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Anu Besson

In Defence of Cities

Aesthetics of Engagement in Everyday Environments

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
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ABSTRACT

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What aesthetic qualities do we find restorative in our environments? I explore this in the context of staycations, favourite places, nature, urban environments, and the ideal or optimal environment. The data was sourced from social media and print media; a qualitative survey (N=308); and via a literature review. This thesis contrasts and bridges theories in environmental and everyday aesthetics with empirical findings in environmental preference studies, to critically examine current knowledge about environmental preferences and restoration, and to fill gaps and identify new directions for research. The main conclusions are that environmental preferences are influenced by the research method; the term "restorative" warrants expansion; and environmental preferences significantly depend on the subject's expectations, earlier experiences and the interactional possibilities that are available in places. We are not passive recipients of sensory input but actively seek to attain positive influences and alter our surroundings to affect our mood and well-being.

Keywords: environmental aesthetics, environmental preference studies, everyday aesthetics, restorative environments, urban studies

Mitä esteettisiä elementtejä koemme elvyttävinä ympäristössämme? Tutkin kysymystä staycation-ilmiön, mielipaikkojen, luonto- ja kaupunkiympäristöjen, sekä ideaalien/idealisoitujen, "optimaalisten" ympäristöjen näkökulmista. Aineisto on kerätty sosiaalisesta mediasta, perinteisestä mediasta, laadullisesta tutkimuksesta (N=308); ja kirjallisuuskatsauksesta. Asetan rinnakkain ja vastakkain teorioita ja tuloksia arjen estetiikan, ympäristöestetiikan ja kokeellisen ympäristömieltymystutkimuksen saralta tarkastellakseni nykyistä tietoutta ympäristömieltymyksistä ja elvyttävyydestä, sekä paikatakseni tiedollisia aukkoja ja osoittaakseni jatkotutkimussuuntia. Päätulokseni ovat, että tutkimusmenetelmät vaikuttavat ympäristömieltymystuloksiin; termi "elvyttävä" tulisi ymmärtää nykyistä laajemmin; ja ympäristömieltymykset riippuvat huomattavasti yksilön odotuksista, aiemmista kokemuksista sekä vuorovaikutteisista toimintamahdollisuuksista paikassa. Emme ole passiivisia vastaanottajia, vaan haemme aktiivisesti positiivisia aistimuksia ja muokkaamme ympäristöämme mielialamme ja hyvinvointimme hyväksi.

Avainsanat: arjen estetiikka, elvyttävät ympäristöt, kaupunkitutkimus, ympäristöestetiikka, ympäristömieltymystutkimus

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Anu Besson

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS
CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION ... 9
1.1 Background ... 10
1.2 Key terms and concepts ... 11
1.3 Research questions and structure ... 13

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION ... 17
2.1 Environmental and everyday aesthetics ... 18
2.2 Empirical environmental preference studies ... 20
2.3 Restorative and/or aesthetically appealing environments ... 23
2.4 Positive and negative aesthetics of environment ... 28

3 DATA AND METHODS ... 34
3.1 Overview of data and method selection ... 34
3.2 Data collection ... 35
3.3 Identified issues in data collection and analysis ... 40

4 RESULTS ... 43
4.1 Overview of articles ... 43
4.2 Results by themes ... 45
4.2.1 Aesthetic appeal in environments ... 45
4.2.2 Aesthetic problems in environments ... 49
4.2.3 The “optimal human habitat” ... 51
4.3 What did we learn about preferred environments? ... 54

5 DISCUSSION ... 58
5.1 Positive nature, negative cities – or vice versa? ... 58
5.2 The restorative effect of aesthetic appeal ... 61
5.3 What does optimal mean in ’optimal human habitat’? ... 63

6 CONCLUSIONS ... 67
6.1 Yearning for beauty ... 67
6.2 Favourite place as a feedback loop ... 68
6.3 Looking vs experiencing ... 70
6.4 Cities as the optimal human habitat? ... 71

TIIVISTELMÄ ... 74

REFERENCES ... 76

ORIGINAL PAPERS

1 INTRODUCTION

What do we like and dislike, in an aesthetic sense, about our everyday public environments – and why does it matter?[1] The underlying reason powering this dissertation has been my personal notion that the aesthetic qualities of one's surroundings can significantly affect one's mental, emotional and physical experience of the world. I have been interested in this question in its different iterations since childhood; if not analytically and critically, then intuitively and emotionally. I grew up in a small village in central Finland, at a lakeshore in the middle of a firtree forest. Perhaps gilded by nostalgia, I today view my early environment through the lens of poetic environmental aesthetics of Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* (1923):

> *The brown, frosted grasses under her feet were velvet piles. The old mossy, gnarled half-dead spruce-tree, […] was a marble column in a palace of the gods; the far dusky hills were the ramparts of a city of wonder. And for companions she had […] the fairies of the white clover and satin catkins, the little green folk of the grass, the elves of the young fir-trees, sprites of wind and wild fern and thistledown. Anything might happen there--everything might come true.*[2]

Early on, I became imprinted with the idea that people are – consciously and/or subliminally - sensitive and open to positive and negative aesthetic experiences; and in some cases, those experiences may have far-reaching influences on the individual's environmental preferences and, as discussed later, subjective well-being. In my case, those influences eventually led to this study and a field of profession.

Going back to my opening question: are certain places more aesthetically pleasing than others, and if yes, why? And are aesthetically pleasing places more conducive to subjective well-being than less-pleasant places? During my Master's studies in art history, art education, history and sociology, I was particularly smitten by Christian Norberg-Schulz's thoughts about a concept originating from antiquity: *genius loci*, the spirit of place. Although I do not attempt to reanalyse Norberg-Schulz's term, dissecting the aesthetic appeal of places – what comprises it – is the undercurrent of this thesis. After graduating, I worked as a heritage adviser for architecture and planning consulting companies. As I was assigned to evaluate buildings and sites to deem their architectural, aesthetic and historical value for conservation or re-development purposes, a follow-up to my earlier contemplations appeared: how can an aesthetically

high-quality living environment be defined or determined? Based on what parameters? And, can the views of, for example, specialists or the majority be used to create 'the best' or 'the most beneficial' environment without inevitably oppressing or excluding those who hold differing views? To summarise, the key question that I attempt to answer is: can such environment(s) exist that could be justifiably called, from an aesthetic point of view, 'the optimal human habitat'; and if yes, how can such environments be identified or produced?

1.1 Background

The theme of this thesis is positive or negative valence attached to places, in other words, what aesthetic aspects, features or elements in the environment we tend to like and dislike. My presupposition is, as discussed later, that aesthetic pleasantness can support attention recovery or restoration, and through that, subjective well-being. Without going too deep in the use of the term valence in psychology, in this context I mean our ability or tendency to appraise events or objects as positive or negative due to their surface qualities. I have focused on the so-called first type of valence,[3] appraisal of beauty and pleasantness related to the sensual, hedonic or aesthetic experience. I treat aesthetic experience both as a value judgement and *aisthesis* - sensuous experience – without drawing a strict line in between. This is because I understand them to occur and overlap on a gliding scale instead of being neatly separated.

In this thesis I attempt to identify or describe the 'optimal human habitat' in the aesthetic sense. To get to that end point, the theories and findings I discuss are from the fields of environmental and everyday aesthetics and environmental psychology; however, my research situates in the wider context of art and architecture history, sociology and media studies that also formed my Master's degree studies and general areas of interest. My approach is descriptive and contextualising rather than normative or definitive due to my training in art history: as a discipline, art history aims to describe and interpret phenomena, in particular creative expression and aesthetic experiences, in time and place, as part of a certain era, culture and society.

My multidisciplinary approach is mostly influenced by Arnold Berleant's environmental aesthetics, Yuriko Saito's everyday aesthetics and Yi-Fu Tuan's cultural geography. I will discuss the core theories that inform this thesis in section 2. The reason for selecting these thinkers is their idea of shared humanity: we all have certain neurobiological needs and capabilities, but also socio-cultural, personal and subjective attributes that affect and differentiate how we perceive, experience, value and devalue our environments at different points in time. My approach is not limited to previously established theories and findings, but I will also discuss data I gathered during this project from a range of sources, from analysing research and theory literature to written and pictorial content in social and lifestyle media and direct data generation via a qualitative survey.

When I started this project, my initial attempt was to identify and describe what specific aesthetic qualities or elements people find pleasing or displeasing in their everyday public environment - by public I mean spaces that are relatively easily accessible

by all, focusing on but not limited to outdoor spaces such as streetscapes and landscapes. However, after reading my PhD supervisor Pauline von Bonsdorff's multifaceted and insightful publication *The Human Habitat - Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives* (1998), I began to understand how monumental and complex a task I had chosen. The first roadblocks emerged: what culture, country or group to study? Why that specific group and not some other? What types of public environments? Areas of business and civic services, or industry, residence, education, leisure, recreation, or a combination of all these? How to gather information without an unintentional bias in selecting a group or an area? My solution was to select different groups, situations and countries in the modern Western context.

This thesis comprises four articles bridging theory and empirical studies as follows: Article I presents a content analysis of data sourced from lifestyle and social media, Article II discusses the results of a content analysis of a semi-structured text survey, Article III is a literature review of recent empirical environmental preference studies, and Article IV is a discussion on the historical, cultural, mythological and sociological concept of 'paradise' in an attempt to define 'optimal' in the question 'what is the optimal human habitat?'. The purpose of this selection of methods is to analyse the data in the framework of environmental and everyday aesthetics (what kind of theories exist to predict or explain aesthetic likes and dislikes); environmental psychology, landscape and health studies, here collectively referred to as empirical environmental studies or EEP studies (what empirical findings appear to support or challenge the abovementioned theories); and sociological and historical viewpoints (what do respondents value in this point of time and as members of specific cultures or groups).

1.2 Key terms and concepts

This glossary is provided to assist the reader to better understand the research questions presented in section 1.3 and the ensuing findings and discussion.

Aesthetic and *aesthetic experience*. By aesthetic I mean both sensuous perception and sensuous qualities of objects that are perceived as pleasing, wonder- or imagination-evoking and valued. I do not imply that aesthetic experience is always positive (negative aesthetic experience can unfold for example when the sensuous quality is for some reason disliked or devalued), but for the sake of succinct expression, I add the qualifier 'negative', when I discuss disliked environments or experiences. Aligning with Pauline von Bonsdorff's definition, aesthetic experience contains the cornerstones of sensuousness, sensitivity, imagination and evaluation.[4] Sensuousness refers to sensations, but also to the act of integrating what is sensed into one's body – being a living, sentient being in the material world. Sensitivity in turn arises from the abilities to discriminate and savour. Imagination is a dimension where perception and thinking intermingle, being a synthetising aspect of experience, drawing from or relating to the subject's worldview, desires and hopes. Evaluation is about recognising what things are, but also discerning their value to the subject.

Biophilia and *biophilic design*. Biophilia means innate affinity with living things, coined by biologist Edward O. Wilson in his book of the same name (1984). Wilson's collaborator, architect Stephen Kellert has later developed 'biophilic design', architecture and urban planning stream that draws from the work of many well-known researchers such as Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, Roger Ulrich and Terry Hartig. As discussed by Kellert throughout his work, biophilic designers propose that similar sensations we were presumably exposed to during our species' early evolution continue to be crucial for our well-being as 'neurological nourishment;' meaning that the mind automatically translates those nature's elements that have been useful to our survival as a species as 'beautiful'.[5]

Empirical environmental studies (EEP). Research mainly in the fields of environmental psychology, landscape studies and health studies, attempting to identify environmental preferences of a specific subject group or more universally, preferences of humans as a species. Such category name of studies does not appear in the field's literature, but for the ease of reference I use the title and abbreviation to discuss empirical studies that share similar research questions, methods and results in these separate but related fields.

Environment. Arnold Berleant discusses the intertwining, overlapping yet separate meanings of 'environment'. *Nature* means predominantly the natural environment, flora and fauna – although also human-made or human-influenced nature such as gardens and parks can be and often are discussed as nature. *Landscape* means scenery, a view of environment, either natural or urban. *Surroundings* are the immediate location of the subject, whereas *environment* is the encompassing whole where the subject is situated and of which s/he is a part of: breathing the air, taking in nutrients, operating in and experiencing the four-dimensional space. [6] Among others, also Allen Carlson and Pauline von Bonsdorff have discussed that nature is difficult to define, because untouched environment hardly exists and 'artificial' or urban environments are always subject to and affect nature's processes, including weather and seasons, and are built of materials extracted from nature.[7] By environment I mainly mean landscape and surroundings, but at times, I mean all Berleant's four definitions simultaneously. The facet I am discussing hopefully comes clear from the context.

Environmental aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics in this thesis largely aligns with the view formulated by Arnold Berleant. According to Berleant, experiencing an environment aesthetically requires the subject's participation in the appreciative process, including physical presence (also movement and bodily stances), cognitive processes (knowledge, memories, associations) and creative or imaginative perceptual involvement. Berleant emphasises how we never experience environment objectively in a vacuum, but as a body with individual sensory acuity and a person with subjective values, taste, and learned and imagined knowing about what is being experienced. Berleant calls this type of environmental aesthetics the aesthetics of engagement.[8]

Everyday aesthetics. Everyday aesthetics discussed in this thesis is mainly based on Yuriko Saito's and Thomas Leddy's work.[9] The key difference between everyday aesthetics and 'high-art-focused' aesthetics is that everyday aesthetics concentrates on the overall human ability – perhaps even persuasion or gravitation - to experience things aesthetically. Everyday aesthetics is interested in everyday objects, activities and events as the (potential) source for aesthetic experience. The question is not settled

on what constitutes 'everyday' or 'aesthetic' in everyday aesthetics; after all, what is common and everyday for one person, may be rare for another. I concur with Ossi Naukkarinen that the focus of everyday aesthetics is on objects and activities that belong to the 'routine, normal and non-spectacular' and that are usually treated with pragmatic considerations but can be regarded aesthetically.[10]

Although I have drawn from both Saito and Leddy, their approach differs, because Leddy argues that everyday aesthetic experiences stem from an 'artist's gaze', our (momentary) ability to see the ordinary as extraordinary – as something marked by an aesthetic 'aura' - whereas Saito questions the need for a mental switch, concerned such switch would dissolve the ordinariness, the abovementioned routine and normalcy, from the everyday. To Saito, aesthetic experience is or can be a part of the ebb and flow of any everyday experience.[11] Overall, I lean towards Leddy's view about the existence of an aesthetic mode of perception, because we do not always see the world in an aesthetic light, but we are able to do so, for example when guided by a connoisseur.

Favourite place. Kalevi Korpela with various collaborators has found that many of us use specific (types of) places for self-regulation, identity and mood management and to retain or regain a positive state of mind, in particular after a draining experience such as mental fatigue, stress or feeling upset. According to Korpela and his colleague Terry Hartig, the restoring effects of favourite places appear to arise from the experiences of beauty, being in control, feeling free to express oneself and being liberated from social pressure.[12]

Restorative environment. The concept originates from Rachel and Stephen Kaplan and concurrently, Roger Ulrich, in the 1970-1980s. All three propose, although from different viewpoints, that people have a tendency or an innate ability to become replenished in nature. The Kaplans defined restoration as recovery from mental fatigue which in turn may follow from sustained directed attention and cognitive tasks (such as work and study) and this definition is perhaps the most commonly used in the EEP field either explicitly or implicitly.[13] By restorative or restoration I also mean the Kaplan's definition, unless otherwise indicated.

1.3 Research questions and structure

In this thesis, I critically examine how environmental preferences are currently studied, what are the established views on what we prefer or dislike for aesthetic reasons, and how aesthetic environmental experiences affect restoration. Building on and challenging the previous research, I embark on finding answers to the following more specific research questions, each discussed in the corresponding article.

I. What elements in their environment do subjects find aesthetically attractive?
II. What kinds of places make subjects feel restored, and is there a correlation between perceived restorative qualities and aesthetic appeal of a favourite place?

III. Are urban environments experienced as less aesthetically appealing or less restorative than nature, as is often proposed in the EEP field?
IV. Does an 'optimal human habitat' exist – or, is it meaningful to say that the first environment of early hominids and the best-suited environment for today's humans are the same or a similar thing?

My research questions and discussion aim to bridge empirical information generated in the EEP field with theories in environmental and everyday aesthetics. The reason for doing this is to synthetise and contrast knowledge that has not been synthetised and contrasted in this way before. This objective arose from my preliminary notion that, due to the nature of scientific enquiry, empirical studies appear to often focus on quite narrow research questions, such as testing one hypothesis out of thousands in clinical or laboratory-like settings, whereas real life and our interactions with our environment are never clinical or laboratory-like. On the other hand, philosophical inquiries and theories about environment are often based on building on previous thinkers' theories and the application of philosophical analysis, which may lead to a lack of empirical data, leaving a gap between theory and reality. I examine how to bridge such gaps and how the philosophical approach provided by environmental and everyday aesthetics may identify unanswered questions and research directions for empirical science – or, even identify biases or explain some aspects of the findings.

In particular, I explore what I regard as two curious blind spots in the EEP field: reactions vs. interactions, and context. In my view, based on the information gathering done for this thesis, EEP field typically relies on biology, evolution and instincts as explanative factors for people's preferences. Yet, such explanations may be quite speculative because it is impossible to test hypotheses about developments that occurred or were triggered potentially millions of years ago. Parallelly, EEP studies often lack in acknowledging that people are not biological automatons reacting to limbic signals, but we also have a sophisticated inner life, complex mental-emotional needs and an ability, even persuasion, to use and understand symbols – to interact with each other and our environment. Secondly, our actions and behaviour always happen in a context. What seems natural, appropriate, or necessary in one context, may be completely out of place in another.

As a generic example, in the EEP field human responses to the environment may be reduced to two basic emotions, fear and attraction.[14] Everything that is disliked or avoided can be understood as fear-inducing (and vice versa) and everything that is liked can be understood as attractive – beautiful, useful, interesting, relaxing – and again, vice versa. But, in environmental and everyday aesthetics such reduction does not pass the test of philosophical analysis. For example, Jack Nasar and Kym Jones discuss confined, concealed or screened places as examples of fear-inducing, hence disliked, places due to the fear of crime or attack. Yet, enclosed spaces have been an essential element of preferred garden design for centuries: hedge labyrinths, thick shrubbery, stone walls, vine-covered pavilions… Concealed or confined spaces are experienced in a variety of ways in different contexts, and environmental and everyday aesthetics can shed light on these qualitative nuances. For example, Arnold Berleant has pondered the nature of 'ugly' environments from different angles; I will discuss this in more detail in section 2.

In the same vein in the EEP field, environmental preferences are often understood to arise first and foremost from the experience of restorativeness – our presumed preference for places that support recovery from mental fatigue, stress or emotional upheaval. Hence, EEP studies commonly focus on identifying places that have this specific effect on people. However, we are not always stressed, fatigued or in need of relaxation. To make a deliberately pointed observation, presuming that restoration in the meaning of relaxation is the 'most optimal outcome' of an environment is similar to assuming that everyone wishes to live in a sanatorium or a holiday resort, because those places are designed for stress relief and health support purposes. Yet, many choose to live in busy, congested, loud and even dangerous places, such as massive metropoles or socio-economically troubled neighbourhoods, challenging the assumption about restorativeness as an essential or 'best' quality of an environment. In Articles III and IV, I explore this viewpoint further.

By answering the four questions listed at the beginning of this section, I aim to produce a fuller picture about how we interact with our environment and what we like and dislike about its aesthetics as a species, members of culture and society, and as individuals. Throughout my articles, intrigued by the EEP 'blind spots' discussed above, I also delve into the question about how relevant aesthetic qualities are to restorativeness, and, is a *restoring* environment the *optimal* environment for humans? Further, I ponder whether 'restorative', the usual 'end goal' of a place in EEP studies, sufficiently captures other preferred or important qualities of environment such as 'aesthetically appealing', 'beneficial', or 'conducive to subjective well-being', and what do these terms mean in this context. This question about terminology is explored in particular in Article IV.

As mentioned, this dissertation consists of four articles, of which two are theoretical discussions and two are empirical studies. The analysis method of the empirical studies was qualitative content analysis, mixing sociological discourse analysis, sociological grounded theory and 'close reading' of the data. The structure of this thesis is classical, starting from the introduction. The theoretical foundation is discussed in section 2; the data and analysis methods in section 3; the findings in section 4; and the discussion tying together the four articles and their findings is provided in section 5. In the concluding comments in section 6, I contemplate aesthetic yearnings, a wish to experience or make things of beauty; environment as a feedback loop to change one's mood or mindset; and how aesthetic experiences are a source for experiencing greater unity and coherence within oneself and in one's life. I conclude that aesthetic experiences are an important pathway to greater subjective well-being.

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1 By aesthetic (qualities, features or elements), I mean sensuously perceived aspects of the environment as opposed to, for example, logically deduced or observed mainly from a rational or utilitarian perspective.

2 Lucy Maud Montgomery, Emily of the New Moon, (1923), Chapter: 'The House in the Hollow', Project Gutenberg, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0201141h.html#C01

3 Vera Shuman et al, "Levels of Valence", chapter: 'Multifaceted Valence', *Frontiers in Psychology*, (2013), Vol. 4, Issue 261.

4 Pauline von Bonsdorff, *The Human Habitat - Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives*, (Jyväskylä: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics Series Vol. 5, 1998), 81-89.

[5] Stephen Kellert et al (ed.), Biophilic Design: The Theory, Science and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life, (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

[6] Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape. Toward an Aesthetic of Environment*, (US: The University Press of Kansas, 1997), 29-30.

[7] For example, Berleant & Carlson (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Human Environment*, (China: Broadview Press, 2007) and Bonsdorff (1998).

[8] Berleant 1997, 64-81; and Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense*, (Imprint Academic, 2010), 29.

[9] See Yuriko Saito, *Everyday aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Broadview Press, 2012).

[10] Ossi Naukkarinen, "What is 'Everyday' in Everyday Aesthetics?" *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2013), Vol 11, Section 6.

[11] Saito (2007), 43-53.

[12] Kalevi Korpela, "Are Favourite Places Restorative Environments?", *Healthy Environments*, (1991) EDRA 22, 373; and Kalevi Korpela & Terry Hartig, "Restorative Qualities of Favorite Places," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (1996), Vol 16, 221.

[13] For an overview of the EEP key theories about restorativeness – the attention restoration theory and information gathering theory by Kaplans, and the stress-reduction theory by Ulrich – see Ksenia Kirillova and Xinran Lehto, "Aesthetic and Restorative Qualities of Vacation Destinations: How are They Related?", *Tourism Analysis*, November 2016, section 2.2 'Restorative Environments'.

[14] Jack Nasar & Kym Jones, "Landscapes of Fear and Stress", *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol 29, No 3, May 1997, 291-323.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Why do the aesthetics of our environment matter? For millennia, various thinkers have understood aesthetic experience as a source for pleasure.[1] The themes of beauty and art and the pleasure derived from them have been at the centre of aesthetics since it was developed as its own field of philosophy in the 1700s. David Hume said: ”[p]leasure and pain… are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity but constitute their very essence”.[2] More recently, aligning with Hume and Immanuel Kant, Alexander Nehamas characterised beauty as an invitation to explore and interpret. According to Nehamas, shared experiences of beauty are particularly intense forms of communication.[3] Going back to the roots of the term aesthetic, in this thesis I use it containing both its meanings, *aisthesis* – sensuous perception; and *aesthetic* – discernment and appreciation of aesthetically pleasing, such as beautiful. An important and related theme in this thesis is the restorative, replenishing, unifying or whole-making power of an aesthetic experience. This power is usually identified in music, but it can apply to all aesthetic experiences.[4]

In the past, beauty was commonly associated with “high arts”: painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry.[5] During the past few decades, the field of aesthetics has moved beyond the sole contemplation of art and beauty to the appreciation of (any and all) things as they appear to our senses. Of the newer branches of aesthetics, environmental aesthetics examines aesthetic perception and appreciation in relation to everything that engulfs us, whereas everyday aesthetics studies aesthetic experiences drawn from the ordinary or familiar via all senses.[6][7] Both environmental and everyday aesthetics have expanded the field from “lofty or complex” themes such as beautiful or sublime to the quotidian, but from different viewpoints. This dissertation is mostly informed by the work of Arnold Berleant, Yuriko Saito and Yi-Fu Tuan. As I will discuss in more detail later on in this chapter, Berleant is interested in the interactionalism and continuum between the perceiver and the perceived, the subject and his or her environment. Saito draws our focus to the seemingly insignificant as a source of aesthetic enjoyment, but is also interested in parts fitting to a whole and the ambience of a situation as an aesthetic experience. Tuan writes about what connects and separates us: our biological aptitudes and impera-

tives, but also different cultural perspectives to the world. The core theme influencing this thesis, collected from the above, is the immediacy of experience: being alive is a first-person lived-through flow of moments and sequences, sometimes responded to, reflected and analysed, sometimes simply felt. The environment incessantly affects and influences us nevertheless.[8]

The main idea I examine throughout this thesis is that humans are not passive observers or recipients of the stimuli of their environment, but adapt their behaviour, choose locations and actions, and make changes to their surroundings as a consequence of sensations and interactions, including pleasure and challenges, provided by their surroundings.[9] This theme has been earlier explored by, for example, John Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Referenced by Philip Zeltner, Dewey pondered an idea that every creature is either in sync or out of sync with its environment and every out-of-sync moment leads to a struggle, an attempt, to restore the sync. The struggle in turn – where it is not fatal – leads to learning and growth.[10] In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty argues that perception is not solely a faculty of the brain or intelligence, but we perceive with, through and as a body.[11] Komarine Romden-Romluch discusses Merleau-Ponty's notion that when we perceive the world, we grasp "the power of reckoning with the possible",[12] meaning that we have an intrinsic ability or persuasion to select an action in every environment from all potential actions.[13] Considering the thinking of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, environment always invites or prompts us to act in it or in relation to it in one way or another.

2.1 Environmental and everyday aesthetics

In recent decades in the field of environmental aesthetics, two distinctive streams have emerged, here called cognitive and non-cognitive.[14] A prominent proponent of the cognitive stream, Allen Carlson suggests that a factual-logical viewpoint such as scientific knowledge about what is being perceived, can significanlty influence or enhance the aestethic experience.[15] Other thinkers, including Yuriko Saito and Yrjö Sepänmaa, have proposed that other forms of knowledge such as local narratives, folklore and mythological stories can be endorsed either as complementary with or as alternatives to scientific or factual knowledge.[16] Emily Brady has emphasised the importance of imagination and creative thinking as enhancers or building blocks of an aesthetic experience: the degree to which imagination is active depends on the individual appreciator, the nature of the aesthetic object and the aesthetic situation itself.[17] Arnold Berleant, in turn, has argued the centrality of non-cognitive position that is somatic and interactional. However, Berleant's view is not devoid of cognitive aspects. He discusses how attitudes towards and experiences of environment may change based on acquired knowledge: for instance, we may learn to appreciate unappealing features of nature or landscapes by learning about ecology.[18]

Berleant emphasises the human condition as a whole as a maker of an aesthetic experience: we always perceive through the lens of our values, sensory acuity, knowledge and memories;[19] and are a part of, permeated by and in continuum with

environment.[20] For Berleant, to appropriately appreciate the environment aesthetically we are to minimise our distance to it; accept, acknowledge or seek immersion. The Kantian tradition in aesthetics treats disinterestedness as one key factor in defining aesthetic experience, whereas Berleant has moved away from this prerequisite for an experience to be called aesthetic.[21] In this thesis, my focus has been somewhere in between the cognitive and non-cognitive positions. I am interested in the direct somatic, spatial and temporal experience in the environment and its effect on our conscious and subliminal experiences, but throughout this thesis I also discuss how we are in a continuous interactional circuit with our environment: we receive cognitive and non-cognitive information from it, react to it, and seek to change our surroundings to suit our needs and moods. In particular, I discuss how I see environment as a feedback loop that we intentionally use to alter or improve our mental and emotional states – for example, by tidying up to feel more organised, in control and aesthetically satisfied.

Like environmental aesthetics, the field of everyday aesthetics has also expanded our understanding on what can be experienced aesthetically. Yuriko Saito and Thomas Leddy have discussed the "smaller" or "lower" aesthetic experiences – such as appraising things as pretty or neat - in contrast to or in addition to the more traditional themes such as beauty or sublime. Saito and Leddy discuss the aesthetics of the quotidian, including the aesthetic pleasure derived from tidying up or restoring the "correctness" or "appropriateness" of how something should appear aesthetically. Quoting Leddy, Saito notes that tidying up and cleaning have traditionally been excluded from aesthetic discussion as uninteresting, possibly due to gender bias where traditional women's sphere of work and life has not generated the same intellectual interest as more "complex" questions.[22] Contemplating a similar theme with Berleant, Saito argues that when we experience the environment aesthetically, we take it in as a whole, including the fixed and the mutable; the built and natural elements; humans and animals; sensations, activities, cultural elements; the season, weather and temporal changes.[23] Most recently, Saito has focused on what belongs to the domain of everyday in the everyday aesthetics;[24] however, this focus is less relevant to my dissertation. In her earlier work, which I find most fruitful to my thinking, Saito examines the appreciation of things for their thing-ness, and appreciation of ambience - the atmosphere of a situation or environment as a whole.[25] These will be discussed further in the following chapters.

If we can consider it established that the aesthetics of an environment matter, how to best study such an experience? Can the aesthetics of environment be conveyed by an image? This has for long been a pertinent question in environmental aesthetics and it is a core question in this thesis as well, because in the EEP field, ranking or assessing images appears to be the most common method of studying environmental preferences. The question of presenting a multi-dimensional, somatic environment as a picture or a video inevitably evokes other questions such as: what is the nature of aesthetic experience and what senses could or should participate in the formation of it? An overview of relevant discussion on these topics is provided by Marta Tafalla and Ira Newman.[26] To summarise and simplify, expanding from the classical art- and beauty-focused aesthetics that used to mainly rely on disinterested attitude and the

"higher" senses of vision and hearing, environmental and everyday aesthetics recognise that all senses and different cognitive and non-cognitive perspectives can participate in the formation of aesthetic experience.[27] In particular Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant have criticised the attempts to view environments as art or equating landscapes with images; quantifying features or qualities of environments to calculate their aesthetic value.[28] According to Carlson, a landscape should not be viewed as art or framed image, because that approach flattens and weakens the experience available from it. He calls this approach objectivist:

> *The basic idea of the objectivist point of view is that our appreciation is guided by the nature of the object of appreciation. Thus, information about the object's nature, about its genesis, type, and properties, is necessary for appropriate aesthetic appreciation.*[29]
>
> …
>
> *In the way in which the art critic and the art historian are well equipped to aesthetically appreciate art, the naturalist and the ecologist are well equipped to aesthetically appreciate nature.*[30]

Berleant argues that experiencing environment aesthetically is not about looking but about embodiment and engagement: being somatically present, in continuum with and interacting with one's surroundings. Cognitive and experiential meanings – knowledge-based and lived-through associations, bodily stances and intimations – are complementary aspects of aesthetic experience: "environment is an interrelated and interdependent union of people and place" and that is why "we cannot discover the aesthetic value of [an environment] … from an accumulation of particular amenities".[31] Berleant suggests, and I concur, that in assessing aesthetic qualities, we ought to move beyond the objects of assessment to the experience itself.[32]

2.2 Empirical environmental preference studies

Of empirical sciences, EEP studies are perhaps the most focused on our preferences and dislikes about the everyday public environment. The typical approach in the EEP field is the attempt to identify restorative and fatiguing elements in the environment to plan, alter or manage our surroundings, for example by reducing noise or adding calming features, for better mental and physical health outcomes. This interest towards environment's ability to affect mental and physical health is not new: as an empirical inquiry it began in earnest in the 1970s. Rachel and Stephen Kaplan were among the first to suggest that cognitive task-executing tends to result in mental fatigue and people need to restore their mind and body to be able to function normally and experience comfortable levels of well-being.[33] The Kaplans suggested that nature – in this context typically understood as lush greenery with water elements - has a notable, possibly inherent, restorative effect on people: experiencing greenery or parts of it (suhc as as images or potted plants) appears to expedite recovery from mental fatigue. Prominent researchers interested in similar research questions in this area include for example Roger Ulrich, Terry Hartig and Kalevi Korpela.

Since the 1970s, it has been a widespread practice in the EEP field to study the environment formalistically, focusing on colours, shapes and forms, in an attempt to identify the potential neuro-biologically coded, inherently pleasant factors;[34] and to quantify the aesthetic value or scenic beauty of environments - this focus appears to link to at the time prominent theory in art criticism, formalism.[35] However, mainly it appears to draw from the idea of positive aesthetics: nature only or primarily has positive aesthetic qualities such as order, balance, unity and harmony, whereas artificial environments possess these in rarer instances. Positive aesthetics have been debated and also opposed in environmental aesthetics, but the approach remains strong in the EEP field, in particular among the supporters of biophilia.[36] In the EEP field, aesthetically appealing and restorative are understood to be either interchangeable or strongly linked, because of the presumption that what has aided our species' survival in the long course of evolution, has become viewed as also aesthetically pleasing. Hence, the concepts of aesthetic appeal and restorativeness are often studied and discussed in parallel.[37] A recent commentary to this is also provided by Katya Mandoki in her discussion of bio-aesthetics or how our ability to appreciate things aesthetically evolved as a by-product of biological evolution.[38]

Perhaps the most influential theories in the EEP field on what is experienced as restorative are Roger Ulrich's stress-reduction or psycho-evolutionary theory (PET), and the attention restoration theory (ART) and the information gathering theory (IGT) by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan.[39] According to PET, we become stressed in threatening situations, whereas nature – where our hominid ancestors evolved – is instinctively de-stressing. ART formulates that cognitive task-executing tires the mind, whereas nature's "softly fascinating stimuli" engage and restore the mind.[40] IGT proposes that sufficiently complex environments that have prompted information gathering in the past have enhanced our survival abilities and consequently became preferred also aesthetically.[41] The ultimate explanation of these theories is similiar – nature inherently de-stresses us – although the perspective to the reasons for why is slightly different. A simplified summary of the usual perspective in EEP studies is that restorative effect of nature arises from neuro-biological and evolutionary factors and instinctive cues about safety and sustenance provided by greenery and water; the presence of such elements allows us to unwind and feel better. The hypothesis is that because humans as a species evolved surrounded by greenery, greenery is our ancestral or instinctive home.[42] However, in my view these theories do not sufficiently account for the possibility that nature has been also experienced as inconventient, threatening or overwhelming by our ancestors due to weather and seasons, pests, predators, injuries, superstitions and the everyday struggle to find shelter and sustenance – the everpresent risk of falling out of sync with one's environment, as notioned by Dewey.

As I discuss in Article III, Roger Ulrich, one of the pioneers and often-referenced researcher in the EEP field, has studied the positive effects of nature since the 1970s. [43] His perhaps most famous finding is that viewing nature through a window appears to expedite recovery after surgery.[44] Ulrich focuses on the stress-reducing or health-inducing effects of nature as opposed to the built environment and as experienced via images, windows, pot plants, hospital gardens and virtual imagery.[45] His focus follows his 1979 study where he identified that stressed individuals feel better after viewing images of nature, but sadder and more aggressive after viewing images of urban

environment. This study contained 100 images, half from nature, half from cities and he commented: "no people or animals were visible in either the nature or urban collections. The absence of people probably increased the pleasantness levels of the urban as well as nature scenes."[46] The urban images depicted only commercial, industrial and vehicle parking areas in the US to avoid potential "emotional bias" attached to residential or religious/ceremonial areas.

Following in Ulrich's footsteps, often referencing his studies, a large body of research has emerged corroborating the view that built environments are more stress-inducing or less restorative than nature.[47] Some researchers, including architects Christopher Alexander and Jan Gehl, have argued for decades that urban environments can and do have plenty of aesthetically appealing and restorative qualities, on par with nature's environments. In spite of this, a common, explicit or implicit presumption in the EEP field is that humans have not yet evolved to cope with the negative sensations and the overall sensory overload present in cities. In this thesis I question this presumption, taking into account that we are not mere biological automatons reacting to sensory cues but have a rich and complex inner life, including cultural, social, mental and emotional needs in addition to physical ones. I will also discuss that although the history of urbanism – if we count from the emergence of the first cities in today's Syria and Mesopotamia in 6500 BCE – is relatively short in comparison to our species' evolution, humans have always attempted to adjust to, alter or decorate their surroundings as evidenced by the remnants of a 300,000-year-old settlement of cave dwellers in Marrakesh, Morocco.[48] The relationship between us and our environment has always been a two-way-street or rather, a web of interactional possibilities.

In Article IV, I delve into the proposition made in the EEP field that the presumed "original" human environment still is the "most suited" for our aesthetic needs. Gordon Orians and Judith Heerwagen first formulated a hypothesis that our inherent landscape preferences include that of savannah - open grassland areas with some bushes and trees, water nearby, opening to at least one direction with vantage to horizon, evidence of animal life, and flowering and fruiting plants.[49] However, the savannah hypothesis has been contested as lacking in cultural depth: we may be conditioned to prefer savannah-like environments because similar elements are often found in modern parks and playgrounds, not vice versa.[50] Regardless, an urban design stream that subscribes to the natural habitat hypothesis at least in principle (humans feel most at home surrounded by nature)[51] has emerged, called *biophilic design*.[52] The proponents of biophilic design think that similar sensations we were presumably exposed to during our species' early evolution continue to be crucial to our well-being. Stephen Kellert argues that experiencing organic shapes and forms, such as fractals, are a biological necessity for our well-being, because fractals offer inherent "neurological nourishment";[53] meaning that the mind automatically translates what has been useful to our survival as a species as beautiful.[54] Again, in my view, this kind of survivalist theory casts too wide a net: fractals are found everywhere in nature, whereas not everything in nature has aided our survival. For example, we may find a leopard's rhythmically patterned coat beautiful, when the same predators were a fatal threat to our ancestors. In my view this indicates that the experience of beauty is culture- and context-depended, not simplistically biologically triggered.

