

Governance | Individual communication

IC - (21040) - SOCIAL ASPECTS OF NATURE ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

Birgitta Gatersleben¹; Emma White¹; Kayleigh Wyles²; Sarah Golding¹; Caroline Scarles¹; Tracey Xu¹

1 - University of Surrey; 2 - Plymouth University

Background and objectives

During the Covid-19 lockdown periods many countries saw a significant increase in visits to local natural spaces (Corley et al., 2021; Soga et al (2021). Having access to greenspace during the pandemic has been associated with greater wellbeing (Dzhambox, 2021; Hubbard et al., 2021; Poortinga et al., 2021; Tomasso et al. 2021). Such benefits of nature engagement are well documented (e.g., Capaldi et al., 2015; Houlden et al, 2018; Bowler et al., 2011). In environmental psychology they tend to be studied from the perspective of environmental restoration theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) and often as a solitary experience (Korpela & Staats, 2021, 2014).

We examined whether the pandemic and lockdown restrictions affected social aspects of nature engagement and wellbeing during the pandemic. Nearby natural spaces may have been “used” more during the pandemic to meet with others as well as to get away from those we lived with.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

A longitudinal survey was conducted with a representative sample of 850 UK households examining nature engagement in spring/summer 2020 and approximately one year later.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Preliminary findings found no change in frequency of nature visits alone (or with others). Participants were less likely to visit natural places to socialise during 2020 (in line with restrictions) than one year later. Visiting alone was not linked to restorative experiences. However, visiting nearby nature to socialise with others was. Further analyses will examine in more depth these relationships to understand how social experiences in nature benefit wellbeing.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

Findings can help gain insight into the value of providing natural spaces for social interaction as well as solitude to support people’s wellbeing.

Palavras-chave : Nature engagement, Wellbeing, Covid19