Introduction

The number of immigrants is constantly rising in Helsinki. In the beginning of 2011, a bit less than 11 per cent of Helsinki's population spoke other than Finnish or Swedish, the two national languages of Finland, or any of the Sámi languages as their mother tongue. In ten years, the proportion has almost doubled (Helsinki Urban Facts 2012).

Similar trend can be seen in the neighbouring cities of Vantaa and Espoo, which both had between nine and ten per cent of foreign language speakers, of whom most are immigrants, in January, 2011. Other cities and municipalities of Helsinki Region have considerably less immigrants (Helsinki Urban Facts 2012). It is also noteworthy to remark that even if Helsinki has larger immigrant population than its neighbouring cities, immigrants there are not as concentrated in certain neighbourhoods as they are in Vantaa and Espoo (Vilkama 2011).

Still, relatively little is known about the green space use of growing immigrant population and about their attitudes toward it (see eg Faehnle et al. 2010). In this research, I have studied the ways how immigrants use green space both by observation and through interviews.

Who is an immigrant?

In this paper, immigrant here means a person that has born outside Finland, does not have ethnic Finnish ancestry, and has moved to Finland.

Finland received relatively few immigrants before the 1990s. Hence it is rather safe to assume that vast majority of non-Finns observed in the parks are either immigrants or tourists. Second generation immigrants are counted here as immigrants too. However, apart from children, they are a still a small minority in Finland. Tourists are excluded whenever identified as such.

Observation

The observation was performed from late summer 2010 till early autumn 2011, and again at summer 2012. However, none of the study sites was observed for both periods.

The first two sites were Ruoholahti and Eiranranta which are two relatively new areas (from the 1990s and 2000s, respectively) and are located at seaside close to the city centre of Helsinki. In these two location, all seasons of the year were observed.

Hakunila, a suburb with apartment buildings dating mostly from the 1970s, is located in the neighbouring city of Vantaa. Observation was performed there from spring to autumn, 2011. Another suburb, Myllypuro, a decade older but having undergone considerable renewal in its central parts in early 2010s, is located in the eastern part of Helsinki. Observation period was shortest there, covering only late summer 2012.
In total, I made 151 observation trips: 75 in Eiranranta, 52 in Ruoholahti, 17 in Hakunila and seven in Myllypuro. Their temporal length varied from 15 minutes to about five hours with most of the shortest ones performed in Eiranranta (as that is close to where I live) and the longest ones in Hakunila. I was the only observer myself.

Observation was documented by taking photographs and notes. I used two different cameras, a pocket-size one and a larger superzoom-type camera. Notes were made by a mobile phone. In order to not to look too suspicious, children's playground were mostly left outside the study. Moreover, private yards (including those of apartment buildings) were not observed.

Identifying someone as an immigrant is not a straightforward process. Several methods were used. Visible minorities from Asia and Africa were in most cases identified by their look. Others can be identified if they speak a foreign language or broken Finnish with each other or, in some cases, to their dogs. Sometimes I also changed few words with someone. That is particularly easy if one has a dog. Moreover, as I observed same parks again and again I also saw some of the same people there again. Hence, in many cases I knew the nationality or broad ethnic group already from my previous observation field trips.

Due to the limits of observation it is impossible to correctly identify all immigrants. It is almost certain that I identified some immigrants as Finns, some Finns as immigrants and some immigrants as immigrants of another origin. The level of doubt was marked in the notes that I made. I have tried to overcome the problem with inaccuracy in identifying process by gathering a large amount of data. The more correct observations there are the less the mistakes bare weight in the overall picture.

In most research concerning the use of green space interviews are used as a primary or only method. Relatively few studies are based on field observation. In their review of qualitative research on characteristics of urban parks associated with park use and physical activity, McCormack and others (2010) found only five studies out of 21 that were at least partially based on in situ observation.

Day, for instance, observed activities and behaviour of older people in public outdoor and indoor spaces in Scotland (Day 2008). Ferré, Guitart and Ferret (2006), on the other hand, developed a systematic approach to map their observations of children's playground in two Catalan cities.

Floyd and others (2008) found in their observation-based study on the parks of Tampa and Chicago that there were significant differences in physical activity and sedentary uses not only between different ethnic groups (Whites, Blacks and Latinos) but also between parks located in neighbourhoods of different income levels.

The main result of my observation was that non-European immigrants tend not to use the neighbourhood parks in the areas where they live very extensively. In some parks, the level of usage was almost null.

**Interviews**

Apart from the observations, I made two sets of interviews. First, I made 76 short intercept interviews in August and September, 2011. They involving 88 different people (as people sometimes participated as couples). Out of them, 38 were not ethnic Finns (in 31 different interviews).

Interviews were made to cover some unobservable issues such as reasons for choosing some
particular green spaces instead of others. They were short, ranging from three to fifteen minutes, and not recorded. Notes were taken instead.