I am not the first researcher noting some of these dilemmas in the abovementioned arguments. Indeed, the EEP field is not homogenous The main positions can be divided into two stances: biology-based and culture-based.[55] The theories discussed so far fall into the former category, whereas for example Marcel Hunziker et al. argue that humans may have evolved in nature – that is, in nonurban or non-artificial environments - but we have also always modified, altered and attached social and cultural meaning to our environments, turning "spaces" into "places".[56] Where the biology-based approach focuses on studying preference towards surface qualities such as forms and colours, the culture-based approach is interested in for example place identity and place attachment. Both positions acknowledge the existence and importance of aesthetic experience in environmental preference;[57] however, aesthetic considerations are not usually in the main focus as both positions see them as initially arising from our biology and hence, *de facto* covered by biology-based theories, which also influence the culture-based EEP studies.[58] In my view, such reductionism does not do justice to the complexity, pervasiveness and meaningfulness that aesthetic considerations and influences have in our everyday life. To examine the question of aesthetic appreciation more fully, other approaches are warranted, such as viewpoints from environmental and everyday aesthetics, and the question of restorativeness.

2.3 Restorative and/or aesthetically appealing environments

As discussed, the usual or mainstream core focus in the EEP field is to identify and describe preferred, aesthetically appealing and hence restorative environments (or vice versa). This has led me to analysing the concept itself: does restorativeness equate with beneficial or "optimal" human environment and what do beneficial or optimal in this context mean? We are not, after all, always in need of restoration - in particular where restoration is understood as relaxation, or regaining the ability to conduct cognitive work, as is often the case in the EEP studies. In this thesis I argue that restorativeness, as understood in the EEP field, is only one aspect of a good-quality everyday environment. The question about what people find aesthetically pleasing or displeasing in their environment could also be asked, for example, in the following iterations without focusing on restoration: what kind of aesthetic elements or qualities people notice positively in their environment? Where do people choose to spend time, when they are free to select, i.e. on holiday, or, when they want to affect their mood in other ways than towards relaxation – for example, to feel more energetic, upbeat, excited or thrilled? And, in what type(s) of environment do people not wish to spend time and why?

These questions do not exclude the idea of restoration but seem to point to a direction of an expanded definition; restoration should not be understood as merely relaxing, de-stressing or calming, but rather unifying or whole-making. In the EEP field, Kalevi Korpela has adopted this perspective by concluding that restorative favourite places are used as a "means of regulating unpleasant and pleasant feelings, the coherence of self-experience, and self-esteem".[59] Throughout this thesis, my aim is

to piece together a larger picture from these smaller questions, which, when combined, hopefully allow a larger unity to unfold. I have approached the question about restorative, preferred/disliked and optimal environments from the viewpoints of holidays (restoration through and in locations that support relaxation and revitalisation), favourite place (a place that is used for the management of emotions, self-identity and self-coherence) and "optimal human habitat", pondering the positive and negative aesthetics of natural and built environments and the concept of paradise as a culturally lasting, imagined ideal environment.

Holidays

In Article I, I discuss how holidays are usually undertaken for the purposes of restoration in the sense of relaxation and replenishment;[60] and through that, for sustaining or improving subjective well-being.[61] Many typical holiday activities, such as sightseeing, photographing and sampling cuisine can be aesthetic pastimes and holidays often take place in aesthetically pleasing locations.[62] Is there, then, a connection or causation between environmental and/or everyday aesthetic experiences, restoration and subjective well-being? Not everyone engages in artistic or cultural activities on a holiday, but everyone is a recipient of a constant flow of sensory cues.[63] Positive and negative sensory data can determine the restorative or depleting effects of the environment.[64] Yi-Fu Tuan has shown that "paradise island" - symbolically expressed in resorts and popular holiday beaches - as an idealised environment has been persistently popular in the collective imagination of the humankind as a safe haven, insulated from the worries of the world.[65] Escapism and isolationism are not the only reasons why people seek idyllic or scenic locations to recharge: findings in environmental psychology[66] and neuroscience[67] (nature boosts restoration and art may aid the release of dopamine, the pleasure hormone, in the brain), indicate that aesthetic experiences are important building blocks for subjective well-being (SWB).

Kevin Melchionne proposes that everyday aesthetic activities such as grooming, cooking and creativity can be particularly important in enhancing SWB by creating a "hedonic high", pleasure that can be re-obtained by repeating or intensifying what caused it.[68] Melchionne posits that SWB is obtainable from two main sources: a) life circumstances; and b) mindset, habits and activities. Everyday aesthetic activities are a potent pathway to increase the SWB, because we have more agency over our everyday activities and practices, than circumstances. Melchionne mainly associates SWB with the ability to regulate one's hedonic high; however, a relevant aspect affecting SWB is *eudemonia*, pleasure obtained from having a sense of purpose in life, social connections with others and avenues for self-expression and self-actualisation.[69] Research suggests that SWB does not only arise from hedonic sources, but also and perhaps more strongly from eudemonia.[70] If holidays exist for restorative purposes and aesthetic experiences have the ability to increase SWB, are holidays usually more about aesthetics than the everyday life, indirectly supporting the theory that aesthetic experiences have a restoring or revitalising effect? One valid aspect is that on holidays we usually have more time – also perhaps inclination - to notice our surroundings aesthetically. But, are holidays, in their potential exotism, escapism and extraordinariness, too far removed from our everyday experience to count in an analysis about

potential preferences and dislikes regarding our everyday environment? A blended approach may shed light on this question.[71]

In Article I, I discuss staycation, a holiday at or near home, to ponder whether it can provide similar relaxation or aesthetic enjoyment as a longer trip to a farther location. Staycation is commonly understood as imitation of a "real" holiday. Consequently or concurrently, it can be seen as make-believe: a performance played with and for oneself, or for one's social circles through social media.[72] Katya Mandoki builds on John Huizinga's and Roger Caillois' categories of play by identifying five basic play types, of which tree essentially apply on staycation. Peripatos, Mimesis and Ilinx (adventure, playful curiosity; make-believe and imitation; and momentary destruction of predictability and normalcy) are the very building blocks of staycation, an activity whose purpose is to enable a novel experience within the familiar.[73] Staycation can also involve the two remaining types of play, Agon and Alea, chance-taking and competition: exploring a familiar region is a gamble that may or may not deliver what is hoped, such as restoration, entertainment, thrill; whereas competition can take place in and out of social media about the depth and wealth of the experience.[74] In addition, Mandoki identifies two different aestetic approaches we can apply in the everyday life: poetics, or attention to art and the artistic; and prosaics, attention to everyday aesthetics, how ordinary things look, feel and are performed.[75] In Article I, I argue that on holiday, we have more time and inclination for play and applying these two types of aesthetic lenses than in the everday life filled with more pragmatic considerations.

Favourite place

In this thesis I discuss, what kind of importance holidays, including staycations, have as sources of environmental or everyday aesthetic experience. But, can special occasions like trips and travels validly be categorised under everyday aesthetics? After all, on holiday, we may be more relaxed, open and geared towards noticing the aesthetics of our surroundings than in the middle of everyday routines. In fact, a body of EEP studies indicates that the most common everyday environment to the majority, cities, may be inherently problematic from an aesthetic point of view: urban areas harbour many stressors and negative sensations and may influence us negatively, whereas experiencing nature provides us with a range of physical, mental and emotional benefits such as restoration.

The common conclusion in the EEP field is that nature must be inherently more aesthetically appealing than urban environments due to these mental, emotional and physical benefits.[76] However, despite the prevalent research in the EEP field, it has not been established what exact qualities or features enable restoration, because different subjects react differently in studies. Kalevi Korpela and Terry Hartig have formulated based on their empirical studies that people identify and use specific places or place types, called *favourite places*, to manage stress or feel calmer or nourished. An essential part of such nourishment is drawn from experiencing beauty in that place.[77] Korpela's and Hartig's findings make one to ask: can mere greenery or naturalness be understood as appealing, if *aesthetic* appeal is the key element for restoration? Nature comes in all shapes and forms; would we inherently perceive, say, an overgrown lawn or a

messy, wiry bush near our house beautiful, compared to a post-card like scenery elsewhere?

As discussed, a common counterargument to this is that we have evolved to see those things beautiful that have aided our species' survival, such as crystal-clear water and flowering, fruit-bearing trees indicating sustenance.[78] However, this argument still does not explain why greenery is experienced as more restorative than a food-filled pantry, or why people travel to see urban sites such as Las Vegas, the Eiffel Tower or London Bridge instead of simply visiting a closest forest. Throughout this dissertation, I contemplate the plausibility of the EEP hypothesis that we intrinsically interpret a range of symbolic, subtle cues (such as fractal forms found everywhere in nature) as more restorative than explicit, straightforward messages about sustenance and safety. Korpela and Hartig, among other researchers, have found that although the favourite place often is in natural settings, also places in the built environment, such as cafés, historical places or one's own home can have restorative effects, depending on the respondent.[79] Why do some people prioritise natural settings as their favourite places, whereas others do not? This apparent discrepancy prompted me to dig deeper into what makes certain environments more restorative than others and the results are discussed in Article III.

In Articles II and III, I attempt to identify what aesthetic elements or qualities in favourite places and environment in general are perceived as restorative. I focus on the noticed link between landscapes and mindscapes and our ability to decipher symbolic or imaginative meanings: for example, a stormy sky can be interpreted as exhilarating and a tidy room as calming. Artists have used this link for centuries:[80] for instance, during Romanticism (ca. 1800-1850), paintings of landscapes were expressly used to convey and evoke emotions.[81] I hypothesise that people use environment(s) as a feedback loop by: picking cues for how to feel from the surroundings, projecting one's inner state to the surroundings, and by modifying one's environment to produce the aspired inner state. This hypothesis is influenced by Yuriko Saito's thinking about the appreciation of thing-ness as well as ambience, something being aesthetically "just right" or appropriate and where we perceive this not be the case, we attempt to alter or rectify the situation (by for example tidying up, or bringing season's decorations in).[82]

Optimal habitat

Do humans have a natural or optimal habitat, in aesthetic sense? This is the key question I ponder in Article IV. If yes, is it the "original" habitat of early hominids, or the most optimal environment for today's humans? Are these two the same and if not, what does the "optimal habitat" mean? Arnold Berleant has commented on this topic in his discussion about *human habitat*.[83] According to Berleant, a(n optimal) human habitat is an environment where people live, work and socialise thrivingly. Also Pauline von Bonsdorff has discussed human habitat, the built sphere of our everyday life, be it optimal or simply (any) surroundings where we dwell.[84] By the *optimal habitat* I mean Berleant's human habitat, but I add the qualifier to distinguish from those environments that people inhabit, but do not thrive in – this is because in ecology, a habitat is simply a residing area of an organism, not the best possible one.

Where to start with the concept of optimal, here meaning the best possible environment? What first comes to mind is "ideal". *Paradise* refers to a long-standing mythical-cultural concept of an environment that offers bliss, ease and perfection - the ideal place of ultimate harmony and lack of need. The word originates from Persian *apiri-Daeza*, a walled orchard or garden. The earliest records of the term date back 5,000 years to Sumerian culture.[85] Virtually all mythologies and religions recognise a primordial paradise, with the common denominators of lack of suffering and need and prevalence of abundance and enjoyment.[86] Because life has never been perfect for the masses, the longed-for perfection often takes place in the otherworld - dwelling of god(s), or afterlife. Given that a paradise is, like utopia, an unattainable ideal, what kind of environment from the available ones could be the optimal? In Article IV, I focus on the concept of paradise in more detail and attempt to answer what else could be optimal.

If the concept of paradise cannot offer answers to optimal, what else could be used as a starting point? Following the lead in the EEP field, in Article IV, I focus on the question: are we more suited to live surrounded by nature than in an urban environment? *Yes* has been the answer of the Garden City movement (by Sir Ebenezer Howard in 1898) and its relatives, spanning to this day in the EEP field and urban design ideologies such as the earlier mentioned biophilic design.[87] But, if we innately prefer nature (or rural life), why does the majority of the world's population live in cities? Economic opportunities or necessities are not the only reason. Humans have always explored, altered and exploited their surroundings. Arnold Berleant points out that we inherently attach values to experiences. According to Berleant, we discriminate against environments that confine or restrict us (physically or mentally) and prefer and thrive in those that allow expansion. Berleant calls this expansion "productive awareness", encompassing curiosity, interest, exploration, discovery and wonder.[88] Berleant indicates that also aesthetic experiences are most readily drawn from environments that allow expansion.[89]

In Article IV, I discuss how an urban environment can be the optimal habitat by serving our complex socio-cultural needs, referencing Berleant. He has drawn analogies between a city and a ship, circus, cathedral and sunset. A city is a logistically and efficiently functioning place of economic and social activity (ship); it offers myriads of experiences ranging from culture to entertainment, wonder, thrill and fright (circus); it manifests and immortalises the ideas and ideals of people in its architecture, functions, customs and layout (cathedral); and it anchors us to something larger (a cosmological viewpoint of the sunset).[90] As another crucial perspective to 'optimal', landscape architect Jacky Bowring, discussing also thoughts by architect Juhani Pallasmaa, has raised the importance of places of sadness, reflection and melancholy. Different environments can contribute to restoration in the sense of replenishing, unifying or whole-making by offering an access to a full range of experiences, including the negative and difficult.[91] Also, the thrill of drama, danger and derelict appeal to many and are one draw-in factor to urban life – we do not always seek the calming, easy or relaxing.[92] Optimal or best possible cannot thus mean an access to only one colour – restorative in the sense of relaxing - in the whole spectrum of experiences.

2.4 Positive and negative aesthetics of environment

If environments should not be viewed as images or art, or focusing on the scenic or the relaxing/restorative, what then makes them aesthetically attractive or unattractive? As discussed in Article III as a "reverse" pathway, Berleant offers an analysis of different modes of negative environmental aesthetics. Regarding built environment, his examples of the unattractive are (American) commercial strip development and shopping mall, which assault the senses due to their vulgarity, marketing hyperbole, visual shrillness and false or contrived aesthetic features, such as cheap imitations of valuable materials. Berleant's other modes of negative aesthetics are: the banal - lack of imagination or new possibilities; the dull - clumsy technique or shallow imagination; the unfulfilled - the "scarring misuse" and "lost possibilities"; the inappropriate - not fit for its purpose or surroundings; and the trivialising and the deceptive, such as "cliché-ridded pastiches" from history. Possibly the most harmful mode of negative aesthetics is the destructive, such as constructions that divide or repress socially. However, Berleant does not suggest that the lack of negative aesthetics suffices in making an environment appealing – quite the contrary, he notes that the lack of positive *or* negative aesthetics may make an environment tip over to the negative due to a vacuum of aesthetic offerings.[93]

Approaching aesthetic appeal from a different angle, again discussed in Article III, Yuriko Saito contemplates the aesthetics of ambience and atmosphere: how we experience a situation as a whole, appraising its ingredients such as the blend of tactile, visual, auditory and somatic elements. According to Saito, sometimes parts fit together to give rise to a satisfying experience, whereas at other times, a mismatch is a dissonance – for example, when one hears Italian music in a traditional Japanese restaurant. The same element may be satisfying in one setting and dissatisfying in another. Aesthetics of ambience links to the sense of place, the recognisable, anticipated or unique mix of sensations and perceptions available there. The aesthetics of ambience is also about the appropriateness of elements to the context and situation, such as season's decorations.[94] Saito raises another essential angle to experiencing the environment aesthetically, demonstrated by the Japanese practice of expressing one's sensitivity and considerateness via sensuous appearance of artifacts and actions – or, how one behaves or makes things to convey one's caring attitude and wish to give aesthetic joy.[95] Although the Western culture in general does not go to similar lengths in sensitive consideration as Japanese, this social aesthetic element is crucial in the everyday life everywhere. How we behave and show consideration or inconsideration towards others' aesthetic sensibility affects our experience of the world. This is particularly salient where masses congregate, including cities.

Although we appear to intuitively know whether we find a place aesthetically appealing or not, the reasons for this appraisal are still being debated. What makes something attractive or unattractive, pleasant or repulsive? One particularly influential theory from the EEP field is the earlier mentioned IGT by Kaplans. Kaplans identified four key qualities of preferred environment, of which *complexity* and *mystery* relate to our presumed need to gather information, while *coherence* and *legibility* serve

our need to make sense of it. However, the IGT has been contested because of the lack of solid empirical support.[96] I note that cities also serve information-acquisition needs (navigating the traffic, work life, shopping etc.) and research has not been carried out to explain why the information gathering needs could only or more aptly be satisfied in nature: logically, the need to learn and make sense seems to point to an innate preference for those environments that are novel in some way. Berleant, again, could shed some light to this: he discusses "authentic" and "false" environments, former meaning an environment that allows people to grow and flourish, and the latter reflecting only a technical or economic solution to a problem: for example, a desolate parking lot of a hypermarket is not a human-centred solution for better city life, but a corporation's solution to a financial and logistical problem.[97] Consequently, cities contain qualitatively different environments, some of which are "authentic" and perhaps more fruitful to information gathering needs, and some "false", and less salient for information gathering.

The ability to grow and flourish in one's environment also includes the ability to modify the environment as required, based on the dislike towards surroundings that do not enable that. One angle is a 2011 meta-study about open offices, reviewing over a hundred earlier studies. Open offices were found to be damaging to the workers' attention span, productivity, creative thinking, motivation and satisfaction, but demotivation was not only caused by distractions: when employees could not influence the aesthetics of their surroundings (including the office furniture, lighting and temperature), their spirits plummeted.[98] Berleant's authentic and false environments, or enabling or disabling environments, parallels with Kellert's nature-filled and nature-deficit environments, but Berleant argues that aesthetic perception always takes place in subjective, cultural and social contexts: each society in history has had its own manner of perceiving aesthetically.[99] In a similar vein, Yi-Fu Tuan writes that every human-made construction is a barrier against the perceived chaos of nature, its natural and supernatural threats.[100] We do not simply perceive or accept environments, but we seek to alter, modify and adjust them proactively to our needs, aesthetic and otherwise. I will discuss in Articles III and IV how this modifying or interactionalism with one's environment appears to be one key to its aesthetic appeal.

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1 Building on Neoplatonic tradition, the medieval church fathers of the 4th century interpreted beauty in terms of good and pleasurable, as a reflection of the world's divine order and beauty – meaning that contemplating beauty offers pleasure, because it is simultaneously about contemplating the divine. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, *Medieval Aesthetics, Key Thinkers: Aesthetics* (Alessandro Giovanelli, edit.), (India: Continuum, 2012), 34-35.

2 Crispin Sartwell, "Beauty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), (Edward Zalta, ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/beauty/, Section 2.4.

3 Sartwell (2016), Section 1.

4 See for example Howard Cannaella, *Why We Need Arts Education, Revealing the Common Good: Making Theory and Practice Work Better*, (Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2015), 93-95. "In this musical moment, all tension can be released, all difficulty forgotten… intricate feelings and interactions occur, invention occurs, without force they [experiencers] can feel more restored, more like human beings." Quote from pages 94-95.

5 Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, (Imprint Academic, 2010), 32.

6 For an overview of the development of environmental aesthetics, see Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture,* (UK: Routledge, 2002), xvii; and Arnold Berleant, "What is Aesthetic Engagement?", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2013), vol. 11 and Allen Carlson, *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics*, (US: Columbia University Press, 2009).

7 For an overview of the development of everday aesthetics, see Yuriko Saito, "Aesthetics of the Everyday", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), (Edward Zalta, edit.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/aesthetics-of-everyday/, Section 2.

8 David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), (Edward N. Zalta, ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology/, section 2.

9 Tom Leddy, "Dewey's Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), (Edward N. Zalta, edit.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/dewey-aesthetics/, section 2.1.

10 Philip Zeltner, *John Dewey's Aesthetic Philosophy*, (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner 1975), 15-25 and 32-33.

11 Komarine Romden-Romluch, "The Power to Reckon with the Possible", *Reading Merleau-Ponty. On Phenomenology of Perception*, (Thomas Baldwin, edit.), (Great Britain: Routledge, 2007), 55.

12 Taking action encompasses all forms of reactive and proactive responses in and towards the environment, including doing nothing (as long as we exist, we perceive, and perceiving is action). Romden-Romluch, (2007).

13 Romden-Romluch (2007).

14 Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), (Edward N. Zalta, edit.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/environmental-aesthetics, Section 3.1. The two positions are usually called cognitive and non-cognitive or narrative and ambient. In this section, I highlight some thinkers but do not imply that others have not made similar points.

15 Carlson (2015), Section 3.1.

16 Carlson (2015), Section 3.1.

17 Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, (Edinburg: MPG Books, 2003), 151.

18 Arnold Berleant, *Living in a Landscape. Toward an Aesthetics of Environment*, (US: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 18-20.

19 Berleant (1997), 24.

20 Berleant (1997), 14.

21 Brady (2013), 142; and Arnold Berleant and Ronald Hepburn, "An Exchange on Disinterestedness", *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2003), Vol 1.

22 Yuriko Saito, *Eveyday Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 150-154.

23 This viewpoint is one theme of *Everyday Aesthetics* (2013) by Yuriko Saito. It is also discussed by Pauline von Bonsdorff in *The Human Habitat*, (international institute of applied aesthetics, 1998).

24 Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

25 Saito (2013), 105-109, 119-124. Appreciation of things for their thing-ness means the appreciation of something that is seen as a particularly apt or 'true' example of its kind.

26 Marta Tafalla, "From Allen Carlson to Richard Long: The Art-Based Appreciation of Nature." *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, 2010, Vol 2, 491-504; and Ira Newman, "Reflections on Allen Carlson's Aesthetics and the Environment", *Canadian Aesthetics Journal*, 2001, Vol 6, https://www.uqtr.ca/AE/Vol_6/Carlson/newman.html

27 Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), (Edward N. Zalta, edit.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/environmental-aesthetics/, section 3.2.

28 Allen Carlson, "Formal Qualities in the Natural Environment", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, (1979), Vol 13, No 3, 100-106; and Berleant (1997), 12-15.

29 Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment. The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2000), page xix.

30 Carlson (2000), 50.

31 Berleant (1997), 12-15.

32 Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense*, (Imprint Academic, 2010), 29.

33 Rachel & Stephen Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature. A Psychological Perspective*, (US: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 185-197 and Stephen Kaplan, "The Restorative Benefits of

Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, (1995), Vol 15, 169-170.

34 Richard Taylor writes: "Researchers are untangling just what makes particular works of art or natural scenes visually appealing and stress-relieving – and one crucial factor is the presence of the repetitive patterns called fractals." "Fractal patterns in nature and art are aesthetically pleasing and stress-reducing", *The Conversation,* 31 March 2017, https://theconversation.com/fractal-patterns-in-nature-and-art-are-aesthetically-pleasing-and-stress-reducing-73255 .

35 Carlson (1979), 100-106.

36 Carlson (2016), section 4.2; and Stephen Kellert & Edward Wilson (edit.), *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, (US: Island Press, 1993).

37 For example Han, Ke-Tsung, "Responses to Six Major Terrestrial Biomes in Terms of Scenic Beauty, Preference, and Restorativeness", *Environment and Behavior*, July 2007, Vol 39, No 4, 529-556, https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/podzim2011/HEN597/um/Readings_Env_Psy/resp_to_terr_biomes.pdf; and Hoyle, Helen et al, "All about the 'wow factor'? The relationships between aesthetics, restorative effect and perceived biodiversity in designed urban planting", *Landscape and Urban Planning*, August 2017, Vol 164, 109-123.

38 Katya Mandoki, "Bio-aesthetics: The Evolution of Sensibility through Nature", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 14 February 2017, Vol 15, https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=769

39 An overview of PET, ART and IGT is provided by Ksenia Kirillova and Xinran Lehto in "Aesthetic and Restorative Qualities of Vacation Destinations: How are They Related?", *Tourism Analysis*, November 2016, section 2.2, 'Restorative Environments'.

40 However, these theories do not explain why early humans would have not found nature stressful due to ever-present dangers such as nature's forces, accidents, injuries, infections, predators and pests.

41 Stephen Kaplan, "Environmental Preference in Knowledge-Seeking, Knowledge-Using Organism", *The adaptive mind*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), (J. H. Barkow et al, edit.), 588. The theory was first published by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan in 1989.

42 Marcel Hunziker et al, "Space and Place – Two Aspects of the Human-landscape Relationship", *Landscape Series*, 2007, Volume 8.

43 These studies include for example "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery" (1984), "Sensation seeking and reactions to nature settings"(1993) (a study about reactions to nature paintings), "Stress Recovery During Exposure to Natural and Urban Environments" (1991) (a study about reactions to videos containing nature or urban landscapes), "Effects of exposure to nature and abstract pictures on patients recovery from heart surgery" (1993), "The View from the Road: Implications for Stress Recovery and Immunization" (1998), "Artificial window view of nature" (2005) and "Anger and Stress The Role of Landscape Posters in an Office Setting" (2008). Ulrich has also studied the effect of other stimuli, such as sound, interior design and actually experienced nature (not via images). These studies are available via ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger_Ulrich4.

44 Roger Ulrich, (1984).

45 Available via Researchgate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger_Ulrich4

46 Roger Ulrich, "Visual landscapes and psychological wellbeing," Landscape Research (1979), Vol 4, No 1, 17-23, quote from page 17.

47 Ana Karinna Hidalgo, "Biophilic Design, Restorative Environments and Well-Being", *Proceedings of the Colors of Care: The 9th International Conference on Design & Emotion*, (J. Salamanca et al, edit.) (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 2014).

48 Mark, Joshua, "The Ancient City", *The Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 5 April 2014, https://www.ancient.eu/city/; and Yong, Ed, "Scientists Have Found the Oldest Known Human Fossils", *The Atlantic*, 7 June 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/06/the-oldest-known-human-fossils-have-been-found-in-an-unusual-place/529452/

49 Gordon Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, "Evolved responses to landscapes", *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, (Jerome Barkow et al., edit.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 555-579.

50 Hunziker et al. (2007).

51 The importance of nature in human habitat becomes evident not only from utopias, but dystopias. As a topical example, nature is completely non-existent in the dystopian future of the movie *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), set in an ultra-consumerist Asian megacity, where the

only remaining signs of nature are the weather and a polluted harbour. The movie explores individuality and humanity (the heroine is a human mind unwillingly locked in an artificial body), but it is also a dystopia of over-exploitation of nature and living things.

52 For an overview, see Rebecca Clay, "Green is good for you", *Monitor on Psychology Journal of American Psychological Association*, (2001), Vol 32, No 4, 40.

53 Stephen Kellert et al., *Biophilic Design. The Theory, Science and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), Chapter 5: *Neuroscience, the Natural Environment and Building Design.*

54 Kellert (2008), sub-chapter: *Biologically Based Design*. Similar idea is discussed in the field of neuroesthetics: for an overview, see Marcos Nadal & Martin Skov, "Neuroesthetics", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd Edition (Elsevier, 2015), 656–663.

55 Marcel Hunziker et al, "Space and Place – Two Aspects of the Human-landscape Relationship", *A Changing World: Challenges for Landscape Research,* (Springer, 2007), 55.

56 Zeltner (1975), 15-25 and 32-33.

57 For example Kalevi Korpela and Terry Hartig have found in their empirical studies in environmental psychology that aesthetic considerations influence place preference. "Restorative Qualities of Favorite Places," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (1996), Vol 16, 221.

58 Kellert & Wilson (1993). According to the theory, humans have an innate affinity to nature and living things and hence, we gravitate towards all things natural or nature- and life-like. First suggested by Edward O. Wilson in Biophilia (1984).

59 Korpela, Kalevi, "Adolescents' favourite places and environmental self-regulation", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, September 1992, Vol 12, Issue 3, 249-258, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272494405801392

60 Sebastien Filep & Philip Pearce (edit.), *Tourist Experience and Fulfilment: Insights from Positive Psychology*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 203.

61 Sarah Pykea et al., "Exploring well-being as a tourism product resource", *Tourism Management,* Volume 55, August 2016, pp. 94–105, Section 1.

62 VisitEngland reports on staycation, https://www.visitbritain.org/economic-downturn-and-holiday-taking-behaviour. Accessed 8 June 2017

63 Katya Mandoki, *Prosaics, The Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2007), 25-26.

64 For example: Kaplan (1992), 137-138.

65 According to Tuan, paradise island appears in many ancient myths across cultures and eras; and the South Pacific Islands with hula skirts, flower garlands and palm beaches gained a mythical reputation as "the paradise" from mid-1800s, promoted by Western artists and writers. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful. Aesthetics, Nature and Culture*, (New York: Kodansha America Inc., 1995), 44.

66 It is not conclusive what causes the restoration effect of green spaces: aesthetic experience, physical exercise, physical and mental relaxation, something else, or all of these combined? Research in this field includes for example Stephen & Rachel Kaplan (1989), Roger Ulrich (1991), Terry Hartig (1991), and Anette Kjellegren & Hanne Buhrkall (2010). For an overview, see Anna Dale & Yuill Herbert, "Community Vitality and Green Spaces," *CRC Research*, accessed 6 December 2016. https://crcresearch.org/sites/default/files/u641/vitality_-_green_spaces.pdf

67 Semir Zeki has found that aesthetic experiences with art can increase the release of dopamine. For an overview of neuro-aesthetic studies, including critique, see Mengfei Huan, "The Neuroscience of Art", *Standford Journal of Neuroscience*, Vol. 2, 2009, 24-26.

68 Kevin Melchionne, "The Point of Everyday Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2014), vol. 12.

69 Eudaimonia or eudemonia is comprehensively discussed in Chapter 1 of Felicia Huppert and Cary Cooper (edit.), *Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide, Volume VI, Interventions and Policies to Enhance Wellbeing,* (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

70 Huppert & Cooper (edit.), 2014.

71 Anu Besson, "Everyday aesthetics on staycation as pathway to restoration", International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies, (2017), Vol 4, No 2, 34-52.

72 Social media users typically do not report on their everyday chores: instead, shared images are part of strategies of identity-building and distinction-making. JD Boy & J Uitermark, "How to study the city on Instagram", PLoS ONE (2016), Vol. 11, No. 6.

73 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Great Britain: Routledge & Paul Kegan, 1949), 8, 21-22.

74 Mandoki (2007), 94.

75 Mandoki (2007), 75-77.

[76] See for example *Urban green spaces and health*, (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016); also, Rachel and Stephen Kaplan suggested that nature aids restoration by 're-setting' our ability to focus after an inherently fatiguing period of sustained attention. *The Experience of Nature. A Psychological Perspective*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 179, 186-188, 197.

[77] Kalevi Korpela & Terry Hartig, "Restorative Qualities of Favorite Places", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, (1996), vol 16, pp. 221–233. Reference from page 221.

[78] For example Katya Mandoki, "Bio-aesthetics: The Evolution of Sensibility through Nature," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2017), Vol. 15, Section 4.

[79] Korpela & Hartig (1996).

[80] Han Lörzing, *The Nature of Landscape: A Personal Quest*, (Rotterdam: 101 publishers, 2001), 111.

[81] Kathryn Calley Galitz, "Romanticism", (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art), October 2004, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd_roma.htm, accessed 4 August 2017.

[82] Saito (2013).

[83] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) pp. 93-98; the term is also used by Pauline von Bonsdorff, *The human habitat. Aesthetic and axiological perspectives*, (Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics Series Vol 5, 1998).

[84] Bonsdorff (1998).

[85] The origins of the paradise myth have been discussed by Nancy Marshall, *The Eden Paradox: Humanity's simultaneous desire for and rejection of earthly paradise*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015). In the earliest written records of paradise, gods roamed in walled orchards, protected from the surrounding desert sand and animals, pages 13-15. Marshall argues that people have a tendency to long for absolute yet unattainable security (of an imagined perfect childhood), manifesting as paradise archetype, pages 115-118.

[86] Jane Garry & Hasan El-Shamy (ed.), *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature. A Handbook*, (US: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 2005), pp. 197-198.

[87] Orians & Heerwagen (1992); and Stephen Kellert et al., *Biophilic Design. The Theory, Science and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), Chapter 5: *Neuroscience, the Natural Environment and Building Design.*

[88] Berleant (1992), pp. 86, 93-98.

[89] Anu Besson, "Building a paradise? On the quest for the optimal human habitat", Contemporary Aesthetics, (October 2017), Vol 15.

[90] Berleant (1992), pp. 72-79.

[91] Jacky Bowring, *Melancholy and the Landscape. Locating sadness, memory and reflection in the landscape*, (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[92] For example Doreen Massey et al., *City Worlds*, (Cornwall: Routledge, 1999); David Bell (ed.), *Pleasure Zones: Bodies, Cities, Spaces*, (US: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 49-50; and Valerie Voon, *Why danger is exciting – but only to some people*, *The Conversation* (2016), 6 September, http://theconversation.com/why-danger-is-exciting-but-only-to-some-people-64680, accessed 25 August 2017.

[93] Berleant (1997), 64-74.

[94] Saito (2013), 119-124.

[95] Saito (2013), 234-238.

[96] Arthur Stamps, "Mystery, complexity, legibility and coherence: A meta-analysis", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, (2004), Vol. 24.

[97] Berleant (1992), 86, 93-98.

[98] Maria Konnikova, "The Open-Office Trap", 7 January 2014, *The New Yorker*. http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-open-office-trap, accessed 24 August 2017.

[99] Berleant (1992), 21.

[100] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, (Pantheon Books, 1979), Chapter 2, 'Fear in the Growing Child'.

3 DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Overview of data and method selection

This thesis aims to bridge and contrast empirical studies with philosophical analysis. Previously, the collection and analysis of empirical data in the fields of environmental or everyday aesthetics has been scarce. I attempt to fill that gap and shed empirical light on environmental and everyday aesthetic practices and preferences, exploring different groups, situations and countries in the Western world. Article I contains empirical data sourced from lifestyle and social media. In Article II, I present the results of my survey about a favourite place. Article III discusses a literature review of EEP studies about preferences in urban and/or nature's environments, and Article IV is a theoretical discussion on the concept of 'paradise', contemplating the meaning of 'optimal' in the 'optimal human habitat'. The purpose of such selection was to widen our understanding on what people like and dislike, in different situational and data gathering contexts, in their everyday environment. This approach allowed me to synthetise and contrast information obtained from different angles and fields. Furthermore, the data selection was influenced by a concern that a too narrow focus on a specific group or area may generate a bias. The solution applied in this thesis is to draw answers from four cornerstones: what we share and what influences us (social and lifestyle media), what we answer when asked (survey), what empirical scientists have already uncovered (EEP literature review) and what philosophical analysis posits (environmental and everyday aesthetics review).

In Articles I and II, the analysis method was qualitative content analysis mainly based on sociological Grounded Theory (GT), informed by sociological discourse analysis, as described by Carla Willig, Jorge Ruiz Ruiz and Kathy Charmaz.[1] I adopted this method to tease out answers from a diverse set of data, because GT and discourse analysis combined form a qualitative research tool to conceptualise latent patterns in complex narrative information such as text and images. My data contained solicited (survey) and unsolicited (social media) content, images (EEP studies, social

media) and professionally produced text (lifestyle media, research literature). Details of each data set are provided in section 3.2. The purpose of my data selection was to uncover, by minimising any research bias, how people portray and discuss their everyday environment (Articles I and II); how people evaluate or rank their everyday environment when requested to do so (Articles II and III); what is considered aesthetically pleasing or displeasing in the environment (Articles I-IV); and why do these experiences matter from the perspective of subjective and societal well-being (Articles I-IV). The specific research questions of each article were provided in section 1.3.

My GT analysis consisted of three main steps: coding (labelling of findings), categorising (forming groups and themes of the labelled terms) and interpreting (analysing themes). GT does not aim to prove or disprove a pre-formed hypothesis, but to identify most discussed concepts or themes in an open-ended data.[2] GT as a method requires constant comparative analysis to capture all instances of variation, meaning the same term or concept discussed in different words. Categories are created as the analysis progresses instead of working on pre-formed categories. GT analysis was supported by sociological discourse analysis to interpret texts and photos in cultural context (including observing, assessing or interpreting intentions of writers and photographers). The sociological discourse analysis of my data contained three levels of examination: 1) textual, 2) contextual and 3) interpretative level.[3] The textual level focused on expressed elements (eg. choices of words or subject-matter of photos), the contextual level focused on the discourse as an act in its cultural etc. background (such as why do we take photographs), and the interpretative level attempted to identify an explanation to the discourse or the act in its context (such as why was this specific photograph taken, what was the photographer's intention in capturing it).

In this kind of analysis, the emphasis is on the researcher's cultural and scholarly ability to derive meaningful answers that are based on the data, not mere guesswork. However, as the method is interpretative, by no means I claim that my observations and interpretations are exhaustive, indisputable or the 'only correct answers'; rather, they are descriptive observations with educated reasoning and theory backing provided along with interpretations. It is important to note that in using sociological discourse analysis, it is accepted that inductive inferences are made from a small number of samples, because the hypothesis with this method is that cultural and/or societal information is intertwined and overlapping: information from one subject can be treated as interchangeable with information from others in a similar social position.[4] When working with sociological discourse analysis, the underpinning theory is that communication constructs the social world, for example by normalising certain practices and values. These constructions in turn affect what people discuss, find meaningful or understand as 'normal' on that specific situation.[5]

3.2 Data collection

This section outlines how the data was collected and selected for each article; what population(s) the data describes; what other information was used to support the data; and what issues were identified in data collection.

