

Sustainability | Individual communication

IC - (21207) - RESTORATIVENESS ONTOGENESIS: HOW EARLY NATURE EXPERIENCES START RESTORATION PROCESSES IN HUMAN BEINGS

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Background and objectives

In the last decades, an increasing volume of research has emphasised the positive effects of exposure to natural settings, such as recovery from stress and mental fatigue. This sense of peacefulness and rehabilitation, known as "Restoration", also makes people emotionally attached to parks and natural areas, as they may rely on them to fulfil their needs. Especially during childhood, ordinary and extraordinary experiences in nature seem to play an essential role in setting up such a wellbeing process. Evidence showed that being surrounded by natural elements can promote children's concentration, attentional capacity, self-discipline, and impulse control.

However, despite extensive research investigating the restoration processes, their ontogenesis remains unclear. Therefore, the present contribution aims to understand what kind of early experiences and activities first led to restoration (e.g., ordinary/extraordinary; structured/unstructured), when the individual became aware of this experiential feeling and what this awareness meant at that time and in later stages of life.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

We used a retrospective approach based on qualitative analyses on life-history interviews: they were collected for a different research purpose (namely, how individuals originate their nature and biodiversity commitment), from 2011 to 2015 within the BIOMOT EC-FP7 on a sample of biodiversity stakeholders from different EU countries. Variables are mapped along three main life periods (i.e., 0-15 years of age; 15-25 years of age; 25 years of age until the time of interviews), considered within each semi-structured interview. Thus, we aim to discuss the chronological trajectory that leads to restoration experiences, considering different levels of analysis (i.e., contextual, social, pragmatic, psychological).

Upon completion of the analyses, based on the literature, results are expected to highlight that direct and frequent early experiences in nature correlate with a deep feeling and awareness of natural restorative effects, especially when experiences are conducted during unstructured activities and bucolic contexts. Furthermore, we predict that undergoing and recognising these people-environment properties would enhance both natural places attachment and environmental commitment in adulthood.

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

The restorative benefits deriving from experiences in nature seem to promote meaningful bonds with the natural world and positive environmental attitudes. However, given the increased urbanisation and the change of lifestyles, there is an increasing loss of contact with nature. Implications include detrimental effects on psychophysical development and a progressive loss of sensitivity to biodiversity and nature in general. Thus, it is essential to raise questions about the role of early experiences and whether they may influence the capacity to facilitate specific restorative feelings and broader environmental awareness.

The qualitative method will allow us to embrace a life course perspective and rebuild the individuals' entire experience of life and interwoven trajectories. By highlighting the most life-changing episodes, this work intends to contribute to this research field with a deep knowledge of the critical factors that activate restorative processes in humans.

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

Understanding the roots of these psychological functions could enhance further research investigating the same issue with quantitative approaches; as well as deepening how to foster connectedness to nature and recovery of adaptive resources consumed due to the demands of day-to-day life.

Palavras-chave : restoration, nature experiences, connection to nature