

# Experienced environmental quality and the right to the city -

The politics of urban greenspace in the informal  
settlements of Nova Contagem, Brazil.

Meri Juntti, Middlesex University, UK

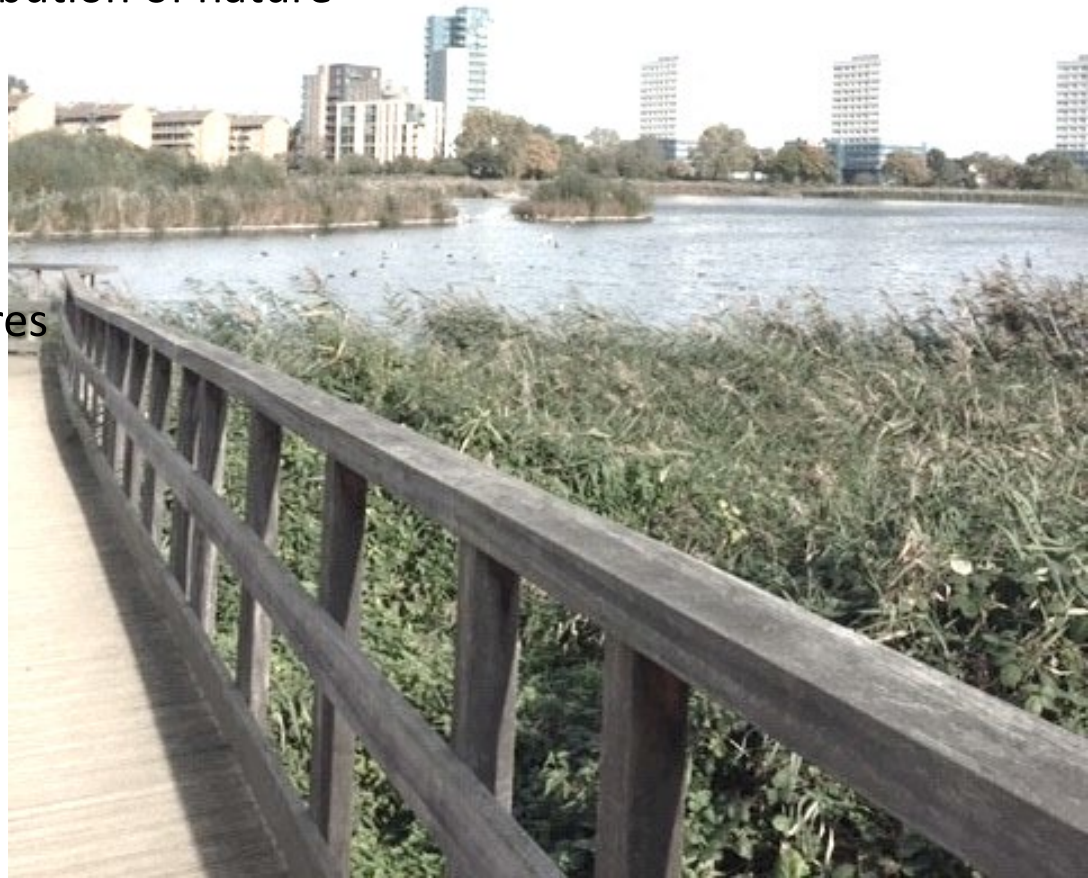
Heloisa Costa, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil

Nilo Nascimento, Federal university of Minas Gerais, Brazil



# Ecosystem services – a celebration and a critique

- Articulates the benefits that nature provides humans (e.g. Daily and Ellison 2002)
  - The environment as a dynamic entity
  - The hidden economic contribution of nature
- Huge scientific traction (Norgaard 2010)
  - Stock-flow metaphor obscures complexity
  - (Economic) valuation problematic
- Urban context needs more attention
  - Complex link to wellbeing
  - Significant social justice implications



# The ADEPT project and the social impact of urban greenspace

- Main aim: to better understand the relationship between wellbeing and urban greenspace from an interdisciplinary perspective
- 3 case study areas: deprived neighbourhoods in the catchment of the Vargem das Flores reservoir
  - Science led ES assessment
  - A questionnaire, qualitative interviews and walking interviews using the UrbanApp



# Incomplete urbanisation

- In Brazil 50% of urban housing is 'spontaneous' or informal settlements
  - Favelas
  - Lower middle class dwellings
  - 'Invasions' in the urban fringe
- City planning informed by an explicit logic of 'capitalist accumulation'
  - A documented tendency among civil authorities to avoid spending in areas which lack lucrative assets
  - Vicious cycle of underinvestment and deteriorating liveability
- Informal settlements have low levels of urban service delivery, public infrastructure and public transport
  - Crime hotspots
  - Unemployment
  - Poor health
  - Strong neighbourhood character and belonging





# The ADEPT research questions

- What role does urban greenspace play in the everyday life of disadvantaged peri-urban neighbourhoods?
- How do material, social and subjective factors (such as gender, housing status, urban service delivery...) mediate the functions of and benefits from urban greenspace?
- What implications does this have for urban environmental justice and the use of ES based approaches in urban planning?