Article I – focus on lifestyle media and social media

Article I, 'Everyday aesthetics on staycation as pathway to restoration', presents my empirical study on lifestyle and social media content discussing staycation. Staycation is typically a short vacation spent at home or in one's home region. The purpose of the study was to identify what elements in their environment subjects find aesthetically attractive. The hypothesis was that a) on staycation, compared to everyday life, people have more time to focus on satisfying, hedonic and/or eudemonic aspects of life such as relaxation and aesthetic enjoyment,[6] b) in the mobile phone era, many have a tendency to 'snap and share' photographs of objects or scenery they find aesthetically appealing, and c) Instagram, world's largest public photo-sharing application can serve as a public 'holiday photo album' to source staycation photographs (N=200) around the world to tell d) what scenes staycationers most wanted to share with others. Supporting data in this study was a selection of lifestyle articles (N=20) describing or discussing staycation.

Why choose Instagram as a data source over other social media options, such as Facebook? Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing app and social network created in 2010 and its key difference to another popular alternative Facebook is that although Instagram accounts can be private, millions of users share all their images publicly. Instagram has approximately 300 million daily active users and 500 million monthly users.[7] Furthermore, two recent surveys found that many holidaymakers rank 'Instagrammability', the opportunity to take appealing photos, a main driver in destination selection. Of people aged 18-33 surveyed in the UK, 40.1% ranked Instagrammability the number one motivator for a holiday location.[8] A study in Australia by mobile operator Telstra found that a quarter of respondents selected a holiday location based on its social media prestige factor.[9] The reason is twofold: beautiful locations are used to enhance one's social media appearances and potential popularity, but attractive photos also indicate that the location is worth the visit. Hence, Instagram does not only reveal what its users wish to share, but actively influences users' preferences.

For my analysis, photographs were sourced with the keyword 'staycation' in two counts on 3 October 2016: 100 photographs at 9am and a further 100 at 3pm. During the interval, the number of 'staycation' photos on Instagram increased by 717 photos, totalling 1,075,464. To support the pictorial data, I sourced 20 lifestyle articles with the keyword 'staycation' on 20 June 2016 by selecting the first 20 non-advertisement articles in English on Google. Most of the articles were published during 2015-16. More than half (12) were from the US, three were from Canada, three were from the UK and two were from Australia. Obvious adverts were excluded from the data, but all of the articles can be considered as promotional or consumerism-friendly. The reason for studying lifestyle articles alongside with staycation photographs was to gather information on what is the 'general' or public understanding on what is a staycation – is it portrayed similarly in the lifestyle and social media, by professional writers and staycationers themselves? The presumption was that the articles not only provide information to a researcher on how staycation is understood, but it informs and possibly influences staycationers' location and activity selections because lifestyle articles found on Google are easily available to anyone interested in having a staycation and looking for inspiration on how to have one.

The analysis process for the Instagram photographs was as follows: the primary and secondary themes, most commonly the focal point and the background, of the photos were identified, labelled and categorised (e.g. 'people', 'food', 'waterfront', 'decorative focal point', etc.). The labels were summed up for descriptive statistical presentation from the most to least common. The approach from sociological discourse analysis, informing the grounded theory method, is that what is discussed or presented, reveals what is important to subjects: it can be presumed that topics that are discussed or portrayed most often, are valued or otherwise seen as worthy of attention, and same applies reversely to topics that do not feature in the data.[10] The analysis process for the 20 lifestyle articles was similar: each article, sentence by sentence, was reviewed and each separate utterance assigned an identifying label. Similar labels were grouped into categories (eg 'adventure', 'sense of fun', etc.) and categories statistically presented from the most common to least common.

My overall concern in data collection and selection has been to minimise bias that may occur when a researcher selects what is presented to or asked from the subjects. Throughout this project, I have been interested in data that is generated by subjects without significant input by a researcher, but also what is available, accessible and influential to the subjects, affecting their view on what is potentially pleasing or displeasing in the environment. As mentioned earlier, the position in discourse analysis is that what we do, share or discuss does not only reveal our inner worlds but actively participates in building it, for us and for others. In Article I, I focused on lifestyle and social media, because according to the basic principles of discourse analysis, media can influence how and what people see and value; for example, by including or excluding topics, creating fashions and framing the 'appropriate' way of presenting things. Social media is a platform for individuals to produce their own content and express themselves, revealing some aspects of what subjects value or find worth sharing. Accordingly and evidently, Instagram is not just a platform to share experiences and build identity, but it also affects decision-making and behaviour.

Article II – focus on a semi-structured survey

Article II, 'Aesthetics and affordances in favourite place – on interactional use of environments for restoration' continued my exploration of the potential connection between aesthetic and restorative elements of environment. The research focus for Article II was, what kind of places make subjects feel restored – or what are the subjects' 'favourite places', borrowing Kalevi Korpela's definition - and whether there is a connection or causation between the perceived restorative qualities and aesthetic appeal of a favourite place. The target group was current or recent Finnish expatriates.[11] The purpose of the target group selection was to examine opinions derived from a shared cultural background, but from people who have experience in different cultural and geographical locations. The data collection method was a semi-structured text-based survey (N=308, 88.6% females and 11.4% males) and it was open online in April 2017 until it reached over 300 respondents.

The purpose of this sample size was to achieve a large enough data set, but keep the data manageable for manual qualitative analysis. The commonly accepted sample size for interview-type data ranges from 15 to 350 samples, weighing towards the

lower end of the numbers (between 20 and 50).[12] My hypothesis was that within a group of 300, data saturation would be reached – meaning that no new statistically relevant information will be generated, but the categories that are formed will adequately capture each discussed concept. The survey contained 10 questions, of which four were demographic background question (age, gender, country of residence and whether the respondent has any 'artistic' or 'cultural' interests or hobbies to gauge the overall interest towards aesthetics).[13] Four questions asked the respondents to select from a list or freely describe an environment that can make them 'feel better', such as calmer, more relaxed, happy, content; and to discuss the essential elements or qualities of such environment. Two questions focused directly on the aesthetic appeal of the favourite place: how important the aesthetics of a favourite place are in general, and what are its most important aesthetic qualities. The 10 questions are provided as an attachment to Article II.

To avoid potential bias inherent in providing any pre-selected options, I created a semi-structured, partially open-ended survey verbally enquiring subjects' preferences. This is in contrast of using the most common EEP study method, an image-based survey, where subjects are asked to rate or rank images or videos of pre-selected environments. The survey was advertised on three Facebook groups called 'Finnish People Living Abroad', 'Expat Finnish Bloggers' (Ulkosuomalaiset bloggaajat) and 'Finns in Australia' (Suomalaiset Australiassa). Participation was voluntary and non-rewarded, based on interest towards the survey topic. The survey attracted considerably more women than men. The purpose of targeting expatriates was to source opinions from a presumably culturally homogenic, yet diverse group, from people who have experience in a variety of geographical and cultural environments. As in Article I, the data analysis method in Article II was qualitative content analysis that combined sociological grounded theory informed by sociological discourse analysis, and 'cross-polluting' reading of theoretical texts that framed and underpinned the data analysis.

The purpose of using grounded theory is to allow 'the data to speak': it can unveil themes and trends without a pre-existing hypothesis. In a grounded theory analysis, the theory is formed based on the revealed themes. The steps of the analysis were similar to what was used in Article I: 1) a manual phrase-by-phrase review of the responses to label and count the most commonly discussed concepts; 2) grouping the identified concepts to establish themes; and 3) analysing and discussing the themes in this study's theory framework. The grounded theory analysis produced descriptive statistical results arising from qualitative data and, like in Article I, the presumption is that what was mentioned in the survey most often, is relevant or important to the subject group. I generated three layers of findings in Article II: the most common favourite place types, the most important aesthetic qualities of a favourite place, and the most typical answers grouped as 'experiencer profiles', revealing preferences towards certain types of environments and activities in such environments.

Article III – focus on literature review

The research question or rather research interest of Article III, 'In defense of cities – on negative presentation of urban areas in environmental preference studies' was to crit-

ically explore the common view expressed in EEP studies that often, cities are experienced as less aesthetically appealing or less restorative than nature; and that the aesthetic appeal of cities can be significantly enhanced by adding to the quantity of urban greenery.[14] To examine this theme, I conducted a literature review of recent EEP studies (N=20). My attempt was not so much to oppose or overturn, but to expand and question this built consensus in the EEP field by focusing on less-researched avenues of inquiry and examining a potential bias in the common EEP study method: surveying two-dimensional images in an attempt to understand experiences in and towards four-dimensional, lived and somatic space.

In keeping with the earlier mentioned approach, to focus on such information that is available, accessible and potentially influential in building our views on what is considered aesthetically appealing or unappealing, I sourced the data from a database that any member of public can access. This was in contrast on focusing only on studies that are behind a paywall, meant mostly to other academics. My data consisted of EEP studies available on ResearchGate; 15 of the studies were published after 2011, the rest, between 1991-2011. The studies were sourced with a combination of keywords 'restorative', 'environment', 'city', 'urban' and 'nature'. Sourcing was conducted on 4 August 2018 by selecting the first twenty research papers on ReseachGate that discussed the topic of restorative environments capturing both, urban and nature's environments. This meant discarding many candidate articles, as traditionally the most common focus in the EEP field has been towards the restorative effect of nature, including wilderness, national parks, semi-maintained forests such as recreational areas, and urban parks. The interest towards built urban environments is lesser, but growing. The supporting data in Article III is an overview of influential studies by a pioneering, often-referenced researcher in the EEP field, Roger Ulrich. The analysis method was content analysis by cross-mapping the twenty research articles to identify whether the findings support or challenge the view that cities are experienced as less aesthetically appealing or less restorative than nature, and why. In addition, the findings of the analysed EEP articles were discussed in the context of architecture and urban planning history to understand the reasons for the long continuum of the assumption that the aesthetics of cities is more prone to adversely affect people than nature.

Article IV – focus on theories on optimal human habitat

Article IV, 'Building a paradise? On the quest for the optimal human habitat' is not a data analysis article, but a philosophical discussion contemplating the concept of 'optimal human habitat'. The material that underpins Article IV are theories by prominent thinkers in the fields of environmental psychology, environmental aesthetics and everyday aesthetics, primarily Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, Roger Ulrich, Stephen Kellert, Kalevi Korpela, Arnold Berleant and Yuriko Saito. The starting point of Article IV was that some scientists have proposed that humans, like other animals, prefer certain surroundings because they serve the species' instinctive needs, making that environment that species' natural habitat.[15]

In Article IV, I ask is it meaningful to say that the first environment of early hominids and the best-suited environment for today's humans are the same or a similar thing. I examined the topic from four main angles:

- Paradise as a culturally shared, ideal environment;
- Biophilic design - planning and building physically and psychologically beneficial or, at minimum, the least harmful environment;
- Favorite place as a means for self-regulation, including recovery from stress or low mood; and
- Environment as an invitation for action.

The purpose of this selection was to contemplate what insights these angles can offer into what might be the aesthetically most beneficial, in the article called 'optimal', environment for today's people to thrive in. The research method was comparative and cross-polluting reading of texts in environmental psychology, biophilic design (nature-based architecture and urban design), favorite place studies and humanities, including aesthetics, cultural geography, and history.

3.3 Identified issues in data collection and analysis

As mentioned, the initial challenge with data collection was to decide what groups and what environments to study to capture meaningful information on environmental preferences. My concern was the potential research bias inherent in the usual preference gauging method in the EEP field, image-based surveys on pre-selected environments. With that method the starting point for selection is always provided by the researchers, not by the subjects, thus preventing the subjects from identifying their most and least favourite elements of environments from all existing ones. To counter this potential bias, in particular in the field of architecture and urban design, some influencers such as the architect and city planner Jan Gehl have developed and implemented new study methods that are based on observing the subjects in the target environment and recording their behaviour and activity for further analysis.[16]

For example, Gehl's team has mapped cities to identify which places in the urban environment appear to be liked and which disliked based on the number of visits and length of time spent there as recorded by observers. Subjects are not told they are being observed and usually their opinions are not sought for why they choose to spend time at certain locations – the observer reasons the motivations based on what elements are or are not present in the place, such as benches, shade, public art, other people, things to do and so on. This method offers a more 'free-range' approach for assessing people's preferences, but an obvious risk is that the observer misinterprets the subject's reasons to spend or not spend time at a place. For example, the observer may state 'presence of public art' for the reason for visit whereas the person may have simply needed a breather and did not even notice the nearby mural.

In this study I attempted to pay particular attention to gathering data from different sources, taking into account the challenges that:

- providing a pre-selected list of environments to rate or rank may skew the results towards what the researcher presumes, not what the subjects would choose in 'free-range' circumstances;

- asking people’s opinions may lead to response bias or participant bias - the subjects answering in accordance to what they believe is the ’correct answer’, the majority’s viewpoint, or the researcher’s preferred answer; and
- not asking people’s opinions may lead to misguided or uninformed interpretations about their motivations and behaviour.

My data sources were selected to cover what I see as four essential pillars informing my research: data generated directly by the study subjects, both in an unsolicited and solicited manner (Article I, social media content; and Article II, survey responses); data generated by empirical studies and other researchers (Article III); and information and philosophical analysis generated by theorists (Article IV).

For the data analysis in Articles I and II, I chose to source data from a worldwide platform, Instagram, and from a specific target group, expatriate Finns, because I am interested in views originating from different cultural and geographical locations. It needs to be acknowledged that despite studying different groups, my data set offers an overview on a relatively small sample size and is by no means purported to be exhaustive. The demographic data of the Instagram users is indirect only, relying on the statistics about Instagram users in general, because it was not possible to access the personal details of people whose photos I analysed. In terms of choosing lifestyle articles about staycation as one data source, it can be argued that they do not necessarily reflect the general consensus about staycation, but rather advertisers’ or businesses’ views on what to sell. However, under the principles of discourse analysis, this potential underlying agenda does not exclude the fact that staycation articles participate in building the shared view on what to do on staycation, what to focus on and how to behave on one. In Article II, an unintended limitation in the survey was that it attracted significantly more female than male respondents (88.6% and 11.4%, respectively) instead of equal representation. Also, a half of the respondents fell into the age group of 25-44-year-olds. However, given that the usual subject recruitment in the EEP field targets university students in their early twenties, my somewhat limited perspective still offers a new angle.[17]

Due to the nature of Articles III and IV, the data collection challenges were different. Article III was a review of twenty EEP studies and Article IV a philosophically geared discussion, not based on any specified data set, but on pondering the concept and meaning of ‘optimal human habitat’. With Article III, limitations to the data sourcing included the fact that a vast number of today’s empirical or natural scientific research is published in paywall publications, meaning that either the researcher or their institution needs to have a subscription to the journals to be able to review the studies. My choice to focus on publicly available articles no doubt excluded a vast number of EEP studies that would have otherwise fitted into my research focus. Another limitation was the fact that plenty of EEP studies since the 1970s have examined subjects’ environmental preferences regarding (different versions or variations of) nature, but research interest in the EEP field towards urban environments has been much more limited. Hence, sourcing studies that discuss or at least touch both aspects, nature and urban environments, proved to be more difficult than expected. Despite these limitations, I have aimed to present and examine the data in an informative, reasoned way. Naturally, many other combinations or sources of data could have been selected and results always depend on what is studied and with what methods. Hence, throughout

this thesis I acknowledge the descriptive, interpretative and propositioning nature of my study.

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1 For conducting a grounded theory analysis, see for example Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*, (London: City University London, 2013), 69-75; Jorge Ruiz Ruiz, "Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic", FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research, May 2009, Volume 10, No. 2, Art. 26. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882, accessed 6 June 2017; and Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, (UK: SAGE Publications, 2006). Normalisation of ideas and practices was first discussed by Michael Foucault.

2 GT analysis produces prescriptive statistical results (percentages) derived from qualitative data and the interpretation is that what is discussed most often, is relevant or important to the subject group.

3 Ruiz Ruiz (2017), section 5.

4 Ruiz Ruiz (2017), section 5.

5 Charmaz (2006).

6 The different aspects of well-being are comprehensively discussed in Chapter 1 of Felicia Huppert and Cary Cooper (edit.), *Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide, Volume VI, Interventions and Policies to Enhance Wellbeing*, (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014). Hedonic wellbeing refers to the avoidance of painful or distressing aspects of life and gearing towards pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction; whereas eudemonia or psychological wellbeing refers to Aristotle's notion about the importance of creativity, self-fulfilment, self-actualisation, self-improvement and achieving goals in life.

7 Shannon Gausepohl, "Instagram for Business: Everything You Need to Know", *Business News Daily*, 3 January 2017. http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/7662-instagram-business-guide.html.

8 The other high-ranking motivators were the cost of alcohol in the location (24%) and chances for personal development (22.6%). Rachel Hosie, "'Instagrammability': Most Important Factor for Millennials on Choosing Holiday Destination," *The Independent*, 24 March 2017.

9 Rod Chester, "Australians say Instagram obsession drives holiday choices and the power of the humble brag", *News.com.au*, 27 December 2016. https://goo.gl/i0GOcP.

10 I note that other reasons exist for not discussing topics, such as cultural or social taboos.

11 The questions are provided in Attachment 1. The top ten current countries of residence were: Finland 24%, Australia 18%, USA 7%, UK 6%, Germany 6%, Spain 4%, United Arab Emirates 4%, Belgium 3%, Sweden 3% and Netherlands 2%.

12 Mark Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews", Forum: Qualitative Social Research, Vol 11, No 3, Article 8, September 2010. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1428/3027.

13 The study contained a background question about creative or cultural hobbies to map whether the respondents were in general interested in arts or aesthetics: yes 66.8%, no 14.3%, and not currently, but generally interested 18.9%. This was to gauge whether only artistically-bent people find aesthetics of environment important. However, this warrants further study as no statistics exist on what percentage of people in general have artistic or cultural interests.

14 *Urban green spaces and health*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016.

15 Well-known theories to this vein have been presented for example by Gordon Orians and Judith Heerwagen in "Evolved Responses to Landscapes", *The Adapted Mind,* (Jerome Barkow et al, ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 555-579; and Edward Wilson, *Biophilia* (US: Harvard University Press, 1984/2003).

16 Jan Gehl & Birgitte Svarre, *How to Study Public Life*, (US: Island Press, 2013), https://centercityphila.org/uploads/attachments/cit0ddf07000df6qd3srp2m4u-gehl-svarre-study-public-life.pdf.

17 In the majority of the EEP studies reviewed for Article III, the participants were university students. Anthropologist Jared Diamond has raised the participant selection as a problem in his book *The World Until Yesterday* (Australia: Penguin Books, 2013), noting that a review in 2008 found that 96% of studies in the field of psychology were residents of Westernised industrial countries, 68% were from the US, and up to 80% of subjects were university undergraduates enrolled in psychology studies. Hence, empirical studies often offer a very narrow view based on mainly North American college students with interest and knowledge about what is being studied and how.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Overview of articles

Throughout the four articles comprising this thesis, I critically examine how environmental preferences are currently studied and what the established views are on what we prefer or dislike for aesthetic reasons. To provide my own answers, I analyse empirical data I gathered about environmental and everyday aesthetic practices, which to my knowledge has not been done in this scale before. To recap, the specific focus point of each article is:

- Article I: how people use a (culturally and/or geographically) familiar environment for everyday aesthetic enjoyment and how that influences restoration;
- Article II: what aesthetic elements in one's everyday environment are experienced as restorative and why;
- Article III: is nature commonly experienced as more aesthetically appealing and restorative than urban environments as indicated by a body of EEP studies; and
- Article IV: do humans have a natural or 'optimal habitat' and if yes, what kind of an environment does it mean?

In summary, Article I presents results of a qualitative content analysis regarding staycation, focusing on how it is portrayed and discussed in lifestyle media and social media, in this case Instagram. The analysis sought to identify what aesthetic elements in their environment – if any – people find important, worth noticing and worth sharing with others during their staycation. Staycation is an interesting phenomenon, because it can be seen as an attempt to experience one's usual or familiar environment as an outsider, a visitor engaging in a form of play or make-believe, seeking pleasant, restoring and/or aesthetic experiences. Based on my grounded theory analysis of In-

stagram photographs (N=200) around the world, I concluded that staycation is actively used for obtaining everyday aesthetic experiences and to maintain or improve one's subjective well-being.

Article II examines what qualities, elements and features people find restorative and/or aesthetically appealing in their favourite place, meaning a place we use to regulate mood, emotions and self-identity. The data was collected in a survey (N=308) targeting current or former Finnish expatriates and the answers were again analysed with Grounded Theory method. To my knowledge, my survey is the first large-scale qualitative study obtaining empirical results on favourite places utilising a theory framework from environmental and everyday aesthetics. I identified five distinctive perspectives, called experiencer profilers. I named the profiles lake-loving forest dweller, horizon-gazer, reflective introvert, seeker of order, and energiser. Each profile appreciates different aspects in their environment as aesthetically pleasing and restorative – however, people can occupy different profiles depending on the situation. Based on my analysis, I argue that a) favourite place is a combination of a place and activity, b) it is as much an interpretation or a mental image of a place as a physical place, and c) favourite places are used as a 'feedback loop' to project one's inner world to it and obtain cues from it for how to feel, to affect one's mood and subjective well-being.

Article III expands the inquiry into the domain of negative aesthetics through an examination of recent findings in the EEP field: I provide an overview to the work of an influential EEP researcher Roger Ulrich and a literature review of twenty EEP research papers by other researchers. As discussed in section 2 of this thesis, EEP studies commonly build on the hypothesis that humans have evolutionary reasons to like or dislike environments and in the EEP field the most common division between the liked and disliked environments is usually understood to be between natural and artificial, nature and urban environments. I argue that the established view in the EEP field that urban areas are experienced as less restorative or less aesthetically appealing than nature may be substantially affected by a bias caused by the common image-based study method. Referencing Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, I discuss how the use of images for studying a somatic and spatial experience of a place is highly problematic; how we form relationships with places based on memories, bodily intimations and multisensory experience; and how the importance of these relationships with urban environments becomes more evident through in-situ research methods than image-based methods. I argue that the long-held convention of looking at nature's landscapes as art appears to affect our viewing of images of nature to the detriment of urban environments. I conclude that the position in the EEP field that nature is *de facto* more aesthetically appealing than cities is not as solidly evidenced as is believed.

In Article IV, I attempt - somewhat ambitiously - to tackle the long-standing question on whether humans have a 'natural' or 'optimal' habitat, like biologists suggest is the case with most other species. In my inquiry, by 'optimal' I mean, in what kind of environment should we live in to have the most aesthetically satisfying, or the least adversely affected life. The usual starting point in the EEP field is that our inherent valence and aesthetic judgements are influenced by genetically determined associations, called intrinsic pleasantness or unpleasantness. This is understood to be due

to evolutionary reasetons that have caused us to experience beneficial or harmful things as pleasant or unpleasant.[1] However, biology is only one facet of the prism of human condition. I argue that aesthetic experiences cannot be understood without encompassing culture, taste, values and behaviour. To examine the definition of 'optimal', I delve into the concept of paradise as a cultural and personal idea(l) that has existed for millennia across cultures and regions, in religion and folklore; as a mirage behind many utopias and town planning practices to create 'the optimal human habitat'; and as a subjective concept perhaps manifesting in the favourite place. Drawing from Arnold Berleant and Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, I suggest that the 'optimal habitat' is internal as much as external. By building on the abovementioned thinkers' work, I suggest that we have six mental operational states, 'tracks', the mind locks onto and these tracks often are affected, prompted or enabled by our environment. Some tracks require active directing - effort by the brain - whereas some are more based on observing the content of one's mind or the outside world, either absent-mindedly, or in an engaged manner. The laborious tracks require fatiguing mental effort whereas the restorative tracks allow the mind to 'ride freely'. My conclusion is that those environments that enable or prompt the restorative tracks, can be experienced as the optimal habitats.

How do these articles come together to answer, what we like or dislike in the aesthetic sense in an environment? The themes that I have explored can be divided into three key categories which overlap and interlink as follows:

4.2.1. What kind of aspects in the environment appear to appeal aesthetically to subjects?
4.2.2. What kinds of aesthetic problems the environment may pose and are such problems more prevalent in urban environments compared to natural environments?
4.2.3 Does 'optimal human habitat' from an aesthetic point of view exist and if yes, what is it like?

4.2 Results by themes

4.2.1 Aesthetic appeal in environments

In Article I, I examined images uploaded to Instagram to identify, what the photographers found worth capturing and sharing about staycation. I found that the majority of images depicted positive multisensory experiences relating to summery outdoors at waterfronts or green locations, and to visually appealing food markets, restaurants and cocktails. On a high level, the 200 analysed photos could be classified into two style streams: composed images (56%) and snapshots (44%). Composed images were framed, arranged or otherwise made more artistic, such as colour-enhanced, to draw the attention to the aesthetic qualities such as composition, colour combinations, rhythm or beauty of the subject-matter.[2] To determine, whether a photo was intended as aesthetic (composed), I used judgement based on the classical aesthetic qualities of

unity, harmony and balance (incl. colours, rhythm and composition) and what can be commonly understood as 'artistic':[3] for example, photos that appeared to reflect the visual style of landscape painting or postcard were classified as 'composed'. As this qualitative method required personal and scholarly interpretation skills in the context of art education and art history, I note that to some extent this classification is, inevitably, subjective. Snapshots in turn were action photos, evidently taken to quickly document something, including a dog running into water, or people in the middle of some activity. I propose that the composed photos dominating the data indicate that a poetic or prosaic version of what is experienced – as defined by Katya Mandoki and discussed in section 2 of this thesis -,[4] is considered pertinent (and perhaps prestigious) to notice and share. It can be argued that snapshots should dominate, if photos were taken for mere documenting purposes.

My analysis sought to uncover, is there a connection between aesthetic experiences and restoration. Can photos on Instagram prove that a staycationer had an aesthetic experience? Could it not be said that the main purpose of publishing attractive photos is to boost one's social status? According to Kirstin Diehl et al., photographing enhances the enjoyment drawn from an experience.[5] Prevalence of one motivation (boosting one's self-image) does not automatically exclude another (aesthetic enjoyment). Thomas Leddy suggests that photographers, amateurs and professionals alike, usually seek to capture the identified aesthetic qualities of the subject-matter; enhance those qualities; and create new aesthetic qualities via means of composition, framing or image manipulation.[6] But, can a photo ever prove an aesthetic experience? Yuriko Saito discusses aesthetic reactions, such as an impulse to tidy a messy room, as an indicator of (or search for) an aesthetic experience.[7] A wish to make something more aesthetic according to one's taste, or a wish to capture, share or communicate something due to its aesthetic qualities, can be seen as an aesthetic reaction - if not a 'full' aesthetic experience, then perhaps its pre-step or relative. Focusing on everyday aesthetics or aesthetic activities, including noticing and photographing content of beauty, can be and is often used as a significant building block for subjective well-being, as argued by Kevin Melchionne.[8]

Aesthetic enjoyment may be one focus point on holiday or staycation, but what is the meaning or importance of aesthetic qualities in the everyday environment? Article II discusses my survey (N=308) about favourite places and qualities or features that are perceived as restorative and/or aesthetic. Nearly all respondents, 93.8%, said they seek a certain environment to become restored and 80.1% identified a particular place (type) as their favourite place. Nearly two thirds had their favourite place in nature – in a forest, water shore, park, garden or rural area; whereas approximately one third preferred an indoor or urban place, such as one's own home, sauna, café, museum, cinema or city centre. A hobby location was the first choice of one in ten (incl. gym, yoga studio, swimming pool, golf course, horse stables). Those who selected 'other' (0.7%) commented that their favourite place depends on the mood or season. The survey contained two direct questions about aesthetics: how important the aesthetics of a favourite place are, and what are its most important aesthetic qualities.[9] Nearly all respondents, 95%, found the aesthetic appeal important to some degree and 82% said the aesthetic appeal is 'very' or 'quite' important. Of the 308 respondents, 270 provided a verbal description of important aesthetic qualities: my phrase-by-

phrase review identified a total of 550 concepts that could be labelled and categorised. The most used words to describe important aesthetic qualities were 'beauty', 'silence' and 'nature's sounds'.

Most respondents discussed aisthesis and aesthetic experience – pleasant sensory perception and judgements of taste – closely intertwined or inseparable. Notably, places and activities overlapped in answers as complementary aspects of the whole: place selection significantly depended on what the subject aspired to do and through that, feel. To further examine the connection between activity, aesthetic qualities and restorativeness of a place, I grouped the labelled concepts in the order from most to least common and that produced five experiencer profiles. All profiles overlapped and what profile 'was active', appeared to depend on the subject's personality but also mood, expectations, situation and context.[10] Some respondents indicated they use certain places at specific times, such as skiing in wintery forest or motorcycling in countryside in summer, recognising their ability to affect their mood through place and activity selection. The profiles are briefly discussed below.

Water-loving forest dweller

The most mentioned favourite place was at a water shore in a forest. Many further defined the forest as 'untouched', 'old' or 'Finnish' and the water body a lake. This may reflect the respondents' cultural background, as Finland has a lake-dotted geography and a strong lakeside cottage culture - summer holidays are commonly or ideally spent at a lakeshore.[11] It is conceivable that at least some of the appeal towards this kind of environment originates from a nostalgic or idealised summer holiday.[12] Often, subjects added conditions: if this preferred environment was not accessible, a substitute was sought for, indicating a hierarchy of choice. This profile challenges the EEP field's position that (any) greenery and water are restorative: respondents have a hierarchy which is affected by their subjective preferences and memories, as demonstrated by this survey response: "[my favourite place is a] simple cabin by the sea where I spent my childhood summers."

Horizon-gazer

Equally popular answer type with the lake-loving forest dweller was a horizon-gazer, who prefers a place with long vistas and openness. The horizon-gazers indicated that the following is relaxing: being near the sky, looking far away or deep down, sensing the spaciousness and pure air, or feeling that one is connected to a larger whole. Some respondents explicitly mentioned 'escaping' at least in imagination. The widespread or innate affinity with water elements such as the sea is a well-known phenomenon in the EEP field and again, it is usually explained by biological or evolutionary necessities.[13] However, symbolic meanings associated with open water or horizon appeared to influence their popularity in my survey, as evidenced by the respondents' comments about how waves are 'hypnotising' or how calm water feels 'safe'. The following quote illustrates the imagined or symbolic aspects of the appeal of a water element: "[...] no matter where you are in the world you know your home is just across

the water. Somehow seeing the endless water and hearing the sounds of the ocean always calm me down."

Reflective introvert

Reflective introvert, the third most common profile, sought calmness and balance through private, quiet activities such as a self-reflection and relaxation, including lounging, daydreaming and yoga. The two abovementioned profiles also appreciated calmness and privacy, but for the reflective introverts the most essential qualities of a place were comfort, peace and quiet, regardless of the location. This profile's favourite places included, in addition to quiet nature, one's own home or other tranquil indoor locations such as sauna, library, museum or church. A calm and harmonious place appears to allow the quieting of one's inner world. Aesthetic surroundings or activities appeared to be particularly apt for restoration, as presented in this quote: "[my favourite place is at] home alone with books, music or [in] nature. [Or at m]useum, castles, historic places with beautiful art and interiors."

Seeker of order

Approximately one in five respondents fell into the category I named the seeker of order. Like reflective introvert, the seeker of order did not prioritise location – urban or nature, indoors or outdoors -, but strongly preferred an organised, clean and tidy environment, aligning with Leddy's and Saito's suggestion about tidiness being a potent source for aesthetic pleasure. Responses covered neat flower beds, tended gardens and harmonious homes. Quite literally, for this group, organised surroundings translate into a serene headspace. Again, this profile may reflect the respondents' cultural background, as cleanliness and tidiness are highly appreciated in Finland;[14] and the neutrally coloured, minimalistic 'Scandinavian design' remains popular in this part of the world, again and again drawing from the simple forms and muted colour palette of the 18th century Gustavian or Swedish neoclassical style.[15] Only women mentioned tidiness as a prerequisite for restoration; men tended to discuss restoration via activities in nature. In the EEP literature reviewed for this thesis, harmony and order in nature are generally recognised as positive influencers for restoration, but the possibility that tidy indoor or urban locations could be perceived as equally or more restorative than nature is practically never discussed.

Energiser

The smallest category, approximately one tenth of respondents, became named the energisers. These seekers of vibrancy preferred socialising with people and/or animals and experiencing signs of vitality and life. The preferred aesthetic elements were for example bright colours and visual stimulation like movement, and sounds like birds' chirrup, people's chatter or music. Another defining feature was this group's attempt to recharge by engaging in movement or exercise (gym, golf, jogging, motorcycle ride) or busyness (shopping, cafés, crowds, people-watching, exercising dogs). The favourite place of an energiser enables reinvigorating activities, sometimes even

an adrenaline rush, or at minimum, connecting with the aliveness of the world, as indicated by these two responses about a favourite place: [my favourite place is] a promenade amongst other people" and "Starbucks to see people o[r] a nature park where [are] lots of animals".

The results of the survey inferred to a gender difference in responses. A notable proportion of female respondents identified as restorative such places that are clean, tidy, organised and/or somehow familiar and under control. The places could be indoors or outdoors, including yards, gardens and summer cottage grounds. Male respondents did not mention tidiness or order as prerequisites for restorativeness, but rather discussed 'rugged' nature or action-oriented approach to the surroundings, including spending time alone at a camp fire in the forest, driving a motorcycle along country roads or going on a hike.[16] Men did mention indoor spaces as well, usually sauna, whereas of indoor places, women often mentioned a bedroom, living room, library, church, museum, or other emotionally important place like the summer cottage. This does not mean women did not appreciate wilder nature. Plenty of women mentioned as their favourite place a location in nature, including Finnish 'untouched' forest, rainforest, mountains and ocean beach. It must be noted that my results did not indicate that women are confined indoors or within 'safe' nature. Nevertheless, this notion in my view warrants further studies: how gender, age, cultural background and other personal attributes affect the experience or preference of favourite place. For example Kalevi Korpela has approached similar question by surveying children and teenagers in Finland.[17]

Overall, my subjects demonstrated keenness to select locations depending on their aspired mood. Popular activities in favourite places were, for instance, relaxation, self-reflection, hobbies, socialising, movement or exercise, and in parallel, appreciation of the place's aesthetic qualities. Favourite place can be a specific location, but quite often it appears to be a 'perception horizon', headspace moving along with the person through the enjoyed environment, as in the case of a jogger circling a lake, a motorcyclist driving on country roads, a skier journeying in a forest or a hiker trekking on a mountain. For all the profiles, the relationship with the environment is interactional, immersed and continuous. The experience is formed from actions in and movement through the environment – even if the actions are relatively passive such as self-reflection – and the very purpose of selecting the specific location is to be receptive to its aesthetic stimuli.

4.2.2 Aesthetic problems in environments

Articles II, III and IV all examine the common hypothesis in the EEP studies that nature is inherently more preferred for aesthetic enjoyment and restoration than urban places. In addition, I examined the validity of the common position in the EEP field that aesthetic enjoyment, relaxation and restoration are interchangeable concepts or experiences.

As discussed in section 2, EEP findings indicate that we tend to become mentally and physically restored in nature faster or more fully than in urban settings – and, conversely, urban aesthetics appear to deplete our mental and physical resources. This

idea is not new. For example since the 1920s, the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto designed health care facilities that were close to nature, promoted access to fresh air and sunlight and were furnished with natural materials where possible.[18] Due to the sustained interest towards the topic in the health arena, EEP studies have largely focused on justifying the necessity of bringing nature to cities for health and well-being purposes, pioneered by Roger Ulrich.[19] Often referencing Ulrich's studies, a large body of research has emerged corroborating the view that built environments are more stress-inducing or less restorative than nature, as summarised by Ana Karinna Hidalgo: "[c]ities aim to provide people with environments that improve their quality of life. However, cities, and specifically streets, produce urban stressors that threaten the ability of people to restore themselves from stress and mental fatigue".[20] The supporters of this view suggest that urban environments and city life are beyond the current evolved capabilities of humans, hence we need respite in nature. But, how strong is the evidence supporting this perspective?

Nature as the preferred environment

My literature review of 20 research papers, presented in Article III, confirmed that in certain circumstances, nature is perceived as more aesthetically rewarding and restorative than nature. The findings include that city dwellers who have access to waterfronts and greenery are more satisfied with their city than those who lack them, and urban residents are more willing to accept high-density development if also increased tree cover and information about sustainability are provided. Barren, chaotic, monotonous and ugly highway corridors are perceived to visually improve with planted trees; and pollution, population density, traffic and lack of greenery are experienced as stressful. Some studies showed that stressed subjects rated nature more beautiful and restorative than cities or an empty room. However, the difference in ratings diminished where subjects were not stressed – also, the restorative potential depended on the compatibility between the environment and the subject, such as expectations and personal preferences. My literature review concluded that, pertinently, the most appreciated green elements were manicured, well-kept or picturesque sceneries, as well as dense yet maintained canopies, rather than nature in its natural, wilder state.