Tucker, Gilliland and Irwin (2007) conducted intercept interviews with users of neighbourhood parks in London, Ontario. They also did observation. In this respect, their methodology is somewhat similar to mine. As they say, this kind of in the field method of data collection allows for a more accurate reflection of the park features than a survey conducted off site. In their research, contrary to the mine, however, interviews were the main method and observation only complementary.

I performed the second set of interviews at summer and autumn, 2012. It consisted of 19 thematic interviews made with 20 immigrants of African, Asian or Middle East origin. The main intention was to find out why the observed level of their green space usage was so low. The interviewees were asked about how they use parks and other green spaces and also used as informants concerning their peers of similar background. Many of them had a history of living in different neighbourhoods in Helsinki Region. In those cases they are also asked about if their ways of using green spaces had changed when they have moved from one place to another.

Part of thematic interviews were recorded. In some cases, the interviewee did not want recording and in some other ones it was impossible due to background noise. Moreover, interviews were the interviewees language skills (English or Finnish) were very limited, only notes were taken. The interviews took from 15 to 50 minutes with most being about half an hour long.

**Observed differences in usage levels**

Immigrants are not just one group. People with different backgrounds use urban green spaces in different ways. Based on observation, immigrants from Europe (excluding Russia) use green space largely in the same ways as ethnic Finns. It is, however, difficult to compare the frequency of use. People from other continents but looking like Europeans are counted as Europeans.

Russians, on the other hand, are extensive green space users. Apart from pure leisure uses, fishing and gardening are also popular activities among them. Russian speaking immigrants from other countries than Russia, for instance Estonia, are counted here as Russians.

It is, however, important to note that different ethnic groups are not monoliths but there are differences inside them. As noted by Li and others (2007), none of the three ethnic groups they studied (Anglos, Hispanics and Asians in California) were homogeneous in terms of the cultural values as far as leisure activities are concerned.

The so called visible minorities - immigrants with African, Asian or Middle Eastern origin - are not that often seen in the parks. Although there is certain level of conflict between the data obtained via interviews and observation, it can be said for sure that non-European immigrants tend to use green space less than other immigrants or ethnic Finns. For instance, in a manor park just few hundred metres away from the housing blocks, no African or Middle East immigrants and only one other Asian were observed during the whole observation period. This is remarkable as Hakunila has a relatively high proportion of immigrants that have origin in those regions.

There are several theories and hypotheses concerning the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the use of green space. Floyd (1999) compares them in his review on literature on race and ethnicity and the use of national parks. Marginality hypothesis asserts that minorities don't use parks because they lack socioeconomic resources to do that. In subcultural hypothesis one assumes that visitation patterns reflect differences in values and norms. Assimilation theory is based on assumption that
using parks tells about acquisition of characteristics belonging to the dominant culture. Discrimination hypothesis, on the other hand, assumes that park visitation is affected by discrimination that can be perceived, actual or institutional (Floyd 1999).

**Reported green space usage levels**

Both in intercept and thematic interviews, almost all interviewees told that they use parks and green spaces. In the intercept interviews that was rather obvious as most of them were done in the parks. In the thematic interviews, there was only one African female who said that she does not use parks practically at all.

Even if non-European immigrants reported using parks, the frequency was rather low. Some said they visit parks only few times a year in the summer. There were, however, some characteristics that seemed to contribute in using more green space. The longer the interviewees had lived in Finland, the more they usually used parks. Also, having a Finnish spouse increases the usage of parks and other green space.

Many said that using parks is not popular in countries where they come from. Either there were no parks or they were places to be avoided. Hence the idea of using parks for leisure is more or less strange to many. Those who were familiar with using parks in their countries of origin were more keen to use them in Finland too.

In thematic interviews I also asked whether the interviewees find themselves as more or less active green space users as their peers from the same countries. Even if they didn't generally use parks much themselves, they still found that they use them at least as much or even more than their peers. Only the one respondent who reported not using parks at all thought she uses them less.

**Question of fear**

Blomqvist (2003) made interviews of immigrants on their use of green spaces in Haninge and Huddinge municipalities near Stockholm, Sweden. Although the immigrants that participated in her study generally used green space they also told some reasons that hindered them from doing that. Fear for encountering racists or rapists or other antisocially behaving people - based both on experience as well as on news from television and newspapers - is one. Fear of dogs is, in some cases, another. Other reasons were lack of time and cold weather in the winter. Some said it is not part of their culture. In some cases, cultural restrictions prevent women going outside alone. Fear for being alone in the park also came out.

Question of fear comes out also in other studies. Madge (1997) found fear as a significant factor preventing park use in Leicester particularly among females of the Afro-Caribbean community. Therefore it is remarkable, that in my interviews with immigrants that wasn't an important issue at all. Fear of dogs got two mentions but neither of them found that as a reason for not going to the parks. Some interviewees found it uneasy to be alone in the parks and wondered why Finnish parks are so empty of people. Only one, however, associated that with some level of fear.

