Green Spaces - Liveable Places by Collaborative Planning?

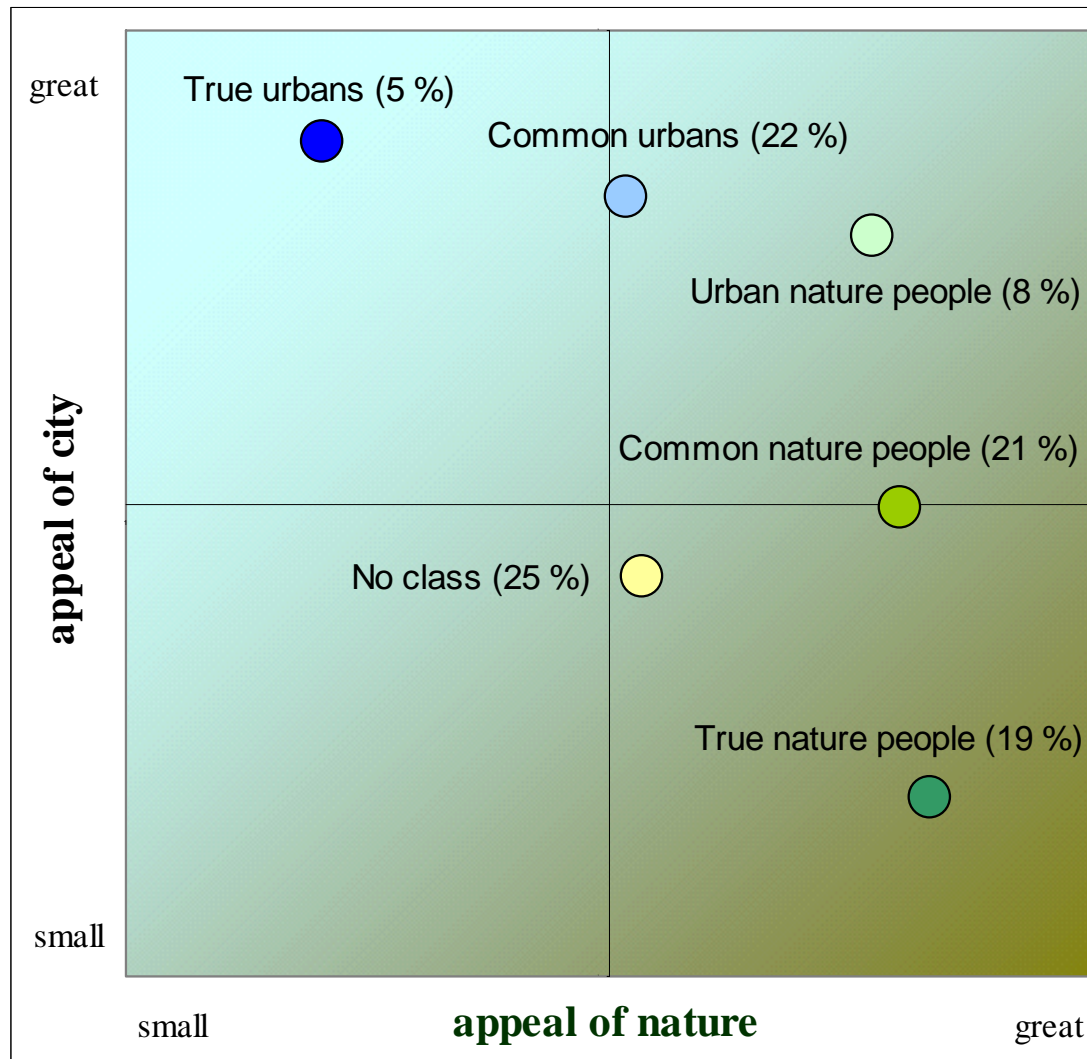**Sipilä, M. & Tyrväinen, L.**
Finnish Forest Research Institute (METLA)

Liveable environments by urban planning? Example: Master planning for the city of Vantaa, Finland (2001- 2007)

- resident movement against a new housing area proposed to a current green space in Kaivoksela

- 473 of the over 800 complaints about the Master plan proposal

- "if this does not make a difference, trust in democracy will be lost" (a citizen in Helsingin Sanomat June 23, 2007)