Although the affinity for greenery is evident across the reviewed studies, none of the research papers sought to discuss the *reason* for disliking the lack of greenery. In Western context, the usual urban areas that most often lack greenery are for industrial, utility, storage or high-volume traffic use. The lack of greenery acts as a signal for places that are culturally coded to be non-places, not meant for spending time.[21] A linked, pertinent notion arising from my literature review was that subjects appreciated manicured greenery over the untouched, indicating that mere naturalness is not automatically the most appealing. This also relates to my survey finding, discussed in Article II, where one fifth of the respondents appreciated orderly, neat and tidy surroundings, including tended gardens and flowerbeds: 'too much' or 'too wild' greenery can be experienced as unpleasant, chaotic or threatening, evidenced by the common practice in the Western cities to trim, prune and keep urban vegetation under control for aesthetic and safety reasons.[22] My survey in Article II furthermore identified that a notable minority – one third of my subjects - had their favourite place in an

urban or indoor location, such as a café, library, city centre, own home or sauna, instead of natural or urban greenery, somewhat contradicting the canonised position in the EEP field about the superior restorative power of nature.

The city as an aesthetic problem?

As discussed, the common underlying position in the EEP field is that cities must be less restorative and less aesthetically rewarding than nature for biological and evolutionary reasons. My literature review identified a more layered and complex situation. Firstly, the restorativeness of a place appeared to mostly arise from the experience of fascination: fascination and restoration were commonly available in nature and greenery, but also in places of social interaction, including cafés and restaurants, historical areas, pedestrian and shopping streets and public squares. Fascination and restoration appear to strongly arise from place attachment, including positive memories, connotations, signs of history and the subject's knowledge of the place (type). Interestingly, subjects of low-anxiety personality type experienced hectic urban environments as or more restorative than nature, whereas green spaces were experienced as less restorative if they became crowded.

My literature review indicates that fascination, social interactions, knowledge of symbolic meanings of places and restoration are interlinked and relevant to the aesthetic appeal. The key finding of my literature review is that different study methods tend to produce differing, even conflicting results. In in-situ studies, people find positive qualities, including aesthetic appeal and restorativeness, in socially active, historically meaningful[23] or sensory-rich urban environments, whereas in image-based studies, nature nearly always outranks urban environments. This appears to reflect the research position and viewing convention where images of landscapes are looked at as art or in expectation of scenic or picturesque content. I suggest that due to this convention, we are more accustomed to viewing nature as scenic images - landscape art, posters and postcards, holiday photos – than urban locations, which are not all scenic, yet may offer other positive aesthetic qualities, such as sounds, scents and ambience when experienced in-situ.

4.2.3 The "optimal human habitat"

Do people have a natural' or the "most optimal" habitat in an aesthetic sense? What kind of environment could be the most beneficial or least harmful to our aesthetic sensibilities and needs? In Article III, I examine and critique the common starting point in the EEP field about the origins and ancestral environment(s) of our species and the presumption that what surrounded us at certain point in history, is still the most natural or suitable for us today. In my view, regardless of what kind of nature was the dwelling area of early *homo sapiens*, a more pertinent question for today is: if nature is inherently more aesthetically rewarding and restorative environment to us than cities, why does the majority of the world's population live in cities? Economic opportunities or necessities may not be the sole explaining factor.

As discussed in Article III, preference towards or restorativeness of urban environments are studied far less than nature because of the current consensus that urban

environments contain stressors that are absent in nature; automatically rendering urban environments less preferred and less restorative. However, also urban environments can be restorative, as evidenced by research on museums and heritage areas.[24] Furthermore, geographer William Meyer has debunked many common assumptions about the harms of urbanism, shedding light on the different ways urban life can be less risky or less unhealthy than its rural counterpart.[25] Meyer argues that rural poverty and indoor air-pollution are harder to tackle than similar urban issues; rural and low-density living cause more harm to the ecosystem and are more dependent on (petrol-powered) vehicles and key resources than urban living; cities often offer better shelter against and treatment for natural, industrial and vehicular hazards; and cities harbour fewer dangerous animals (including disease-spreading insects) and offer better and more accessible health care.

Economic and practical considerations naturally weigh in when people make decisions on where to live, work or holiday. But, if we presume that we are inherently predisposed to enjoy nature more than urban environments, it would be conceivable that more people would attempt to fulfil their everyday needs in small villages or rural communities, closer to nature. Pertinently, Marcel Hunziker et al. discuss how people's needs are not limited to biological, but also encompass cognitive and socio-cultural needs: how we attempt to make sense and create narratives about ourselves and our surroundings by attaching personal memories and shared symbolic meanings to locations, thus making "spaces" into "places".[26] Discussing how an urban environment can best serve a range of such complex needs, Arnold Berleant draws analogies between a city and a ship, circus, cathedral and sunset. A city is a logistically and efficiently functioning place of economic, social and cultural activity (ship); it offers myriads of experiences ranging from culture to entertainment, wonder, thrill and fright (circus); it manifests and immortalises the ideas and ideals of people in its architecture, functions, customs and layout (cathedral); and it anchors us to something larger (a cosmological viewpoint of the sunset).[27]

In Article IV, following Berleant, I ask, what are cities for, or what do we do in cities? Despite the idea in the EEP field that nature – greenery, a jungle, a savannah – is our first and original home, it can be argued that humans have always explored, altered and exploited their surroundings. For the past ten millennia, such alteration has become increasingly large-scale, beginning from the first villages and introduction of agriculture and domestication of animals, leading to today's massive infrastructure projects and megacities. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that every human construction from the smallest path or fence to the largest skyscraper is an attempt to control, seek shelter from and wall out nature and the unsettling chaos it represents.[28] Another angle I discuss in Article IV is our hypothesised innate need to explore and utilise our surroundings and these being best achieved in nature.[29] The four key qualities of a universally appealing environment, according to Kaplan & Kaplan's information gathering theory, are *complexity* and *mystery* – relating to the need to gather information - and *coherence* and *legibility*, which serve the need to make sense of it. I point out that research has not been carried out to explain why the information-gathering and processing needs could only or mainly be satisfied in the 'original home', nature: logically, the

need to learn and make sense seems to indicate an innate preference for those environments that have not been experienced or explored before, including ever-expanding, ever-changing cities.

Before the Kaplans, philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and John Dewey discussed a parallel theme to information-acquisition: the environments' "invitation potential".[30] Merleau-Ponty noted that every environment invites us to take some action in and as a response to it. Dewey discussed how every being attempts to live in sync with its environment and if the sync is disrupted, the creature attempts to restore it. This struggle enables learning and growth, which in turn enable expansion (of the species or the individual's knowledge and survival potential) or migration to a larger or different habitat.[31] In a similar vein, Berleant discusses "productive awareness", attention towards something fascinating in the environment - worth appreciation, enjoyment, contemplation or intellectual effort. According to Berleant, environments that enable or encourage productive awareness are human(e) habitats;[32] in my terminology, the optimal habitats. In Article IV, I suggest that we can link Berleant's productive awareness theory with the Kaplans' information gathering theory and the attention restoration theory as follows: 1) certain surroundings feed productive awareness, 2) experiencing productive awareness appears to reinvigorate the brain; which in turn 3) enables more productive awareness, prompting a beneficial feedback loop.

From where, or in what circumstances, does this productive awareness emerge? To further elaborate on the Kaplans' theories and Berleant's productive awareness theory, I propose that we have six different mental operational states, "tracks", the mind regularly locks on.

The potentially restorative tracks are:

- Meandering internal track: dreaming, daydreaming, and musing.
- Meandering external track: being fascinated by or in sync with one's environment.
- Directed engaged track: curious making-sense, creative problem-solving, or flow.

The potentially fatiguing tracks are:

- Directed rational track, cognitive task-executing, such as errands, studying, or menial work.
- Distressed track: mental, emotional, or bodily discomfort, including worry and pain.
- Confused track: a prolonged or repeated state of distraction or fogginess caused by for example illness or substances.

I do not claim that the mind cleanly switches from one track to another, but rather, all the tracks intermingle, overlap and switch back and forth, all the time. For example, watching TV can activate the meandering external, the directed engaged and the directed rational tracks, when one comprehends the news or follows a plot of a film. Also, all tracks have different amplitudes: watching birds on a feeder and having an aesthetic experience in Louvre can be at different spots of the axis of the external meandering track, overlapping with the directed engaged track.

In Article IV, the answer to my overarching research question arises from the contemplation of the "tracks": what aspects, features or elements in their everyday environment subjects tend to like or dislike for aesthetic reasons? My concluding suggestion is: what if the appeal of nature does not arise directly from naturalness, but from the restorative tracks it is able to offer through the perceived freedom to roam and explore, admire and wonder (Berleant); gather information, resources and experiences (Kaplans, Dewey); alter one's surroundings to suit one's needs and tastes and be free from others' control (Korpela)? What if the invitation for these can be offered in an urban environment - does that make the city, then, the optimal habitat? I return to this question in the next sections.

4.3 What did we learn about preferred environments?

The above sections summarise the findings of my articles, but do not yet give the full account on my overall findings. The key results that arose from my data analysis and the close reading of my source material are:

- The results in the EEP field are affected by the research methods and the fact that the border between nature and urban environments is not clearly or consistently defined;
- In the EEP field, "restorative" is used in its narrow sense to the detriment of urban environments; and
- Subjects are active participants to the making of aesthetic and/or restorative experience, not simply recipients of it.

Based on my literature review, it appears evident that research methods affect the results. Image-based studies tend to generate different results from in-situ based studies: a bias towards favouring greenery is apparent in image-based studies, whereas in-situ studies generate more favourable results for (certain) urban environments.[33] This is rather concerning, as it easily leads to binary or simplified interpretations, where nature's environments and human-influenced environments are seen as polar opposites and the former as positive, latter a negative. In reality they are nearly always intermingled to some degree. Linking to this, in the EEP studies the imagery about nature and urban environments is often not clearly separated but the images of cities contain greenery and other nature's elements and the images of nature contain signs of human presence or influence, such as paths, fences or other constructions or indication of human activity. In fact, my literature review identified that the most preferred green spaces for aesthetic enjoyment and restoration were to some degree artificial, meaning tended, pruned and kept in control. Even more importantly, it is unclear what is the subjects' thinking process in preferring certain images over others, because their reasoning for rating is not usually asked in studies.

A parallel, relevant finding is that the term "restorative" in the EEP field is usually defined following the Kaplans; as something that restores the cognitive task-executing ability of the subject – in other words, makes us less tired, scattered or stressed,

and more focused and effortlessly alert. The term is not usually defined as "whole-making", although the implicit assumption appears to be that restoration in the stress-recovery sense is whole-making. In the EEP field, to identify environments that support recharging, subjects are usually made stressed so that their restoration levels can be measured. Firstly, this focus draws from the health and economics arena instead of city planning as its purpose is to understand what can support people to reattain their ability to lead productive life. Secondly, it eliminates all other purposes or desired qualities an environment can have. We are not always stressed and in fact, my literature review and survey found that depending on a study, up to a third of subjects feel they recharge best in indoor or city environments. The finding that most challenges the usual position in the EEP field is that subjects are active and purposeful participants in creating or obtaining an aesthetic and/or restorative experience. We do not merely register the visual or other sensory input we receive, but actively seek and even amend environments to influence our mood and inner world. The sought-after environment is not always or solely greenery or waterfront, although they are popular. This, again, highlights the need to listen to the subjects in gauging environmental preferences, because their thinking process and reasons for selecting environments appear to be far more culturally influenced and based on one's own personal sensations, memories, connotations and knowledge about the place than is currently acknowledged in the EEP field.

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1 Vera Shuman et al, "Levels of Valence", *Frontiers in Psychology*, (2013), Vol 4, No 261, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3651968/ accessed 10 October 2018.

2 The assessment of the aesthetic intention/reaction was informed by Carolyn Korsmeier's discussion of taste, Berys Gaut & Dominic McIver Lopes (edit.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, (Taylor & Francis Books, 2013), 259-262: in summary, aesthetic qualities are debatable and depend on the adopted viewpoint and philosophy, but objects have properties that make them worth appreciation or criticism, such as colour, composition, elegance, rhythm etc. and the value of these qualities is understood fairly similarly within a culture or among a class of objects (paintings, photographs, furniture etc.).

3 Unity in (visual) variety means the harmony or union of cooperating elements or the balance of contrasting or conflicting elements. Aesthetic harmony exists when some identical quality or form or purpose is embodied in various elements of a whole – sameness in difference. Aesthetic balance is the unity between elements which, while they oppose or conflict with one another, nevertheless need or supplement each other. Dewitt H. Parker, Chapter V, "The Analysis of the Aesthetic Experience: The Structure of the Experience", *The Principles Of Aesthetics*, (1920), E-book, Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6366/pg6366-images.html.

4 Katya Mandoki has identified two aesthetic attitudes: poetics, or attention to art and the artistic; and prosaics, attention to everyday aesthetics: how ordinary things look, feel and are performed. Katya Mandoki, Prosaics, *The Play of Culture and Social Identities,* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2007), 25-26.

5 Kristin Diehl et al., "How taking photos increases enjoyment of experiences", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, (2016), Vol .111, No. 2.

6 Thomas Leddy, "Everyday Aesthetics and Photography", *Aisthesis* (2014), vol. 7, no. 1, 45-62.

7 Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2007), Chapter 4.

8 Kevin Melchionne, "The Point of Everyday Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics,* (2014), vol. 12.

9 The study contained a background question about creative or cultural hobbies to map whether the respondents were in general interested in arts or aesthetics: yes 66.8%, no 14.3%, and not currently, but generally interested 18.9%. This was to gauge whether only artistically-bent people find aesthetics of environment important. However, this warrants

further study as no statistics exist on what percentage of people in general have artistic or cultural interests.

10 Unlike some environmental psychology studies, this survey did no attempt to trace whether there is a connection between personality type and place selection.

11 Karoliina Periänen has shown that "the summer cottage is considered to represent something that is originally Finnish, having its roots in the traditional Finnish way of life." "Summer Cottages in Finland. The cultural construction of life, space and national identity", *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*, (2004), Vol 4, 46.

12 "'Finnishness' was indicated by the villa's [or cabin's] location beside a 'wilderness' lake, the lack of neighbours and other people […]", Periäinen (2004), 45.

13 Tim Smedley, "What impact do seas, lakes and rivers have on people's health?", 16 March 2016, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/impact-sea-lakes-rivers-peoples-health

14 Embassy of Finland Washington, "Finland among top 5 cleanest countries in the world", News 15 June 2009, http://www.finland.org/public/default.aspx?contentid=165396&nodeid=35833&contentlan=2&culture=en-US

15 *CorD Magazine*, "Nordic Design: Maximum Style With Minimum Fuss", (2016), https://cordmagazine.com/markets/country-in-focus/nordic-countries/2016/nordic-design-maximum-style-minimum-fuss/, accessed 7 May 2018; and Mårdh, Hedvig, *A Century of Swedish Gustavian Style: Art History, Cultural Heritage and Neoclassical Revivals from the 1890s to the 1990s*, (2017), Doctoral Thesis, Uppsala University, Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Department of Art History.

16 I note that any conclusions about gender differences in my survey can be indicative only, because nearly nine out of ten respondents were female.

17 Kalevi Korpela, "Adolescents' favourite places and environmental self-regulation", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, (1992), Vol. 12, No. 3. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272494405801392.

18 Ellis Woodman, "Revisit: 'Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium continues to radiate a profound sense of human empathy'", *Architectural Review*, 17 November 2016, https://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/revisit-aaltos-paimio-sanatorium-continues-to-radiate-a-profound-sense-of-human-empathy/10014811.article

19 These studies include for example "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery" (1984), "Sensation seeking and reactions to nature settings"(1993) (a study about reactions to nature paintings), "Stress Recovery During Exposure to Natural and Urban Environments" (1991) (a study about reactions to videos containing nature or urban landscapes), "Effects of exposure to nature and abstract pictures on patients recovery from heart surgery" (1993), "The View from the Road: Implications for Stress Recovery and Immunization" (1998), "Artificial window view of nature" (2005) and "Anger and Stress The Role of Landscape Posters in an Office Setting" (2008). Ulrich has also studied the effect of other stimuli, such as sound, interior design and actually experienced nature (not via images). These studies are available via ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger_Ulrich4.

20 Ana Karinna Hidalgo, "Biophilic Design, Restorative Environments and Well-Being", *Proceedings of the Colors of Care: The 9th International Conference on Design & Emotion*, (J. Salamanca et al, edit.) (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 2014)

21 Examples of urban sites that draw visitors but lack greenery could be for example urban ruins; however, in my view this fascination arises from the thrill of horror, abnormality of abandonment, discussed in section 3.1.

22 Western cities commonly have policies for the acceptable vegetation height and density, in particular near vehicular and pedestrian roads. Jack Nasar with various collaborators has studied places of fear and found that people tend to find confined and blocked places threatening, fearing someone is hiding behind screening. For example Jack Nasar & Kym Jones, "Landscapes of Fear and Stress", *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol 29, No 3, 291-323.

23 Meaning signs of the past, such as heritage areas, and personal history and memories.

24 Stephen Kaplan et al, "The museum as a restorative environment", *Environment and Behaviour*, (1993), Vol. 25, No. 6, 725-742; and Massimiliano Scopelliti et al, "Is it Really Nature That Restores People? A Comparison With Historical Sites With High Restorative Potential", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 9, 28 January 2019, https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02742/full.

25 William Meyer, "Urban Legends", *Colgate Scene* (Colgate University News, 2014) November, http://news.colgate.edu/scene/2014/11/urban-legends.html.

[26] Marcel Hunziker et al, “Space and Place – Two Aspects of the Human-landscape Relationship”, *Landscape Series* (2007), Volume 8, 49-50.

[27] Berleant (1992), pp. 72-79.

[28] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, (Pantheon e-books, 1979), Chapter 2, “Fear in the Growing Child”.

[29] Arthur Stamps, “Mystery, complexity, legibility and coherence: A meta-analysis”, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24 (2004) 1–16, 1.

[30] Taking action encompasses all forms of reactive and proactive responses in and towards the environment, including doing nothing (also perceiving is action). Komarine Romden-Romluch, "The Power to Reckon with the Possible", *Reading Merleau-Ponty. On Phenomenology of Perception*. (Thomas Baldwin, edit.), (Great Britain: Routledge, 2007), 55; and Philip Zeltner, *John Dewey's Aesthetic Philosophy*, (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner 1975), 15-25.

[31] Romden-Romluch (2007); Zeltner (1975), 15-25 and 32-33.

[32] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 93-98.

[33] This potential bias has been studied by Scopelliti et al, who noted that experiencing nature in-situ tends to lead to a stronger preference towards nature as a restorative environment, compared to experiencing urban environments in-situ. However, this preference was only identifiable in stressed subjects, whereas in neutral situations such preference did not emerge. Scopelliti et al. (2019).

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I take a more detailed look into my key findings by discussing the following, regarding the existing research in the EEP field:

5.1) research methods: selected methods affect results, and key concepts like nature and urban environments are not consistently defined;
5.2) research approach: "restorative" is understood as the end goal of an environment, yet the term is used only in its narrow sense of "re-charging", not in its fuller meaning of "whole-making"; and
5.3) interpreting results: understanding subjects as passive recipients of environment's influences vs. active makers of their aesthetic and/or restorative experience.

By discussing these matters, I draw together an answer to my overall research interest: what kinds of environments are most likely or most universally aesthetically appealing, based on current research, if such environments can be identified? A definite answer may not be possible to give, but I have attempted to approximate the answer from the different angles below.

5.1 Positive nature, negative cities – or vice versa?

Sometimes, an answer to a question is found by answering another, opposite question. Is it possible to identify elements or features in the environment that are universally or predictably *disliked*? A moderately affirmative answer to this is a long-held position in the EEP field. Usually what is understood to fall into the category of disliked, are "artificial", meaning urban landscapes, for evolutionary reasons. In Articles II, III and IV, I sought to explore whether this question is, in fact, settled. In Article II, a notable minority - one third of my survey respondents - found indoor or urban places the most restorative. Furthermore, one fifth of my survey respondents discussed order, neat-

ness and tidiness of the environment as prerequisites for restoration, indoors and outdoors. Also, many of those respondents whose favourite place was in nature, located it at a familiar lakeside scenery, such as their own summer cottage. This may indicate that for many, nature is most enjoyable when it is navigable, comfortable and safe, for example as experienced in a tended garden or at a personally meaningful spot.

As identified in my EEP literature review and in my survey, many subjects choose as the most aesthetically appealing and restorative a location that is in nature or has green elements, but is tended, to some degree artificial. So, where exactly lies the border between nature and human-made? As discussed in chapter 2, many thinkers, including Berleant, Carlson and von Bonsdorff, have pointed out that such border is practically impossible to define. In the EEP field, one solution to separate nature and human-made is to minimise greenery in the images that depict urban environments. As I discuss in Article III, by following this approach Roger Ulrich identified that industrial and commercial environments lacking greenery - mainly parking lots and strip malls - were perceived as aesthetically unappealing, even aggression-inducing. In Article III, I further discuss how other non-green urban areas such as spaces for traffic, bulk commerce, storage, industries and utilities, are commonly experienced as aesthetically unappealing.

This research approach has several flaws. Firstly, it artificially divides the city into two functions: recreational (green areas as "positive nature") and technological-artificial (transportation, bulk commerce, solutions to economic problems as "negative urban"). Secondly, it presumes that certain places - the non-green ones - are more quintessentially urban than others, yet these quintessential places often are built to serve machines and economic efficiency rather than any other human need, such as cultural or social. Contrary to the early views of Roger Ulrich, the appeal or lack of appeal of urban environments cannot be assessed without also researching, for example, residential, commercial, civic, pedestrian, heritage and sacred places. Thirdly, focusing on commercial spaces such as strip malls excellently highlights the artificial division between interiors and exteriors of city, when in reality they are intertwined and porous. Many experts of aesthetics seem to find malls vulgar and unattractive,[1] whereas consumers seem to enjoy the social and aesthetic experience they can offer.[2] The overall aesthetic experience about urban environment does not switch on and off when we enter or exit buildings. Focusing on facades and exteriors cannot tell the whole story about experiencing a city.

Following this avenue of thought, it is not surprising to find that, indeed, studies that focus on real-life experiences in urban environments, tend to generate more positive results in favour of cities. As I discuss in Articles II and III, place attachment, positive memories, connotations and multisensory experience notably influence environmental preference and this becomes visible in in-situ studies. In image-based surveys, subjects tend to assess images as artwork or looking for scenic or picturesque qualities. When we are asked to rely only on our visual sense, the image's visual appeal is what we focus on. This raises concerns about photo surveys and video viewings as a research method. Throughout my research I concluded that 'aesthetically appealing' cannot mean only 'visually appealing', because image-based studies are not able to capture nearly all relevant aesthetic aspects of environments. My survey

demonstrated that when respondents are asked to describe their favourite place, instead of selecting from a list provided by a researcher, the 'typical' environmental aesthetic experience appears to comprise the following: 1) an immersed multisensory experience, 2) one's own memories, connotations and knowledge about the place, 3) the appreciation of "thingness" or how something should appear or is most quintessentially presented, 4) the appraisal and appreciation of ambience, or the subjective experience of the place's "feel"; and 5) judgements of taste based on all of the above.

My EEP literature review found that "city" in studies can mean very different areas of it, including high-traffic and utility areas, commercial and residential areas, pedestrian streets and plazas, urban parks and boulevards, even aerial views – but practically never all of the above in the context of one study. In the EEP field, due to the nature of empirical inquiry, it is not common to contemplate the *reasons* why people like or dislike places, beyond any biological or evolutionary explanations. However, a problematic angle in attempting to neatly separate nature and urban areas in research is that cities are never devoid of nature, without life. Not only greenery (and animals), but *people* and their behaviour, actions and quirks are a necessary part of the city. Interactions with others significantly influence the formation of aesthetic experiences available in cities. In Article II, I found that one tenth of respondents specifically sought for urban buzz to feel restored; and my literature review in Article III revealed that the experience of restorativeness depends on personality type, personal preferences and levels of stress: the less stressed the individual, the more positive aesthetic appeal they were able to notice in urban environments. Another issue with comparing nature to cities is that they exist for "different purpose" in our mind. Nature is "meant to be" serene and without people, whereas cities are "meant to be" vibrant, social, fascinating *because of* people. In my view, we are not able to study "nature" and "cities" if these are not properly defined, and if qualitative differences between and among different areas of nature and urban areas are not fully fleshed out.

In the EEP field, the restorative influence of nature is usually seen to arise from solitary reflection or recreation in green settings and it is inferred that this need arises from our species' past. Yet, our genetically closest ancestors, chimpanzees and bonobos, live in small groups and continuously interact with, join and leave larger groups, consisting of up to hundreds of individuals. These primates live in the "original home" of homo sapiens, in the wilderness, yet they are nearly always interacting with or surrounded by other individuals.[3] Similarly, in many still-surviving tribal societies, people live in extended family groups in forest-surrounded villages and regularly come together to meet other tribes to trade, socialise and find spouses.[4] Most tribal people draw a line between the familiar and safe nature near the village, and unfamiliar, unpredictable, potentially hostile nature outside of the territory boundaries.[5] Without going too deep into anthropology, it can be validly asked, is the solitary reflection or enjoyment of greenery an evolutionary or biologically coded trait at all or a culturally learned habit in the modern society? Again, conversely, is it realistic to expect that people would enjoy empty cities as often depicted in the EEP imagery? My answer is that such "innate trait" cannot be understood without cultural influence, and I have shown in this thesis that cities exist first and foremost for social purposes. Comparing a place we understand to be for recreation, exercise or introspection to a place of social

interactions but also rules and burdens may be a false equivalent to start with. Treating nature and cities as each other's polar opposites is also unnecessarily and unrealistically dichotomising: all human settlement exists within nature, and nature as gardens and parks has been a building block of cities for millennia.[6] I have aimed to show that the enjoyment of or thriving in urban and nature's environments are not mutually exclusive and nature (greenery) is not necessarily a habitat everybody instinctively longs for: by way of example, people have for millennia inhabited also vegetation-barren areas, such as tundras and deserts. Furthermore, instead of a well of recreational joys, nature (wilderness) has been seen as a source of unpredictability and malevolence in many cultures and eras.

5.2 The restorative effect of aesthetic appeal

One of my four key results was that "restorative" is usually seen as the end goal or a hallmark of a preferred environment in the EEP field; however, the term itself is used in quite a narrow sense. What does restorative mean? As discussed, in the EEP field it is usually defined as something that aids recovery from stress, fatigue or a scattered feeling. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, restorative is something that "serves to restore to consciousness, vigour or health". In a wider sense, restorative is something that restores the previous (or preferred) state, or one's overall well-being, makes us whole. As indicated in chapter 2 of this thesis, in addition to the basic biological needs of shelter, safety and sustenance, people also have other needs that different environments can support or fulfil, enabling restoration in the fuller sense of whole-making. For example, Berleant, Massey and Voon discuss how a city can offer us opportunities for economic and social activity; a collective memory of ideals, ideas and customs; and an anchor for us to belong – but it is also a place for entertainment, thrill, drama, fright, decadence and derelict.[7] Bowring and Pallasmaa in turn discuss the importance of places that offer a full range of experiences, including negative and difficult.[8] "Restorative" cannot thus mean an access to only one colour – relaxing or stress-reducing - in the whole spectrum of whole-making.

However, talking about restoration in the "relaxation and recharge" sense, as I discuss in Article I, staycation is a prime example of an activity undertaken for the purposes to become restored via the means of environmental or everyday aesthetics. The data analysed in Article I showed that the appeal of a staycation arises from a "permission" to enjoy: staycation is earmarked for specific pleasurable activities, including outdoor recreation, exploration, entertainment, social bonding, gustatory experiences and playful creativity. Aesthetics as a field has for long focused on the disinterested, contemplative aesthetic experience, whereas my data indicates that many seek creativity and aesthetic experiences as an inseparable part of enjoyable life - combined with self-expression, entertainment, mastering a skill and so forth. This aligns with Melchionne's discussion about everyday aesthetic activities being used for maintaining or improving one's subjective well-being.[9] Staycation, especially one shared in social media in the form of composed images, can be seen as a strategy to refresh or sharpen one's aesthetic sensitivity by engaging in and capturing what is perceived as

aesthetic, revealing a "yearning" for aesthetics in the everyday – and a pathway via aesthetic experiences to restoration.

To identify a potential, more direct link between aesthetic and restorative qualities of environments, I set up the survey presented in Article II about restorative favourite places. Aisthesis, (positive) sensory perception, and aesthetics, judgements of taste, overlapped and interlinked in my subjects' discussion and both aspects appeared equally important in a favourite place. The most mentioned aesthetic and restorative quality of a favourite place was visual appeal. Typically, sight is our primary sense and when respondents are asked to think of "aesthetic qualities", they may associate it with visual appeal and art. The question attempted to uncouple this by also mentioning other senses. Notably, the second most discussed experience was multisensory and the third, positive auditory experience. In summary, the respondents appeared to value an embodied somatic experience of the place, as proposed by Berleant. My data also corroborated Yuriko Saito's theory about appreciation of "thingness" and ambience as sources of aesthetic pleasure: for instance, my subjects appreciated a "typical" or "quintessential" Finnish lakeside landscape. The purpose of visiting one's favourite place was to be receptive to its ambience, including its aesthetic appeal, the activities, experiences and sensations available in it, and one's own memories and interpretations of it. This immersed experience was understood as restorative.[10] This multifaceted restorative experience appears deeper and more layered than the experience usually discussed in the EEP field, where subjects' own thought process, reasoning, memories etc. are not accounted for in assessing a place's restorative power.

In my survey, the respondents were not provided with a definition for "aesthetic" nor "restorative", to give more freedom to the subjects to interpret and discuss the place as they wish. Most respondents appeared to interpret "aesthetic" as appealing or pleasant; as positive features or qualities that are available through multiple senses and intertwined with one's own musings, feelings and memories about the place. Curiously, none of the respondents discussed any additional means to enhance the aesthetic experience, such as factual or scientific knowledge of the place, as theorised by Carlson. A handful implied that imagination could play a role in the appeal of the place, providing some support to Brady's suggestion about the value of imagination in the formation of an aesthetic experience.[11] Rather, the positive experience of the place emerged from direct sensations integrated with one's own associations and previous experiences about the place, most reflecting Berleant's view of aesthetics of engagement. Given that a definition for "aesthetic" was not provided, is it meaningful to call the respondents' experiences aesthetic instead of simply pleasant? In the context of the traditional, (now more contested) Kantian disinterested position in aesthetics, it perhaps is not. The respondents were quite obviously not disinterested: they were invested in seeking a personally meaningful, memorable and pleasurable place that would lift their mood. However, I hesitate to apply strict boundaries on aesthetic experience: I understand it as one experience type among others and it is often intertwined with, influenced by and an influencer of other equally relevant experiences, such as flow, self-realisation and restoration.

Returning to my earlier pondering about the use of the term restorative in its fuller sense of whole-making, my study did not directly identify environments that were experienced as restorative yet somehow negative or difficult, such as places of

sadness or melancholy. For example, none of my survey subjects mentioned a graveyard or a memorial as a favourite place, although in Finland graveyards often double as public parks, as they are commonly situated near city centres and have plenty of greenery. This does not prove that such places are not experienced as restorative, or that they do not contribute to restoration. This aspect of restoration has not been adequately studied and warrants further interest. As one indicator of a different meaning to the term restorative, one tenth of the respondents explicitly discussed places that are invigorating and energising rather than relaxing in the quieting sense of the term. It is a common, yet usually unnamed presupposition in the EEP field that for restoration we seek places with no human interaction. This is evidenced by the usual study setting, where the assessed images do not depict (many or any) people.[12] The idea behind this elimination is to direct the focus on the place itself, not some mutable, uncontrollable element in it, including passersby. However, to one tenth of my subjects the passersby, the possibility for human (or animal) interaction appeared to be the very element they seek in the preferred restorative environment. I will discuss this notion further below.

5.3 What does optimal mean in 'optimal human habitat'?

It appears that the affinity for greenery – or perhaps rather wilderness or nature at a natural state – at the expense of urban environments is not as strongly evidenced as is believed in the EEP field. But, are urban environments still less preferable, or in other words, is nature still more beneficial or optimal as an everyday surroundings to us? Currently, EEP studies tend to concentrate on the "healing power" of nature in the presumption that nature is our original home and hence, still the most suited for us. As discussed in Articles III and IV, the hypothesis often is that we benefit from receiving health-inducing or positively affecting influences, sensory signals, from nature. Indeed, EEP studies have produced evidence that we measurably feel better in nature: for example, people recover faster from stress or illness when they have access to greenery. But, in Article IV, I point out that favourite place studies partially challenge the view about restoration being uniquely or solely a faculty of nature: when a person visits his or her favourite place, positive emotions dominate over the negative, regardless of whether the place is in nature, urban area or indoors.[13] Favourite places appear to be a positive feedback loop: people choose certain places not just to relax and improve their mood, but to enjoy a range of qualities, including aesthetic ones, which in turn help them feel restored and whole – and enjoy the place more.[14] The pitfall of favourite place studies is that they usually focus on a specific effect on mood: uplifting or soothing. Thus, favourite place findings do not explain what kind of environment is preferred for everyday activities and chores. After all, we are not always stressed or in need of recharge. A valid yet usually undiscussed viewpoint is, that people may need respite *from* nature. An easy example could be a camper returning from a trekking trip, seeking and appreciating indoor facilities and urban conveniences, such as indoor toilet, kitchen and corner store.

In Article IV, I further ask, what about biophilic design as a compromise towards the optimal habitat? By replicating or mimicking nature's features and forms, biophilic designers aspire to provide sensorially rich and aesthetically rewarding environments that align with our presumed inherent or "original" needs; bringing (more) nature to cities, yet allowing us to enjoy the conveniences of modern, urban life. Nature is undoubtedly a generous source of aesthetic experience, but with biophilia the risk is the presumption that only those elements and qualities that have empirically measurable effects on people (for instance, that lower the blood pressure or stress hormones) are what matter; and only nature's forms and elements can be aesthetically valued. For example, biophilia-advocate Stephen Kellert instructs that non-natural colours should be avoided in architecture.[15] Focusing on measurable effects may exclude or dismiss those aesthetic experiences that do not manifest as accepted measurable reactions. Also, if beauty is understood to be present in nature's forms only, will that leave room for arts and architecture that seek to imagine novel, non-nature-like things? Our interest, fascination and sense of beauty are not piqued only by what is known and natural, but by what is new and surprising. Beauty can be present in both nature and human-made[16] and if beauty is the draw-in factor in favourite places, that explains why a favourite place can be anywhere, not only in nature.

A largely unexplored, yet crucial question about the most optimal habitat is: if a perfect environment for humans exists, is perfection in itself optimal? The intuitive answer may be yes, but contemplation raises pertinent issues. John Dewey said that every organism lives in rhythm with its environment and as a result, its knowledge of itself and its environment expands.[17] Evolution means the ability of organisms to adapt to something new or changed. As an everyday example, a forest may appear soothing to one person, threatening to another, but the latter can learn to enjoy the wilderness through exposure and expansion of what is known. Will perfection lead to complacency and lack of learning and evolution? Should "optimal" ever equate with "comfort zone"? Humans have spread around the globe and colonised almost every thinkable environment: it appears that the ability to grow, learn and adapt are characteristic to our species, even if they are not characteristic to each individual.[18] Throughout my articles, I have uncovered evidence that we actively use places to our own purposes, including aesthetic enjoyment and becoming restored, whether the latter is understood as relaxation and recharging, or as conducive to improved or maintained subjective well-being in some other ways. Favourite places, aesthetically enjoyable places or restorative places cannot be understood as one-way streets, where we enter, receive influences and become affected by the place's visual signals. Rather, we always "feel and read" places, including their symbols, perceived meanings and multisensory ambience; and take some action, even if it is relatively passive such as simply observing the surroundings.

Based on my research, I suggest that due to an art viewing convention, we are familiar with seeing nature's landscapes as static, framed, scenic images, whereas aesthetic experiences available in the city appear to have a wider and deeper symbolic dimension, including social connections, memories, associations, value judgements and the sense of history and culture. In light of this, is it accurate to say that cities are less aesthetically appealing or less restorative than nature? My literature review indi-

cates that the answer depends on a number of variables. Saito argues that the appearance of a thing can communicate our intentions, or how much we care about others' aesthetic sensibility.[19] I suggest that places we experience as unattractive do not convey positive, if any, consideration for aesthetic sensibility. However, this does not mean that urban environments as a whole would or could not convey such sensibility, quite the contrary. Drawing from Saito, I suggest that in those human-made places that appeal to us aesthetically, we recognise and appreciate the effort to create things of beauty; such as decorative buildings in a heritage area, or fashionable clothes in a high-end shopping street. The recognition and appreciation of "things of beauty" in cities often is a more layered and even a conflicted process compared to appreciating beauty in nature, because living in a society often requires many kinds of simultaneous value judgements. For example, we may find fashionable clothes aesthetically appealing but be against consumerism, which may diminish or erase the aesthetic enjoyment. In my view, these aspects are not properly accounted for in the EEP field.

In this thesis I identified that restorative favourite places are selected based on their affordances: aesthetic qualities and the place's ability to support an aspired activity and through that, mood. This indicates a more active, interactive and symbolic relationship with places than assumed in the biology-based position about restoration. I suggest that the appeal of nature may not arise from nature's instinctively appealing forms, but from the possibilities to use the environment in a beneficial or meaningful way; such as the perceived freedom to roam and explore, forage (resources, information and experiences), alter and personalise surroundings and obtain aesthetic pleasure.[20] It is conceivable that some universal environmental preferences can exist, given our shared biological needs. But, considering an example of eating reveals how nuanced our responses to biological needs can be. We all must eat, but what is considered as the best form of nutrition, depends significantly on personal, cultural, socio-economic and aesthetic reasons. For example, eating insects may be natural to one person but repulsive to another. Diets are an area, like the EEP field, where discussion revolves around the most "natural" or "beneficial" choices. Yet, diet choices such as "natural" paleo diet are far from settled and are hotly debated among experts and laypeople alike.[21]

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2 Rob Shields (edit.), *Lifestyle Shopping. The Subject of Consumption*, (Routledge, e-book, 2004), 3-4.