The reasons given by non-European immigrants, both male and female, in the interviewees dealt more with lack of interest in visiting green space than with fear to do so. Weather conditions, particularly in seasons other than summer, were also important. It is also worth to notice than none of the interviewees reported any racist behaviour toward them. When asked, few told about incidences that they had found racist but none of those whose in any way related to green space or
parks.

**Dogs**

In a research made in California, Cohen and others (2010) found that most frequently used areas inside the parks were dog parks, walking paths, water features, and multipurpose fields. It is not the only study where the importance of dogs comes out. Kaźmierczak (2013) found in Greater Manchester that ‘those with no dogs, children or company to visit parks may be dissuaded from using green spaces’.

Walking the dog was one of the most common things to do that I observed in the parks of Helsinki and Vantaa. This was particularly evident in cloudy days when it can be somewhat chilly in the parks even in the summer. If there was some rain, in most cases dog owners were the only people out in the parks. Also in the morning, even if the weather was otherwise sunny and warm, most people using green spaces were walking their dogs there.

Having dogs is probably one of the reasons why Russian immigrants are so intense green space users. Unlike non-European immigrants, they often have dogs. Özgüner (2011), for instance, asserts that there is no tradition of walking dogs in Turkey as it is not common there to keep a dog as a pet. Among the interviewees from Africa, Asia or the Middle East there was not a single dog owner. One East Asian female was planning to have one, however, as she had experience on walking her friend's dog and had found that as good way to meet other people and even make new friends.

The social effect of dogs has also been noted by Kaźmierczak (2013). She found that not having a dog was one of the issues precluding people from establishing social contacts in parks.

However, for some immigrants the fact that there are dogs in the parks can be a reason to not to go there themselves. Not only fear of dogs, but in some cases also the disgust about dog feces can hinder people from visiting the parks, as noted by Blomquist (2003). Risbeth (2001) asserts that the often-mentioned ‘fear of dogs' is ‘mainly associated with the need for religious cleansing after being in any sort of contact with dogs'.

A female interviewee told that she had had a dog while still living in West Africa where she was from. She said she could have a dog in Finland too if she had her own yard where she could keep it. She did not like the idea of having a dog inside the apartment. Some other interviewees, two female and one male, said that they were afraid of dogs. None of them, however, found that as an reason to avoid going in the parks.

The question of unleashed dogs came out only in intercept interviews which I made in the suburb of Hakunila in Vantaa. One African and one Middle East respondent, both male, said that they didn't like to go to a manor park in the outskirts of the suburb in the evening as there were often loose dogs. Evening was their preferred time to go out. I could confirm the habit in observation: significantly more dogs were kept unleashed in the evening than in the daytime. Those dog owners were often but not exclusively Russians.

**Children**

Apart from the dogs, another important reason to go to a park are children. On good weather days it was observed to be a common pastime for mothers to go out with their children, and somewhat less often for fathers too. Non-European immigrant families were observed too but not very often.
Being out with children is also a good way to socialize with other families. Nevertheless, in the interviews mothers of African or Asian origin didn't express that much interest in going to parks with their children apart from public playgrounds. One of them, however, was planning to spend more time in the green space when her baby grows older.

Although the playgrounds and private yards were not part of my observation, those were places were one could often see non-European mothers with their children. It can also be that if one has a large family the number of children can be more an obstacle than a reason to go out to a park. I had no interviewees with large families but some (male) interviewees of African or Middle East background thought that could be the case.

School-aged children spend time in the parks also without their parents. Seeland and others (2009) found in Zurich, Switzerland, that urban forests, parks and playgrounds are places were children and teenagers make new friends. In terms of cross-cultural friend making the forests were less important since children and youngsters of immigrant background did often prefer parks and playgrounds to them. The latter, according to Seeland and others, 'have considerable potential for fostering the social inclusion of immigrants'.

This seems to be case in Finland too. Although it is most common for children to be in the company of children with similar ethnic background, mixed ethnicity groups were observed too. In Hakunila, I once observed such a group of about 10-year old children even in the forest.

Seasonality is an important issue in green space use whether one has children or not. As children mostly pee inside, it is not that necessary to come out with them in all weathers like with the dogs. On sunny winter days in February and March, however, it was common to see families walking outside at seaside and on the sea ice. What was not common, however, was to see a family of non-European origin to do that.

**Utilisation of green space to something useful**

Immigrants from East and Southeast Asia often use green spaces not for leisure but at least partly to something useful. It is rather common to see them fishing on the seaside or working with laptops in the parks. They were also observed at allotment gardens in Hakunila as well as Russians although the majority of the gardeners seemed to be Finns. Gardening, however, was not focused in my this research and hence what I can say about it is rather vague.

According to Ward Thompson (2002), 'certain immigrant groups find the ability to grow familiar plants and vegetables an important link with the experience they may have left behind', even if that happens in a different cultural context. Sometimes growing one's own food may also be an economic necessity.

