



## Adolescent outdoor life and well-being

Mark Wales

The public defence for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy will take place in Crafoordsalen, Alnarp, on Friday the 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2024, at 09:00.

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### Abstract

Outdoor environments have long offered adolescents opportunities for meaningful encounters, experiences and movements as part of everyday life, but technology and indoor attractions have changed adolescents' relationship with outdoor environments. This makes it important to re-examine the role of everyday outdoor life for adolescent well-being. This study adopts a mixed methods design to investigate the role of outdoor life for adolescent well-being in southern Sweden, across urban, rural and suburban settings. A strategic sample of adolescents, aged 12-15 years old, completed questionnaires in autumn/winter 2020 (n = 320) and spring/summer 2021 (n = 208), providing insights into their perceptions and use of outdoor environments in relation to their well-being. The findings revealed positive associations between adolescents' perceptions and use of outdoor environments and their well-being and self-esteem. Semi-structured and photo interviews were conducted with a sample of participants who had completed the autumn/winter questionnaire. The findings suggest multiple and overlapping outdoor pathways to well-being are active in the outdoor lives of adolescents, including opportunities for really being with others completely; being in motion; being in sensory experiences; developing independence; developing mastery and capacities; and managing emotions and thoughts. The study underscores the vital role of outdoor environments for adolescents' well-being and overall development. A recommendation is made for society to prioritise the everyday environments of adolescents, engaging a wide range of professionals in policy and planning to help ensure the presence of outdoor spaces supportive of adolescents' everyday practices across all types of living environments.

*Keywords:* Adolescent development, Health promotion, Landscape architecture, Mental health, Mixed methods, Nature, Outdoor environment, Public space, Urban planning, Youth-friendly environments

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