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[9] Kevin Melchionne, "The Point of Everyday Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2014), vol. 12.

[10] Anu Besson, "Aesthetics and Affordances in a Favourite Place: On the Interactional Use of Environments for Restoration", *Environmental Values*, 30 October 2019, http://www.whpress.co.uk/EV/papers/1806-Besson.pdf

[11] Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), (Edward N. Zalta, edit), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/environmental-aesthetics Section 3.1; and Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, (Edinburg: MPG Books, 2003), 151.

[12] Anu Besson, "In Defense of Cities: On Negative Presentation of Urban Areas in Environmental Preference Studies", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2019), Vol 17, Section 3, https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=861

[13] S. Johnsen & L. Rydstedt, "Active use of the natural environment for emotion regulation", *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 4.

[14] Giorgios Tsiris, "Aesthetic experience and transformation in music therapy", *Voices: A World forum for music therapy*, (2008), Vol. 8, No. 3, Section: 'Aesthetic Experience and Its Relevance to Music Therapy', https://www.voices.no/index.php/voices/article/view/416/340

[15] Stephen Kellert et al., *Biophilic Design. The Theory, Science and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008).

[16] I note that in practice, it is nonsensical to treat human-made as non-natural, as also humans are a part of nature. For the sake of argument and following the position in the EEP field, the dichotomy of natural/urban or natural/artificial (human-made) is maintained in this thesis.

[17] As discussed by Philip Zeltner, *John Dewey's Aesthetic Philosophy*, (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner 1975), 15-25 and 32-33.

[17] Komarine Romdenh-Romluch, *The power to reckon with the possible: Reading Merleau-Ponty*, (Great Britain: Routledge, 2007).

[18] Anu Besson, "Building a paradise? On the quest for the optimal human habitat", *Contemporary Aesthetics,* (October 2017), Vol 15, https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=806

[19] Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 234-238.

[20] By altering and personalising I mean for example the following: in rural areas or in nature, it is often easier to live as one pleases than in cities, including making alterations on one's dwelling, gardening, cultivating the land or foraging nature's materials. In cities any similar actions may require permits or are forbidden.

[21] Ibid.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from the previous chapters, it can be argued that environmental preference is built on four pillars: context, culture, convention and connection. We experience our surroundings always in some context. How we see the forest, for example, depends on whether we are hiking in it with a map, or whether we are lost in the woods. My survey findings indicate that our personal and cultural background play a role in how and what we like to experience. Convention acts as an undercurrent for how we are accustomed to experiencing things, for example, how we tend to look at pictures of nature searching for scenic or art-like qualities, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Lastly, like Berleant among others has argued and as evidenced by my research, an environmental aesthetic experience is not truly possible via a surrogate like a photo: a connection with or an immersion in the environment is a prerequisite for experiencing all of its aspects, including its ambience, as pointed out by Saito. Below, I discuss these notions further.

6.1 Yearning for beauty

As discussed throughout this thesis, in the EEP field the usual position is that restorative and aesthetically appealing environments are similar, or in practice, interchangeable environments. “Restorative” is usually defined following the Kaplans’ attention restoration theory - a restorative place enables us to regain the ability to focus on cognitive tasks, and/or supports a relaxed, calm mood. Based on my findings in Article I about staycation, I argued that subjects appeared to have a yearning for beauty demonstrated by seeking for and sharing images of aesthetically pleasing locations to recharge. The prevalence of pleasurable whole-of-body experiences in the Instagram images, in my view, signals that moments of savoured aisthesis – sensuous experiences of aliveness – are understood as restorative. Consequently, these aesthetically appealing locations or pastimes (such as enjoying a visually appealing brunch and photographing it) appear to enable or enhance, according to Melchionne, restoration

and higher subjective well-being. The popularity of staycation with its deliberate, selected activities for revitalisation implies that opportunities to recharge in the everyday are potentially lacking.

A usually undiscussed area in the EEP field is the meaning or definition of restoration as unifying or "whole-making". This meaning is sometimes inferred to, but not explicitly pondered. In favourite place studies, following Korpela's definition, favourite places are usually understood as locations that help the subjects to manage their emotions, self-identity and self-coherence. The pitfall of favourite place studies is that they typically focus on a specific effect on mood: uplifting or soothing. Thus, favourite place findings among other EEP findings do not explain what kinds of environments are preferred for everyday activities and chores - after all, we are not always stressed or feeling down. The Cambridge Dictionary defines restoration as "the act or the process of returning something to its original condition, or to a state similar to its original condition" and the Merriam Webster dictionary additionally defines it as "restoring to an unimpaired or improved condition". A deeper and wider definition for restoration can be found in psychology and the power of beauty to restore. For example, George Hagman references various thinkers in describing how the sense of beauty is involved in a process of resolution of a psychological conflict. Beauty can be understood as something that calms and brings together the fragmented self, because "the sense of transcendence predominates where beauty conveys a sense of wholeness, completeness, rhythmicity and meaning(fulness), perhaps even celebration of mortality, aggression and ugliness".[1] Over a century ago, George Santayana wrote:

> *The sense of beauty is the harmony between our nature and our experience. When our senses and imagination find what they crave, when the world so shapes itself or so moulds the mind that the correspondence between them is perfect, then perception is pleasure, and existence needs no apology.*[2]

My findings indicate that many view experiences of beauty as an integral part of good life. Everyday aesthetic (self)education, learning to acquire aesthetic experiences within the ordinary, appears to offer a vehicle for more frequent revitalisation and enhanced well-being as proposed by Melchionne. But, as discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis, restorative as "whole-making" or "unifying" cannot mean an access to only one colour – restorative in the sense of relaxing or calming - in the whole spectrum of experiences that make up the human condition. Consequently, studies that seek answers to what is restorative, would benefit from expanding the search of "restorative" to also cover other whole-making experiences besides relaxation or stress-reduction.

6.2 Favourite place as a feedback loop

In Article II, I explored the responses of expat Finns about their restorative favourite places and the essential aesthetic elements of such places. The results inferred to an interesting gender difference in preferences. A notable proportion of female respondents found organised, controlled, tidy and clean environments restorative, whereas

male respondents did not mention tidiness or order as prerequisites for restorativeness. What might explain this preference for orderly or organised environments? Our relationship with nature has for long been divided: the history of humankind is also history of survival, seeking shelter from and managing our vulnerability in the face of nature's threats.

In today's EEP field, nature in general is understood as recreationally beneficial and benevolently restorative, but in reality, the experience of restorativeness is entirely context-dependent.[3] An easy example could be getting lost. Hiking in the daylight with a map and adequate food and water supplies is relaxing, whereas losing one's path is stressful, even terrifying, as evidenced by myriads of films and TV shows revolving around this plotline, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *The Ritual* (2017), or Jane Harper's bestseller books *Force of Nature* (2017) and *The Lost Man* (2018). In his book *Landscapes of Fear* (1979), Yi-Fu Tuan explores different nature-related threats and fears, ranging from physical to imaginary, mythological and uncanny. Given that a) the EEP field relies on evolutionary explanations and b) humans have always been both predators and prey, experiencing nature as fearsome appears curiously absent in many EEP studies.

Fear is not entirely excluded; in fact, the experience of fear is a core element of some key theories in the EEP field, mainly embedded as binary like-dislike-feature understood to explain environmental preference.[4] Yet, despite the wealth of studies, what exactly is relaxing and what is fear-inducing in the environment is still not clear. Tuan writes that every human construction is, in a way, also a barrier against nature and the physiological and psychological chaos it inevitably brings: every garden hedge, wall, fence or cultivated field is carved from and against nature in an attempt to protect ourselves from its threats, ranging from strangers and predators to the elements, mud and dirt.[5] Hence, seeing nature as first and foremost a source of recreational and restorative experiences can only be understood as a counterpart to city life - life that is protected, walled and secured by the civilisation from the unpredictability of nature – which in turn allows us to enjoy the "benevolent" aspects of nature, including aesthetic pleasure.

The main finding in Article II are the experiencer profiles, meaning different ways or stances to experience one's environment, including focusing on different aesthetic aspects in it. The respondents demonstrated a well-defined ability and keenness to select locations depending on their aspired mood, supporting the earlier findings about this type of use of favourite places by Korpela and colleagues. As a new finding, I concluded that favourite place can be a specific location with defined boundaries, but more often it appears to be a "perception horizon" – headspace moving along with the person through the experienced landscape - or a web comprising external influences and internal musings. In my view, all of the profiles evidence the relevance of Berleant's aesthetics of engagement, where the relationship with the environment is interactional, immersed and continuous; somatic experience is formed from movement through and actions in the environment; and one key purpose of the experience is to be receptive to the aesthetics of the surroundings. Also, my findings lend support to Melchionne's proposal about everyday aesthetic activities as a pathway to increased subjective well-being – over 80% of my 308 subjects indicated that they regard

the aesthetic appeal of their favourite place as an important draw-in factor and a reason why they use that specific place (type) for recharging.

6.3 Looking vs experiencing

What do people like and dislike in their environment? The answer cannot be a universal list of features or elements, as argued by Arnold Berleant and supported by my findings in Article III. We never experience our surroundings as automatons that objectively and accurately record sensory input, but always through a lens of personal cognitive and experiential meanings, including knowledge, memories, associations and imagined meanings of the place, subjective sensory acuity, bodily stances and intimations. Furthermore, our beliefs, values, and attitudes participate in the process of interpreting and structuring the experience; "environment is an interrelated and interdependent union of people and place".[6] As discussed in Article III, some of our current findings or presumptions about environmental preferences and dislikes appear to be coloured due to the research methodology: image-based and in-situ studies tend to generate different, even conflicting results. I pointed out that by convention, the studies in the EEP field tend to present nature as "meant to be" – without people - and cities as "not meant to be" – again, without people. In other words, images of nature align with our expectation of greenery, but city images do not align with our everyday or preferred experience about a city environment.

As another issue, I noted that most images of nature in EEP studies depicted summer- and daytime views of greenery and waterfront locations. This raises a question, are such studies directing the subjects' focus on nature as such, or on what greenery and water represent or symbolise? A summery day in a green environment easily has connotations to recreation, relaxation, free time and holidays, as discussed by Yi-Fu Tuan and Orvar Löfgren;[7] which in turn usually have a positive meaning in people's minds. The aspect of nature that is rarely, if at all, portrayed in the EEP imagery, is its unpredictable, rugged, even dangerous side, such as bad weather or difficult and challenging terrain, including mountains, tundras and deserts. Are we "programmed" to like any greenery because of our ancestors' discovery that green bushes and trees may provide fruit and shelter; or do we like greenery because in the modern society that is where many recreational, hence pleasurable, activities take place, as it is far enough removed from our everyday life, chores and worries? My study is not able to answer this, but it is a question that warrants more focus or at least acknowledgement.

These explanations – greenery as the ancestral home or greenery as a modern recreation location - are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they may be circular. As an example, the proponents of the savannah theory often rely on studies that indicate that children tend to prefer playground and park settings that have savannah-like qualities, such as open grasslands with high-canopy tree groups. But, critics have validly asked, does the preference arise from becoming accustomed rather than from some deep evolutionary well? If parks and playgrounds are designed with savannah-like features, are we not encoding children with a certain expectation about what a typical playground or a park looks like?[8] In general, a viewpoint that does not seem

to receive much attention in the EEP field is *context*, and in *what ways* places are preferred to be experienced, such as in predictable or unpredictable settings (familiar vs unknown/new), or alone or in groups? Again, my study did not attempt to answer this, but raises this issue as a potential direction for further study.

In my view, pinpointing answers beyond doubt is not the core of the matter – rather, the crux is the notion that our relationship with nature, wilderness or greenery has been and is subject to change and not fully or mainly biologically automated. As discussed, the favouring of images of nature appears to arise from the convention of looking at them as art or representation of scenic or picturesque views; whereas experiencing the urban environment aesthetically appears to require utilising a different kind of operative arsenal, including multisensory experience and cognitive aspects such as memories and interpretations of symbolic meanings of things, including architecture, design, social rules and interactions. This does not mean that we do not use or do not need the same "tools" in experiencing nature or cities. Rather, I suggest that due to the long tradition of turning nature's landscapes into art (including decorations like photographs, posters and post cards) we are more accustomed to being content with "flattening" and temporally pausing nature's landscapes into visual representations, whereas cities appear to require or benefit from a more multi-layered approach to positive aesthetic experience.

6.4 Cities as the optimal human habitat?

Do people have a "natural" or "the most optimal" habitat? In Article IV, I examined and critiqued the prominent hypotheses in the EEP field about the origins and ancestral environments of our species and the presumption that what surrounded us at some point in the past, is still the most natural for us today. As discussed in Article IV, given that the specific "original" location of homo sapiens is still unclear, as well as reasoning for why one specific location would override the genetic coding of any other eras before or after, I remain unconvinced that the "original home" can be identified with reasonable accuracy. Nevertheless, regardless of what kind of nature was the roaming area of early humans, I suggest that the more valid starting point for the inquiry is: if nature is an inherently more aesthetically rewarding and restorative environment to us than cities, why does the majority of the world's population live in cities? Preference towards or restorativeness of urban environments are studied far less than nature because of the current consensus that urban environments contain stressors that are absent in nature. My survey in Article II, the literature review in Article III and the contemplation of "the optimal human habitat" in Article IV identified a more layered and complex situation.

Firstly, humans have always explored, altered and exploited their surroundings. For the past ten millennia, alterations have become increasingly large-scale. We have never been mere recipients of environment's sensory input but have adapted to and taken action in response to it or in anticipation of it. Hence, deeming "artificial" environments as innately less appealing appears somewhat paradoxical – if our innate or normal response to our surroundings is to take some action in relation to it, including

altering, amending, constructing, decorating or even destroying, how could the results of our own actions be unnatural or innately unappealing? Secondly, based on my literature review, it appears evidenced that the restorativeness of a place arises from the combination of fascination, aesthetic enjoyment and place attachment, including social interactions, positive memories, connotations and knowledge of the place. Thirdly, the key finding of the literature review was that in image-based studies, nature nearly always outranks urban environments, whereas in in-situ studies, people find plenty of positive qualities, including aesthetic appeal and restorativeness, in certain kinds of urban environments. These findings add an essential layer to gauging environmental preferences, moving beyond registering or reacting to shapes, forms and fractals.

Based on the results discussed in this thesis, cities notably benefit from the environmental aesthetic approaches discussed by Allen Carlson and Emily Brady, even if experiencing nature aesthetically does not appear to "require" the same approaches. Carlson suggests that scientific or factual knowledge of nature may help reveal aesthetic qualities in the same way in which knowledge about art history and art criticism can for works of art. Based on my findings in the literature review, presented in Article III, appreciating the city aesthetically appears to involve experiencing it in light of various cultural and historical knowledge, including personal and/or shared narratives, and taking into account also other factual or cognitive knowledge of the environment.[9] Emily Brady has emphasised the importance of imagination and creative thinking as enhancers or building blocks of an aesthetic experience.[10] In my literature review, fascination, including wonder and awe, were identified as influencers of aesthetic experience in particular in urban environments, indicating that the involvement of imagination enhances the experience available in urban environments.

In summary, the key reasons for subjects to prefer a certain environment appears to be their ability to positively interact with(in) it and form a meaningful relationship with it. It appears clear that people find fascinating places restorative – but what exactly does "fascinating" mean? After all, if it is simply defined as captivating or intriguing, we are not any closer to understanding what exactly holds attention positively in an environment. Arnold Berleant has argued that we tend to prefer places that feed "productive awareness", attention towards the fascinating - worth admiration, enjoyment, contemplation or intellectual effort.[11] According to Berleant, environments that enable or encourage productive awareness, are human(e) habitats. Building on Berleant's thinking, also borrowing from Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, I proposed in Article IV and discussed in chapter 4 that we have six different mental operational states, "tracks", the mind regularly locks on. Half of them are experienced as fatiguing and half as restoring. The environments that enable or prompt the restorative tracks, are perceived as restorative.

I do not dispute the importance of urban greenery, but wish to point out that if nature's benefits and cities' harms are taken as a juxtaposition, this may result in unintended consequences: 1) negative labelling of cities may lead to urban sprawl and rejecting higher-density planning,[12] with negative impacts on nature; 2) reliance on biology- and evolution-based explanations renders our responses to different environments largely automatic, leaving little space for discussion on any other viewpoints; and 3) if we categorically understand nature as beneficial and cities as harmful,

we are less inclined to analyse or utilise qualitative differences between different kinds of nature and urban environments. Such consequences are sure to mislead and impoverish the otherwise rich and diverse experiences available in urban environments.[13] In conclusion, I suggest that the optimal human habitat comprises the experience of productive awareness and positive mental tracks, combined with opportunities to explore and act meaningfully in the environment, as well as alter it. If an invitation for positive action can be offered in an urban environment - does that make the city, then, the optimal habitat? Based on the findings in this thesis, my answer is affirmative.

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1 George Hagman, "The Sense of Beauty", *the International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2002) 83, 661-64.

2 George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1898), 269.

3 For example, Orvar Löfgren writes that a part of the appeal of summer house culture as a form of recreation throughout Europe and North America is that it offers safe access to outdoor activities to women and children, yet promising immersion in positive sensations and experiences. Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*, (USA: University of California Press, 1999), 151.

4 Jay Appleton (1975) suggested that we prefer places that provide us with the capacity to observe (prospect) without being seen (refuge). Rachel and Stephen Kaplan (1989) suggested in their information gathering theory that we have an innate need to explore our environment and such environments that provided useful information – improving our chances of survival – became preferred, and conversely, those environments that did not support survival, became feared and thus disliked.

5 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), Chapter 1, Introduction.

6 Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape. Toward an Aesthetic of Environment* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1997), 12-15.

7 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, (USA: Columbia University Press, 1974/1990 edition), p. 96; and Orvar Löfgren, On Holiday: A History of Vacationing, (USA: University of California Press, 1999), 148-150.

8 Marcel Hunziker et al., "Space and place: Two aspects of the human-landscape relationship", *A changing world: Challenges for landscape research*, (2007), Landscape Series, Vol. 8. Springer.

9 Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Edward N. Zalta, edit.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/environmental-aesthetics, Section 3.1.

10 Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, (Edinburg: MPG Books, 2003), 151.

11 Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 86, 93-98.

12 Criticism towards urban or high-density environments has a long history. For example, Steven Conn has researched the deep-seated anti-urbanism in the US in *Americans Against the City. Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century*, (US: Oxford University Press, 2014).

13 Anu Besson, "In Defense of Cities: On Negative Presentation of Urban Areas in Environmental Preference Studies", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2019), Vol 17, Section 3.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Millaiset esteettiset elementit koemme miellyttävinä tai epämiellyttävinä arkiympäristössä? Väitöskirjani esittelee, miten ympäristömieltymyksiä tutkitaan, mitä tämänhetkinen tutkimustieto sanoo miellyttävistä ja epämiellyttävistä ympäristöistä, sekä omat tulokseni aiheesta. Lähestyn aihetta *staycation*-ilmiön, mielipaikkojen, luonto- ja kaupunkiympäristöjen, sekä ideaalien/idealisoitujen, ns. optimaalisten ympäristöjen kautta. Tavoitteena on analysoida laadullista empiiristä aineistoa siitä, miten koemme ympäristöämme esteettisessä (aistimus- ja kauneusarvomielessä); sekä kriittisesti tarkastella aiempaa tutkimusta alalta.

Väitöskirjani asettaa rinnakkain ja vastakkain filosofisia teorioita ja pohdintoja arjen ja ympäristöestetiikan, sekä kokeellisen ympäristömieltymystutkimuksen alalta, täyttääkseen tutkimuksen aukkokohtia ja osoittaakseen suuntia jatkotutkimukselle. Aineisto on kerätty sosiaalisesta mediasta, perinteisestä mediasta, kirjallisuuskatsauksena ympäristömieltymystutkimukseen, sekä laadullisesta kyselytutkimuksesta (308 osallistujaa). Aineistonkeruun tavoite oli tuoda esiin kokijoiden oma ääni mahdollisimman monipuolisesti ja välttää asettamasta liian tiukkoja tai vääristäviä raameja tutkimukselle. Teoreettisesti väitöskirja pohjaa eritoten Arnold Berleantin, Yuriko Saiton, Kalevi Korpelan, Rachel ja Stephen Kaplanin, Kevin Melchionnen sekä Yi-Fu Tuanin ajatuksiin.

Päätulokseni on, että nykyisessä ympäristömieltymystutkimuksessa keskitytään liiaksikin luonnon elvyttävään ja eheyttävään voimaan (*restorativeness*): luonnon elvyttävyyttä korostavia tuloksia on saatu eritoten kuvakyselymenetelmillä, joissa tutkittavat arvottavat tutkijan valitsemia kuvia eri paikoista. Yleiset, positiivinen luonto -negatiivinen kaupunki-kahtiajaot tuloksissa johtuvat ainakin osittain tutkimusmenetelmistä. Läsnäoloon perustuvat menetelmät tuottavat erilaisia, jopa ristiriitaisia tuloksia kuvakyselyihin nähden. Kyseenalaistan elvyttävyydenä määritelmän, joka keskittyy stressistä palautumiseen muiden elvyttävien kokemusten sijasta, sekä ajatuksen, että kaupunkitilaa ei yleensä koeta elvyttävänä tai esteettisesti miellyttävämpänä kuin luonnonmaisemaa. Esitän, että maisemakuva- ja taidetraditioon perustuen tutkittavat analysoivat kuvia kuin taidetta, kuvauksellisia piirteitä etsien, kun taas kaupunkitilaa tyypillisesti koetaan moniaistisesti ja kokemukseen sekoittuvat aina kokijan omat muistot, tulkinnat, ajatukset, odotukset ja toimintamahdollisuudet tilassa.

Tutkimukseni pohjalta ympäristömieltymykset rakentuvat neljän pilarin varaan: konteksti, kulttuuri, konventio ja kytkös. Koemme ympäristöä aina jossain kontekstissa. Vaeltaminen, esimerkiksi, voi olla elvyttävää, mutta eksyminen metsään puolestaan pelottavaa. Kyselyaineistoni perusteella kokijan henkilökohtainen ja kulttuuritausta vaikuttavat miellyttävyyden kokemukseen. Aineistossani tyypillinen ympäristö-esteettinen kokemus perustuu positiivisiin aistimuksiin ja kauneusarvotulkintoihin, mutta myös positiivisiin konnotaatioihin, mukaanlukien muistot, tunnelma ja tulkinnat tilasta. Kuten mainittua, konventiot vaikuttavat siihen, miten koemme tilaa, esimerkiksi maisemataiteen katsomisen tapa näyttää vaikuttavan kuvatulkintoihin luonnon elvyttävyyttä arvioitaessa. Kytkös tarkoittaa uppoutumista ja yhtymistä tilaan: esteettistä kokemusta ei voi autenttisesti kokea kiertoteitse, eli tilaa ei voi koko-

naisvaltaisesti kokea kuvan tai muun representaation pohjalta. Tarvitaan omakohtaista kehollista läsnäoloa, jotta kaikki aistimukset voi vastaanottaa ja esteettiseen kokemukseen vaikuttavan tilan tunnelman tuntea.

Kyselytutkimukseni ulkosuomalaisten parissa identifioi, lueteltuna yleisimmästä harvinaisimpaan, viisi kokijaprofiilia: vedenäärtä rakastava metsän asukki, horisonttiin katselija, itsetutkiskeleva introvertti, järjestyksen ystävä ja eläväisyyden etsijä. Jokainen profiili käyttää itselleen miellyttävää ympäristötyyppiä latautumiseen, ja mihin profiiliin kuuluu, saattaa vaihdella tilanteen mukaan. Valtaenemmistö ilmoitti esteettisten elementtien olevan tärkeä syy hakeutua tiettyyn paikkaan latautumaan. Aiemmasta tutkimuksesta poiketen ainestoissani mielipaikka näyttäytyy tapahtumahorisonttina, mielentilan, toiminnon ja paikan yhdistelmänä, joka kulkee kokijan mukana – esimerkiksi moottoripyöräilijän mielipaikka voi olla maalaistie kokonaisuudessaan sen näkyjen, äänien, tuoksujen, tunnelman ja tarjoaman toiminnan vuoksi. Kaplaneita ja Berleantia mukaillen esitän, että elvyttävä ympäristö sallii rentouttavat, inspiroivat, ihmettelevät tai ihastelevat mielenliikkeet, kun vastaavasti rasittava ympäristö – esimerkiksi jatkuvaa kognitiivista suorittamista vaativa tila – estää tai haittaa näiden kokemista.

Kaiken kaikkiaan, ympäristömieltymykset riippuvat paljolti kokijan ja tilan välisistä vuorovaikutus- ja tekemismahdollisuuksista sen sijaan, että kokijat passiivisesti vastaanottaisivat aistimuksia ympäristöstään, kuten empiirisellä ympäristömieltymyskentällä usein oletetaan. Etsimme tiettyjä ympäristöjä ja muokkaamme niitä jatkuvassa vuorovaikutussuhteessa, mieltymystemme ja mielialamme mukaan, hyvinvointiimme vaikuttaaksemme.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

EVERYDAY AESTHETICS ON STAYCATION AS PATHWAY TO RESTORATION

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Everyday aesthetics on staycation as a pathway to restoration

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Abstract

This multidisciplinary study enforces a suggested link between everyday aesthetic experiences and restoration. The studied phenomenon is staycation, a short-term holiday spent at home or at one's home region, to identify how people use a (culturally) familiar environment for everyday aesthetic enjoyment and how that influences restoration. This focus minimises the potential effect of long-distance travel, novelty and escapism to restoration. Staycation has not been studied before from the perspective of everyday aesthetics and restoration. I explore staycation through a lens of qualitative media analysis; history and empirical research of holiday-making; and theories in everyday aesthetics.

Keywords: Staycation, everyday aesthetics, restoration, subjective well-being, aesthesis.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why study staycation?

Holidays are undertaken for the purposes of restoration and replenishment;[1] and sustaining or improving subjective well-being.[2] By *restoration*, I mean Stephen Kaplan's definition: recovery from mental fatigue.[3] Many typical holiday activities, such as sightseeing, photographing and sampling cuisine are aesthetic pastimes; and holidays are typically taken in aesthetically appealing locations. Is there, then, a connection or causation between (everyday) aesthetic experiences, restoration and wellbeing?

In this paper, by *aesthetic* I mean sensory, pleasing, fascinating and valued qualities of an object or the environment as a whole. An aesthetic experience comprises the aspects of sensuousness, sensitivity, imagination and evaluation.[4] For millennia, philosophers have understood beauty and aesthetic experience as sources of pleasure.[5] David Hume said: "[p]leasure and pain… are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity but constitute their very essence".[6] Alexander Nehamas has argued that "shared beauty [experienced or shared with others] is a particularly intense form of communication".[7] Beauty is often associated with "high arts" (painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry),[8] whereas everyday aesthetics studies "non-art-related" aesthetic experiences, aesthetic enjoyment drawn from ordinary, familiar or everyday objects, sights and activities via all senses.[9] Currently, empirical studies in everyday aesthetics are scarce:[10] more research is called for to understand, what aesthetic elements or qualities people enjoy (or dislike) in their environment and why; and what is the significance of everyday aesthetic experiences to well-being and the human condition in general.

Not everyone engages in artistic or cultural activities on a holiday, but everyone is a recipient of constant flow of sensory cues, whether conscious of this or not.[11] Positive and negative sensory data can determine the restorative or depleting effects of the environment.[12] A series of interviews (N=60) and a survey (N=1,043) conducted by Ipsos Mori for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment in the UK in 2010 found that people feel deeply about beauty in their environment, but many refrain from talking about it due to the fear of their taste being judged. Feeling comfortable at one's settings emerged as a prerequisite for being able to enjoy beauty; implying that being relaxed can open a person to aesthetic experiences. Ipsos Mori found a shared view that beauty is an instinctive need and the question "why should we have more beauty?" was treated equal to "why have more happiness?" – non-sensical - due to the strong association between beauty and well-being.[13]

The term staycation became popular in the US and the UK at the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2007 and it has spread around the world since.[14] The Oxford dictionary defines staycation as a domestic holiday, or more narrowly, a break spent at home, involving day trips to local attractions. VisitEngland has surveyed staycationers from 2008 and found that staycation is popular, because holidaymakers wish to have a safe, easy break, utilise last-minute deals, experience their home region in a novel manner (as tourists) and have frequent breaks in between of "real" vacations.[15] In the UK, staycation trend has grown year on year since 2009: for example in 2013, one- to three-day trips were the fastest growing holiday

type.[16] A global survey in 2016 found that of 1,000 respondents, half had had at least one staycation.[17] In Australia, the spending on local daytrips rose by 7% in 2016.[18]

The rise of staycation can be attributed to many roots, such as the emergence of experience economy, commodification, nostalgia (re-creating childhood experiences) or instability in the job markets. Nonetheless, staycation is used as a strategy to experience the familiar (non-exotic or non-foreign) environment through the eyes of a visitor.[19] On staycation, the change from the everyday to holiday occurs more in the subject's attitude and mood than in the environment and activities. Staycationers are simultaneously residents and visitors; hence, studying staycation can offer information to a range of parties, from resident groups to policy makers, urban planners, local businesses and travel industry.

1.2 Data and analysis method

The analysis consisted of a detailed review of 20 recent lifestyle articles to establish, how staycation is understood and discussed in the society, on a platform accessible and meaningful to staycationers; and of a review of 200 Instagram photos to establish, how staycation is portrayed by staycationers themselves - what elements or features staycationers find worth sharing with others. The photos indicate what is seen as pleasing, aesthetic or restorative; or, what the contributors presume other people view as such. The analysis method with both data sets was grounded theory (GT), informed by sociological discourse analysis (DA), both qualitative analysis tools. The purpose was to elicit quantitative data with GT to make statistical inferences; and examine the deeper cultural and semantic meanings with DA. The articles were published in English-speaking countries since 2015 and the photographs were uploaded on Instagram around the world in October 2016.[20]

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The connection of beauty and pleasure

Linking beauty and pleasure is an age-old notion, and holidays, also staycation, are usually taken for reasons of pleasure (e.g. relaxation, enjoyment and entertainment). Intuitively, pleasure appears restorative, but pleasure can also be a momentary distraction or relief that does not lead to a more stable state of restoration. Is it possible to establish a connection – or further, causation - between aesthetic experiences and restoration or revitalisation? If becoming restored is understood as increasing or sustaining one's longer-term wellbeing, theory in everyday aesthetics indicates that the answer may be positive.

Kevin Melchionne proposes that everyday aesthetic activities such as grooming, cooking and creativity can increase subjective well-being (SWB) by creating a "hedonic high", pleasure that can be re-obtained by repeating or intensifying what caused it.[21] Melchionne notes that high(er) SWB is obtainable from two main sources: a) life circumstances; and b) mindset, habits and activities. Everyday aesthetic activities are a potential pathway to increased SWB, because we have more agency over our activities than circumstances. Melchionne mainly associates SWB with the ability to regulate one's hedonic high. Another viewpoint is *eudemonia*, pleasure obtained from having a sense of purpose in life, social connections with others and avenues for self-expression and self-actualisation.[22]

Happiness research suggests that well-being does not only rise from hedonic sources, but also and perhaps more potently from eudemonia. Melchionne proposes that the point of everyday aesthetics is to widen one's scope for sources of pleasure.[23] Staycation is an attempt to experience something different or new in one's every day, hence, it can be a strategy to expand one's range or frequency of everyday aesthetic experiences. Melchionne's proposal is supported by indirect empirical evidence: today, creative activities such as (mobile phone) photography, street fashion and make-up, crafting, gourmet cooking and "homing", ongoing home beautifying, are immensely popular and enjoyed by many, as indicated by, for instance, vast and global social media content.[24]

Social media is not just about fun. In a recent study, Instagram was found to cause anxiety, negative body image and mental health issues to young people due to its appearances-focus. But, Instagram was also appreciated as a platform for self-expression and identity-building.[25] A recent study found that (mobile phone) photographing makes the photographer look at the world more attentively – presumably with an aesthetic disposition. The act of planning a photo or looking for things to capture makes the photographer more deeply engaged in the experience, which, according to the study, tends to lead to deeper enjoyment.[26] Despite the potential negative effects, sharing photos on social media can also increase hedonic and eudemonic high by enabling a creative outlet, social connection and positive self-identity. The Ipsos Mori study identified that a part of the appeal of beauty is its ability to connect like-minded people - draw deep enjoyment of a shared taste, as theorised by Alexander Nehamas.[27]

2.2 Can social media prove an aesthetic experience?

Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing app and social network created in 2010. It has approximately 300 million daily active users and 500 million monthly users.[28] Social and urban studies researchers use Instagram as a source to study, for example, cultural geography, subculture formation and identity.[29] Instagram is not just a platform to share experiences and build identity, but it affects decision-making and behaviour. Two recent surveys found that many holidaymakers rank "Instagrammability", the chance to take appealing photos, a main driver in destination selection. Of people aged 18-33 surveyed in the UK, 40.1% ranked Instagrammability the number one motivator for a holiday location.[30] A study in Australia by mobile operator Telstra found that a quarter of respondents select holiday locations based on its social media prestige factor.[31] The reason is two-fold: beautiful locations are used to enhance one's social media appearances, but attractive photos also indicate the location is worth the visit.

Sharing aesthetically appealing, prestigious or "enviable" photos on social media can be seen as a substitute or cultural continuum for sending postcards. In the turn of the 18-19th centuries, some travellers carried a *Claude glass*, a small, tinted convex mirror, to frame, focus and "image manipulate" the landscape to be portrayed with watercolours more artistically and dramatically. Postcards have been among the most popular souvenirs since their invention in the latter part of the 19th century.[32] Orvar Löfgren analyses that postcards "filled a void", a hunger for pictorial expression still scarce in the 19th century; for instance, five million Swedish people sent 48 million postcards in 1904. According to Löfgren, and

parallel to the popularity of photos shared in social media, postcards became depicters of not just locations, but moods and feelings that many found difficult to express verbally.[33]

This study seeks to uncover, is there a connection between aesthetic experiences and restoration. Can photos on Instagram prove that a staycationer had an aesthetic experience? The Telstra survey on Instagrammability found that sharing photos on social media often indicates a wish to boost one's social status. But, according to another study, photographing enhances the enjoyment drawn from the experience.[34] Prevalence of one motivation (boosting self-image) does not automatically exclude the other (aesthetic enjoyment). Thomas Leddy argues that a photo can be many things simultaneously. Photographers, amateurs and professionals alike, usually seek to: 1) capture the identified aesthetic qualities of the subject-matter; 2) enhance those qualities; and 3) create new aesthetic qualities via means of composition, framing or image-manipulation.[35] But, is photo a proof of an aesthetic experience? It depends on the content. Yuriko Saito discusses aesthetic reactions, such as an impulse to tidy a messy room, as an indicator of (or search for) an aesthetic experience.[36] A wish to make something more aesthetic according to one's taste), or a wish to capture or communicate something because it looks good, can be seen as aesthetic reactions; if not "full" aesthetic experience, then its prerequisite or pre-step.

2.3 Everyday aesthetic experiences on a holiday

If holidays exist for restorative purposes and aesthetic experiences have the ability to increase SWB, are holidays usually more aesthetic than the everyday life, indirectly supporting the theory that aesthetic experiences have a revitalising effect? That depends on what is meant by aesthetic. The traditional understanding of an aesthetic experience is based on Immanuel Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation:[37] objects can be said to be beautiful (aesthetic)[38] - instead of mere "agreeable" or subjectively pleasing - *only* when they evoke sensuous pleasure without any utilitarian purpose. In light of the traditional take, it is always debatable whether for example a meal can be beautiful, if it is also eaten and hence, utilised for bodily pleasure and sustenance.

Everyday aesthetics adopts a different viewpoint: disinterested, unemotional contemplation is not the (only) key to an aesthetic experience. Aligning with Arnold Berleant's engaged aesthetics,[39] I suggest that (mental, bodily or emotional) distance is not a prerequisite for having an aesthetic experience: it is possible to enjoy a nicely served breakfast, a decorated cocktail, a dip in a swimming pool or sunbathing at the beach both aesthetically and "merely" bodily. On holiday, people often (seek to) engage in pleasurable whole-of-body experiences, seeds of aesthetic experience, such as listed above. Also, holidays often take place in tranquil, warm or beautiful locations; similarly, staycationers prefer the countryside, beach or park.[40] Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has shown that "paradise island" (symbolically expressed in resorts and palm beaches) as an idealised environment has been persistently popular in the collective imagination of the humankind as a safe haven, insulated from the worries of the world.[41] Escapism and isolationism are not the only reasons why people seek idyllic or scenic locations to recharge: findings in environmental psychology[42] and neuroscience[43] (nature boosts restoration and art may aid the release dopamine, the pleasure hormone, in the brain), indicate that aesthetic experiences are important for SWB.