Risbeth (2001) has found that familiar plants and landscape features can provide immigrants a link to their native country and hence make them feel more at home in the parks. Also, she found that particularly Asian immigrants may be enthusiastic about allotment gardens not being only a means to grow food but also to provide a social space. In their research on community gardens, Shinew, Glover and Parry (2004) suggest that green space may bring different ethnic groups together.

In the interviews, East and Southeast Asian immigrants emphasized more the leisure and sports than 'useful' activities. Only one East Asian male said he was occasionnally doing fishing. It can be that even though it is rather common to observe Asians fishing on the seashore at Eiranranta and
particularly at Ruoholahti, they often the very same people. Hence percentage of Asian immigrants that do fishing as part of their outdoor activities can still be rather low.

Fishing is, however, not exclusively an East and Southeast Asian hobby. Russians and other Europeans were observed fishing, as well as some Middle East immigrants. Finns do fish too but seem to be a minority. However, if fishing is only a side activity for drinking with friends, as is sometimes the case, the participants are almost exclusively either Finns or Estonians.

**Picnics and socializing**

Having picnic was observed to be a rather popular way to spend time in the parks in Eiranranta and Ruoholahti. While most of the family picnickers were Finns, also other Europeans and the Chinese were represented. Non-family group picnics were mostly youth groups who often came to the parks in the evening and sometimes were involved in other activities such as informal sports too. Youth groups were often multiethnic with both Finns and foreigners involved. Foreign ethnicities were most often Europeans but occasionally Asians and Africans too.

In Hakunila, picnicking is surprisingly unpopular activity. The Håkansböle manor park or the Blyodinpuisto park next to it or the large lawn next to Hevoshaka school should be perfect sites for such but still only few were observed there in the whole summer. Additionally, there were also youth group picnics on a rocky hill in Ravurinpuisto park. Family and group picnics in Hakunila seemed to include mostly Finns and perhaps some other Europeans. Only once I observed a Chinese family having picnic in Hakunila.

In Myllypuro, I observed no picnics at all. This can be, however, due to shorter observation period and also due the summer 2012 when the observation was performed there being considerably colder and rainier than the two previous ones.

Although picnics are popular, they are still not very common activity. The interviewees told that they have picnics only once or twice a year, only in the summer. Apart from picnics with friends and family, some of the interviewees had taken parts in picnics organized by different associations.

Barbecues are an issue in some other European countries such as Germany or Netherlands particularly among the Turkish population (see eg. Peters et al. 2010). In his paper on parks in Turkey, Özgüner's (2011) says that picnics and barbecues are the main uses - ‘picnic’ often used to mean a barbecue too. 'Turkish people like to come to parks in groups or with their family members to have their lunch, dinner, or drinks (tea, coffee) and to enjoy socialising in natural surroundings until late evening.' Use of parks by individuals is, according to him, extremely low. Barbecues, however, don't seem to be as popular in Helsinki and Vantaa as they are in some other European cities.

Sunbathing, another stationary activity, can be more or less social. Sunbathers often prefer the same parks as picnic groups and hence it was observed to be more common in Eiranranta and Ruoholahti than in the suburbs. It is quite exclusively an European activity: non-European immigrants were not observed sunbathing.

Both African and Middle Eastern immigrants were often observed gathering with their friends at summer evenings. However, as revealed by the interviews, they did not often go to their local neighbourhood parks. As their friends often live in different parts of the city they tend to gather in places that are easily accessible by public transport. Those places are, however, more often open squares or streets with not much vegetation than parks. Interviewees of African or Middle Eastern
origin emphasize that it is due to the accessible location and not the greenness or lack of it that affects the decision. However, the results of my observation show that in places where both park and square are available side by side, such as in Ruoholahti, the latter is preferred.

It seems also that having an urban square is not enough. New square with no trees and minimal vegetation was created in the centre of Myllypuro when the old shopping centre was replaced with a new one, completed at summer 2012. Myllypuro is a neighbourhood with a sizable immigrant population but still the new square has not gained popularity among the them. It is not found centrally located even though it is served by metro. On the other hand, it can be that people have not yet found it as it had just been opened when I did my fieldwork.

Nearby Tallinnanaukio square at Itäkeskus metro station, on the other hand, is rather popular place for immigrants to spend time. Being served by metro to three different directions and having terminus of several bus lines it is easy to reach from eastern parts of Helsinki as well as from the city centre. Tallinnanaukio, however, cannot be called a green space as it has practically no vegetation at all.

Tallinnanaukio is second in popularity only to area around Helsinki Railway Station in the city centre, including Kaisaniemi Park. Other popular places that got mentioned in the interviews are Kamppi (in the city centre), Malmi and Ruoholahti. Ruoholahti was observed to be particularly popular among immigrants from India.

There is, however, large difference between males and females of African or Middle East origin (less so among South of Southeast Asian interviewees). Those who gather together in the evenings are mostly male. Apart from children's playgrounds female immigrants use urban green space even less than their male counterparts.

