

Restoration Revisited: The Swiss and the Forest

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Introduction

A vast body of studies shows that people generally prefer natural environments like parks and forests over urban environments for restorative purposes (e.g. Hartig & Staats, 2006; Nordh et al., 2009; Stigsdotter et al., 2010). However, it is still not too clear which characteristics and attributes of e.g. forests are perceived as fostering or hindering factors for restoration.

We addressed this issue by analyzing a Swiss national representative sample regarding their motives and preferences for visiting forests. Additionally, we asked them to evaluate their forest visits in terms of restorative effects and to rate diverse characteristics and attributes of the forest.

Methods

Data of $N = 3022$ individuals (mean age 52,58 SD 16.08, 52 % female) has been elicited using computer assisted telephone interviews and a web based survey.

Main Findings

A factor analysis (varimax rotation) resulted in three motives for visiting forests, which could be labeled as “experience of nature”, “physical activity and enhancing health”, and “social activity”. These motives could be associated with different preferences for characteristics and attributes of the forests, e.g. people who wanted to experience nature preferred ponds, a natural

soundscape, and diversity in general more when compared to people who want to be physically active or enjoy social activity. In terms of restorative effects, people who wanted to experience nature benefitted most from visiting forest while the social activity motive was completely uncorrelated with restorative effects.

Discussion

Our findings imply that restorative effects of visiting forests are related to motives for visiting and are influenced by characteristics and attributes of forests. It can thus be concluded that natural environments have not necessarily a stronger recreational effect compared to other environments.

References

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