Beach is the most popular holiday destination according to two recent surveys in the US and the UK.[44] Seaside resorts in the UK have attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors every year since the early 1800s, when mass tourism first emerged.[45] The long-term appeal of beaches and pools aligns with a recent study that linked lower psychological distress (or higher SWB) with the proximity of the sea: looking at the "blue space" helps reduce stress.[46] The appeal of water appears to be both visual and haptic-kinaesthetic: the multisensory contact with the warmth of the sun, sand and water are perceived as sources of deep satisfaction and enjoyment.[47] In general, nature appears to have a restorative effect and greenery is perceived as calming and revitalising.[48] Tuan suggests that people enjoy beach or pool holidays, because we understand time based on heartbeat and breathing – the slow rhythm of the lapping water means relaxation.[49]

2.4 Aesthetic play

Staycation is commonly understood as imitation of a "real" holiday. Consequently, it can be seen as make-believe: a performance played with and for oneself, or for one's social circles through social media.[50] Katya Mandoki has identified two aesthetic attitudes: poetics, or attention to art and the artistic; and prosaics, attention to everyday aesthetics: how ordinary things look, feel and are performed.[51] Thomas Leddy has suggested that everyday aesthetic experiences rise from the ordinary extraordinarily experienced: (momentarily) perceiving the world like an artist.[52] Sharing photos on social media implies a "tourist's gaze", capturing interesting, novel or socially pertinent objects and events (e.g. portraits of the location and undertaken activities); but they can also indicate aesthetic reactions, prosaics or poetics, depending on the content.

The theory of play, first developed by Johan Huizinga and further evolved by Mandoki, can in part explain the appeal of staycation. Play is a form of enjoyment deriving from mental and physical freedom (play by definition is voluntary and hence, also following rules of play is freedom).[53] Poetics and prosaics can be understood as play: one can engage in them, for example, by creating a narrative, or being open to sensory experiences. Mandoki builds on Huizinga's and Roger Caillois' categories of play by identifying five basic play types, of which tree are essential for staycation: Peripatos, Mimesis and Ilinx (adventure, playful curiosity; make-believe and imitation; and momentary destruction of predictability and normalcy) are building blocks of staycation, an activity whose purpose is to enable a novel experience within the familiar. Staycation can also involve the two remaining types of play, Agon and Alea, chance-taking and competition: exploring one's home region is a gamble that may or may not deliver (restoration, entertainment, thrill), and competition takes place in and out of social media about the depth and wealth of the experience.[54]

3. Analysis of data

3.1 Analysis method

The analysis method for both sets of data, articles (N=20) and photos (N=200) was grounded theory (GT); the analysis process is described in the endnote.[55] Sociological discourse analysis (DA) was used to interpret the texts and photos in cultural context (e.g. intentions of the writers and photographers). GT is a qualitative research tool to conceptualise latent

patterns in text and images. The analysis comprised three main steps: coding (labelling of findings), categorising (forming label groups and themes) and interpretation (analysing themes). GT requires constant comparative analysis to capture all instances of variation: categories are created as the analysis progresses instead of working on a pre-set hypothesis or classes.

The concurrent DA contained three levels of analysis: 1) textual, 2) contextual and 3) interpretive level. Textual level focused on elements (choices of words or subject-matter of photos etc.), contextual level focused on the discourse as an act in its cultural etc. background, and interpretation provided an explanation to the discourse. In sociological DA inductive inferences are made of a small number of samples, because the presumption is that cultural, societal information is always intertwined and overlapping: information from one subject can be treated as interchangeable with information from others in a similar social position.[56] With DA, the base argument is that communication constructs the social world by, for example, normalising certain practices and values.[57] My analysis aimed to reveal what is understood as normal, common or typical about staycation.

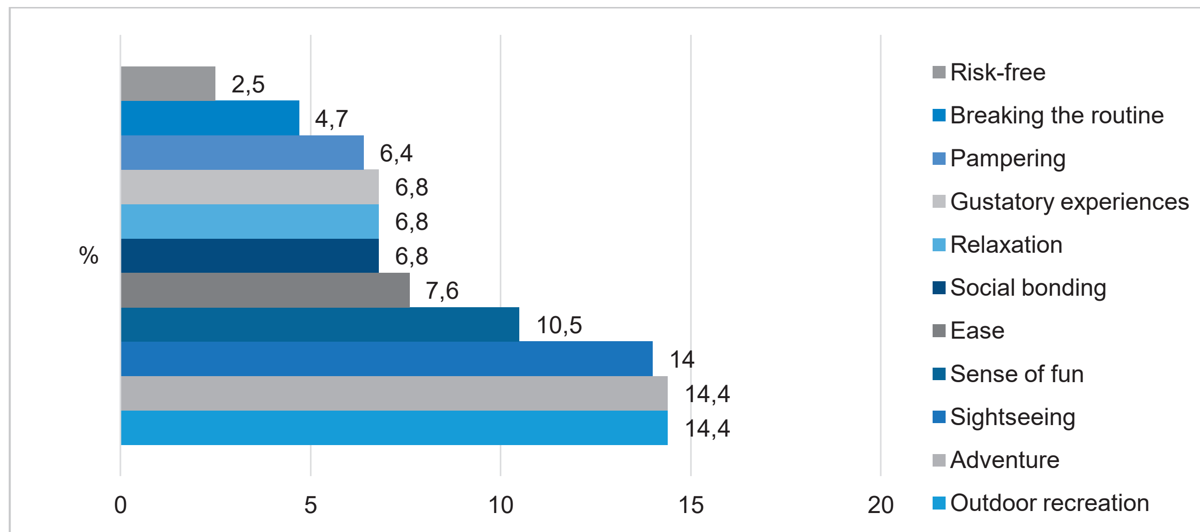
3.3 Review of lifestyle articles

The majority of the lifestyle articles were written in the format of a "tip list" for a successful staycation.[58] The recommended activities or presumed objectives were relaxation, excitement, social bonding and entertainment, including self-expression and creativity, to recharge. As an example of typical article, Steve Odland's text is a prime sample. It is a self-help stress-management guide to navigate the rut of the everyday. The article *16 Things To Do On A "Staycation"* (Forbes, 31 May 2012) sums up staycation:

> "[…] an increasingly popular and fun vacation is the stay-at-home-vacation, or the "staycation." […] visit your local museums: art, natural or American history, botanical gardens […]. Every area also has its architectural gems […]. Pretend you're a tourist and go visit them. […] Do we ever take time to explore the [local] area as we would if we were tourists? […] Let's admit it, we probably have spent more time exploring places far away from home than we have sites of our own area or region."

The lifestyle articles contained 485 statements that could be labelled and categorised. The category titles were based on the expressions used in the text [refer to Figure 1].

Figure 1. The most discussed activities and objectives for a staycation.



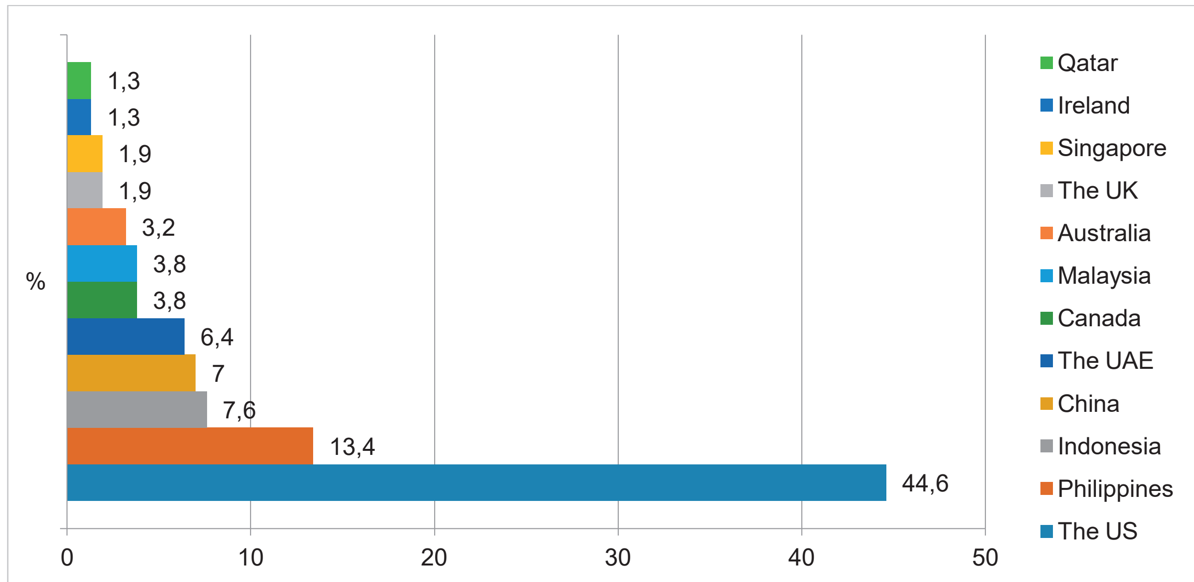
The three most discussed or recommended activities were *outdoor recreation* (at a beach, pool, yard, park or wilderness); *adventure* or exploration; and *sightseeing* (incl. local landmarks, attractions and culture venues). Sightseeing links to exploration, but it was categorised separately, because not all adventure is sightseeing and vice versa. The fourth popular theme was the *sense of fun*: discussion covered play- and fairgrounds and movies, but also DIY, art and craft projects as self-expression. All of the categories overlapped and interlinked: for instance, outdoor recreation was commonly understood as exploration, and one of the main purposes of exploration was to have fun.

Typically, staycation was seen as a pale cousin of a "real" holiday. Every writer felt the need to sell staycation via potential benefits such as saving money, time or both. The *ease* of a home holiday was mentioned in 7.6% of the statements. Other important elements or benefits were *social bonding, relaxation* and *gustatory experiences* (e.g. trying out new restaurants or indulging in one's favourite café). Rarer, but relatively often mentioned activities or justifications for staycation were *pampering* and *breaking the routine* for the purposes of revitalisation. Safety featured in 2.5% of the comments: staycation was perceived as *risk-free*. Typically, the articles discussed free or low-cost, family-centred activities, such as camping at one's backyard or experimenting with arts or crafts. Concurrently, indulging in pampering (e.g. hotel or spa night in one's own home city) was justified by the savings made in travel costs. Only one article was critical about unrealistic expectations by criticising a niche trend to buy a holiday home within one's home city.[59]

3.3 Analysis of Instagram photographs

True to the birthplace of the term staycation, close to half of the photographs were taken in the US, but English-speaking countries did not otherwise dominate the data [refer to figure 2].[60] This implies that staycation as a phenomenon is global, or at least globally known.

Figure 2. The countries of origin of Instagram photos.



The 200 photos could be classified into two style streams: composed images (56%) and snapshots (44%). Composed images were framed, arranged or otherwise made more artistic (the object positioned in a certain manner or the image afterwards manipulated) to draw the attention to the aesthetic qualities of the subject-matter (e.g. a decorated breakfast table, a row of pretty bottles at a bathroom sink, or a scenic view).[61] To determine, whether a photo was intended as aesthetic (composed), a classification method was developed based on the classical aesthetic qualities of unity, harmony and balance (incl. colours, rhythm and composition).[62] For example, photos that reflected the visual style of landscape painting or postcard were classified as "composed". Snapshots were action photos, such as a dog running into water, or people casually posing [refer to figures 3 and 4, sample photos].

Figure 3. Example of snapshots.

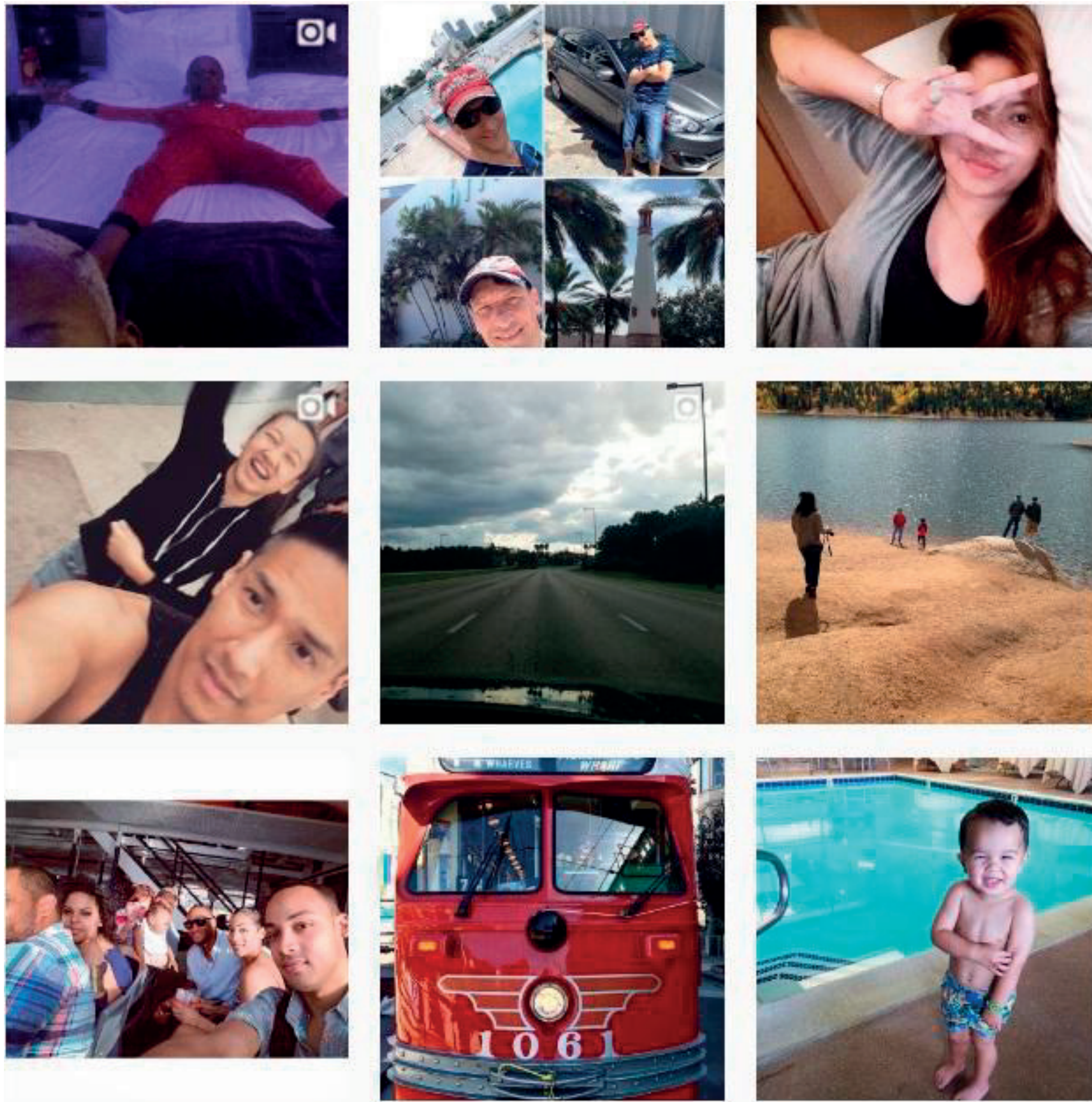
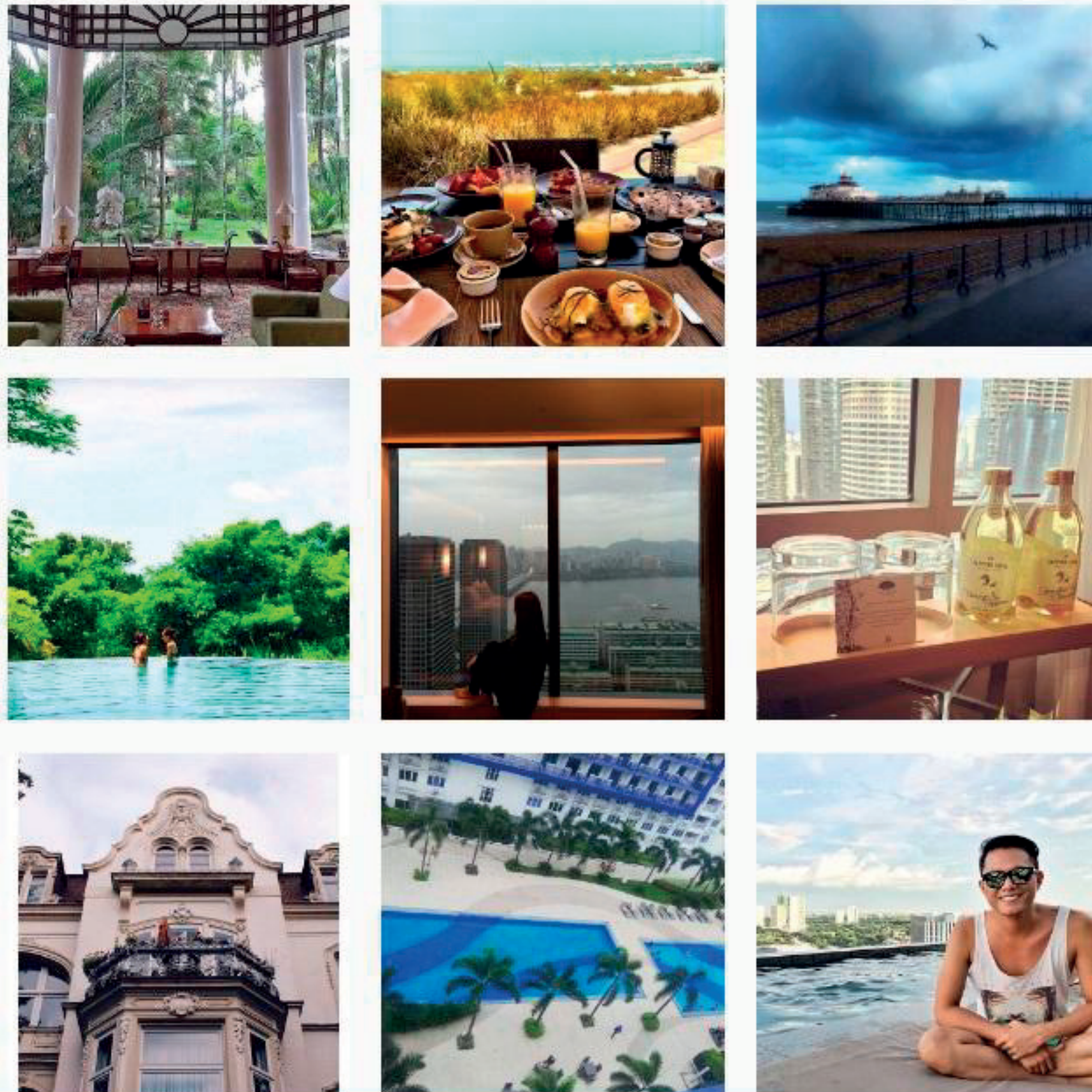


Figure 4. Example of composed images.

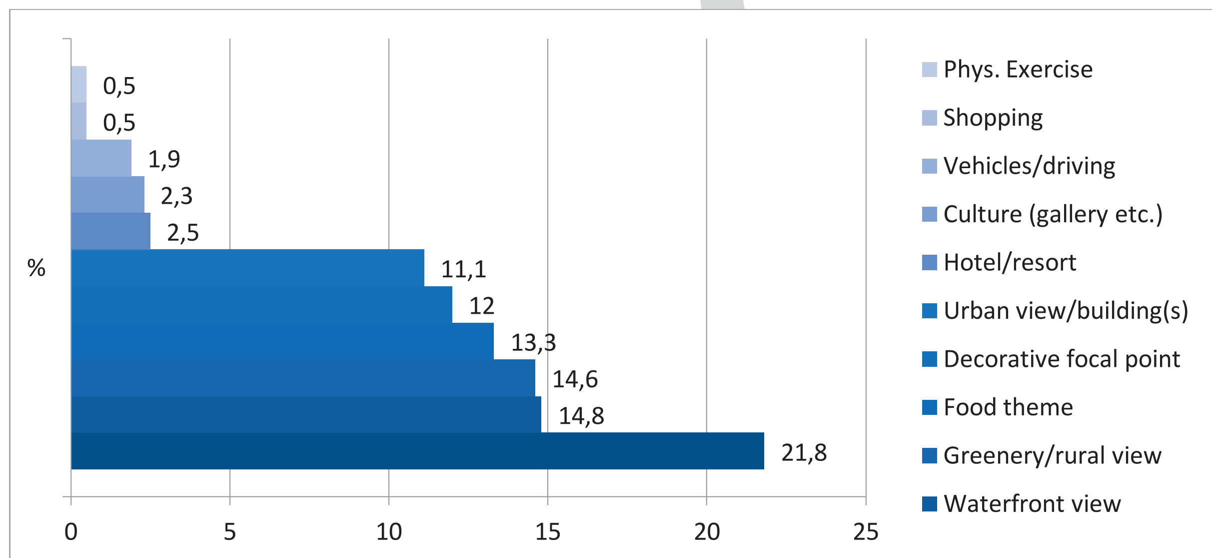


The fact that the majority of the photos could be classified as composed – reflecting an aesthetic intention or reaction - indicates that a poetic or prosaic version of what is experienced, is considered as pertinent (and perhaps prestigious) to notice and share. It can be argued that snapshots should dominate, if photos were taken for mere recording purposes. Even if the composed photos were primarily meant for boost of self-image and identity, the boost takes place through aesthetic means, revealing a cultural and social connotation linking prestige and beauty. As discussed in theory section, photos can serve a number of purposes and focusing on the act of photographing is commonly understood as enjoyable – and so is contemplating beauty, as argued by Hume. Focusing on creativity or aesthetic activities can, in turn, boost SWB, as argued by Melchionne.

The most popular subject-matter was a person or people posing. The other common themes in the order of popularity were a waterfront view (e.g. a beach, pool, marina or lakeside); greenery or rural view (e.g. a garden or resort, scenic landscape, flowering plant); food theme

(a meal, drink, restaurant or food market) and a decorative focal point (e.g. design furniture, architecture detail, fireplace). Urban views and buildings were significantly less popular than nature and greenery. By far, the most popular activities were swimming and sunbathing (depicted in every fifth photo), echoing Tuan's notion about satisfaction found in the beach, sun and water.[63] The prevalence of water- and nature- themes builds on a long history of cultural understanding about a holiday. The bourgeoisie tradition of relocating to countryside for summer is an obvious reference point; and the findings in environmental psychology about the restoring effect of nature are also echoed in this data. Noticeably, the photos depicting nature were most typically portraits of something perceived as beautiful due to its aesthetic qualities - colours, rhythm, harmony etc. (e.g. turquoise water or colourful sunset), indicating that not mere naturalness appeals to people. [Refer to figure 5].

Figure 5. The most typical content of Instagram photos.



Instagram photos are usually labelled with keywords, "hashtags". The 200 photos contained a too varied selection of hashtags, such as place names, to make meaningful statistical inferences. However, the most used hashtags were family or couple (8.3%), sea, lake or swim (6.2%) and weekend (6%). The popularity of weekend hashtags indicates that for staycationers, weekend becomes or is portrayed as active self-realisation and search for pleasant experiences.

4. Discussion

In the articles, staycation is targeted to urbanites with financial means for mini-holidays between holidays,[64] it is promoted as a self-help stress-management tool, and it offers easy-read content. The articles could be dismissed as mere marketing, but they offer insights on social conventions. Staycation is understood as inadequate for the purposes of a holiday, but adequate for the purposes of "quick-fix" restoration. The appeal arises from "ring-fencing": staycation is earmarked for specified pleasurable activities, incl. outdoor recreation, exploration, entertainment, social bonding, gustatory experiences and playful creativity (DIY

and art projects). The content largely aligns between the articles and the photos, indicating that staycation is understood fairly similarly globally.

The prevalence of whole-of-body experiences in the photos (e.g. water, nature and sun; food markets, cocktails and restaurants), in my view, points that moments of savoured *aesthesis* – sensuous experiences of aliveness – are understood as restorative. It is conceivable that in the modern everyday filled with cerebral or non-physical activities, sensory experiences act as restorative counterbalance. The idealised, tranquil paradise island of Tuan is found in the data in the symbolic form of a resort, garden, beach or pool. In my data, the objective of staycation is to obtain exciting, enjoyable and/or enticing experiences, including experiences of beauty, which in turn can be seen as an attempt to open oneself to wonder. Recent research in psychology has found causation between feeling awe and (momentarily) increased SWB.[65] Dr. Keltner, professor of psychology in Berkeley, writes:[66]

> *[…] people report feeling awe in response to more mundane things: when seeing the leaves of a Gingko tree change from green to yellow, in beholding the night sky when camping near a river […]. Intriguingly, each burst of daily awe predicted greater well-being and curiosity weeks later.*

Aesthetics as a field has for long focused on disinterested, contemplative aesthetic experience, whereas today's voluminous online content (lifestyle and social media, including Instagram and blogs) indicate that many seek creativity and aesthetic experiences as an inseparable part of the enjoyable everyday - combined with self-expression, entertainment, mastering a skill etc. Staycation, especially one shared in social media in the form of composed images, can be seen as a strategy to refresh or sharpen one's aesthetic sensitivity by engaging with and capturing what is perceived aesthetic.

Instagram can only tell a limited story. By selecting scenic or fun-filled images a staycationer builds a narrative of an idealised break or self. The lack of negative photographs indicates that those do not fit into the narrative. It can be asked, whether negative experiences (for example encountered discrimination) are psychologically harmfully erased for the purposes of fitting into the convention. But, it is equally possible that non-positive experiences are dismissed (and perhaps faster forgotten) in favour of the positive ones – photographing one's environment may help in this, as indicated by the study noting a connection between enjoyable experiences and photographing. Staycation undoubtedly is one manifestation of today's experience economy, but its popularity, in particular the popularity of composed photos, lends support to Melchionne's proposition that everyday aesthetics has unacknowledged power in bringing about greater wellbeing.

The popularity of staycations implies that opportunities to recharge in the everyday are lacking, questioning the sustainability of today's work-life from the well-being perspective. My findings reinforce the Ipsos Mori finding that many treat experiences of beauty as an instinctive need, an integral part of good life. Everyday aesthetic (self-)education, learning to acquire aesthetic experiences within the ordinary, could offer a vehicle for more frequent revitalisation and enhanced well-being as proposed by Melchionne.

5. Concluding comments

The lack of coherent background data – demographics etc. - sets limitations to my study. It was not possible to conclude how deep or conscious was the staycationers' own emphasis of the aesthetic aspect of their break. Despite the limitations, based on history and theory of holiday-making and everyday aesthetics, this study enforced a link between everyday aesthetic experiences and restoration. Composed (aesthetic) photos on social media cannot prove, but they indicate aesthetic intentions or reactions, pre-steps of aesthetic experience. Photographing as an act appears to deepen the enjoyment drawn from the experience. This study summarised and found further theoretical and empirical support for the view that everyday aesthetic experiences can increase SWB. Also, on holidays, relaxation may aid noticing beauty and savouring *aesthesis*, sensuous experience of aliveness, which in turn may enable revitalisation.

Staycation is understood as imitation of a "real holiday" - or, make-believe: a performance played with and for oneself. In this data set, a "successful" (restorative) staycation appears a four-layered process, aligning with Mandoki's poetics, prosaics and five types of play: 1) staycation emerges from different configurations of the five types of play, 2) staycation involves poetics, e.g. performance or narrative for oneself and/or one's social circles, 3) staycation involves prosaics, e.g. an attempt to notice the aesthetic around, and 4) staycation involves aesthetic reactions and experiences, such as photographing and sharing sights to obtain eudemonic pleasure from self-expression, identity building and connecting with others.

End notes

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[1] Sebastien Filep & Philip Pearce (edit.), *Tourist Experience and Fulfilment: Insights from Positive Psychology*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 203.

[2] Sarah Pykea et al., "Exploring well-being as a tourism product resource", *Tourism Management,* Volume 55, August 2016, pp. 94–105, Section 1.

[3] Stephen Kaplan, "The Restorative Environment: Nature and Human Experience", *The Role of Horticulture in Human Well-Being and Social Development* (Diane Relf, edit.), (Portland: Timber Press, 1992). pp. 134-135. Mental fatigue follows from directed attention (cognitive effort e.g. work and studies). Mental fatigue causes irritability, inability to focus and make decisions, and decreased overall health.

[4] Sensuousness means absorbing information sensuously; sensitivity refers to the ability to discriminate and savour; imagination refers to the intermingling of perception and thinking; and evaluation refers to recognition but also valuation of objects. Pauline von Bonsdorff, *The Human Habitat - Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives*, (Jyväskylä: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics Series Vol. 5, 1998), pp. 81-89.

[5] Building on Neoplatonic tradition, the medieval church fathers of the 4th century interpreted beauty in terms of good and pleasurable, as a reflection of the world's divine order and beauty: contemplating beauty offers pleasure. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, *Medieval Aesthetics, Key Thinkers: Aesthetics* (Alessandro Giovanelli, edit.), (India: Continuum, 2012) pp. 34-35.

[6] Hume 1740, p. 299, quoted by Crispin Sartwell, "Beauty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), (Edward Zalta, edit.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/beauty/, Section 2.4.

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[8] Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, (Imprint Academic, 2010), p 32.

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[11] Katya Mandoki, *Prosaics, The Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 25-26.

[12] For example: Kaplan (1992), pp. 137-138.

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[16] Lauren Davidson, "The rise of the staycation: more Brits holidaying at home", *The Telegraph*, 7 February 2015.

[17] Anne Pilon, "Staycations Survey: Staycations Almost as Popular as Vacations", AYTM website (Ask Your Target Market), 8 November 2016, https://aytm.com/blog/daily-survey-results/staycations-survey/, accessed 9 June 2017.

[18] Belinda Tasker, "Aussie holidaymakers switch to staycations", *News.com.au*, 21 December 2016, https://goo.gl/i0GOcP, accessed 9 June 2016.

[19] Tej Vir Singh (edit.), *Challenges in Tourism Research*, (Channel View Publications, 2015), p. 25.

[20] Photographs were sourced with the keyword "staycation" in two counts on 3 October 2016: 100 photographs at 9am and a further 100 at 3pm. During the interval, the number of "staycation" photos on Instagram increased by 717 photos, totalling 1,075,464.

[21] Kevin Melchionne, "The Point of Everyday Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2014), vol. 12.

[22] Eudaimonia or eudemonia is comprehensively discussed in Chapter 1 of Felicia Huppert and Cary Cooper (edit.), *Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide, Volume VI, Interventions and Policies to Enhance Wellbeing,* (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

[23] This point is also made by Damien Freeman, "Aesthetic Experience as Transformation of Pleasure," *the Harvard Review of Philosophy* (2010), vol. 17, pp. 56-75.

[24] By way of example, the number of everyday aesthetics themed blogs indicates that many find undertaking, discussing and viewing everyday aesthetic activities meaningful and rewarding. A Google search on 12 June 2017 with keywords "home design blog" produced 388 million hits; "photography blog" 309 million hits; "fashion blog" 152 million hits; "cooking blog" 23 million hits; and "crafts blog" 14.6 million hits.

[25] Denis Campbell, "Facebook and Twitter 'harm young people's mental health'", The Guardian, 19 May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/19/popular-social-media-sites-harm-young-peoples-mental-health, accessed 13 June 2017.

[26] Kristin Diehl et al., "How taking photos increases enjoyment of experiences", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 111(2), Aug 2016, pp. 119-140.

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[37] First published in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) and since discussed extensively in the field of aesthetics.

[38] I prefer to use the term aesthetic instead of beautiful to not limit the association to visual perception.

[39] Arnold Berleant, "What is Aesthetic Engagement?", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2013), vol. 11.

[40] VisitEngland reports on staycation, https://www.visitbritain.org/economic-downturn-and-holiday-taking-behaviour. Accessed 8 June 2017

[41] According to Tuan (1995), paradise island appears in many ancient myths across cultures and eras; and the South Pacific Islands with hula skirts, flower garlands and palm beaches gained a mythical reputation as "the paradise" from mid-1800s, promoted by Western artists and writers.

[42] It is not conclusive what causes the restoration effect of green spaces: aesthetic experience, physical exercise, physical and mental relaxation, something else, or all of these combined? Research in this field includes for example Stephen & Rachel Kaplan (1989), Roger Ulrich (1991), Terry Hartig (1991), and Anette Kjellegren & Hanne Buhrkall (2010). For an overview, see Anna Dale & Yuill Herbert, "Community Vitality and Green Spaces," *CRC Research*, accessed 6 December 2016. https://crcresearch.org/sites/default/files/u641/vitality_-_green_spaces.pdf

[43] Semir Zeki has found that aesthetic experiences with art can increase the release of dopamine. For an overview of neuro-aesthetic studies, including critique, see Mengfei Huan, "The Neuroscience of Art", *Standford Journal of Neuroscience*, Vol. 2, 2009, pp. 24-26.

[44] Statista, "If you could take only one holiday, what type of holiday would you prefer?", Preferred types of holidays in the United States 2012, https://www.statista.com/statistics/249577/preferred-holiday-types-in-the-us/, accessed 8 June 2017; and Peter Woodman, "Beach breaks are the most popular holiday type say survey," *The Independent*, 24 May 2012, http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/beach-breaks-are-most-popular-holiday-type-says-survey-7784549.html, accessed 8 June 2017.

[45] John Walton, "The seaside resort: a British cultural export", website *History in Focus* (2005), Department of Humanities, University of Central Lancashire, https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Sea/articles/walton.html, accessed 29 May 2017. In 2013 in the UK, city breaks and beach holidays were the two most popular holiday types. ABTA (the Association of British Travel Agencies), "City breaks now as popular as beach holidays", August 2013, https://abta.com/about-us/press/city-breaks-now-as-popular-as-beach-holidays, accessed 29 May 2017.

[46] Daniel Nutsforda et al., "Residential exposure to visible blue space (but not green space) associated with lower psychological distress in a capital city," *Health & Place* (2016), Vol. 39, pp. 70-78. This study did not establish what is the required exposure time or the size of the water body: hence, it is not conclusive whether people are drawn to water bodies due to the "blue space effect" or for other reasons.

[47] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values,* (USA: Columbia University Press, 1974/1990 edition), p. 96. Also, Tuan has noted that places that offer diverse tactile experiences are seen as more appealing overall than monotonic places. *Passing Strange and Wonderful. Aesthetics, Nature and Culture*, (New York: Kodansha America Inc., 1995), p. 44.

[48] For example Richard Ryan et al., "Vitalizing effects of being outdoors and in nature," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2010), Vol. 30, Issue 2, pp. 159–168.

[49] Tuan (1995), p. 72. Also Tuan (1974/1990 edit.), pp. 116-119.

[50] Boy and Uitermark (2016) note that social media users typically do not report on their everyday chores: instead, shared images are part of strategies of identity-building and distinction-making.

[51] Mandoki (2007), pp. 75-77.

[52] Mandoki's (2007) theory about prosaics parallels with Leddy's suggestion about the existence of aura in an object that transforms ordinary to extraordinary. I understand Leddy to mean that aura is product of a shift in one's attitude, to be open or curious to look at the object like an artist. Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, (Broadview Press, 2012), pp. 128-130, 244.

[53] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Great Britain: Routledge & Paul Kegan, 1949), pp. 8, 21-22.

[54] Mandoki (2007), 94.

[55] For conducting a GT analysis, see for example Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*, (London: City University London, 2013), pp. 69-75. The analysis process for the articles was as follows: each article, sentence by sentence, was reviewed and each separate statement assigned an identifying label. Similar labels were grouped into categories (i.e. "adventure", "sense of fun", etc.), as presented in Figure 1. The analysis process for the images was similar: the primary and secondary themes of the photos were identified, labelled and categorised (e.g. "people", "food", "waterfront", "urban greenery", "decorative focus point", etc.). The labels were summed up for statistical presentation from most common to least common. Concurrently, the themes were examined against their semantic and cultural meaning (e.g. was a food market photographed for curiosity, documenting or aesthetic purposes or all of the above).

[56] Jorge Ruiz Ruiz, "Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic*", FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, May 2009, Volume 10, No. 2, Art. 26. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882, accessed 6 June 2017.

[57] See for example Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, (UK: SAGE Publications, 2006). Normalisation of ideas and practices was first discussed by Michael Foucault.

[58] The articles were sourced with the keyword "staycation" on 20 June 2016 by selecting the first 20 non-advertisement articles on Google. Most of the articles were published during 2015-16. More than half (12) were from the US, three were from Canada, three were from the UK and two were from Australia. Adverts were excluded from the data, but all of the articles can be considered as promotional. All except one article portrayed staycation positively and did not discuss its potential downsides, such as promotion of consumerism, or financial and social performance stress.

[59] Rebecca Fishbein, "Some Charming Manhattanites Are Buying Second 'Staycation' Homes in Manhattan for 'A Change of Scenery'", *Gothamist*, June 3, 2016.
http://gothamist.com/2016/06/03/always_buy_a_burner_apartment.php

[60] The other relatively common source countries were Philippines, Indonesia, China and the United Arab Emirates. Rarer countries with more than one photo were Canada, Malaysia, Australia, the UK, Singapore, Ireland and Qatar. The remaining ~4% of the photos were individual shots from all around the globe, from Mexico to Czech Republic.

[61] The assessment of the aesthetic intention/reaction was informed by Carolyn Korsmeier's discussion of taste, Berys Gaut & Dominic McIver Lopes (edit.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, (Taylor & Francis Books, 2013), pp. 259-262: in summary, aesthetic qualities are debatable and depend on the adopted viewpoint and philosophy, but objects have properties that make them worth appreciation or criticism, such as colour, composition, elegance, rhythm etc. and the value of these qualities is understood fairly similarly within a culture or among a class of objects (paintings, photographs, furniture etc.).

[62] Unity in (visual) variety means the harmony or union of cooperating elements or the balance of contrasting or conflicting elements. Aesthetic harmony exists when some identical quality or form or purpose is embodied in various elements of a whole – sameness in difference. Aesthetic balance is the unity between elements which, while they oppose or conflict with one another, nevertheless need or supplement each other. Dewitt H. Parker, Chapter V, "The Analysis of the Aesthetic Experience: The Structure of the Experience", *The Principles Of Aesthetics*, (1920), E-book, Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6366/pg6366-images.html, accessed 15 June 2016.