Winter, Jeong and Godbey (2004) found in that Asian Americans of different origins differ in many respects from each other in their outdoor recreation. For instance, Chinese and Japanese visit parks as individuals or couples, while Koreans prefer groups of three or more.

**Sports and exercise**

In the observation, I concentrated on sports in unofficial places such as park lawns. That is most popular in Eiranranta and in somewhat lesser extent in Ruoholahti. Different ball games such as soccer, croquet, badminton, petanque are occasionally played in the parks of both neighbourhoods. People involved were usually white males in their 20s or 30s. Females and non-Europeans where not totally absent but a minority. The younger the participants were, the more probable it was that the game involved people of different ethnicities.

Children or youth belonging to non-European ethnic groups were most often seen at official sports grounds in Ruoholahti and Hakunila. As far as winter sports were concerned, non-Europeans where only seen in school hours as part of school curriculum. Outside the school hours winter sports were practised almost exclusively by Finns or other Europeans. Most popular sports at official grounds are soccer in the summer and ice hockey and skating in the winter.

In the thematic interviews it came out that non-European immigrants often find places to practice sport rather far away from where they live. Often that is because they want to play together with friends who live in different parts of the capital region. Sometimes it is also due to limited availability of time slots in sports grounds closer to their homes.
Some of the interviewees said they would be interested in practising some kind of sport but they were not aware of the possibilities. However, most of them showed more interest toward indoor than outdoor sports.

Skateboarding was observed to be a popular activity on the sides of Ruoholahti Canal and in parts of Eiranranta. In the latter, stone benches around a pool were modified by the city to prevent the activity. Most skateboarders are children or adolescents and more often boys than girls. Although the majority are ethnic Finns skateboarding it is practised by youth of different ethnic backgrounds occasionally also in mixed groups.

Observed joggers were exclusively white (both male and female). If there were immigrants among them, they were Europeans (or North Americans). The same applies also to cycling although it is not as exclusively white activity. Still, few Asians and even fewer Africans where observed cycling in the parks. Cycling was mentioned in the thematic interviews, though, but jogging was not.

The results can be compared to those achieved when studying ethnic minorities in the United States. Ries and others (2009) found, that in Baltimore, perceived park availability, quality, and use by friends were associated with park use and physical activity of African American adolescents. Krenichyn (2006) asserts that Working class women of color in some cases see leisure-time physical activity as a white middle class luxury. They find themselves as strong and physically active because of the amount work, both paid and at-home, that they do. Moreover, African-American women do sometimes find parks too dangerous for physical activity.

Preferences toward green space

In the United States, Latinos, Blacks and Asians all seem to prefer more developed recreational spaces than Anglo American whites (Tierney, Dahl & Chavez 2001). Similar findings were made by Buijs, Elands and Langers (2009) in Netherlands: Moroccan and Turkish immigrants showed lower preferences to unmanaged non-urban landscapes in comparison to the native Dutch.

There are also differences in the type of vegetation that different ethnic groups prefer. According to Fraser and Kenney (2000), Toronto residents of British origin preferred having shade trees on their own property. Portuguese and Italian preferred fruit trees. Chinese residents, on the other hand, were more likely to prefer not having trees at all.

When asked by Özgüner (2011) what Turkish park users would like to change they asked for more sitting areas, better cleaning and maintenance, more toilets and sports areas and bigger children's playground. Özgüner's respondents also asked for more trees and flowers. Whether this tells more about their preferences or about the Turkish parks remains unclear.

Cohen and others (2007) found that 'parks play in facilitating physical activity in minority communities, not only by providing facilities and scheduled, supervised activities, but also by providing destinations to which people can walk - even though they may be sedentary after arriving there.' Nevertheless, they also observed that increased availability of structured and supervised activities increased the park use. Their analysis concerned eight parks mostly in low-income, minority neighbourhoods of Los Angeles, California.

The suggestions given by non-European immigrants in the interviews were well in line with these results. East and Southeast Asian asked more commercial services such as café and kiosques. Africans and those from Middle East asked more events and organized activities. Some asked generally for more people in the parks. In the intercept interviews, some respondents asked dogs to
Another issue is that cultural symbols and rituals can often become more important for immigrants than they were in their original setting. Risbeth (2001) talks about this as nostalgia. There are examples of traditional cultural elements being used in park design, such as the case of 'Mogul-style garden complete with tiled mosaic water channels and pagodas with arches such as those found on mosques' in Birmingham. According to Risbeth, the park 'evokes an idealized element of Islamic garden design rather than simulating a typical park in an Islamic country'. The symbols can also exclude: some elderly white residents living close to the garden said 'that the design was sending out a message that this project was for Pakistanis only'.

