

Abstract

The benefits of urban nature on people's health, for fostering community, and for climate change adaptation are widely acknowledged. Within the discourse of environmental justice (EJ), these benefits have been used to demonstrate that equitable access to healthy, unpolluted environments is a human right, with scholars like Anguelovski and Agyeman arguing that marginalised and vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by lack of access to such spaces.

Despite extensive studies on the accessibility of urban green spaces (UGS), urban blue spaces (UBS) have not been given the same attention. Moreover, research on UGS accessibility has focused on geographical accessibility, such as proximity to home, and has seldom considered subjective experiences as influencing access. However, accessibility is a multidimensional and complex concept which cannot be reduced to spatial distribution. As Wang, Brown and Liu put forward, perceived accessibility that addresses subjectivities, socio-personal characteristics, and the quality and diversity of the space, must also be considered.

My research addresses the issue of perceived accessibility to UBS by looking at the extent to which subjective experiences and perceptions shape how (un)fairly accessible high-quality, public UBS interventions are, and what this means for the environmentally just city. I will pay special attention to socio-economic and personal characteristics such as age, gender, income, ethnicity, cultural practices, and general preferences for infrastructure and aesthetics.

Specifically, I will be looking at three blue spaces in Copenhagen located in neighbourhoods with varying socio-economic and demographic profiles. A combination of observations of human activity, surveys with users, and interviews with experts will allow me to study a variety of perspectives on UBS. I will discuss the extent to which the city of Copenhagen offers equitable opportunities for people with different backgrounds and preferences to enjoy UBS, and juxtapose this against the ideal of the environmentally just city. Given the availability of UBS in Copenhagen and the importance the city is giving to harbour baths and urban beaches, it will be particularly useful to evaluate whether Copenhagen's UBS caters to everyone's needs.

I argue that perceived accessibility is an important dimension of EJ, because public UBS are places of community, attachment, and well-being. Ignoring subjective experiences that differ from the mainstream can contribute to social inequalities, discrimination, and displacement.

In conclusion, my research will closely examine how perceptions shape accessibility to UBS. It will serve to understand what perceptions and experiences those who control access (city planners) must take into account if UBS are to be usable by everyone.