Urban Landscapes for Mental Well-Being: Evidenced-Based Design Guidelines

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Negative moods (tension, depression, fatigue, anger and confusion) are reduced as the garden environment offers a respite from urban settings.

Introduction

A body of research, developed over the past few decades, points to the beneficial effects that exposure to nature has on mental and physical well-being. Most studies assumed that all green spaces have the same effect on people, regardless of their characteristics. While it is true that more accessible green spaces are beneficial, Francis et al. (2012) contended that the quality of green spaces is as important for mental well-being. That is, "micro" features of green spaces (e.g., design elements such as lines, form, colour, texture and biodiversity) influence well-being outcomes. as much as "macro" level greenery provision (amount of greenery per capita, walking distance to parks). In fact, the presence of micro features and how they are arranged defines the character and specific identity of that landscape (Martin et al., 2016).

The significance of the quality of green spaces on mental well-being has been validated through a number of studies. For instance, a study in the United Kingdom found a positive association between richness of biodiversity and restorative benefits of urban parks (Wood et al., 2018). In Singapore, a cohort study has also shown that the presence of micro-level park features such as forested areas, water features and unpaved trails for walking or jogging encouraged individuals to spend more time in parks (Petrunoff et al., 2022), which in turn resulted in better well-being in the domains of social connectedness, reduced stress, increased resilience, and an increased sense of purpose and meaning (Petrunoff et al., 2021).

Apart from furnishing urban green spaces with various amenities, can they be further designed to evoke awe and positive emotions in people, to satisfy the innate need of urbanites to connect with nature?