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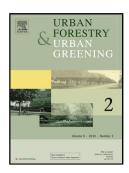
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ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

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Abstract

Urban sprawl and population growth lead to loss of contact with nature for urban residents; thus giving more importance to the remaining urban green spaces for the residents' wellbeing. In this study, we assess the preferences and uses of urban and peri-urban green spaces by inhabitants of the city center and of the bordering areas of the pre-alpine city of Bellinzona in southern Switzerland. In a quantitative survey in which a questionnaire was mailed to a selective quota of 1000 local households, we asked about general perceptions of the quality of life; the general importance of the green on the surrounding mountain slopes; the frequency of urban and periurban green space visitation including the activities undertaken in them; and the motivations for engaging in those activities. The results of a multivariate analysis, which included linear modelling and ordinal regression, show that visual contact with the green slopes of the mountains is a decisive contribution to the perceived general quality of life for the inhabitants of Bellinzona and surroundings. This positive perception tends to increase with closer proximity of available private or urban green spaces. Different motivations for visiting urban green spaces were found, and vary among inhabitants according to age and gender, which indicates the existence of different user groups with different perceptions and also different (and potentially contrasting) needs with respect to the green areas. The practical implications of these differences for managing and planning urban green spaces are discussed.

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Keywords: urban green infrastructure, urbanization, residential quality evaluation, user groups, life quality, environmental perceptions.

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