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Health from nature

The ongoing sixth wave of extinction is significantly reducing biodiversity. Along with urbanisation, the connection people have with nature is also declining. According to the biodiversity hypothesis*, the decline in biodiversity and the increase in inflammatory diseases and allergies may be linked.

As studies show that nature has a favourable effect on human health, it is important to ensure that natural environments can be

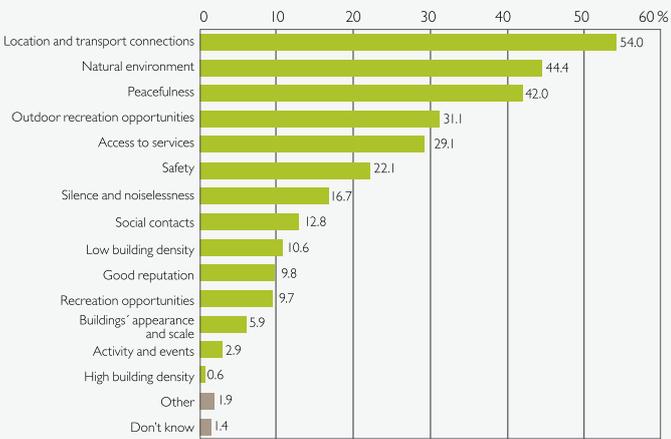
found close to human habitation in the more and more densely populated cities. It has been observed that spending time in nature improves our mood, relieves stress and lowers heart rate and blood pressure.

Activities in nature increase our exposure to diverse microbes, which protects against diseases caused by an immunological imbalance, for example, against allergies and asthma.

Closer to nature
300 meters

is the maximum distance between residential areas and the recreational areas in the neighbourhood according to the recommendation of the Ministry of the Environment of Finland. Parks in the Helsinki metropolitan area supplement the network of recreational areas formed by forests.

ASPECTS OF URBAN AREAS VALUED BY RESIDENTS



According to the Finnish 2016 Asukasbarometri (Residents' barometer), a natural environment is the second most important factor affecting contentment in residential areas after location and transport connections.

3km

Atopy may be less common in children who live within a radius of 3 km from forests or agricultural land than in children in the control groups.



Nature saves money

The costs of allergies to Finnish society have gone down by 15% as a result of a change of direction made by the Finnish Allergy Programme 2008–2018. The focus has been moved from the treatment of symptoms to the prevention of allergies, for example, to paying attention to the importance of contact with nature.

6.8 billion \$

were the estimated savings in public health costs in the United States in 2010 when it was calculated that trees had absorbed 17.4 tons of air pollution.

-£280

In Scotland, the costs of treatment of mental health problems go down by £280 per person near green areas.

The revitalising effect of parks and forests

15 minutes

In a forest or a park already helped the test subjects feel revitalised in a field test carried out in Helsinki.

42%

Danish people who lived at a distance of 1 km or more from green areas experienced 42% more stress than people who lived near those areas. A total of 11,200 adults participated in the study.

In Japan, clearly fewer cases of lung, breast and colon cancer have been reported in forested areas than elsewhere in the country. The study took into account the effect of socio-economic factors and smoking.

Further information

- Nature and health, Sitra: sitra.fi/en/topics/green-health/
- The state of the environment in Finland 2017 / Urban nature: ymparisto.fi/en-US/Maps_and_statistics/The_state_of_the_environment_in_Finland_in_2017
- Ihmisen ja ympäristön yhteinen terveys – luonnoltaan monimuotoisempi elinympäristö turvaa terveyttä. Forum for Environmental information: ymparistotiedonfoorumi.fi/puheenvuorot/ihmisen-ja-ympariston-yhteinen-terveys
- Connecting global priorities: biodiversity and human health. A state of knowledge review. UNEP, WHO and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2015: cbd.int/health/stateofknowledge
- Luonto lähelle ja terveydeksi, a report: helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/153461 (abstract in English)

Sources

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