentage of immigrant pupils per study area as reported by the school administration (Pearson's $r = .90$), and the teachers ($r = .94$). This is consistent with the assumption that those pupils who indicated that they had moved to Switzerland have predominantly non-Swiss national backgrounds.

5.2. Social inclusion and exclusion

Most of the pupils (90%) reported that they had many friends, whereas 9% had only a few friends, and 1% ($n=4$) stated that they had no friends at all. However, only 71% of pupils who had just recently moved to Switzerland reported many friends, compared with 86% of those who had lived in Switzerland for a considerable time and 92% of pupils who had always lived in Switzerland. The corresponding rank correlation was statistically significant (Spearman's $r = .12$, $p = .014$),

indicating that pupils with an immigrant background have fewer friends and consequently are less included in the social networks of their peers.

Moreover, 45% of pupils who had recently moved to Switzerland and 34% of those who immigrated some years ago stated that their friends were predominantly or exclusively foreigners. In contrast, this was reported by only 16% of pupils who had always lived in Switzerland. This difference is statistically significant (Chi-square test, $p = .001$), indicating that pupils with an immigrant background are less socially integrated with friends who have the nationality of the host country. Conversely, circles of friends with mixed (i.e., Swiss and foreign) nationalities were more frequently reported by the pupils who had always lived in Switzerland (64%) than by those who had immigrated to Switzerland some years ago (61%) or recently (50%).

5.3. Making friends in leisure time

Participants were asked where, besides school, they could easily make new friends. Overall, 86.5% of participants ($n = 378$) gave at least

Table 1
Returned questionnaires, immigrant pupils, and gender distribution in the five locations

Location	Number of classes	Number of questionnaires (pupils)	Overall percentage of immigrant pupils in the location (%)	Pupils reporting they moved to Switzerland (%)	Immigrant pupils in selected classes of survey as reported by teachers			
					Percentage (%)	Number	Female (%)	Male (%)
Z.-Aussersihl	6	100 (106)	83	45.0	81.1	86	78.9	83.3
Z.-Wiedikon	6	102 (108)	52	44.1	56.5	61	44.1	71.4
Z.-Hottingen	6	109 (126)	16	21.1	26.2	33	29.5	23.1
Rüschlikon	3	71 (72)	22	16.9	16.7	12	25.7	8.1
Schlieren	3	55 (58)	58	36.4	62.1	36	59.3	64.5
Total	24	437 (470)	–	33.2	48.5	228	–	–

one answer. The participants mentioned 'outdoor environments', such as parks, playgrounds, and lakeside locations, most frequently (43%, $n=186$ persons), followed by cultural events (cinema, concerts), parties and discos (16%), and sports clubs, sports events and training (14%). Boys and girls mentioned outdoor locations approximately equally. There was also no significant difference between the pupils who had always lived in Switzerland and those who had moved to Switzerland either a short time or a long time ago (Fig. 2). Outdoor environments were, however, mentioned somewhat more frequently by those who had moved to Switzerland (48%) than by those who had always lived in Switzerland (40%; Chi-square test, $p=.13$). Outdoor locations were scored highest by the youngest pupils and lower by the higher classes: 55% for fourth-grade primary school, 40% for sixth-grade primary school, and 34% for second-grade secondary school ($p<.001$).

In day-to-day life, children and youths tend to orient themselves around their parents' homes, including their neighbourhoods, and their schools. Schoolyards and public green spaces are environments they share with others and where they experience the outdoors (Joye et al., 1999). In several responses, Swiss and migrant youths described how and where (besides school) they met others of the same age group and made acquaintances and friends. Table 2 shows some typical answers that pupils gave to the open-ended question, 'Where is it most easy for you to make new friends (besides school)?' These selected answers illustrate that outdoor environments and corresponding activities are the main avenue for children and youths to make new friends in their leisure time. Parents or existing friendships were reported to be helpful for making new friends, and organized activities like taking courses or joining the Scouts and sports clubs or youth associations also have a facilitating role.