In Helsinki, there is a Japanese style garden in Roihuvuori suburb. That was not, however, part of my research sites and the park did not come out in the interviews (perhaps because I did not have any Japanese interviewees). Nor did any of the interviewees ask for parks that would represent any particular culture in a manner or other.

Access to green space

Differences in access to public parks and other types of green space is a widely discussed issue in research literature. Risbeth (2001) asserts that as ethnic minorities often have below-average access to private transport, initiatives which 'focus on local green space may be most relevant to their needs'. In their GIS-based study of Leicester, Comber and others (2008) found that areas with high populations of Indians, Hindus and Sikhs had limited access to urban green space.

In the study of Ravenscroft and Markwell (2000), most people used less than 15 minutes to reach parks where they were going and visited them on regular basis. There was some evidence for mixed ethnicity involving Asian and white youths. Generally the users of local parks correlate well with the ethnic profile of their neighbourhood. The authors emphasize that public parks in the UK are often, although unevenly, more accessible to ethnic minority youth than many other leisure facilities.

In Helsinki Region, there is no lack of local neighbourhood parks in suburbs where most of the non-European immigrants live. It is also worthwhile to notice that immigrants are not even close to forming majority in any of the Helsinki Region districts but live mostly in the same areas as ethnic Finns (Vilkama 2011). Helsinki residents in general do not lack access to green and outdoor space. According to Neuvonen and others (2007), nearly all (97%) Helsinki residents participate in some outdoor recreation during the year: half of them on a daily basis or every second day. Those living in suburbs are even more active in close-to-home visitation than those living in the centre. Rather few non-European immigrants live in the centre of Helsinki (Vilkama 2011) where green space is not as abundant as in the suburbs.

Low usage levels of neighbourhood parks by non-European immigrants is not due to lack of access but rather of lack of interest in them. The access issue comes in the question in a different manner: tariff borders in the Helsinki Regional Traffic system hinder the popularity of travelling between the cities of Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo. Particularly those immigrants living outside Helsinki reported that as a problem since many of the popular meeting sites, such as Kaisaniemi Park or Tallinnanaukio, are located in Helsinki.

As immigrants living in different parts of the Helsinki Region want to use the parks and other open spaces to meet each other and socialize, the locations that are easily accessible by public transport from different parts of the region are important for them. However, those places are usually central
Discussion and conclusions

The main result of my observation was that non-European immigrants tend not to use the neighbourhood parks in the areas where they live for recreation. In the interviews I examined why is it so and the main reason seems to be lack of interest to them. European immigrants and particularly Russians are more active users of neighbourhood parks.

One can ask whether it is important that immigrants use green space in general or the neighbourhood parks in particular? For the integration, that could be beneficial. Research on the contribution of local parks to neighbourhood social ties in Greater Manchester suggests that ‘social ties are being developed and strengthened in local parks through regular and longer visits, in particular those involving social activities’ (Kaźmierczak 2013). Ethnic minorities were included in the focus group of the study but were not analysed separately.

Kaźmierczak (2013) observed also that knowing people in the neighbourhood contributes to the interactions in local parks of inner city areas, and thus ‘suggests that parks can play not only play a role as places where ties are initially developed, but also where they are reaffirmed.’ Moreover, the character of park visits emerged as potentially more important for developing social ties than their frequency. Durations of visits were associated with the number of people known in the area. Also, as Peters and others (2010) found, knowing other visitors and having interactions with them has been found to evoke comfort and security among park users.

On the other hand, one can ask why neighbourhood parks are so important to ethnic minorities and to non-European immigrants elsewhere but not in Helsinki Region? Could it be because the large-scale immigration from distant countries is a relatively new issue in Finland? Perhaps second and third generation immigrants will be more rooted in the neighbourhoods and find the local outdoor spaces more important than newcomers to whom it is more important to keep in contact with their friends in different parts of the region? In this case, one can assume that the importance of neighbourhood parks for immigrants will rise in the future.

Or is it due to the fact that in Helsinki Region there are no areas where immigrants would be heavily concentrated? That could be one reason why the friends are far away. In cities where immigrants are concentrated in certain neighbourhoods they have also their friends there and may socialize with them in the neighbourhood parks. That would, together with the social problems that such concentration often causes, also explain why the question of fear is so much more important in cities with longer immigration history, with more immigrants, and with more socially deprived neighbourhoods.

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APPENDIX: RESEARCH SITES

Ruoholahti

Ruoholahti is a former port and industrial area in the western part of Helsinki peninsula, less than two kilometres from the city centre of Helsinki. It was converted to residential and office district in the 1990s. One of the landmarks is old Nokia cable factory which is now a cultural centre. Other notable buildings are Salmisaari power plant and Helsinki Court House (former headquarters and factory of Alko, the national alcohol retailing monopoly). Ruoholahti is also known for the canal that was built through it in the beginning of 1990s to reinforce the maritime image of the area.

Ruoholahti is the eastern end of Länsiväylä highway connecting Helsinki to the neighbouring city of Espoo. It is also the western end of the Helsinki Metro although a westward extension is under construction.

