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### Urban Green Spaces: Who Benefits? The Integration of Nature in Urban Communities

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# URBAN GREEN SPACES: WHO BENEFITS? THE INTEGRATION OF NATURE IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

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This thesis examines the effects of green spaces on urban environments and communities, assessing extensive literature and studies to answer the following research question: do green spaces benefit urban communities? A historical background of the concept of urban green space is provided, from the emergence of the first urban public parks to their integration into contemporary international environmental movements to combat climate change. In light of recent rapid urban population growth, it is important to better understand how to improve the health of urban residents. Results show that urban green spaces offer environmental, physical, mental, and social health benefits, but these benefits are not spread evenly across urban populations. Increasing green areas may generate gentrification, displacing lower-status residents, and poor implementation may produce other negative effects. This thesis also analyzes two studies: the High Line in New York City, a linear park on the old elevated railroad track, and community gardening in St. Louis, a local method to increase access to fresh healthy food while improving the aesthetic of dilapidated neighborhoods, utilizing vacant land, and strengthening community ties. The conclusion reached is that green space initiative must be implemented with continuous input from residents. This thesis does not claim that green spaces are the solution to urban poverty, segregation, crowded housing, crime rates, homelessness, or various other problems associated with urban life. Green spaces are only one of many strategies to improve urban communities, and must be realized in congruence with other economic and social programs.