5.4. Frequency of forest visits

An analysis of the frequency of forest visits of pupils from the different quarters and communities revealed that those from Z.-Hottingen visited

forests more often than those living in Z.-Wiedikon or Z.-Aussersihl, where the proportion of foreigners is higher (Fig. 3). Similarly, pupils from the affluent community of Rüschiikon, which has a low proportion of foreigners, visited the forest more frequently than their peers from the predominantly working-class community of Schlieren. Thus, the higher the social status of a residential area and the fewer foreign residents, the higher the likelihood that the pupils had visited forests.

Most of the 81 respondents who reported that they had never visited forests lived in places whose inhabitants predominantly belonged to the lower social strata of society (Z.-Wiedikon, Z.-Aussersihl, and Schlieren). Only 6% of respondents from Z.-Hottingen and none of the respondents from Rüschiikon gave this answer.

As is true for other Western European cities, in Zurich, many green spaces like forests or parks are located in and around high-status town quarters and are therefore easily accessible to wealthier inhabitants. The differences among the five locations regarding the frequency of youngsters' forest visits were significant (Kruskal–Wallis test, $p<.001$). Furthermore (but not independent from this), pupils who had always resided in Switzerland reported that they visited the forest more frequently than pupils who had immigrated to Switzerland (Mann–Whitney U test, $p=.001$).

5.5. Company in the forest

The pupils from Z.-Hottingen and the affluent community of Rüschiikon socialised much more with their friends and peers in the forest than the pupils from the less wealthy locations, who were generally accompanied by their parents or other older relatives (Fig. 4). For example, 70% of the Z.-Aussersihl youngsters frequenting forests reported that they usually visited the forest with parents or other adults, compared with only 34% of the pupils from Rüschiikon. Conversely, only 30% of Z.-Aussersihl pupils visited the forest with their friends or alone, compared with 66% of the pupils from Rüschiikon. Since children are limited in their ability to travel without adults, the physical distance between Aussersihl and the forest is

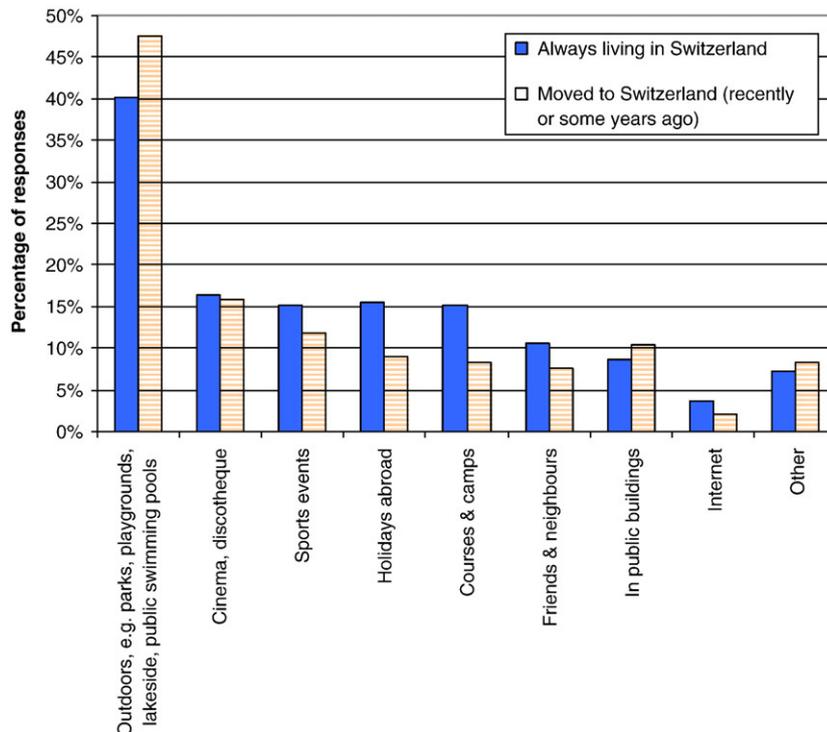


Fig. 2. 'Where, besides school, can you easily make new friends?' Answers of pupils who had always lived in Switzerland or had moved to Switzerland either recently or some years ago ($N=437$, $n_{\text{always in Switzerland}}=292$, $n_{\text{moved to Switzerland}}=145$; several entries were possible).