New residential district of Jätkäsaari is under construction to the former container port area just next to Ruoholahti. Officially, the border between Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari is the Ruoholahti Canal. The area on the southern side of the canal is, however, mostly built at the same time as Ruoholahti and commonly referred as Ruoholahti. In this research, regardless of its official status, that area is considered as part of Ruoholahti.

The combined population of Ruoholahti and the already built part of Jätkäsaari was was 5345 in January, 2011. As construction of the area coincided with the repression years of 1990s, a considerable amount of public housing was built in there. As a result of this, the area houses more immigrant population than most of the other quartiers in Helsinki that are located such close to the city centre. 13 per cent of the population speak other language than Finnish or Swedish, the national languages of Finland, or any of the Sámi languages, as their mother tongue (Helsingin seudun aluesarjat 2011).

Eiranranta

Eiranranta is another new seaside residential district on Helsinki peninsula. Distance from the city centre is about two kilometres. It is not an official neighbourhood in itself but part of Munkkisaari, which has one residential block built mostly in the early 20th century. There is also a shipyard. Hernesaari, another part of Munkkisaari neighbourhood to the southwest from Eiranranta, houses warehouses, offices, cruise ship berths and the Hernesaari Heliport. While the shipyard and the ports are staying in the area, Hernesaari is under planning process for a new residential area.

Eiranranta has 11 residential buildings that were built in 2007 and 2008. There is no public housing. It is one of the most expensive areas to buy or rent an apartment in Helsinki.

Munkkisaari, including Eiranranta, had 1072 inhabitants in January, 2011. In 2006, before the construction of Eiranranta, the population was 737. The proportion of inhabitants speaking a foreign language (other than Finnish, Swedish or any of the Sámi languages) as their mother tongue was, respectively, 7.7 per cent in 2006 and 9.7 in 2011 (Helsingin seudun aluesarjat 2011).

A distinctive feature in Eiranranta is that it has unobstructed seaviews to the open sea. Apart from the islands in front of Helsinki and from the seaports, there are not many places in the capital where one can see the horizon while standing on the ground.
Hakunila

Hakunila differs from Ruoholahti and Eiranranta in many respects: it is not in Helsinki but in Vantaa, it is not on the seaside but next to large forested areas, and it is further away from Helsinki city centre.

Hakunila is located close to the municipal border between Helsinki and Vantaa, and near the crossroads of Ring Road III and Lahdenväylä highway. The suburb, which was constructed mainly in the 1970s, is on top of a hill. It is bordered by old Lahti highway (Vanha Lahdentie) to the west, Ring Road III to the south, and Ojanko forest and recreation area and Sotunki village, which is largely a rural area, to the east. In the north and the northeast there are the suburbs of Itä-Hakkila and Nissas.

Commercial centre of Hakunila consists of a shopping mall which has a supermarket, bars and cafés, and some other business. The centre is in the crossroads of Hakunilan tie, the main north-south traffic artery of Hakunila, and Jokiniementie street, which connects Hakunila to the westbound direction. There are plans to build new housing and a new commercial centre further to the west to an area which is now occupied by a bus depot. Even further to the west, less than two kilometres from Hakunila, there is a large retail business area with domestic appliance and furniture stores, including IKEA.

On the southern side of Hakunila shopping mall, there are the Lutheran church and a library.

Hakunila had 11,198 inhabitants in January, 2011, of whom 21 per cent speak other language than Finnish, Swedish or any Sámi as their mother tongue. Compared to the situation in 2001, the number of foreign language speakers has more than doubled while the total population is almost the same. Today, Hakunila is the part of Vantaa with largest share of its population being immigrants (Helsingin seudun aluesarjat 2011).

Myllypuro

Myllypuro is a suburb in the eastern part of Helsinki. Like Hakunila, it is a forest suburb but about a decade older: most of the apartment blocks were built in the 1960s. Commercial centre of the suburb is located next to Myllypuro metro station which is 16 minutes from the Helsinki city centre. Old commercial centre was demolished in 2009 and a new more dense centre with housing blocks and an open square in the middle was completed at summer 2012.

New centre with a more urban character was the main reason to include Myllypuro in the research. In the first phase of the research I found that immigrants with non-European background prefer open squares to parks as outdoor spaces to spend time. In Myllypuro the aim was to find out if a new urban square in a forest suburb such as Myllypuro would attract immigrants to spend time there.

Myllypuro had 9,679 inhabitants in January, 2011. Out of them, almost 18 per cent speak a language other than Finnish, Swedish or any Sámi as their mother tongue.

