

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURE TO URBAN FINNS

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Abstract

Today, large majority of Finns live in the southern parts of the country in urban development centres. Although by European standards, Finnish cities are still relatively green, but the green areas of the largest growth centers are faced with major land-use pressures. In the Nordic countries, people have also outside cities rather wide opportunities to use water and land areas based on common right of access. It is, however, unclear what kind of effects the urbanization process has to people's nature relationship and how fast these changes are occurring.

In a recent research project 'Urban nature and Human Well-Being' funded by Academy of Finland different types of uses and relationships towards nature in Finland were studied. Moreover, the impact of use of nature to people's mental well-being were investigated. The data was collected by a postal questionnaire was sent to 3000 residents aged 15-75 of two major cities, Helsinki and Tampere. The response rate was 42,6 %

The study results confirm that increased number of visits to nature both within and outside the city increased people's mental well-being. Almost half of the respondents stated their favourite place in urban area to be located in a forest or in an other extensively managed nature area. Respondents were categorized into six classes based on the relative appeal of nature and the built environment: true urban, moderately urban, urban nature lovers, moderate nature lovers, true nature lovers and others. About half of the respondents (48%) felt great attraction towards nature, and roughly a third (35%) felt a strong attraction towards built-up areas. The true urbans formed the smallest group (5%) in this study.

Results show that nature is still important for large part of urban residents in Finland. The loss of highly restorative nature areas due to compact city policies should be taken more seriously as a psychological public health and urban planning concern. Moreover, the information about the motives for visiting nature should be further used in designing nature tourism services for urban clients.

Key Words

Nature and human well-being, nature tourism, urban green areas, nature relationship

Key references

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