Table 2

Examples of pupils' responses to question, 'Where is it most easy for you to make new friends (besides school)?'

Answers	Location, class level, age, gender	Length of residence in Switzerland
I find them in parks, or elsewhere, if my mother knows their mothers, then I am their friend.	Z.-Wiedikon 3, 4th primary school, 12 years, female	Just recently moved to Switzerland
In parks and when I am playing football.	Z.-Aussersihl, 6th primary school, 13 years, male	Just recently moved to Switzerland
Abroad. [Pupil reported having no friends]	Z.-Hottingen, 4th primary school, 12 years, male	Moved to Switzerland some years ago
In parks, at playgrounds and in playing fields.	Z.-Aussersihl, 6th primary school, 13 years, female	Moved to Switzerland some years ago
Most easily I find friends in the park.	Z.-Aussersihl, 6th primary school, 13 years, male	Moved to Switzerland some years ago
Mostly in parks and playing fields or in sports courses organized by the city.	Z.-Hottingen, 6th primary school, 13 years, female	Moved to Switzerland some years ago
In parks or else you get to know new friends via old friends.	Schlieren, 2nd secondary school, 15 years, male	Moved to Switzerland some years ago
At the tennis court and on the playground.	Z.-Hottingen, 4th primary school, 10 years, female	Always resided in Switzerland
When other children play football or other games, I watch them playing and sometimes they ask me, 'Do you also want to play?'	Rüschlikon, 4th primary school, 11 years, male	Always resided in Switzerland
In my town quarter, at celebrations or on playgrounds.	Z.-Hottingen, 6th primary school, 13 years, female	Always resided in Switzerland
In parks and when playing football.	Z.-Aussersihl, 6th primary school, 13 years, male	Always resided in Switzerland
On the playground, at parties or when taking courses.	Rüschlikon, 6th primary school, 13 years, female	Always resided in Switzerland
Certainly not indoors, rather in parks, and in public swimming pools, etc.	Z.-Wiedikon, 2nd secondary school, 14 years, female	Always resided in Switzerland

presumed to explain this turnaround of percentages. There was also a relationship between school level and one's typical company in the forest. Fourth-grade primary school pupils were usually accompanied by adults (74%); the figure for sixth-graders was 51%, and for secondary school pupils, 22%.

5.6. Activities in the forest

In the forest, youngsters walked (36%), had barbeques (35%), played (35%), and ran or engaged in other kinds of sports (25%). Socialising in the sense of talking with one another or being together (14%) and 'enjoying nature' (7%) were mentioned less frequently. However, socialising was much more important for pupils at the highest school level (28%) than for primary school sixth-graders (7%) and fourth-graders (4%). The opposite was true for playing and adventure, which were less important for pupils at the highest school level (10%) than for primary school sixth-graders (43%) and fourth-graders (56%). The differences between those who had always lived in Switzerland and those who had immigrated to Switzerland were very small; however, sports activities seemed to play a somewhat larger role for the Swiss (29%) than for immigrants (18%).

5.7. Frequency of visits to other urban green spaces

Parks and playgrounds were visited very frequently: 66% of pupils went more than once a week, whereas only 3% said they never visited such places. There were no important differences among the five locations or between pupils who had always lived in Switzerland and those who had moved to Switzerland. The frequency of visits was, however, higher for primary school fourth-grade pupils than for sixth-graders; secondary school pupils visited parks least frequently.

