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## **Nature: The natural choice in reconstruction scenarios.**

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### **Introduction**

Within the academic and professional community, nature and the environment have predominantly been researched both as a source of conflict and natural destruction. Little previous emphasis has been placed on the use of nature as a tool of healing, peace-building, reconstruction and development. Nature, however, provides an opportunity for multi-tiered benefits within post-crisis reconstruction scenarios. The construction of green spaces provides a practical means of concurrently addressing immediate psychosocial needs within post-crisis, peace-building and reconstruction settings, whilst simultaneously addressing long-term development, reconstruction, environmental and peace-building goals. Green spaces should thus be a priority in reconstruction planning.

Post-crisis reconstruction scenarios are unique and complex situations. Various actors including local communities, governments, NGOs and international bodies find themselves attempting to simultaneously: restore physical infrastructure and community services; address immediate humanitarian issues as well as long term development goals; recreate a sense of well-being amongst individuals and trust between communities or factions when conflict has occurred. Many of these issues are addressed as separate issues, despite the continued rhetoric calling for effective assistance.

The abstract realms of emotional, social, and psychological considerations in post-crisis scenarios are predominantly treated separately to the physical realm. Increasingly, however, there is recognition that successful reconstruction must incorporate both spheres. Green spaces provide a unique platform to combine reconstruction efforts and simultaneously address a multitude of issues raised within the aforementioned fields, many of which are often perceived as being non-complementary. This argument is based on the current use of nature to address various issues within Western societies which are also identified within post-crisis reconstruction scenarios.

Improving wellbeing is of increasing importance within the reconstruction field. Research has shown that nature positively affects wellbeing. Emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing improvements have been noted to occur on all spectrums of nature contact,

from a view of nature through a window to time spent in the wilderness. The notion that architecture and urban design affect wellbeing is also well recognised. In non-crisis scenarios the aesthetic, emotional and psychological impact of space is a standard consideration. Thus the link between nature and design is not new, and some form of nature is often incorporated into everything from individual building design to urban planning. Reconstruction scenarios provide a unique opportunity to surpass previous planning and bring urban areas in line with current trends, which often highlight environmental concerns and 'resident friendliness'.

In addition to improved wellbeing, green spaces in reconstruction scenarios provide an opportunity to meet other abstract notions. Memorialisation and monumentalisation are well recognised as important aspects of reconstruction. The use of nature and green spaces for this purpose is growing, as it provides the opportunity for symbolic representation coupled with the therapeutic benefits of nature contact. Psychosocial notions such as identity, unity, ownership, and power are often fragile within post-crisis scenarios. Such issues can be partially addressed through community participation in design and construction of green spaces. In post-crisis scenarios that have resulted from conflict, green spaces can play a role in constructive peace-building. Many peace-building efforts attempt to establish bonds, understanding and forgiveness through joint participation in activities. The construction of green spaces provides a unique opportunity for joint participation in a community project that is beneficial to all community members, in addition to providing individual therapeutic benefits to construction participants.

Green spaces also provide the opportunity to meet tangible issues. If implemented effectively, the construction of green spaces provides an opportunity to meet immediate survival needs as well as long term development goals. Green spaces could provide community access to drinking water, a location for food production, a safe location for children to play and education to be conducted. Long term, green spaces may promote environmental protection, encourage sustainable development, reduce pollution and improve health.

Currently, this field of inquiry is exploratory and primarily theoretical. Little previous research has been conducted into the use of green spaces to provide a platform to simultaneously address various components of the reconstruction/peace-building process. The complexity of reconstruction scenarios insists on a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. The notion of green spaces within reconstruction scenarios draws on theories and frameworks identified in urban design, peace studies, reconstruction planning, peace-building, development studies, psychology, landscape architecture, ecotherapy, and other relevant fields. It is hoped that the emergence of this field of inquiry will encourage greater cooperation between interested parties, and the adoption of more holistic approaches to reconstruction.

## Author's Biography

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Tiffany Greene has several degrees in the Humanities, and specialises in Peace studies. She is the founder and director of The Gnome Project, a research, advocacy and consultancy organisation concerned with the use of nature in post-crisis and peace-building scenarios. She plans to complete a PhD investigating the role of nature in peace -building.