

“When I come to the park, I forget all my worries”: how urban green spaces support population health



Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic has accentuated **disparities** in housing and living conditions, specifically for people who did not have access to a private garden or were denied access to a public urban green space (UGS) during the lockdown.

Some countries, such as Austria, made the choice to let public UGS opened, but not France.

Based on the GREENH-City research carried out in cities of the French network of WHO healthy cities, we show :

- **how UGSs, depending on different drivers, can support a wide variety of physical and social activities, but also offer multiple other functions that contribute more or less directly to the health of the population.**



Results

186 observations and 591 recorded and unrecorded interviews with individuals or groups were conducted in the 18 parks.

24 types of physical activity have been described as possible uses of UGSs.

- The most important, regardless of UGSs location, is **children activities in playgrounds**.
- The most common activities are **walking (with a social function) and jogging (individual function)**.

Proximity and the **accessibility** are two reasons for use. **Security** feeling is also one of importance. Most importantly, they give a feeling of protection against the noise.



Method

A qualitative survey was conducted in 2018 among users of **3 different parks in each of the 6 selected cities** with both observations and semi-directive interviews and a **thematic analyzes** were performed.

Observed activities were classified into **8 groups** including physical activity (non-sport, sports).

Interview's analysis aimed to describe the **reasons** for coming and the type of activity made.



Conclusion

As open access amenity, UGSs are protective factors of population health. They serve an important **social function** and affect the **collective physical and mental health** of the population in many different ways (e.g., as environmental risk regulators).

They have play a **major role in crisis coping** for population who had the chance to live nearby one of them.

From a **social justice perspective**, policy makers should ensure that every neighborhood is sufficiently close to an UGS to ensure benefits for all.