5.8. Activities in other urban green spaces

The most frequent activities in parks and playgrounds were playing football (soccer) (42%) and, to a lesser extent, other ballgames (e.g., basketball, volleyball, hockey, table tennis) (19%), socialising, relaxing and meeting people (36%), and playing or gymnastics (34%). However, the ranking of the most common activities in parks and playgrounds varied significantly with age (Fig. 5). The higher the age and school level, the higher the respondents' interest in meeting friends and socialising. On the contrary, playing football and, in particular, other games were less important with increasing age.

Those youngsters who had immigrated to Switzerland were less involved in socialising, relaxing and meeting friends (27%) than those who had always lived there (41%). This corresponds to the high prevalence of these activities among the youngsters of the affluent community of Rüschlikon, where relatively few foreigners live (compare Figs. 6 and 7). That football is not generally an upper-class

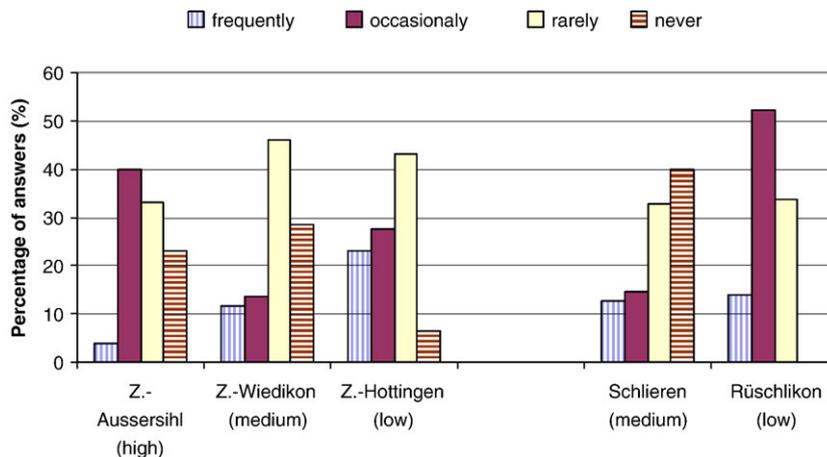


Fig. 3. Frequency of forest visits of pupils of three selected town quarters (Z.-) and two communities outside Zurich (N=437, ratio of immigrant pupils per area in brackets; for exact numbers, see Table 1).

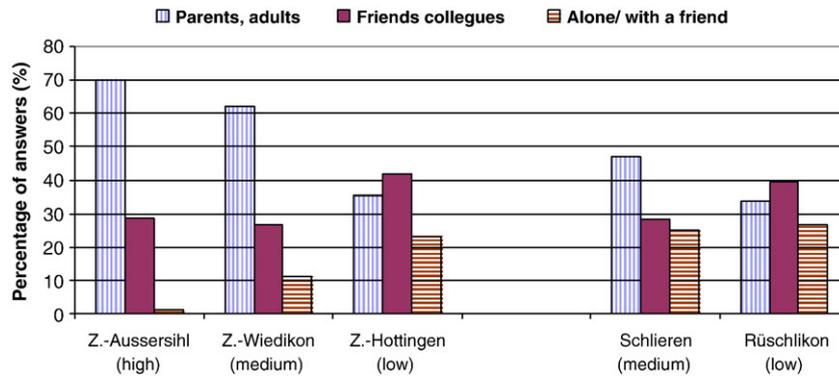


Fig. 4. Pupils' company in forest by town quarter (Z-) and community outside Zurich (n=343, ratio of immigrant pupils per area in brackets).

sport might explain the higher prevalence of games other than football in Rüschiikon compared with the other locations.

