

# Why do people go to urban green? - Understanding the recreation and restoration in urban forest

*Ju-Hyoung LEE, University of YeungNam, South Korea, foresterlee1@gmail.com*

## ***Current status of forest recreation in Korea***

After the post-war Industrial Development in Europe in the second half of the twentieth, “Green” was used to refer to quality of life (Küster, 1999: 331). Since then forests and green areas have played an important role in Europe, ensuring the mental and physical health of its citizens.

In contrast, Korea has also experienced rapid industrial development after WWII; however, interest in the natural environment has only recently started to increase. The first recreational forest was designated in 1988, and has been followed by, to date, 145 such areas (Korea Forest Service, 2014). Koreans work approximately 160% more than Germans (2,316 hours/year as opposed to 1,433 hours/year), and they have limited and rare experiences of nature and recreational activities (OECD, 2014). To satisfy the general public's high demand, this recreation programme was planned and implemented nationally, rather than locally. While having certain time benefits, this has failed to highlight the individuality and uniqueness of different areas. Korea's urban forest amounts to about 1,102ha, accounting for 17% of the total forested area; moreover, 44% of urban land area is classified as urban forest, but the actual area that citizens can use is only 2.3% (7m<sup>2</sup>/person) of urban land area. These forests have poor accessibility, meaning the local citizens have few chances to experience nature.

In Germany, forests' healing properties are considered to be part of their many-faceted role in maintaining health, rather than being recognized as having a special medical function. However, in Korea, forest healing is recognized as an innovative concept, and studies on the effects of the forest from medical viewpoints—clinical pathological effects, including forests' to depression, stress, hormones, skin diseases, and learning capabilities—are currently in progress.

This study presents a comparative analysis of the contrasting awareness of the healing function of urban forest recreation in Korea and Germany.

## ***Methods***

In total, 16 urban forest locations in Berlin, Hannover, and Freiburg were selected to be surveyed in Germany, and 9 in Daegu, Daejeon, and Seoul in Korea. A face-to-face survey method was used. A total of 458 interviewees—154 in Germany and 304 in Korea—were selected. 23 research questions were developed in the following categories: 1) forest recreational behavior; 2) satisfaction with urban forests; and 3) the healing function of urban forests. For their responses the Likert five-point scale was used.

## ***Results and Discussion***

In Germany, 57% of the respondents who visited urban forests answered that it took them up to 15 minutes to reach the forest, and 62% answered that they rode a bike or walked to the forest. In accordance with such good accessibility, 65% of the respondents indicated a high frequency of visits to forests, namely more than one per week

In contrast to that, only 29% of the respondents in Korea needed less than 15 minutes to reach an urban forest. 13% answered “I need more than 1 hour.” Only 22% could walk or take the bike to get there while the majority answered that they drove by car (50%) or used public transport (28%) to visit the forest. Correspondingly half of the visitors went to the forest less than 4 times a year and only 29% managed more than one visit per week.

This reveals a significant difference between the two countries. with respect to forest accessibility and frequency of visits. Regarding motives for the visit and activities that were undertaken, recreation in general and “going out” accounted for two-thirds of the visitors in Korea. In comparison to that German visitors showed diverse motives and activities, including forest environmental education, sports and wildlife watching, walking with companion animals, learning, experiencing nature, meditation, and even taking a break during office hours.

In Germany, only 18% of the respondents answered that it was possible to experience nature in urban forests, and 47% stated they recognized urban forests as a created green space rather than nature. In South Korea, 76% of the respondents answered they were satisfied with their nature experience in urban forests, 30% of them being “very” satisfied. Concerning the recreational function of urban forests, 86% of respondents in Germany and 73% in Korea were positive.

Most visitors in Germany answered that they were very confident of an excellent healing function of forests in general (95%), including both, psychological as well as physiological effects. A major part (77%) also felt sure about a good healing function of urban forests.

Korean respondents felt less confident: 81% considered a good healing function of forests in general also including both, psychological and physiological effects but only 56% of them acknowledged a limited healing function of urban forests

### ***Discussion***

Although they were less satisfied with the recreational function and facilities of urban forests, Korean respondents rated the quality of their nature experience very positive. However German respondents assessed the quality of nature experience in urban forests rather low, were, however, satisfied with their recreational function.

Despite high motivations for recreation, a substantial demand for recreational facilities and the awareness of forest healing in general the findings from the Korean survey indicate rather limited visitor appreciation concerning the healing function of urban forests. This is likely due to the insufficient nature experience and recreation opportunities of Koreans, because of their long working hours and the poor accessibility of urban forests.

In contrast, in Germany, with diversified recreational activities and motivations for forest recreation, visitors experience superior accessibility, leading to high recognition of the satisfaction to be achieved from forest recreation, and the healing function of forests.

The survey shows a close correlation between the awareness of the healing function of forests, the opportunity and frequency of visitor’s forest recreation, and the satisfaction that is gained from it. So these factors cannot be considered separately. Therefore, better accessibility of urban forests and more frequent opportunities to visit them is required in order to enable citizens to have more meaningful nature experiences and improve their satisfaction from forest recreation.

### **References**

- Korea Forest Service. 2014. Statistical Yearbook of Forestry 2014. 496pp.
- Kuester, H. 1999. Geschichte der Landschaft in Mitteleuropa. Verlag C.H.Beck. 424pp.
- OECD. 2014. OECD Employment Outlook 2014. OECD Publishing.