Parks

All three research areas have many different kinds of parks. In Ruoholahti, it looks like that city planners have wanted to try as many different kinds of parks as possible in a small area. There are parks on the sides of Ruoholahti canal. Partly they are open lawn, partly more shadowy parks with
trees. There are terraced sitting areas and benches by the canal, a small ornamental flower garden and a small fenced park with lot of benches, apparently aimed for elderly people to sit and socialize with each other. To the south from the canal, there is a large children's playground with some artificial hills and also with some open lawn for games and family picnics. Also on the southern side, there is a sports ground and a small park next to it with some open lawn, birches and exposed natural bedrock. Next to it, there is also a small formal park with well-maintained bushes and benches, and another children's playground.

Until November, 2010, there used to be a dog park on the southern edge of Ruoholahti. That was removed in the end of the year. A new dog park has been under construction in the southeastern corner of the area but was not yet finished at September, 2011, when I finished the field research in the area. Another change in the infrastructure of the area was the new Crusell Bridge over the bay of Ruoholahti which gives a new connection in the western part of area. The bridge was opened for pedestrians in the beginning of 2011 and also to cars in June of the same year.

The parks in Ruoholahti are inside the residential area and hence mostly used by inhabitants of Ruoholahti themselves. To the north of Ruoholahti, in Hietaniemi, there are seaside walking paths, a beach and a cemetery used for recreation by residents of Ruoholahti and also people living in other nearby neighbourhoods. That area was, however, outside the study area for this research.

In Eiranranta, on the other hand, the parks are around, not in the middle of, the residential district. Luostaripuisto park between Eiranranta and the old part of Munkkisaari and Pyhiinvaeltajanpuisto which is connected to it are old parks but where renovated (and renamed) when Eiranranta was built. Saint Birgitta's Park (Pyhän Birgitan puisto) is even newer: it was opened at autumn, 2010. It has a seaside pedestrian path and dune-like grass area. The new Eiranranta beach next to it was opened at the same time. To the southwest from Saint Birgitta's Park, there are some open seaside lawns (Hernesaarenranta) with commercial padel facilities built in 2011.

There is also a dog park between Eiranranta and Eira, opened in 2009. It is one of the biggest dog parks in southern Helsinki and hence it has become rather popular. It also has some natural bedrock features which is not common in dog parks.

The parks in Eiranranta are part of the green space network in the southern seashore of Helsinki peninsula and thus widely used also by people not living in the immediate vicinity of the area.

Eiranranta parks were awarded as the Environmental Structure of the Year 2011 by Betoniteollisuus ry, the Finnish concrete industry association, ‘to raise awareness of high-quality construction projects that create sustainable, good environment with high-quality design and implementation’. According to the jury, ‘previously wasteland on the periphery of the Helsinki inner city, the area is now a stylish and pleasant, urban seashore milieu that invites residents and visitors to walk and linger around in the area’ The dog park was described as ‘a luxury site’. (City of Helsinki... 2011). The same award was granted to the Ruoholahti canal in 1995.

In Hakunila, there is a large park area on the eastern side of the suburb, below the hill were most of the apartment houses are located. Central part of it is the Håkansböle manor park which is behind the small Komminilitynoja brook. On the Hakunila side of the brook, there is Blylodinpuisto park with a pedestrian path and some benches. Further south by the brook there are first some allotment gardens and a carpet-washing facility, and further away a large dog park. To the north from the manor house, main pedestrian path follows the brook until reaching the Hakunila sports park. Further north, in Nissas, one can see the ruins of the Nissbacka manor which was destroyed in a fire in 1935 (Rinkinen 2004: 78). Due to their location on hill they are visible to the sports park. The old manor park is now unmaintained although there is a sculpture park next to it.
On the Hakunila hill, inside the residential area, there is a network of small parks connected to each other by pedestrian paths and bridges that cross the main traffic arteries. Pedestrian access to most apartment buildings is from this network. Hence, many people in a way use parks everyday just by walking to and from their homes.

Main pedestrian path is south-northbound Hakunilanraitti that follows the main street Hakunilantie on its western side. Several bridges connect it to the other side of the street. Next to Hepopolku bridge, there is a bedrock hill between the main street and a small Siwa supermarket and bars. To its north, there is a children's playground and a small park with pool (although during the study period there was no water in the pool). From there, the path goes northward between yards and parking lots to the shopping mall.

Opposite to the shopping mall, on the other side of Hakunilantie, there is Ravurinaukio park which is rather new, constructed in 2004. It is a small square with main road on one side, a kindergarten on the other, and a small forest on third side. From the fourth side, a pedestrian path, which used to be a local road before construction of the suburb, leads to the east. Also next to the shopping mall, on the other side of Jokiniementie, there is a small park with playing facilities for children. Skomars croft, a historical cottage now used as a community space, is located in this park.

In Myllypuro, the research area included only the commercial centre, Orpaanporras walking path between the centre and the Lutheran church in the middle of Myllypuro and forest-like parks in their immediate vicinity. Apart from those, there are also other mostly forest-like parks and a large sports park.

The main square of the new Myllypuro commercial centre cannot be really described as green space as it has not any trees and only a few other plants. It was still included in the research to find out if that kind of outdoor space would attract immigrants more.