5.9. Correlations with cross-national friendships

Whereas only 15% of all pupils reported predominantly Swiss friends and 22% had mainly foreign friends, 63% stated that their circle of friends consisted of Swiss as well as foreigners. The percentage of pupils having a mixed circle of friends is significantly higher (Chi-square test, $p < .01$) in the four locations with medium and low percentages of foreigners (67%) than in Z.-Aussersihl, which has a high population of immigrants. In Z.-Aussersihl, 49% of pupils had a cross-national circle of friends, 49% had mainly foreigners as friends, and only 2% had predominantly Swiss friends. Generally, girls were significantly more likely to have a cross-national circle of friends (72%) than boys (52%; Chi-square test, $p < .001$). Older pupils (72% of primary school sixth-graders and 63% of secondary school second-graders) reported more cross-cultural friendships than primary school fourth-graders (53%; $p < .001$).

As previously described, pupils who had always resided in Switzerland visited forests more frequently than pupils who had immigrated from other countries. Additionally, pupils with an almost exclusively Swiss peer group visited forests more frequently than those having predominantly foreign friends or a culturally mixed circle of friends (both Mann-Whitney U tests, $p < .001$). This may indicate that youngsters who are more in-group oriented prefer public spaces that provide them with privacy (Hammit, 2002). With regard to visits to parks and playgrounds, no significant distinction between Swiss and foreign youths could be

found. This implies that parks and playgrounds are an arena for meeting and socialising that could favour social inclusion (Coley et al., 1997; Field, 2000).

Finally, the relationship between the main activities in forests and parks on the one hand, and the frequency of cross-cultural circles of friends on the other, was analyzed using Chi-square tests. Walking in forests was positively related to the percentage of pupils reporting cross-national friendships ($p < .05$). The positive relationship between socialising and talking with friends in parks and the percentage of pupils reporting cross-national friendships was almost significant ($p = .06$), and youngsters who engaged in ballgames other than football also tended to report more cross-national friendships (71%) than those who did not play such games in parks (61%; $p = .09$).

5.10. The perspective of the teachers

Zurich has a tradition of more than 20 years of environmental education in schools located in three forests close to the city. Seven teachers of this survey had visited these schools with their classes, three of them regularly, but the other 17 teachers had never been to the forest with their classes. More than half of the classes surveyed had visited other green spaces and taken walks regularly, gone camping and on excursions, or had outdoor environmental workshops.

Most of the teachers (n=16) were convinced that public urban green space had a positive effect on the social inclusion of

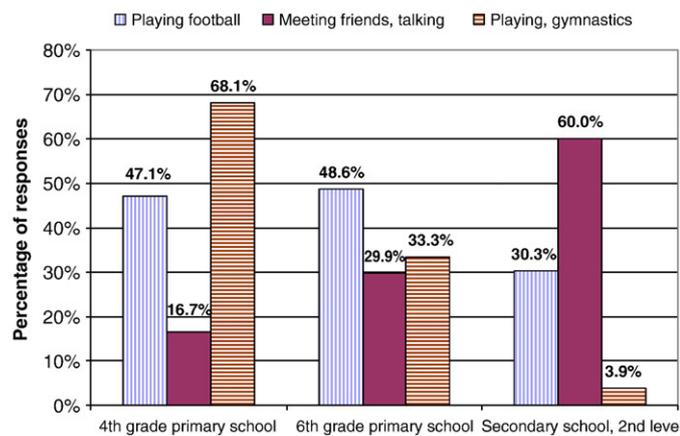


Fig. 5. Main leisure activities of pupils in public urban green spaces by school level: N=437; fourth (n=138) and sixth (n=144) grades of primary school and second grade of secondary school (n=155); several entries were possible.