Classification of residents

(Tyrväinen et al. 2007)
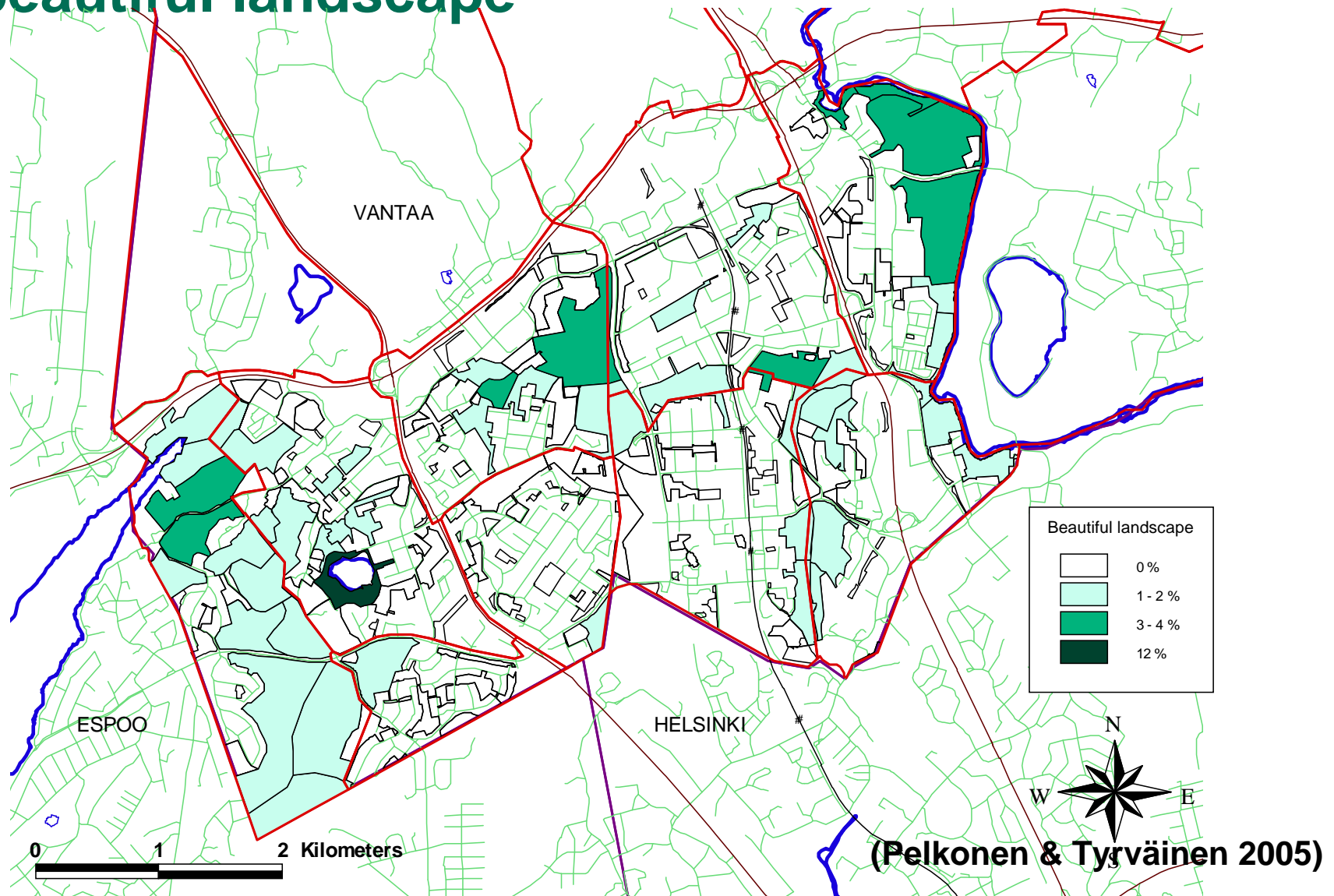
Meanings of urban green spaces for residents

- favourite places of residents are more often in nature areas (especially forest areas) than in built-up environments

- being in nature influences mental health positively

- weekly contact with nature within work or studies increases positive emotions and decreases negative emotions (Tyrväinen et al. 2007)

- perceiving and experiencing nature is subjective

- what kind of and how managed environment is healthy and positively experienced?

In search for quality: collecting social information for urban land use and green area planning

- citizens' expertise needed in defining 'urban environmental quality' (Bonnes et al. 2007)
- social information: information on citizens' needs, values and opinions concerning the urban environment
- citizens have a right to influence decision making concerning their living environment (The Constitution 731/1999, Local Government Act 365/1995, Land Use and Building Act 132/1999)
- municipal decision making should reflect the values of citizens (Niiranen 1997)
- citizens' expertise on local ecological issues valuable alongside with scientific ecological information (Yli-Pelkonen 2006)

Urban green spaces of Western Vantaa: beautiful landscape

VANTAA

ESPOO

HELSINKI

Beautiful landscape

	0 %
	1 - 2 %
	3 - 4 %
	12 %

0   1   2 Kilometers

N
W   E

(Pelkonen & Tyrväinen 2005)

Are citizens actually influencing the plans and the urban green environment?