*Nova Contagem*





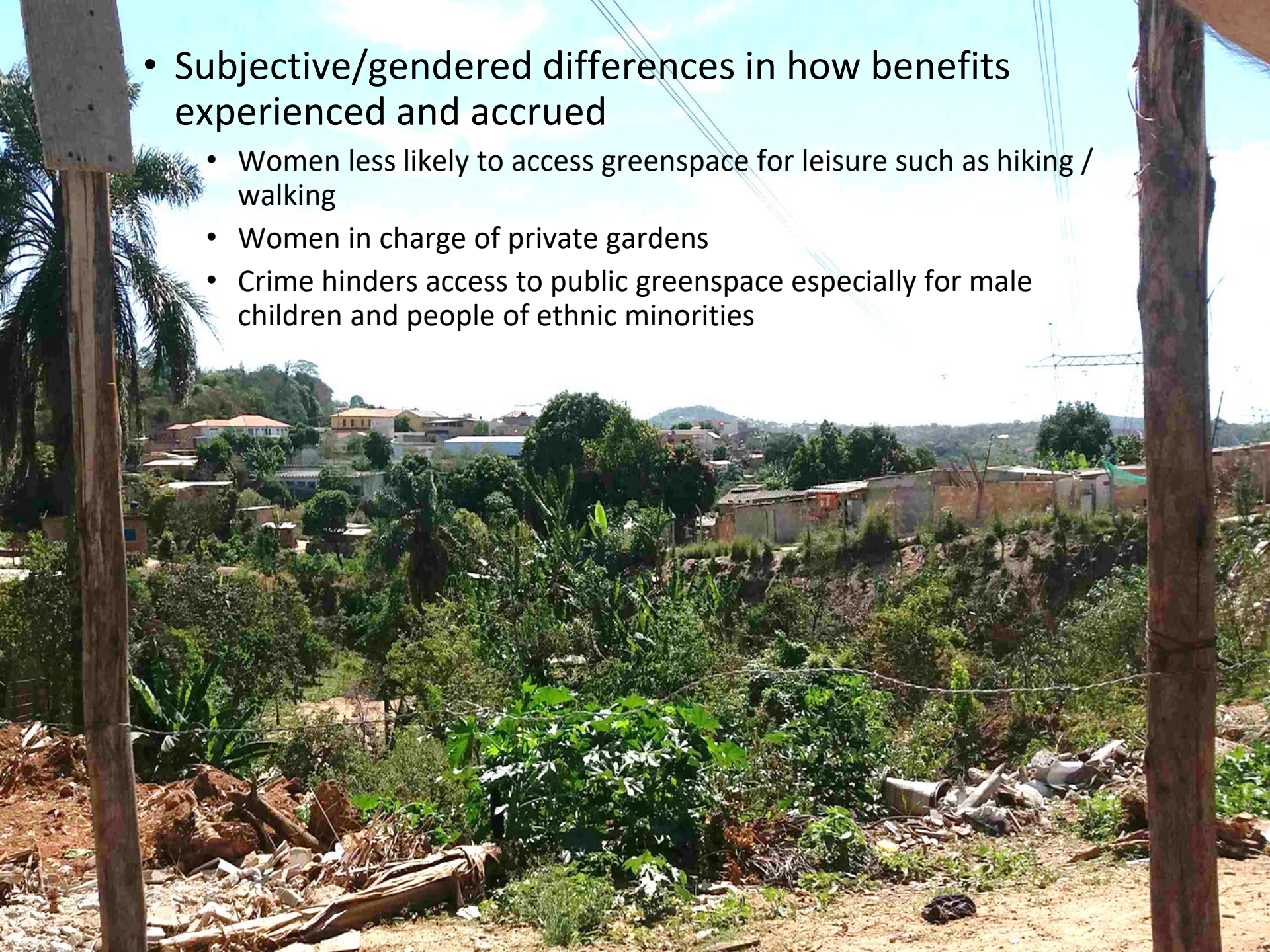
## Incomplete urbanisation and greenspace