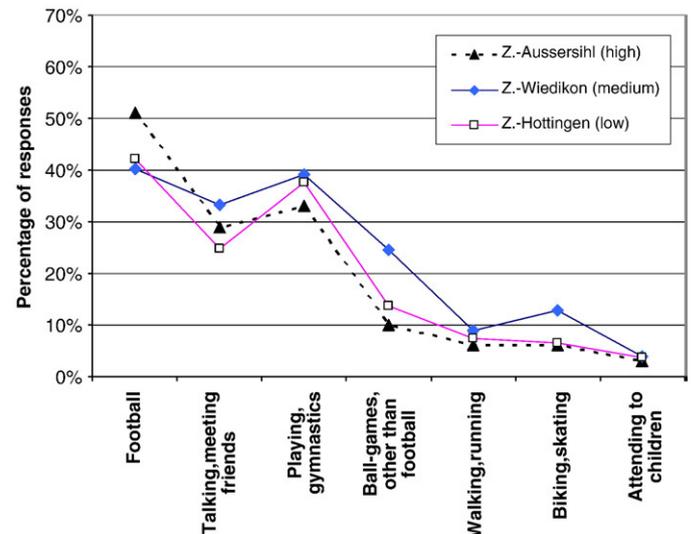


Fig. 6. Leisure activities that pupils from three town quarters of Zurich perform in public urban green spaces (n=311); several entries were possible.

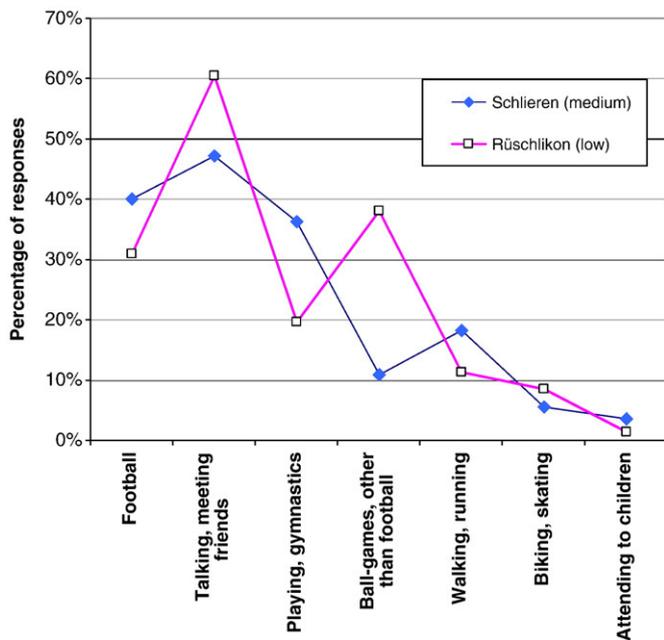


Fig. 7. Leisure activities that pupils from two communities outside Zurich perform in public urban green spaces ($n=126$); several entries were possible.

youngsters, but two were undecided, and six were rather sceptical about such positive effects. Some teachers who believed that urban green spaces could foster social inclusion emphasized that 'green spaces generally promote companionship and togetherness', and others stressed the importance of 'companionship-building activities that are frequently arranged (e.g., by the city or associations) in public green spaces'.

6. Discussion

Forests, parks and other public urban green spaces are places where children like to play. In the forest, taking a walk, playing adventure games, cooking a barbeque and running or doing other kinds of sports are favourite activities. In parks and playgrounds, playing football and meeting people rank highest. Play was found to be the predominant activity of the younger pupils, whereas socialising and talking were reported more frequently by secondary school pupils. These findings show that certain activities and interactions are supported by the place and space where they occur, and that certain patterns of outdoor leisure pursuits coincide with age (Newell, 1997).

An interesting observation was the infrequency of cross-cultural friendships in the town quarter that was the poorest and had the highest percentage of foreigners. Furthermore, pupils in higher grades were more likely to have mixed peer groups than younger children, and teenage girls especially cross barriers of ethnicity and nationality. Outdoor contacts can be regarded as a major way for pupils to bridge the peer group divide. For both Swiss and immigrant youngsters, outdoor locations like forests, parks and playgrounds are important places for making new friends. Whereas the forest seems to be visited more frequently by Swiss pupils, parks and playgrounds are visited by foreign and Swiss pupils to the same extent. This suggests that these latter places have considerable potential for fostering the social inclusion of immigrants.