[63] Appropriate to the narrative of a holiday, half of the images displayed a sunny summer day. One quarter of the photos was taken indoors, and the remaining pictures depicted an overcast weather, night or indiscernible weather. Only one image showed sleet and a half a dozen pictured rain.

[64] The socio-economic background of staycationers was not revealed by this data, but the portrayed staycation (eating in restaurants etc.) requires some disposable income.

[65] See for example Melanie Rudd et al., "Awe Expands People's Perception of Time, Alters Decision Making, and Enhances Well-Being", *Psychological Science* (2012), 23(10), p. 1135.

[66] Dacher Keltner, "Why Do We Feel Awe?" *Greater Good*, Berkeley University of California, 10 May 2016. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_do_we_feel_awe, accessed 14 December 2016.

IJHCS

II

AESTHETICS AND AFFORDANCES IN FAVOURITE PLACE – ON INTERACTIONAL USE OF ENVIRONMENTS FOR RESTORATION

by

Anu Besson, 2019

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Aesthetics and Affordances in a Favourite Place: On the Interactional Use of Environments for Restoration

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that nature offers many physical and mental health benefits, including restoration – or recovery from mental fatigue. However, questions remain about what exactly in one's environment is experienced as restorative and why. Bridging environmental aesthetics, environmental psychology and cultural studies, this study establishes a connection between landscape and mindscape as seen, for instance, in the ways in which an orderly environment is interpreted as an orderly state of mind and vice versa. Using data drawn from a qualitative survey targeting expatriate Finns, the article mobilises content analysis to interpret the results and concludes that a 'favourite place' is aesthetically appealing, enables actions that are experienced as restorative and is as much an interpretation of a space as a physical place.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetic experience, favourite place, environmental aesthetics, environmental preference, restoration

1. INTRODUCTION

Research in environmental psychology, health studies and landscape studies has established that experiencing nature provides a range of physical, mental and emotional benefits, particularly restoration (WHO 2016). In the context of empirical environmental preference (EEP) studies, restoration is usually defined as recovery from stress, attention depletion or low mood (Kaplan and

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Kaplan 1989), while nature is generally understood to mean greenery and water – the life-sustaining elements, in other words, that we are presumably conditioned to enjoy for biological and evolutionary reasons (Grinde and Patil 2009; Steg and de Groot 2013). But is this explanation too simplistic? If the mere presence of these life-sustaining elements restores us, would it not suffice to see a running water tap or a grocery store aisle to feel restored?

To better understand such environmental preferences, I surveyed and analysed subjects' own descriptions about the places they considered 'restorative'. Based on Grounded Theory, this method mitigated the risk of potential selection bias that is inherent in the most common study method in the EEP field: the rating or ranking of pre-selected photographs of places (Wherrett 2000). To my knowledge, this study is the first large-scale qualitative survey about the aesthetic and rejuvenating qualities of restorative places, the findings of which are discussed in a framework of environmental and everyday aesthetics.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Key concepts

EEP studies can be roughly divided into two positions: biology-based and culture-based (Hunziker et al. 2007, 55). The former relies on formalist and evolution-based explanations of environmental preference, focusing on surface qualities such as the shapes and colours of things, whereas the latter is more interested in the personal, cultural and symbolic meanings we give to environments, including place identity, place attachment and a so-called 'favourite place'. For Christian Norberg-Schulz (1971), a place is 'where we experience the meaningful events of our existence' (19); 'the spaces where life occurs are places', he posits, and a 'place is a space which has a distinct character' (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 5). A *favourite place*, meanwhile, is an environment (type) that, according to Kalevi Korpela (1992), is used for self-regulating emotions, identity and restoration (249).

Following Korpela's definition, this paper discusses the various 'affordances' associated with a person's favourite place. James Gibson (1986) defines 'affordance' as something that an environment offers, provides or furnishes, including any fixed or mutable elements such as the terrain, vegetation, construction, or resident animals and humans. Affordances are opportunities, that is, to use the environment or objects in it in specific, beneficial and/or identifiable ways (Gibson 1986). Discussing what we mean by 'environment', Arnold Berleant (1997) in turn identifies four intertwining, overlapping meanings for this term (29–30). For him, *nature* means predominantly opportunities derived from the natural environment, flora and fauna – although human-influenced nature in spaces such as gardens and parks are also commonly included – while *landscape* means scenery, understood as a view of a given environment, either

natural or urban. *Surroundings*, on the other hand, are comprised of the immediate location of the subject, whereas *environment* is the encompassing whole where the subject is situated and of which s/he is an integrated and an integral part.

Both biology- and culture-based positions acknowledge that aesthetic appeal or even the possibility for an aesthetic experience can influence environmental preference (Korpela and Hartig 1996, 221). However, contemplating the meaning of 'aesthetic' is not usual in the EEP field because aesthetic appeal is understood to arise from evolutionary or biological factors (i.e. we find beautiful what has aided our species' survival) and hence this aspect is seen to be covered *de facto* by biology-based theories (Kellert and Wilson 1993). In my view, such a reductionistic approach strips away the layers and complexities that aesthetic considerations often have in our personal and collective lives. Conversely, I argue that restorativeness and aesthetic appeal are not automatic qualities of nature, and restorativeness cannot be understood without factoring in aesthetic appeal.

My starting point for this argument is the observed link between landscapes and mindscapes, a tool that artists have used for centuries (Lörzing 2001, 111); for example, during the Romantic period (circa 1800–1850), paintings of landscapes were expressly used to convey and evoke emotions (Calley Galitz 2004). I suggest that people use environment(s) intentionally and interactionally to influence their state of mind by picking cues for how to feel from it, projecting one's inner state onto it and modifying it to produce an aspired inner state. I discuss 1) primary sensory perception, or *aisthesis,* and 2) aesthetic experience, or judgements of taste and contemplation of valued sensory input, in order to identify what qualities in the environment are perceived as restorative.

2.2 Restorative environment

Despite it being established that nature appears to have a restorative effect on people, it is still debated what exact features or qualities in nature – or the environment, more generally – enable restoration. Some influential biology-based theories include Roger Ulrich's (1983) psycho-evolutionary theory (PET), and Rachel and Stephen Kaplan's (1989) attention restoration theory (ART) and information gathering theory (IGT) (see also Kirillova and Lehto 2016). PET suggests that threatening situations induce stress, whereas nature – where our hominid ancestors evolved – is instinctively de-stressing; ART suggests that cognitive task-executing tires the mind, while nature's 'softly fascinating stimuli' engage and restore the mind; and, finally, IGT suggests that the sufficiently complex natural environments that developed during our species' evolution prompted information gathering, enhanced our survival abilities and, consequently, became the preferred surroundings of modern-day humans (Kaplan 1992, 558).

But what exactly is restorative in a 'softly fascinating' or information-rich environment? ART proposes the following restorative qualities: (1) fascination, or the environment's ability to hold our attention; (2) being away, offering a sense of distance to the usual, (3) extent, or the sufficient scale and scope of nature; and (4) compatibility, a match between a subject's intentions and their environment. In their IGT theory, the Kaplans (1989) suggest the following preferred qualities: (1) mystery, giving reason to explore, (2) complexity, with a sufficient range of diverse elements, (3) legibility, or the environment's degree of readability and (4) coherence, meaning that which provides order, structure and harmony.

PET, ART and IGT have all acquired empirical support, but also challengers. For example, Nicola Rainisio et al. (2015, 91–104) suggest that places that enable or support the experience of 'flow', as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988), are inherently restorative. Korpela (2008) has, in turn, found that favourite place depends on personal attributes, such as age, gender, childhood experiences and social and cultural context. In a large-scale survey in Finland (N=3000), Korpela found that two out of five adults preferred a place in natural greenery, one a waterfront location, one urban greenery and the remaining selected an active urban place such as a hobby location or city centre. In fact, it is relatively common to perceive certain urban spaces, such as heritage areas, as being restorative (Korpela 1991, 373; 2008, 388). According to Korpela and Terry Hartig (1996, 221), naturalness is an apparent restorative quality, but other important aspects of restorative place are experiences of beauty, being in control, freedom of self-expression and lack of social pressure.

A survey by Natural England (2009) found that people seek nature to escape daily routine and feel 'life-affirming' somatic sensations (22), which nature appears to offer more fully or in a different way from urban settings. Other studies suggest that nature is preferred as a source of restoration over urban greenery because city noise is perceived as irritating (see Hunziker et al. 2007, 55). In Natural England's survey, water elements were particularly popular as they were seen as calming when still, exhilarating when in movement and as something that 'crowns the beauty' of scenery (2009, 44). Natural England identified seventeen profiles of how people experience nature (26–28), which I group into four categories: *the engaged* seek immersive experiences of beauty and connection with nature; *the employed* spend time in nature as part of daily routines (rural work, dog walking, etc.); *the escapees* seek distance from a daily rut and/or urban environment; and *the energised* mobilise nature in pursuit of exercise and/or thrill. Nature thus provides a range of 'services', including aesthetic enjoyment, spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, recreation and self-reflection (ibid., 4). In opposition to biology-based positions, these findings indicate that people have a range of differing motivations for seeking out certain environments outside of their everyday surroundings.

2.3 Aesthetics of environment

What kind of aesthetic approaches or attitudes might people have towards their environment? Environmental aesthetics examines aesthetic perception and appreciation towards everything that engulfs us (Carlson 2000, xvii). In recent decades, two distinctive streams of environmental aesthetics have emerged: cognitive and non-cognitive (ibid.). Within the former, Allen Carlson (2007 [2016]) suggests that to appropriately appreciate an environment aesthetically, a cognitive viewpoint such as scientific or factual knowledge about what is being perceived is beneficial, if not essential, just as knowledge *about* art may enhance the aesthetic experience derived *from* art. Following this, Yuriko Saito and Yrjö Sepänmaa have proposed that other forms of knowledge such as local narratives, folklore and mythological stories can be complementary with or alternative to scientific knowledge (cited in Carlson 2007 [2016]).

From the non-cognitive position, Berleant discusses the 'aesthetics of engagement' as the essentiality of a somatic, immersed and interactional experience of or within an environment. His view is not devoid of cognitive aspects: for example, he discusses how we may learn to appreciate 'unappealing' features by acquiring knowledge about ecology (ibid., 18–20). Nevertheless, he emphasises that we always perceive environments through the lens of our values, knowledge, memories and sensory acuity – that is, in relation to the human condition as a whole (Berleant 1997, 24). Taking a slightly different approach, Emily Brady (2003) suggests that the use of the imagination enhances aesthetic appreciation, although the degree to which the imagination is active depends upon the individual appreciator, the nature of the aesthetic object and the aesthetic situation itself (151).

The field of everyday aesthetics has similarly expanded our understanding of what can be perceived aesthetically and how. Saito (2013) suggests that we take in the whole of the environment, including the fixed and the mutable; built and natural elements; humans and animals; activities and cultural features; and the season, weather and temporal changes (see also von Bonsdorff 1998). Saito also discusses the aesthetics of ambience and 'appropriateness' – or, the ways in which we appreciate the atmosphere or a situation as a combination of parts that 'fit together' (105–109) – such as how seasonal decorations add to our aesthetic pleasure owing to their 'appropriateness' to the moment (119–124). Saito thus guides our attention to the role of the quotidian in our aesthetic judgements, including the aesthetic pleasure derived from restoring the 'appropriateness' of one's surroundings – for example, by tidying up a commonly used space. Importantly, she notes that acts of cleaning have traditionally been excluded from the focus of aesthetics as uninteresting, possibly due to a gender bias where the traditional women's sphere did not generate the same interested as more 'complex' aesthetic questions (ibid., 150–154).

3. DATA AND ANALYSIS

Launched online in April 2017,[1] the survey conducted for this study targeted current or recent Finnish expatriates, whose top ten countries of current residence were:

- Finland 24%
- Australia 18%
- USA 7%
- UK 6%
- Germany 6%
- Spain 4 %
- United Arab Emirates 4%
- Belgium 3%
- Sweden 3%
- Netherlands 2%

The purpose was to source opinions from a relatively homogenous, yet still diverse, group of people who have experience in a variety of geographical and cultural environments. The survey contained ten questions (see Attachment 1), of which four were demographic, two were selection-based and four open-ended. My analysis was based on Grounded Theory (GT) and mobilised sociological discourse analysis to identify values, stances or opinion positions in the responses (Ruiz 2009; Charmaz 2006). GT is used to elicit descriptive statistical information from complex narrative information to identify themes and trends; the presupposition is that what is discussed most often is most pertinent to the subject group. The analysis in this study consisted of 1) a phrase-by-phrase review of the responses to label and count the most commonly discussed concepts; 2) grouping of the identified concepts to establish themes; and 3) interpreting the themes in the context of this study's theoretical framework. Overall, the study generated three layers of findings: the most common favourite place types, the most important aesthetic qualities of a favourite place and the most typical responses grouped into what I call 'experiencer profiles'.

1. The survey was advertised in three Facebook groups: 'Finnish People Living Abroad', 'Expat Finnish Bloggers' (Ulkosuomalaiset bloggaajat) and 'Finns in Australia' (Suomalaiset Australiassa). Participation was voluntary, based on interest, and it appeared to appeal more to women than men, who made up over four fifths of the participants (N=308; 88.6% female and 11.4% male).

3.1 Quantitative results

Nearly all respondents (93.8%) said they seek out certain environments to feel restored. Just under two thirds (58.9%) had their favourite place in nature – in a forest, water shore, park, garden or rural area – and one third (31.4%) preferred an indoor or urban place, such as their own home, sauna, café, cinema or city centre. A hobby location (e.g. a gym, yoga studio, swimming pool, golf course or horse stables) was the first choice of one in ten participants, while those who selected 'other' (0.7%) commented that their favourite place varies depending on the season or their mood.

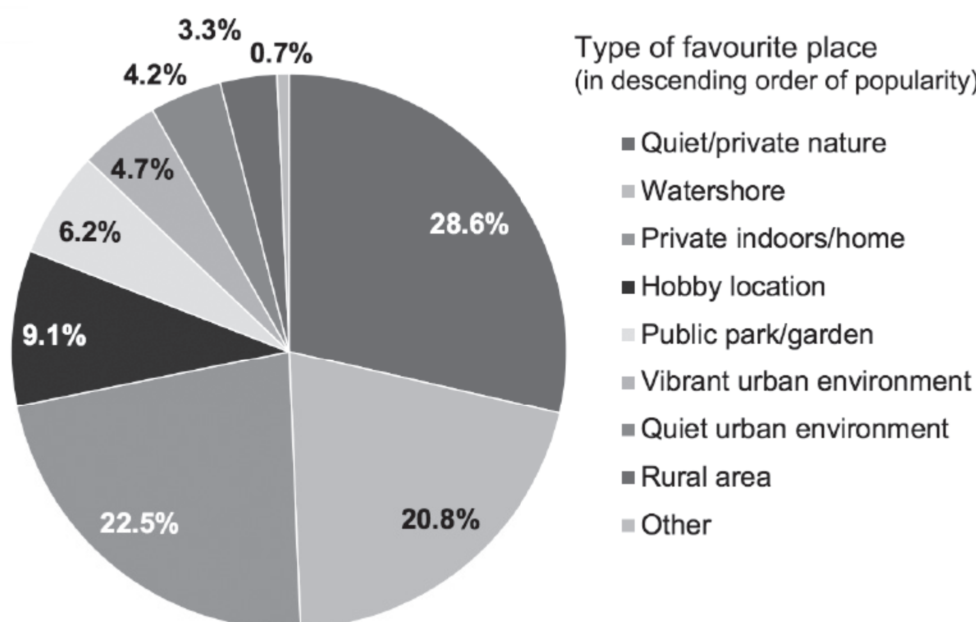

Figure 1. Favourite places by type

The survey contained two direct questions about aesthetics: how important the aesthetics of any given favourite place are in general, and what aesthetic qualities are the most important.[2] The vast majority of participants (82%) found the aesthetic appeal of their favourite place either 'very' or 'quite' important, and a total of 95% found it important to some degree. Of the 308 respondents, 270 provided a description of what they see as being the most important aesthetic qualities, the most frequently used words being 'beauty', 'silence' and 'nature's sounds'.

2. The study contained a background question about creative or cultural hobbies to map whether the respondents were generally interested in arts or aesthetics. Of the 308 participants, 'yes' was the response of 66.8%, 'no' 14.3% and 'not currently, but generally interested' 18.9%. The purpose of this question was to gauge whether only artistically bent people find the aesthetics of an environment to be important. This angle warrants further study, however, as no statistics exist on what percentage of people in general have artistic or cultural interests.

A phrase-by-phase review of these descriptions identified a total of 550 concepts that could be labelled and categorised. Four sensuous categories were identified: visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile/kinetic. Nearly half of the respondents also described blended experiences, which I categorised into two groups: 'multisensory' and 'ambience'. Aisthesis (sense-perceptions) and aesthetic aspects similarly overlapped, as respondents described positive somatic sensations alongside judgements of taste, for example: 'I enjoy looking at beautiful things and taking photos, and also pay attention to smells like freshly cut grass or fresh air coming from the sea' (female, Malaysian resident).

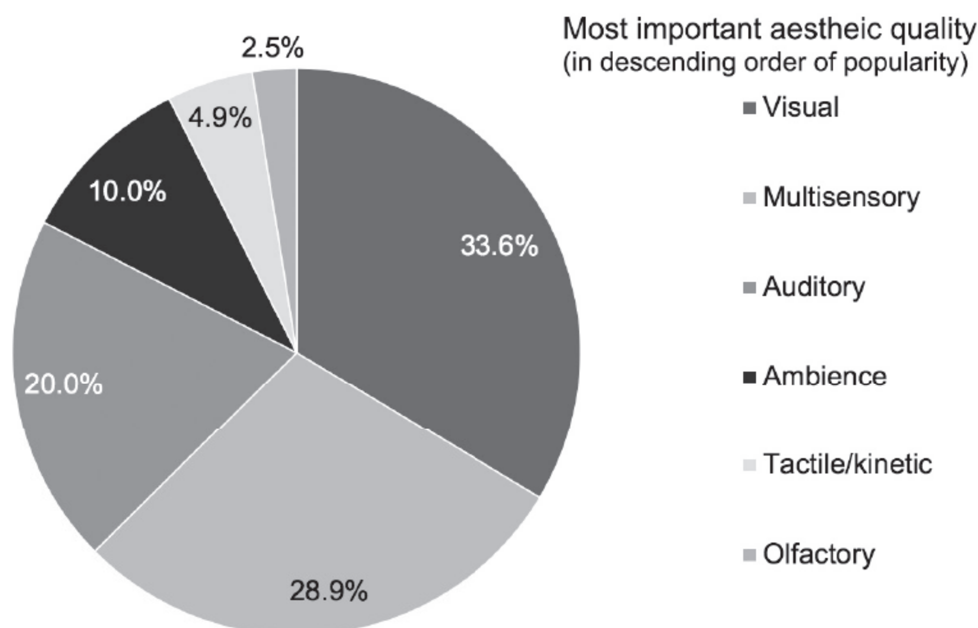

Figure 2. The most important aesthetic quality of favourite place

Analysing the categories presented in Figure 2 further revealed that the most often mentioned elements in the visual category were as follows:

- Nature's scenery, colours and forms (51.4%)
- Cleanliness, tidiness (17.3%)
- Sun, light, lighting (9.7%)
- Balance, harmony, order (9.2%)
- Art, architecture, design (8.6%)
- Complexity, diversity, change, surprise (3.8%)

Overall, visual appeal was the most often mentioned pleasant aesthetic aspect of a favourite place. Usually, this was seen to be found in nature as a whole or in its details – its flora, fauna, topography, colours and shapes. However, of those who commented on visual elements, nearly one third also appreciated

harmony, order, balance, cleanliness and tidiness, and nearly one in ten appraised built environment and humanmade objects.

In comments about auditory experience, on the other hand, there was an evident aversion towards artificial sounds. Non-natural or humanmade sounds such as music and urban soundscapes were mentioned rarely and, even then, were described most often as simply 'noise'. This may have been influenced by the survey's name, 'Favourite Places and Stress Management', evoking ideas about artificial sounds being unwelcome, uncalming or even stress-inducing. The most appreciated qualities in the auditory category were, accordingly:

- Pleasant and/or 'natural' sounds (51.8%)
- Silence or quietness (44.5%)
- Music or people's voices (3.6%)

Responses referring to olfactory and tactile/kinetic aspects were too few for any meaningful statistics; however, the most often mentioned features were nature's scents, comfortable air or water temperature, soft surfaces, clean sheets and a relaxing position. The most mentioned sources that produced a positive multisensory experience were:

- Natural greenery (52.8%)
- Water elements (24.5%)
- Sky, horizon, openness (9.4%)
- Urban greenery (5.7%)
- Fresh air or suitable temperature (5%)
- Mountains, cliffs, rocks (2.5%)

Meanwhile, the most discussed aspects of a positive ambience were:

- Calm, peaceful or private (52.7%)
- Vibrant, social, re-invigorating (25.5%)
- Supports overall positive feelings or memories (21.8%)

Unaware of each other's answers, many subjects described as 'the most important aesthetic quality' a combination of affordances, sensations, perceptions, feelings and often also memories and interpretations of the place. Some of the subjects referred to this web of aesthetic and other inseparable considerations collectively as 'ambience'. This identification provides empirical support to Saito's theory about aesthetics of ambience: how we recognise and savour the 'feel' of the place as a source of aesthetic enjoyment.

3.2 Qualitative analysis

Most respondents discussed aisthesis (pleasant sensory perceptions) and aesthetic experience (judgements of taste) as being closely intertwined. In

addition, places and activities often overlapped in answers as complementary aspects of the whole: place selection depended largely on what the subject aspired to do and, through that, feel. To further examine the connection between the associated activities and restorativeness of a place, I categorised the response types into the following five 'experiencer profiles': *water-loving forest dweller, horizon-gazer, reflective introvert, seeker of order* and *energiser*. All profiles overlapped, and which profile was 'active' appeared to depend on the subject's expectations and mood. Some respondents indicated they use certain places at specific times for a specific purpose (including skiing in a wintry forest, or motorcycling through countryside in summer), recognising their own ability to affect their mood through place selection: 'I have many favourite places, I choose the one according to my current mood. Sometimes I seek for calmness, sometimes a lively environment with lots of activities' (female, Finnish resident).

The following section presents the identified experiencer profiles, citing common responses for each and offering qualitative analyses of the respective places to which they refer. In each case, I seek to link the respondents' favourite place to a certain mood, state of mind or personal background, and situate the experiencer profile within a pertinent theoretical framework. All of the following statements were given in response to the question: 'Please describe a place that can make you feel better (calmer, more relaxed, happy, content, etc.)'.[3]

Water-loving forest dweller

> *My favourite place is in the forest trail and I run it and it goes around lakes (male, Finnish resident)*
>
> *Lake side forest with pines and birches (female, US resident)*
>
> *Lake (I do stand-up paddling and chanting at the same time) (female, Belgian resident)*
>
> *Walking path in the forest by the lake Saimaa [in Finland] (male, Australian resident)*
>
> *House in the forrest [sic] by the lake in the middle of nowhere! (female, United Arab Emirates resident).*

The most common favourite place of respondents matching this profile was at a water shore in a forest. Many further defined their ideal forest as one that is 'untouched', 'old' or 'Finnish', and the water body as a lake. Some respondents added conditions or alternatives: if this particular environment was not accessible, a substitute such as a tropical forest or an ocean beach would be sought. The desire to be near water may reflect the respondents' cultural

3. All the italicised quotes are verbatim – that is, direct copies of the written survey responses – and therefore include some spelling mistakes as well as grammatical and linguistic errors.

background as Finland has a lake-dotted geography and a strong lakeside cottage culture – summer holidays are commonly or ideally spent at a lakeshore. It is therefore conceivable that at least some of the appeal of this kind of environment originates from a nostalgic recollection, yearning or idealised summer holiday (Periäinen 2004, 45–46). This reading connects to Korpela's (2008) findings that childhood experiences and memories strongly influence favourite place selection, as demonstrated by the response: '[my favourite place is a] simple cabin by the sea where I spent my childhood summers' (female, Spanish resident).

Horizon-gazer

> *Home/someplace high where I can see around (a hill, a room in tall building etc.) (female, Finnish resident)*
>
> *Places that 'help' me breath – where I feel there's space and air around me (female, Spanish resident)*
>
> *[Anywhere it is possible, at the] same time to see an ocean and mountains (male, Saudi Arabian resident)*
>
> *Seashore, a beach, with lapping waves. Air, breeze, freshness (female, Malaysian resident)*
>
> *My favorite place is on the beach looking into the sea. That way no matter where you are in the world you know your home is just across the water. Somehow seeing the endless water and hearing the sounds of the ocean always calm me down. It doesn't matter if the beach is empty or full of people, the main thing is to be with the water either near it or in it (female, Finnish resident).*

Although the presence of water was equally popular among the forest-dwellers, respondents in this profile preferred places with long vistas and openness, typically from the mountains, the seashore or, rarely, a tall building. These respondents indicated that they found the following features restorative: being near the sky, seeing the horizon, looking far away or deep down, sensing the ocean, having access to pure air and spaciousness, feeling that one is connected to a larger whole or able to, at least in theory, travel afar. This yearning links to Natural England's (2009) finding about 'escapees' in that both Britons and Finns appear to find restorative the experience of 'breaking free', having the option to let the mind travel, if one is not able (or willing) to travel physically.

Reflective introvert

> *My lounge and watching movies (male, Australian resident)*
>
> *[Somewhere] warm, quiet, where I can be alone, e.g. [a] sauna (male, Austrian resident)*
>
> *I like to sit on the steps leading to my back lawn. I don't know why, but I had a similar spot in the house I grew up in, and I think it just has nice memories associated with that sort of spot (female, Finnish resident)*

Possibility to think ones thoughts in their [sic] own head without any outside stress or at least the beauty in front of the eyes.... you can then turn inside and not see the disturbance (female, Finnish resident)

Happy childhood places like home or [a] grandparent's home, where you feel safe or have nice memories from, or under a blanket on a bed or sofa so you just feel warm physically too. So something safe and warm usually works, and it can't be noisy. Even though it's ok if there are some familiar faces around as well. It's difficult to describe a place only because it is perhaps more related to feelings which can relate to memories and senses which can then relate to places (female, Finnish resident).

Reflective introvert, the third most common experiencer profile, sought restoration through calming, private, quiet activities such as a self-reflection and relaxation. The forest-dwellers and horizon-gazers also appreciated calmness and privacy, but for introverts the most essential qualities were comfort, peace and quiet, regardless of the place type. In addition to quiet places in nature, answers included, one's own home or other quiet, indoor locations such as a library, museum, café or church. A tranquil place appears to allow for a quieting of one's inner world; aesthetically appealing surroundings or activities seem to be particularly suitable for this calming, as evidenced by the following statement: '[my favourite place is at] home alone with books, music or [in] nature. [Or, at m]useum, castles, historic places with beautiful art and interiors' (female, Canadian resident).

Seeker of order

[C]alm, serene, doesn't need to be one certain place but a place with these characteristics (female, French resident)

It should be clean and well-maintained, I'm not such a big fan of wilderness when I speak of what I need for my own relaxation (female, Finnish resident)

Favourite place/places in my home city are public parks for me: they have harmonical [sic] plantations and well thought design. They are well kept and clean, and everything seems to be fitting in (female, Italian resident)

The most important quality is that it is tidy (no rubbish left lying around) (female, Finnish resident)

[A] 'sorted' or 'simple' view with not too many elements; no mess or chaos (female, Finnish resident).

Like the reflective introvert, the seeker of order did not prioritise the place type – urban or natural, indoors or outdoors – but strongly preferred an organised, clean and tidy environment, echoing Saito's (2013) suggestion about tidiness being a salient source of aesthetic pleasure. Responses ranged from orderly flower beds and gardens, to tidy, clean and harmonious homes. Quite literally for this group, organised surroundings translated into calm headspace, as captured by the following response: '[my favourite place] is clean, as untidy

surroundings make me anxious' (female, Finnish resident). This profile may also reflect respondents' cultural background as cleanliness and tidiness are highly appreciated in Finland (Embassy of Finland Washington 2009), while 'Scandinavian design', neutral colours and minimalistic decoration styles, remains popular in this part of the world (CorD Magazine 2016). Once again aligning with Saito's theory, only women mentioned tidiness as a prerequisite for restoration, whereas men tended to discuss wilderness, exercise or movement.

Energiser

> *Diving in warm clear [s]ea with colourful fishes and corals (male, Finnish resident)*
>
> *[A] walk in a forest with dogs and watching their [sic] running about (female, Finnish resident)*
>
> *Training studio for kickboxers and skydivers club house (male, US resident)*
>
> *I love the Finnish nature but if I want to feel happy and see my friends I go to Dublin where I spent 10 years working (female, Finnish resident)*
>
> *It is seldom just a place, it could be a good movie, theatre, time with friends. If only alone, then a place where I can be relaxed, in peace: home, summer cottage, even a hotel room (female, German resident).*

A relatively small but evident category of energisers emerged from the survey. These seekers of vibrancy preferred signs of vitality, including socialising with people and animals. Another defining feature was an attempt to recharge through movement (a gym session, golf, jog, motorcycle ride) or busyness (shopping, cafés, crowds, people-watching). This matches Natural England's (2009) profile of 'energisers' who seek 'life-affirming' sensations; however, these sensations are not solely available in nature, but might also be found in urban and social environments. Ultimately, the favourite place of an energiser enables reinvigorating activities, sometimes involving an adrenaline rush or, at a minimum, connection with the aliveness of the world. Starbucks was the favourite place of one respondent, for example, as it provided opportunities 'to see people o[r] a nature park where is lots of animals [sic]' (female, UK resident).

4. DISCUSSION

The main findings of my survey were 1) subjects have a hierarchy of favourite places depending on the places' affordances and availability; 2) the different experiencer profiles speak against the universal preferences presumed by the biology-based position; 3) favourite place is mainly selected based on what activity – and, through that, mood – its affordances support; and 4) aesthetic

qualities appear to be a key aspect in favourite place selection across all of the identified profiles.

4.1 Hierarchy of favourite places

For this study, I chose not to define 'aesthetic' to the respondents. The purpose of this was twofold: to gauge what respondents understand as 'aesthetic', and to avoid any overtly academic, abstract or narrow definition. This approach aligns with the usual position taken in EEP studies, where the terms 'aesthetically appealing', 'pleasant' and 'restorative' are used almost interchangeably. Likewise, it was evident from the survey that most respondents interpreted 'aesthetic' as 'appealing' or 'pleasant' features that are available in the environment, accessed via multiple senses, and intertwined with one's own internal musings and feelings about these surroundings. Aisthesis, or (positive) sensory perceptions, and aesthetics (involving judgements of taste and contemplation of valued sensory qualities) overlapped and interlinked in discussion, and both appeared to be equally important features of a favourite place.

The most noticed aesthetic quality of a place was visual appeal, including the 'beauty' of nature's colours and forms, but also harmony, order, tidiness and, to a minority of respondents, architecture, design and people. Typically, sight is humans' primary sense and, when people are asked about 'aesthetic qualities', they may associate these with visual appeal and/or art. The question deployed in this survey attempted to uncouple this connection by also mentioning other senses. Notably, the second most discussed experience was multisensory and the third, auditory experience. Contrary to the common presumption in the EEP field, restoration does not arise only from relaxation in the usual, rest-focused meaning of the word; indeed, many subjects found quite vigorous or busy activities restorative, including hiking, skiing, running, driving a motorcycle or strolling in a crowd.

Multiple subjects discussed two or more favourite places, indicating that they have secondary or tertiary favourite places to turn to if or when the first choice is not available owing to geographical distance, season or weather. Similarly, many subjects discussed several places, stating that their selection depends on the aspired mood that could be achieved through the affordances and activities available in each favourite place. This indicates that subjects have a hierarchy of choice, which appears to be culturally influenced. For example, Finns appeared to find being surrounded by a tall, dense forest soothing, whereas the Natural England (2009) study found that Britons valued admiring a dense woodland from afar but not being inside it physically (29).

4.2 Personal versus universal experience

Are experiences of beauty essential for restoration? Would it not suffice to say that experiences of positive somatic sensations are restorative? And, is it not self-evident that positive experiences or pleasant sensations are restorative? Firstly, in the context of EEP studies, aesthetic appeal is usually understood to be mainly or mostly present in nature owing to evolutionary reasons. Yet, corroborating Korpela's earlier findings, subjects participating in my study found a variety of aesthetic appeal in built environments, too, including indoors. Secondly, my subjects explicitly discussed both pleasant *sensations* and experiences of *beauty*, indicating that both are essential in the selection of a favourite place. These two are not interchangeable, as it is quite possible to find beauty in unpleasant things – as argued by Berleant (1997) in his discussion of negative aesthetics (64–74) – and it is also possible to enjoy things sensuously that one would not describe as beautiful. This indicates a more personal and symbolic understanding of beauty than is common employed in the field of EEP.

In this survey, a notable minority (one third) named indoor or urban places more restorative than nature. Additionally, of those subjects who discussed positive multisensory experience in the favourite place, half expressed that nature is its best source whereas less than six percent thought so about urban greenery. This challenges the biology-based position that there is a universally shared understanding of what is restorative. If the presence of nature, including urban greenery, can provide some restorative neuro-biological benefits, it would be logical that people prefer urban greenery over other urban locations, bringing natural and urban greenery close in popularity. It is possible that, compared with untouched nature, urban greenery does not allow similar or as much distance from the threats and stress of urban environment (Ulrich 1983), development of fascination (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989) or imagination-enhanced aesthetic experience (Brady 2003), and it also contains stressors such as traffic noise (Hunziker et al. 2007). Nevertheless, the fact that every third respondent prioritised something *other than* nature clearly warrants further research.

If the EEP studies are not correct about universal preferences regarding restoration, do they have some other or any explanatory use? In my study, some similarities emerged between the Kaplans' theories (ART and IGT) and the experiencer profiles:

- Water-loving forest dwellers appeared to appreciate fascination and mystery (diversity in nature, unknowability);
- Horizon-gazers appeared to prefer extent and legibility (long vistas, uniform or navigable views);
- Reflective introverts and seekers of order appeared to prioritise coherence (offering structure for thoughts);

- Energisers appeared to prefer complexity (a mutable combination of place, activity and/or social interactions).

A prerequisite for all profiles was compatibility with expectations and, to some extent, being away or escaping stress. The experiencer profiles appear at the onset to corroborate Kaplans' theories, although all profiles had a different angle on what was experienced as restorative. However, one could question whether the Kaplans' frameworks are too generic to pinpoint which elements, objects or features in the environment are considered restorative – if such formalist conclusions are possible at all. The eight qualities of ART and IGT can be identified in and experienced via other means of restoration, such as books, TV, cinema and video games, indicating that these qualities are not solely somatic and spatial but symbolic and cultural.

4.3 Affordances, activities and mood

Indisputably, urban environments can be a source for stress, but nature also presents stressors such as poor weather, challenging terrain and pesky or dangerous animals, questioning both Ulrich's and the Kaplans' position that nature is innately de-stressing. The prevalence of responses concerned with tidiness and order raises questions about cultural background and gender (roles) as potential influencers in favourite place selection. Yet this may also indicate that, for many, nature is most enjoyable when it is predictable, orderly, comfortable and safe – for example, as experienced in a garden or lakeside cottage. Notably, despite the subjects' exposure to and experience of different geographical locations, the majority prioritised a certain type of nature – Finnish lakeside forest – indicating that personal experiences, memories and culture strongly imprint upon such preferences.

Favourite place can be a specific location with defined boundaries but, more often, it appears to be a 'perception horizon': a headspace moving along with the person through the enjoyed environment, as in the case of jogger around a lake, a motorcyclist on a country road, a skier in a forest or a mountain hiker on a trek. The 'place' of favourite place is therefore less a physical location and more an interpretation or multifaceted experience. Most often, subjects chose locations that enabled activities that supported the aspired mood, mentioning, for instance: thinking, self-reflection and relaxation (e.g. by reading, walking or at a sauna); hobbies, socialising and movement (e.g. jogging, hiking, motorcycling, horse-riding); and implicit or explicit appreciation of the environment's aesthetic qualities. The prioritised activity typically depended on each subject's experiencer profile – for example, a reflective introvert enjoys sauna, whereas an energiser seeks urban buzz – although people may occupy different experiencer profiles in different circumstances.

This survey did not attempt to identify the root causes for experiencer profiles, such as personality type or situational variables. On the contrary, the

most important finding in my view was that many respondents expressed their attempt to 'pick cues' from their surroundings to alter their mood – for example, by tidying up to feel less anxious – corroborating my hypothesis about environments being used for that specific purpose.

4.4 Aesthetics of engagement

As already discussed, subjects' experience in and of their favourite place was often defined or enhanced by actions and activities carried out within the environment – even if those actions were relatively passive, such as taking time for self-reflection. The purpose of visiting the favourite place was thus being receptive to its affordances to positively influence one's inner state. The various theories about environmental aesthetics discussed in this paper were purposefully not introduced to the subjects in order to gauge what kind(s) of approaches or attitudes they might display unprompted. Nonetheless, respondents appeared to corroborate Berleant's aesthetics of engagement wherein, to appropriately appreciate an environment aesthetically, one has to immerse oneself in it wholly and in an interactive, embodied fashion.

