

Survey of urbanites asks who needs nature and why?

If you live in Auckland or Wellington, the University of Sydney wants to know how much you think your wellbeing depends on nature being a part of your daily life.

"Does being able to see trees from your office window, or chat to neighbours in a local park make you feel better mentally, physically and socially?" asks [Lucy Taylor](#), a PhD researcher from the University's [Faculty of Science](#) who is working on the [online survey](#), which is also inviting residents of Melbourne and Sydney to take part.

"The answer to those questions can help local councils ensure they have the resources to maintain our cities to benefit human health and wellbeing."

[Associate Professor Dieter Hochuli](#), the leading researcher, from the University's [School of Biological Sciences](#), said, "These are not frivolous concerns. Given that over half the world's population now live in urban areas and about 80 percent will by 2050, understanding how urban ecosystems work is vital to our sustainability and to how governments plan our cities."



There is a comprehensive body of research detailing the benefits of our interactions with nature in urban settings. Qualitative and self-reported evidence is supported by data measuring stress hormones, cardiovascular health, concentration and weight.

"Access to a variety of natural spaces, whether walking paths, gardens, sports fields, town squares or even a local graveyard are associated with a well-documented range of benefits from combating stress and depression, improving focus, boosting job satisfaction and an 'inoculation' effect that relates to the sense of rejuvenation many people feel after engaging with nature," said Taylor.

A study in the US found that people with a view of a natural setting recovered from surgery more quickly than participants with a view of a brick wall, just one of many studies showing that a view of nature, especially water, has tangible benefits.

Research in the UK shows that exercising in parks has greater benefits than exercising inside, with benefits that include expediting recovery from mental fatigue, stress reduction and improved mood and self-esteem.

"Many of these benefits apply to the whole community, even for those people who don't directly engage with natural spaces. That's because they can be protected from modern environmental stressors such as pollution and noise, and climatic events such as heatwaves," said Lucy Taylor.

The British government agency, [Natural England, recommends](#) that urban residents should have greenspace less than 300 metres from their homes. The European Environment Agency states that people should be able to access greenspace with no more than a 15 minute walk.

Much of this research has occurred overseas so the aim of this [online survey](#) is to find out whether urban adult residents of large cities in Australia and New Zealand experience the same benefits of interacting with animals and plants as shown in many of the international studies.

"If people live in the inner-city and never experience trees or wildlife, then they may be deprived from experiencing the benefits that those who regularly take a walk around the harbour or through a park would receive," said Taylor. Access to nature has the potential to become an issue of social justice."

All answers to the survey are anonymous. [The survey](#) ends 30 April 2014: www.whoneedsnature.com.

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