- Urban greenspace and its benefits to wellbeing are more abundant in less developed neighbourhoods
  - High ES provision a significant benefit for neighbourhood character
- BUT
  - Lack of paving = informal settlement and neglect by authorities
  - Greenspace compromised for signs of development: paving, commercial property and need to extend housing for new generations
- In more 'developed' neighbourhoods private gardens and urban streams main remaining greenspaces
- Access to remaining public parks and gardens is restricted by fear of crime
  - 'If there is a shooting, in a park there is nowhere to hide'



- Subjective/gendered differences in how benefits experienced and accrued
  - Women less likely to access greenspace for leisure such as hiking / walking
  - Women in charge of private gardens
  - Crime hinders access to public greenspace especially for male children and people of ethnic minorities





# The signifying function of urban greensapce

- In our target areas unkempt greenery signifies neglect by authorities
  - Sanctions littering
  - Sanctions anti-social behaviour

*“...squares which are not very well cared, the bushes grow, the waste increases, there aren't many trees, ... these are not places for you to take the children to ride a bike, they are not good places for you to stay with your husband, your wife.*

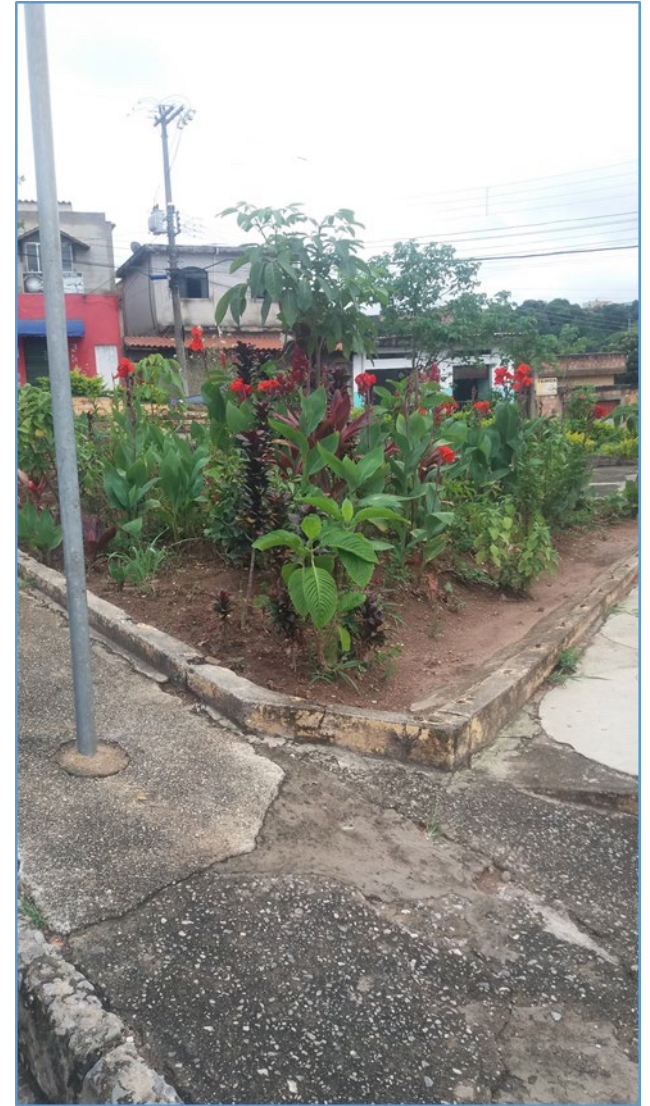
*...*

*They are dangerous and neglected places...” (R1 NC)*





- Urban squares and front gardens increase residents' agency in the otherwise chaotic / disordered context
  - Resisting crime
  - Caring community





# Directly experienced benefits and 'dis-benefits' of urban greenspace overlooked



- Potential to counteract the impact of incomplete urbanisation lost
- Only catchment scale ES recognised in formal planning initiatives
- Frequent conflicts between residents needs and preferences and metropolitan water needs and management measures
- Potential synergies between experienced ES and large scale economically valuable ES are missed due to 'blunt' planning and policy instruments
- The recognition of local level appropriations of urban nature central to advancing 'right to the city'





*Thank you for listening*

*Source: Juntti M. Costa H. and Nascimento N. (2019) Urban environmental quality and wellbeing in the context of incomplete urbanization in Brazil: integrating directly experienced ecosystem services into planning. Progress in Planning.*

# Café Table question

- How can intentional and unintentional processes of green gentrification be resisted and managed?