- the praxis of urban planning does not sufficiently support the interaction between the citizens' knowledge and that of planning expertise (Staffans 2004)

- a majority of the residents who had participated in the collaborative groups felt that they had affected the green area plans noticeably (Sipilä & Tyrväinen 2005)

- but: most residents agreed that they had been given an over-optimistic idea of how much they could influence the green area plans (Sipilä & Tyrväinen 2005)

- how and with what kind of arguments is valid and useful information defined? (Bäcklund, forthcoming)

- how to collect usable information and how to integrate it in planning and decision making?

Integrating social information in urban planning

- sub-study of GREENDECISION - Integrating ecological and social information in urban planning
- Academy of Finland 2006-2008
- Finnish Forest Research Institute & University of Helsinki

The research team
Prof. Jari Niemelä, Dept. Biol. & Env. Sciences, University of Helsinki
Prof. Liisa Tyrväinen, Finnish Forest Research Institute
Dr. Vesa Yli-Pelkonen Dept. Biol. & Env. Sciences
MSc Maija Sipilä, Finnish Forest Research Institute

The steering group
Dr. Stephan Wild-Eck, Head of Sports Promotion, Dep. Social Affairs and Security, Canton of Zurich, Switzerland
Dr. Harry Schulman, Dept. Geography, University of Helsinki
MSc Pia Bäcklund, City of Helsinki Urban Facts
MSc Stephen Venn, Dept. Biol. & Env. Sciences, University of Helsinki

http://www.helsinki.fi/biosci/jariniemela/research/greendecision.htm

http://www.metsantutkimuslaitos.fi/hanke/7220/index-en.htm

Integrating social information in urban planning

Key research objectives

(1) criteria for evaluating land use and green area planning processes in terms of social information on green areas and public involvement

(2) addressing the availability, quality and use of social information in urban planning and decision making

(3) addressing the quality of urban planning processes, including e.g. quality of participation and decisions

(4) understanding the relation between social and ecological values in stakeholders' relationship to the environment, and in planning and decision making

Research methods

Developing of the evaluation criteria

- spring 2007: semi-structured expert interviews
    - 33 actors who had been involved in planning processes on case areas
    - decision makers, city authorities, citizens, landowners
- autumn 2007: focus groups
- 2008: testing of the criteria: e.g. structured interviews, questionnaire, document analysis, participatory observation

Case areas

Preliminary results from the interviews

Why is collaboration with citizens needed in planning concerning urban green spaces?

Very varying views:
- "the information is transferred, so that the planning and refining can be based on the best information available"
- "people have much information on the near environment and nature, such that we do not know"
- "that people would accept the coming changes and learn to live in the changed environment"
- "I do not know whether it is needed in forest planning either... the feedback we got   [through collaboration] is just nothing.... [the role of collaboration] is the ostensible possibility to influence, keeping the illusion"

How should social and ecological perspectives be considered in defining the quality of the urban green environment?

Equally

- "these [ecological and social values] should be equal"

Ecology comes first

- "it is the value of nature that has to be the strong argument"

- "people want to get rid of the bushes but they do not necessarily know that there is a lesser spotted woodpecker living there...although they say that the customer is right so in this case the resident is not necessarily right"

Social values can bypass ecological

- "they are such values that sometimes they just do not match but then you just have to accept it. Sometimes it feels that such a great importance in this ragged green structure that is left in this city.. Recreation and landscape values are important too. If there happens to be some winged, they often can move... Does it have to remain in Helsinki, one single occurrence, if there are plenty of it in the country..."

Ecological and social values are not in conflict

- "I would not see there any notable conflict. If ecology is taken into account and for instance some thicket is preserved... I cannot understand that it would disturb someone's life"

Conclusions

- people's interest in and knowledge of urban green space is a valuable resource for urban planning

- how should planning emphasize, on the other hand, implementing policy decisions, and transmitting information from citizens to decision making on the other?

- tools are needed that help

  - making different understandings of quality of the urban green environment visible

  - organizing collaborative planning that corresponds with peoples' rights and needs for involvement

  - integrating social information with ecological information

- Greendecision will contribute with an "evaluation tool", aiming to help organizing efficient and effective collaboration

THANK YOU!