Growing up in a multicultural social environment in and around cities has been found to favour social inclusion (Faber Taylor et al., 1998), and the City of Zurich aims to proactively support such integration (Präsidialdepartement der Stadt Zürich, 2002). Social inclusion is achieved through slow but constant integration of the

customs and patterns of cultural values that bring resident foreigners into the local social fabric (Centlivres, 1990; Emmenegger, 1995). Unfortunately, however, immigrants are often stigmatized and frequently belong to the lower strata of society. As a result, their children tend to maintain their nationality and culture by remaining inside their own national, ethnic, kin or family networks. Self-identity as a foreigner seems to be socially and culturally more relevant and meaningful to them than their integration into the host society as permanent resident citizens (Esser, 2003). The cultural distinctions will persist as long as long-term resident foreigners are not prepared to become Swiss citizens or are rejected in the process of naturalization.

Private homes do not promote social inclusion, since the social distinction between Swiss and immigrants is an obstacle to their visiting each other (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2001). Meeting and communicating in open spaces, however, can be a platform for breaking up social segregation, and therefore public places are indispensable for meeting and establishing contacts.

Youngsters' communication and recreation patterns can allow them to make friends in public urban green spaces (Ravenscroft and Markwell, 2000). Such spaces are therefore important for improving the social interactions that can lead to social inclusion. Open space can be a catalyst for cross-cultural coexistence. To bridge the cultural divide, planners in Swiss and other Western societies will have to develop the underutilised potential of urban green spaces by creating social inclusion programs that link school, green spaces and leisure activities. In addition to cross-cultural approaches to green space design itself, proactive approaches to the socially inclusive use of green spaces are required. Such approaches can include cultural events, organized sports and leisure-time activities that attract people from various cultural backgrounds.

To make urban social policy more sustainable and to facilitate public urban green space planning that supports a socially integrated approach, active participation in the planning process is required of every group that considers itself relevant to this process (Milchert, 1998; Field, 2000; Nesdale and Todd, 2000; Bell et al., 2003). To facilitate active participation, Munda (2006) suggests using a multi-criteria social evaluation to identify and engage social actors and stakeholders in focus groups. Such an approach needs to ensure that the voices of children and youths – including those with immigrant backgrounds – are heard. In fact, if participation in urban green space planning could be organized in ways that made it attractive to young people from different cultural backgrounds, the planning process itself could be a first step towards social inclusion when they use these spaces for leisure activities. How and in which phase of planning processes such activities should be organized and how the youngsters should participate are important research questions not addressed here, but examples of involving children and community administrations in outdoor planning already exist, such as "children's bureaus" (Kinderbüros) and the "children's lobby" (Kinderlobby) in Germany and Switzerland. The latter, for instance, has thus far initiated participation projects in eight Swiss communities. However, creating public urban green space that fosters social functions is a challenge far beyond aesthetic design – it has to include green space architecture from both European and non-European cultural traditions. Given that urban landscapes are representations of culture, making various cultural traditions of green space visible might help make all youths feel 'at home'.

7. Conclusion

Social inclusion among Zurich's young people depends in many practical respects on urban public green space. Outdoor activities are popular among Swiss and foreign resident youngsters, even as this generation is said to be increasingly oriented towards the virtual reality of the cyberworld. For socialising and making friends,

public open space is still the dominant arena for personal interactions and face-to-face communication. Our survey of Swiss and foreign children and youths in selected quarters of Zurich and two nearby communities has shown this rather clearly. To see and be seen among one's peers and to make friends are essential for the social cohesion that is a prerequisite for social inclusion. Sports and other leisure activities in convenient and attractive outdoor environments such as parks, playgrounds, and urban forests that are free and geographically accessible provide occasions for youngsters to meet and make new friends. A society that considers the potential of public urban green space for social interaction in its green space planning has recognized the social policy value of the landscape.

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