Another identified attitude towards favourite places aligns with Saito's aesthetics of ambience regarding parts fitting into a whole: it was important to the respondents that the place contains specific features (such as Finnish tree species and a water element) for the ambience and the experience to be 'appropriate'. Of the other theories discussed in this paper, some support emerged for Brady's suggestion about imagination enhancing the environmental aesthetic experience. For example, being at the seashore and imagining that home is just across the water added to the positive experience of the place. However, none of the respondents raised the relevance of scientific or factual knowledge to the aesthetic experience, beyond their own perceptions and memories, nor did they include references to stories, folklore, myths or other forms of knowing. In light of my study, it appears that Carlson's suggestion about scientific or factual knowledge adding to the environmental aesthetic experience may not be the usual attitude or approach among 'laypeople'. Instead, as earlier identified by Korpela, the respondents appeared to value most their own positive memories and associations with the favourite place (type), in addition to the immersive somatic experience.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This study found that restorative favourite places are selected based on their aesthetic affordances, including pleasant sensuous qualities, possibilities for aesthetic experience and the place's ability to support an aspired activity and, through that, mood. This indicates a more interactional, personal and symbolic

relationship with place than is usually assumed in research. Further, as the most mentioned aesthetic qualities, positive visual and multisensory input were almost equally valued by my participants, raising questions about the appropriateness of image ranking or rating – a common research method in the EEP field. The embodied, lived, multisensory experience of a place, including ambience or a subjective experience of its 'feel', had a notable effect on the place's perceived restorative potential, suggesting that image-based studies may not capture all or the most relevant reactions to environments.

Based on my findings, it appears that positive somatic experiences coupled with aesthetic experience (positive judgements of taste) are essential for restoration and, further, can reinforce one's feeling of 'aliveness'. Of the discussed theories in environmental aesthetics, the respondents' aesthetic approach appears to align most closely with Berleant's aesthetics of engagement and Saito's aesthetics of ambience: overall, the respondents attempted to be sensuously open to and appreciative of their surroundings, while engaged in internal musings that were, in turn, prompted or supported by that environment.

The study's limitations include both the unintended gender bias and the underlying theme of 'stress management' prompted by the survey's questions. Since we are not always stressed, this particular study cannot conclusively answer what kinds of environments people prefer in other circumstances, such as for work or other aspects of everyday life. The study thus raises further questions about gender or gender roles in experiencing places, and how personal history or cultural traditions affect favourite place selection.

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ATTACHMENT 1

Survey questions - Favourite places and stress management

Favourite place is a place that you use to alleviate stress, to feel restored or more balanced.

1. When you feel down, stressed or upset, do you seek a certain place or environment (e.g. nature, a room in your home, other) to feel better?
2. If you do seek a certain place or environment to feel better, what is it most often?
3. What is the most important element in your preferred environment?
4. Please describe a place that can make you feel better (calmer, more relaxed, happy, content etc.)? The place can be real or imagined, outdoors or indoors.
5. How important are the aesthetic qualities of your favourite place? Such as: beauty, scents, pleasant sounds (or silence), tidiness, richness of sensory stimuli (a lot to see or sense), etc.?
6. What is the most important aesthetic quality in your favourite place?

Demographic questions

7. Do you have any creative or cultural hobbies (e.g. music, photography, writing, art, galleries, theatre, etc.)?
8. What is your age?
9. What is your gender?
10. What is your country of residence?

III

IN DEFENSE OF CITIES – ON NEGATIVE PRESENTATION OF URBAN AREAS IN ENVIRONMENTAL PREFERENCE STUDIES

by

Anu Besson, February 2019

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In Defense of Cities: On Negative Presentation of Urban Areas in Environmental Preference Studies

Anu Besson

Abstract
This paper critiques a common research method, image-based studies, in assessing environmental preferences. The method is used, in particular, in the fields of environmental psychology, landscape studies, and health studies, here called empirical environmental preference studies or EEP studies. I argue that the established view in the EEP field that nature is inherently experienced as more aesthetically appealing and restorative than urban environments may be biased because of the image-based method. This paper presents a literature review of EEP studies, discussing them in a framework of environmental and everyday aesthetics. The conclusion is that EEP studies may strip cities of their physical, socio-cultural, and aesthetic layers; and comparing nature and cities as places of restoration may be unfruitful as our relationship with nature and urban environments is dissimilar.

Key Words
aesthetics of ambience; aesthetics of engagement; environmental aesthetics; environmental preference studies; multi-sensory experience; urban environments

1. Introduction

Aesthetics of urban environment are primarily studied in the fields of architecture and placemaking; sociology; consumer studies and marketing; everyday and environmental aesthetics; and empirical environmental preference studies, or EEP studies.[1] My focus is on the EEP field, which aims to identify universal preferences and has generated the largest body of empirical data and the most negative views about cities. I examine how cities are typically studied, presented, and discussed in that field by reviewing studies by influential researcher Roger Ulrich and twenty EEP studies by other researchers. My focus is on examining the relationship between common study methods, image-based and in-situ, and their results. The main question is how reliably a two-dimensional image can convey an experience of temporal, spatial, and somatic dimensions of environment.

Image-based studies are surveys where subjects are asked to rate images or videos of pre-selected environments on a given scale, for example, based on their perceived aesthetic appeal or restorativeness. Environments that enable recovery from mental fatigue or stress are called restorative. To ensure that study subjects share a comparable emotional baseline, a common research pre-step is to induce stress, usually via cognitive task-executing or negatively arousing imagery.[2] The required presence of stress stems from the presumption that preferred environments have calming rather than arousing qualities because negative arousal, including stress, may have negative mental or physical health implications. In-situ studies typically comprise interviews with or observations of subjects in a studied environment. A common supplementary research method is data cross-mapping.[3]

For the past decades, EEP studies have focused on the importance of our access to nature because of the hypothesis that humans innately prefer nature—in this context, greenery and water—over artificial environments.[4] Presumably, we find nature more appealing than cities because of evolutionary or biological reasons. What has aided our species' survival in the past is viewed as restorative and, hence, aesthetically attractive. Consequently, it must be beneficial for us to live surrounded by nature or in nature-imitating settings.[5] Concurrently, a body of studies has emerged about the harms and risks of city life.[6] Cities are seen to contain personal stressors related to social interactions, identity, and fulfillment of needs, in addition to external stressors such as pollution, noise, crowds, and other negative aesthetics.[7] It has become mainstream knowledge that nature has substantial positive impact, exceeding that of cities, on our mental, physical, and emotional well-being.[8]

In an attempt to identify the most preferred, beneficial, or least harmful environments, EEP studies typically focus on external stress by asking what in the

physical environment causes, reduces, or restores us from it.[9] But, given that an increasing number of people holiday in or move to cities year after year,[10] the juxtaposition of positively experienced nature and negatively experienced cities appears simplistic. I examine the empirical evidence about cities being perceived *de facto* as less aesthetically attractive than nature and contextualize my findings in the framework of everyday and environmental aesthetics and cultural history.

2. On experiencing environment aesthetically

Can the aesthetics of a landscape be conveyed by an image? This has for long been a pertinent question in aesthetics, and it inevitably evokes other questions such as: what is the nature of aesthetic experience, and what senses could or should participate in an aesthetic experience? Environmental and everyday aesthetics have expanded our view on what can be experienced aesthetically, including how all senses and different cognitive aspects can participate in it.[11] Specifically, Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant have criticized equating landscapes with images and attempts to quantify features or qualities of environments to calculate their aesthetic value.[12] A summary of the relevant discussion is provided by Marta Tafalla and Ira Newman.[13]

Since the 1970s, it has been a widespread practice in the EEP field to formalistically study the environment, focusing on colors, shapes, and forms, in an attempt to quantify the aesthetic value of environments. This links to the era's prominent theory in art criticism, formalism.[14] It also draws from the idea of positive aesthetics; nature only or primarily has positive aesthetic qualities such as order, balance, unity, and harmony, whereas artificial environments possess these in rarer instances. Positive aesthetics have been debated and also opposed in environmental aesthetics but the approach remains strong in the EEP field, in particular among the supporters of biophilia.[15] Carlson argues that the attempt to view landscapes as art is inherently flawed because by doing so some parts of nature are not positively experienced and this approach does not include ecological value.[16]

Berleant, in turn, argues that experiencing environment aesthetically is about engagement, not about two-dimensional static representation. Engagement means being embodied by and interacting with one's surroundings. Cognitive and experiential meanings—knowledge-based and lived-through associations, bodily stances and intimations—are complementary and necessary aspects of aesthetic experience. Similarly, our beliefs, values, and attitudes participate in the process of interpreting and structuring the experience; "environment is an interrelated and interdependent union of people and place" and that is why "we cannot discover the aesthetic value of [an environment] … from an accumulation of particular amenities."[17] Berleant suggests that in assessing aesthetic qualities we ought to move beyond the objects of assessment to the experience itself.[18]

If environments should not be viewed as art or focusing on the scenic, what, then, makes them attractive or unattractive? Berleant discusses modes of negative environmental aesthetics. Regarding built environment, his examples are commercial strip developments and shopping malls that assault the senses because of their vulgarity, marketing hyperbole, visual shrillness, and false or contrived aesthetic features, such as cheap imitations of valuable materials. Berleant's other modes of negative aesthetics are: the banal, lack of imagination or new possibilities; the dull, clumsy technique or shallow imagination; the unfulfilled, the "scarring misuse and lost possibilities;" the inappropriate, not fit for its purpose or surroundings; and the trivializing and the deceptive, such as "cliché-ridded pastiches" from history. Possibly the most harmful mode of negative aesthetics is the destructive, such as constructions that divide or repress socially.[19]

Approaching aesthetic appeal from a different angle, Yuriko Saito discusses the aesthetics of ambience and atmosphere: how we experience a situation as a whole, appraising its ingredients, such as the blend of tactile, visual, auditory, and somatic elements. According to Saito, sometimes parts fit together to give rise to a satisfying experience, whereas at other times a mismatch is a dissonance, for example, hearing Italian music in a traditional Japanese restaurant. The same element may be satisfying in one setting but dissatisfying in another. A fast food restaurant may fit into an urban landscape but not in natural

scenery. Aesthetics of ambience links to "the sense of place," the recognizable, anticipated, or unique mix of sensations and perceptions. The aesthetics of ambience is also about the appropriateness of elements to the context and situation, such as seasonal decorations.[20]

Saito raises another essential angle to experiencing the environment aesthetically, demonstrated by the Japanese practice of expressing one's sensitivity and considerateness via the sensuous appearance of artifacts and actions, or, how one behaves or makes things to convey one's caring attitude and to give aesthetic joy.[21] Although the Western culture, in general, does not go to similar lengths in sensitive consideration as Japanese culture, this social aesthetic element is crucial in everyone's everyday life. How we behave and show consideration or inconsideration towards others' aesthetic sensibility affects our experience of the world. This is particularly salient where masses congregate, including cities.

3. Environmental preference studies

To examine how cities are viewed in the EEP field, I discuss a range of studies by influential researcher Roger Ulrich and a literature review of twenty EEP studies from other researchers. I aim to provide an overview on a) what has influenced the development of the consensus about cities as less attractive environments than nature; and b) what is the current perception or presentation of cities in this field.

Ulrich has researched the positive effects of nature since the 1970s. His perhaps most famous finding is that viewing nature through a window appears to speed recovery after surgery.[22] Ulrich is interested in the stress-reducing or health-inducing effects of nature as experienced via, for example, posters, windows, pot plants, hospital gardens and virtual imagery.[23] His focus follows his 1979 findings that revealed that stressed individuals feel better after viewing images of nature but sadder and more aggressive after viewing images of urban environment. He surveyed 100 images, half from nature, half from commercial and industrial areas in the US, and commented: "no people or animals were visible in either the nature or urban collections. The absence of people probably increased the pleasantness levels of the urban as well as nature scenes."[24] The study excluded residential and sacred places to avoid potential "emotional bias."

Since Ulrich's 1979 study, a large body of research has emerged corroborating Ulrich's view that built environments are more stress-inducing or less restorative than nature, as summarized by Ana Karinna Hidalgo: "cities aim to provide people with environments that improve their quality of life. However, cities, and specifically streets, produce urban stressors that threaten the ability of people to restore themselves from stress and mental fatigue."[25] The common conclusion in the EEP field is that people do not yet possess evolved capabilities to appreciate or adapt to city life and urban environments, hence we need respite in "our original home," nature.

My literature review that informs this paper consists of ten image-based and ten in-situ studies, listed in Attachment 1.[26] The key findings of the studies can be grouped into four categories: social aspects, greenery, place attachment and multisensory experience, and formal aesthetic features. Overall, I noted several problematic aspects in the reviewed studies. Image-based studies tended to focus on formal qualities, such as colors, forms, and lines; some researchers even enhanced this focus by only supplying monochromatic images to the subjects (Shi et al., 2014).[27] Definitions for 'urban' and 'natural' environments were not consistent. For example, each city study assessed different parts of cities, including plazas, heritage areas, scenic harbors, aerial views, pocket parks, high-traffic corridors, and empty streets, whereas nature images ranged from woodlands to pastoral and parkland sites.

All city images contained vegetation ranging from very little to abundant, some city images contained waterfronts or water features, and all urban environments were affected by nature, at minimum by weather and season.[28] In contrast, nature photos nearly always depicted some human influence, such as walking paths or signs of agriculture. In 1979, Ulrich excluded humans and animals from his images, and this approach is still in use.[29] My literature review was not able to establish whether people and animals were systematically included or

excluded, as it was not consistently addressed in the studies, but exclusion appeared more likely.[30] Below, I discuss the four main themes that emerged in the literature review affecting the environmental aesthetic experience.

3.1. Social aspects

The restorativeness of a place appeared to mostly arise from the experience of fascination (Troffa & Fornara, 2011) that was provided by nature but also by places of social interaction, such as cafés and restaurants (Lorenzo et al., 2016), along with historical or social areas including waterfronts, pedestrian streets, and public squares, in particular where these were combined with urban greenery (Bornioli, 2018). Subjects of low-anxiety personality types experienced hectic urban environments as equally or more restorative than nature (Newman & Brooks, 2014), whereas green spaces depleted in restorative value where they became crowded (Bornioli, 2018).

These findings indicate that fascination and social interaction are interlinked and pertinent to restoration and aesthetic appeal. These findings are poignant, considering the approach to exclude people from studied images. The purpose of the exclusion is to direct attention to the fixed and permanent elements. However, just as nature is by definition organic, our everyday experience of the city is not solely or primarily about the immutable. Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl have argued from the 1960s that vibrant street life is what makes a city, and the current placemaking movement demonstrates how this resonates with today's city planners and communities.[31] It can be argued that images without people present nature as "supposed to be" but cities as "not supposed to be". Cities exist for social interaction, and the eeriness of empty streets is evident in horror entertainment. Films like *28 Days Later* (2001), video games like *Fallout* (series from 1997-), and documentaries about Chernobyl revolve around the thrilling horror of desolation of once-lively places. This fascination may arise from the negative sublime of contemplation of destruction, but the abnormality of abandonment is the cornerstone of the experience.

If cities are not meant to be empty, they are not appreciated if they are over-crowded, either. Hidalgo identified "crowded" and "noisy" as qualities of public space that can cause irritability and other negative effects.[32] But, the experience of a crowd is context-dependent. Being stuck in rush hour and celebrating the New Year's Eve in a crowd are entirely different experiences. People are drawn together for events to share and be influenced by others' emotions. Creating reasons for gatherings is one of the main objectives of urban (re)vitalization.[33] Where is the line between vibrancy and negative crowding? Referring to Saito's aesthetics of ambience and parts forming the whole, this appears culture- and situation-dependent. What parts and what whole do we wish to experience? For example, young people flock in the fashion district of Harajuku, Tokyo, so tightly it is hard to weave through. For the uninitiated, Harajuku is an urban nightmare, but for the teenagers, the more the merrier.[34] In contrast, Bornioli found that crowded green spaces deplete in restorative potential, and this, I suggest, is because it clashes with our expectation about "appropriate," that is, quiet and serene, nature.

3.2. Greenery

Stressed subjects rated nature as more beautiful and restorative than cities or an empty room, but the difference in ratings diminished where subjects were not stressed. Furthermore, the restorative potential depended on compatibility between the environment and subject, such as expectations and personal preferences (van den Berg et al., 2003; Newman & Brooks, 2014; Hartig &Staats, 2006; Berto et al., 2015; Sahlin et al., 2016). In urban greenery, dense yet maintained canopy and shrubbery were the most preferred (Suppakittpaisarn, 2018). City dwellers who had access to greenery and waterfronts were more satisfied with their city than those who lacked them (Yilmaz, 2015), and city dwellers were more willing to accept high-density development if increased tree cover and information about sustainability were also provided (Cheng et al., 2017). However, in selecting urban walking routes, subjects prioritized low speed limit, low traffic volume, and upkeep over greenery (van Cauwenberg et al., 2016).

Although the affinity for greenery was evident in my literature review, none of the studies sought to discuss potential reasons for disliking the lack of greenery beyond any evolution- or biology-based points. Empty parking lots and sandy deserts are scant in greenery and water, yet people travel to see deserts but not parking lots. The over-familiarity of parking lots compared to the rarity of deserts does not explain the difference, because people living in deserts can find them beautiful whereas people living surrounded by parking lots rarely find them beautiful.[35] In a Western context, the usual urban areas that most often lack greenery are for industrial, utility, storage, or high-volume traffic use. The lack of greenery in such a place signals that it is a culturally coded non-place, not meant for anyone's social or aesthetic enjoyment.[36] The usage of such places usually means monotonic, uninteresting design, and the lack of points of fascination, such as detail-richness or presence of other people to observe. I suggest that the lack of aesthetic considerateness is one reason for the lack of aesthetic appeal of non-green areas, discussed further in Section 3.4.

Conversely, too much greenery can be experienced as unpleasant or even threatening, evidenced by the common practice in Western cities to trim, prune, and keep urban vegetation under control for aesthetic and safety reasons.[37] Plenty has been written about how romanticism affected how we see wilderness as a source of recreational and aesthetic pleasure instead of a source of unpredictability and danger.[38] We have a millennia-long history of appreciating scenic, picturesque, and tamed nature.[39] It could even be asked whether urban greenery is a more reliable or appropriate source for aesthetic pleasure than wild nature because manicured greenery rarely has connotations of anything threatening. I suggest that the aesthetic pleasure associated with urban greenery is, at least partially, drawn from the blend or balance of natural and artificial elements: the composition and contrast of the permanent and fixed versus the organic and changeable. I propose that the interplay of nature and urban elements is an essential part of the appeal of good-quality urban areas, as seen in Image 1.

photograph by the author, Perth, Australia

3.3. Place attachment and multisensory experience

Restoration appears to arise from place attachment and positive memories, connotations, and knowledge of the place (Maulan et al., 2006; Vidal et al., 2012). For example, favorite places of young adults, from most to least mentioned, were a private home, restaurant/city center, nature, and a sports facility, because favorite place supports the sense of identity as well as attention-recovery (Korpela, 1991). Urban landscape preferences were influenced by personal feelings, knowledge, memories, and multisensory experience of that place; urban places that provided interaction between people and place and contained signs of history and traditions were perceived as aesthetically attractive (Ginzarly & Teller, 2018).

In in-situ studies, people find positive qualities, including aesthetic appeal and restorativeness, in socially active, historically meaningful or sensory-rich urban environments, whereas in image-based studies, nature nearly always outranks urban environments.[40] This appears to reflect the research position and viewing convention, criticized by Carlson and Berleant, where images of landscapes are looked at as art or in expectation of scenic or picturesque content. I suggest that because of this convention we are more accustomed to viewing nature as scenic images—landscape art, postcards, holiday photos —than urban locations, which are not all scenic yet may offer other positive aesthetic qualities, such as sounds, scents, and ambience when experienced in-situ. Agreeing with Berleant, I suggest that the discrepancy between the results of image-based and in-situ studies stems from the fact that viewing an image and attending to a multisensory, spatial, temporal location are different experiences, and it is misguided not to critically consider the importance of embodiment in the EEP studies.

The image-based method is not the only study method in the EEP field. Are image-based studies problematic, if other methods, such as in-situ studies or data cross-mapping, produce similar results? Here we must consider whether different methods accumulate causal or merely parallel information. For example, cross-mapping crime statistics and percentage of greenery in a city may not indicate the restorative effect of nature but the fact that poor or socially problematic areas tend to receive less attention and funding for good-quality green spaces. To illustrate, in images 2 and 3 the quantity of greenery is approximately the same, that is, on a map their greenery statistics would be nearly identical, yet the aesthetic experience differs based on the architecture and street layout. Each study method's strengths and weaknesses should be critically assessed and the results carefully examined for whether they support other studies' findings or merely correlate, without causation.

photographs by the author, Perth, Australia

3.4. Formal aesthetic features

Plenty of interest in the EEP field is directed to formalistic questions, such as identifying preferred shapes, lines, and colors. For example, subjects preferred stylistically unified streetscapes even if they preferred other architectural styles in individual locations (Stamps III, 1994); city dwellers preferred open urban spaces with pathways, visual connection to adjacent spaces, and clear and navigable spatial structure (Shi et al., 2014); a barren, chaotic, monotonous and ugly highway corridor was perceived to visually improve with planted trees (Alabi &Oriola, 2014); pollution, population density, traffic, and lack of greenery were experienced as stressful (Yilmaz, 2015); and the most appreciated green elements were manicured, well-kept, or picturesque over untouched nature (Khew et al., 2014).

The positive aesthetic qualities were identified as unified, manicured, well-kept, picturesque, and navigable, and negative qualities were crowded, chaotic, barren, monotonic, and ugly. Undoubtedly, as discussed by Berleant, cities harbor negative aesthetics, including visual chaos, sensory overload, or utterly bland places. The negativity associated with cities does not appear to simplistically arise from the lack of natural elements because the subjects appreciated manicured, urban greenery over untouched nature. Rather, as Berleant argues, we tend to dislike places that restrict our imagination, aesthetic enjoyment, exploration, and expansion.[41] I suggest that places we usually perceive as unattractive are meant primarily for machines or economic efficiency, such as motorways, utility, storage, and bulk commercial areas, rather than for people's social, cultural, or aesthetic enjoyment, and the purpose and interlinked appearance of such places limits the positive "expansive" experiences discussed by Berleant.

A similar point is found in Saito's discussion about aesthetic considerateness. Saito argues that the appearance of a thing communicates our intentions, that is, how much we care about others' aesthetic sensibility. For example, in Image 4, a building on the right appears a monotonous bulk product, whereas the building on the left appears hand-crafted, hence more aesthetically considerate. I suggest that the places Berleant calls "restrictive" and Saito calls aesthetically inconsiderate are experienced as unattractive because they do not convey positive, if any, consideration for aesthetic sensibility. This does not mean such places cannot be made aesthetically considerate. In Australia, a mass-scale mall revitalization wave is underway, usually including a facelift with art, design, and greenery; and Mexico City is becoming renowned for its initiative for vertical gardens, plants covering bland concrete highway structures.[42]

photograph by the author, Perth, Australia

4. City as an aesthetic problem

Place attachment, positive memories and connotations, and multisensory experience significantly influence environmental preference, and image-based surveys tend to lead to landscapes being assessed as artworks, whereas in-situ methods capture also other aesthetic and restorative qualities (Maulan et al., 2006, and Vidal et al., 2012). Likewise, my literature review identified that subjects appeared to treat image-based studies as assessments of scenic or picturesque qualities of images. It is conceivable that the long-held convention of looking at landscapes as art gears subjects to seek scenic qualities in images of nature, whereas other aesthetic qualities, including scents, sounds, and ambience, may be more pertinent in urban environments than scenic appeal. In light of this, we need to question the apparent findings of EEP field that city poses an aesthetic problem because it contains more negative than positive aesthetics.

Cities indisputably can cause sensory overload or deprivation. Ulrich discovered that subjects found industrial and commercial environments, mainly parking lots and strip malls, aesthetically unappealing. Berleant argues that certain commercial environments are aesthetically offensive and ugly because of the incoherence, gaudy signage, banality, kitsch, and engineered anxieties and discomfort arising from overbearing sensations.[43] Nevertheless, it needs to be recognized that cities offer aplenty to experience positively. Many architects and experts of aesthetics seem to find malls vulgar and unattractive, whereas consumers seem to enjoy the social and aesthetic experience they can offer.[44] Is this a question of taste or development of taste? I suggest it is more about perspective. Anna Kortelainen has discussed how department stores in the 1800s were the first public spaces designed for and freely accessible to women:

> Women took the city in a rebellious way when they rushed into the department store without chaperones and could stroll around, experiencing sensuous pleasures… At the other side of the counter were the saleswomen, the "queens of the working class"… Department store still is a women's world, a sanctuary in a hostile city space… Department store holds promises about self-actualization and sensuous femininity, forbidden passions and even crime, but first and foremost about women's culture, unwritten history of women.[45]

Commercial spaces highlight the artificial division between interiors and exteriors of a city when in reality they are intertwined and porous. When experts of architecture assess public space, they often focus on the external such as the façade and streetscapes, whereas the everyday experience of the city is about both, indoors and outdoors. Cities are a constellation of buildings of different services. The overall aesthetic experience about urban environment does not switch on and off when we enter or exit buildings. Shops, restaurants, and cafes entice us precisely with the promise of sensuous pleasures, aesthetic appeal, and

the relationship we can have with these places. Focusing on facades and exteriors does not tell the whole story of experiencing a city.

Currently, EEP studies concentrate on the healing power of nature. This is important but unnecessarily dichotomizing; nature as gardens and parks has been a building block of cities for millennia.[46] During the past two centuries, the interest in urban greenery has peaked. The tree-lined boulevards of Paris, since their establishment in 1853, became imitated by other cities. The first urban parks in the US, "pleasure grounds" for the wealthy, emerged in 1850. From 1900 onwards, many cities built "reform parks", healthy outdoors for the working class. Since the 1930s, parks and sporting ovals have become essential recreational facilities. The goal of urban greenery has been, from the beginning, to reform and improve city and its residents. For example Joseph Strutt, the creator of the first public park in the UK, the Arboretum, in 1840, expected it to deliver "social improvements, develop the working class' moral conduct… and enhance their industriousness."[47] The need to bring nature to cities speaks of the long-standing tendency to dichotomize nature and built environment, seeing the former as positive and the latter as negative, when it is more accurate to think of nature and city as parallel, intertwined, and complementary.

The still-held idea of positive nature versus negative cities partly arises from the EEP studies suggesting that subjects tend to become mentally and physically restored in nature faster or more fully than in urban settings, or, conversely, urban settings appear to cause various negative effects, including stress. However, this polarization is problematic because nature and cities exist for a "different purpose" in our mind. Nature is ‘'meant to" be serene and without people, whereas cities are "meant to" be vibrant, with people. Comparing a place we understand to be for recreation, exercise, or introspection to a place of social interactions, rules, and burdens may be a false equivalent to start with. My literature review identified that stressed individuals found nature more beautiful and restorative than urban environment, whereas for the less stressed, this correlation became statistically unclear.[48] This indicates that aesthetic appeal links to the inner state of the subject. We are not always stressed; for example, on a city holiday it appears quite possible to enjoy the urban aesthetics.

In 1979, Ulrich focused on commercial and industrial areas as a representation of "city," whereas my literature review found that "city" can mean very different parts of it. My concern is that studies about cities may be biased if we understand places of utilitarian, bulk commercial, vehicular, or storage purposes as more quintessentially urban than places where aesthetic considerations are more pronounced or positive, such as sacred or heritage areas, pedestrian streets, or upmarket shopping areas. There are also other issues that are currently not discussed in the EEP field. For example, can a city heal us from nature in some instances, as when we seek shelter from miserable weather or dark and cold winter season? Do rural and urban residents see cities in a different aesthetic light, and how does that light change, depending on subjective circumstances, such as mental and emotional state, expectations, and so on?

Based on my review, I suggest that cities are perceptually rich environs with a wide scale of positive and negative aesthetics. Reducing an environment to a two-dimensional static image appears to disproportionally disadvantage cities because of the convention of viewing nature as art or scenic imagery, whereas the positive experience of cities appears to largely arise from multisensory aesthetic experience and place attachment, including memories, sense of history, and social connections. Another angle that disadvantages cities is the EEP field's search for restorative environments, focusing on recreation at the expense of other areas in life. Cities are experienced in a multitude of other positive ways, such as thrilling, explorative, productive, and even ironic, through work/study/services. For example, a social media group, "Perth aesthetics", in Australia has 6,300 members whose daily online photos of Perth, often induced with nostalgia and humor, explore the aesthetics of ugliness, such as the gaudy signage or bland or incoherent strip malls criticized by Berleant.[49]

5. Concluding comments

Is it accurate to say that cities are less aesthetically appealing or less restorative than nature? My review indicates the answer depends upon a number of variables. Image-based and in-situ studies appear to generate different, even

conflicting, results, questioning the usability of image-based methods in studying multisensory, temporal, and spatial experience. Focusing on biology- or evolution-based explanations for environmental preference flattens the aesthetics of cities.

It is conceivable that some universal environmental preferences can exist, given our shared biological needs. But considering an example of eating reveals how nuanced our responses to biological needs can be. We all must eat, but what one considers the best form of nutrition depends significantly on personal, cultural, socio-economic, and aesthetic reasons. For example, eating insects may be natural to one person but utterly repulsive to another. Diets are an area, like the EEP field, where discussion revolves around the most natural or beneficial choices. Yet, diet choices such as the "natural" paleo diet are far from settled and hotly debated among experts and laypeople.[50]

I do not dispute the importance of urban greenery but wish to point out that if nature's benefits and cities' harms are taken as a juxtaposition, this may result in unintended consequences: 1) negative labelling of cities may lead to urban sprawl and rejecting higher-density planning, with negative impacts on nature; 2) reliance on biology- and evolution-based explanations renders our responses to different environments largely automatic, leaving little space for discussion on any other viewpoints; and 3) if we categorically understand nature beneficial and cities harmful, we are less inclined to analyze qualitative differences between different kinds of nature and urban environments.[51] Such consequences are sure to mislead and impoverish the otherwise rich and diverse experiences of urban environments.[52]

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End Notes

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[1] For architecture and placemaking, see Maria Popczyk, "The aesthetics of the city-image," *Argument Biannual Philosophical Journal*, (2015), Vol 5, No 2, https://philarchive.org/archive/POPTAO-5, and Project for Public Spaces, "What is Placemaking," https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking. For sociology, see Michael Borer, "Being in the City: The Sociology of Urban Experiences," *Sociology Compass*, (2013), Vol. 7, Issue 11. For consumer studies, see Rob Shields (ed.), *Lifestyle Shopping. The Subject of Consumption*, (Routledge, e-book, 2004). For everyday and environmental aesthetics, see Yuriko Saito, "Aesthetics of the Everyday," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/aesthetics-of-everyday, and Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*. *Toward an Aesthetic of Environment* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1997), pp. 64-81.

[2] Roger Ulrich et al., "Stress Recovery During Exposure to Natural and Urban Environments," *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol 11, Abstract: "120 subjects first viewed a stressful movie, and then were exposed to color/sound videotapes of one of six different natural and urban settings. Data concerning stress recovery during the environmental presentations were obtained from self-ratings of affective states and… physiological measures: heart period, muscle tension, skin conductance and pulse transit time."

[3] For example, a typical method is to cross-map statistics between crime rates or health records and green spaces in cities.

[4] Urban green spaces and health," WHO, (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016), http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/321971/Urban-green-spaces-and-health-review-evidence.pdf?ua=1. I note that Arnold Berleant, Allen Carlson, and Pauline von Bonsdorff, among others, have discussed how nature is difficult to define, because untouched environments hardly exist and cities are always subject to and affect nature's processes, including weather and seasons, and are built of materials extracted from nature. See, for example, Berleant & Carlson (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Human Environment* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007). For succinct expression and following the convention in the EEP field, in this paper 'nature' means green vegetation and water elements unless otherwise expressed.

[5] Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Bjørn Grinde & Grete Grindal Patil, "Biophilia: Does Visual Contact with Nature Impact on Health and Well-Being?" *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2009), Vol 6, No 9, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2760412/; and Stephen Kellert and Edward O. Wilson (ed.), *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993).

[6] Leo Benedictus, "Sick cities: why urban living can be bad for your mental health,"*The Guardian*, 25 February 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/feb/25/city-stress-mental-health-rural-kind

[7] This argument is not new. For example, Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement (1898) aimed at creating safer, healthier and 'less sinful' environments in nature-surrounded towns.

[8] WHO (2016).

[9] Roger Ulrich has studied the effects of nature in stress reduction since the 1970s. A list of his studies is available at ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger_Ulrich4/publications.

[10] ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents), "City breaks continued to be the nation's [the UK] favorite holiday type in 2017, with over half the population having taken one," *ABTA Travel Trends Report 2018*, 4, https://abta.com/assets/uploads/general/ABTA_Travel_Trends_Report_2018.pdf; and Michael Collyer, "The world's urban population is growing – so how can cities plan for migrants?" *The Conversation*, 2 November 2015, https://theconversation.com/the-worlds-urban-population-is-growing-so-how-can-cities-plan-for-migrants-49931

[11] Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/environmental-aesthetics/, section 3.2.

[12] Allen Carlson, Formal Qualities in the Natural Environment," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* (1979), Vol 13, No 3, 100-106; and Berleant (1997), pp. 12-15.

[13] Marta Tafalla, "From Allen Carlson to Richard Long: The Art-Based Appreciation of Nature," *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, 2010, Vol 2, pp. 491-504; and Ira Newman, "Reflections on Allen Carlson's Aesthetics and the Environment," *Canadian Aesthetics Journal*, 2001, Vol 6, https://www.uqtr.ca/AE/Vol_6/Carlson/newman.html

[14] Carlson (1979), pp. 100-106.

[15] Carlson (2016), section 4.2; and Kellert & Wilson (1993).

[16] Carlson (1979), pp. 106.

[17] Berleant (1997), pp. 12-15.

[18] Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense* (Imprint Academic, 2010), p. 29.

[19] Berleant (1997), pp. 64-74.

[20] Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 119-124.

[21] Saito (2013), pp. 234-238.

[22] Roger Ulrich, "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery" (1984), *Science*, 224(4647), pp. 420-421.

[23] For example, "Sensation seeking and reactions to nature settings"(1993) (a study about reactions to nature paintings); "Stress Recovery During Exposure to Natural and Urban Environments" (1991) (a study about reactions to videos containing nature or urban landscapes); "Effects of exposure to nature and abstract pictures on patients recovery from heart surgery" (1993); "The View from the Road: Implications for Stress Recovery and Immunization" (1998); "Artificial window view of nature" (2005); and "Anger and Stress The Role of Landscape Posters in an Office Setting" (2008). Available at ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roger_Ulrich4.

[24] Roger Ulrich, "Visual landscapes and psychological wellbeing," *Landscape Research* (1979), Vol 4, No 1, 17-23, quote p. 17.

[25] Ana Karinna Hidalgo, "Biophilic Design, Restorative Environments and Well-Being," *Proceedings of the Colors of Care: The 9th International Conference on Design & Emotion* (Bogotá: Ediciones Favourite Uniandes, 2014, ed. J. Salamanca et al.).

[26] In-situ studies include interviews within or following a visit to the subject environment, mixed-method studies, and literature reviews that contain in-situ studies. Image-based studies comprise studies where subjects viewed photos or videos of pre-selected places. Studies were sourced in July 2018 via ReseachGate.

[27] The studies included in the literature review are listed in Attachment 1. References in brackets in this paper refer to the listed studies.

[28] Throughout their work, Yuriko Saito and Pauline von Bonsdorff have discussed the aging of materials and changes of seasons as salient aspects of aesthetic experience of built environment.

[29] For example, Dmitri Karmanov & Ronald Hamel, "Assessing the restorative potential of contemporary urban environment(s): Beyond the nature versus urban dichotomy," *Landscape and Urban Planning* (2008), No 86, p. 118: 'By filming early in the morning we managed to eliminate practically all visible human activity. … the presence of cars or people at both the urban and natural locations might adversely influence the perceived qualities of the environments.'

[30] Typically, less than a dozen photos were provided in each research paper out of forty to fifty studied images; and in the case of video viewings, only a few still-captures were provided.

[31] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (US: Vintage Books, 1961/1992). Jan Gehl has spoken extensively on this topic since the 1970s, see for example *Life Between Buildings* (Denmark: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1980/1987).

Project for Public Places (PPS), https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat, accessed September 12, 2018. "PPS has found that [for a public place] to be successful, they generally share the following four qualities: they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the space is comfortable and has a good image; and finally, it is a sociable place." PPS is a non-profit, US organization but promotes placemaking internationally.

[32] Hidalgo (2014), p. 541.

[33] Project for Public Places, *Ten Strategies for Transforming Cities and Public Spaces Through Placemaking*, 29 April 2014, https://www.pps.org/article/ten-strategies-for-transforming-cities-through-placemaking-public-spaces, accessed 12 September 2018.

[34] Kazuaki Nagata, "Trendy Harajuku draws crowds," *Japan Times*, 1 February 2011. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2011/02/01/reference/trendy-harajuku-draws-crowds/#.W-EB1ZMzY2w

[35] In practice, separating nature and urban environments is impossible, as cities are situated in and a part of nature's processes and elements. It can be argued that deserts, unlike parking lots, are also natural and hence, aesthetically appealing. However, here I discuss 'nature' as greenery and water, as is common in the EEP field.

[36] Examples of urban sites that draw visitors but lack greenery are for example urban ruins; however, in my view this fascination arises from the thrill of horror, abnormality of abandonment, discussed in section 3.1.

[37] Western cities commonly have policies for the acceptable vegetation height and density, in particular, near vehicular and pedestrian roads. People tend to find screened places threatening, fearing someone is hiding behind the screening. Nasar &Jones, "Landscapes of Fear and Stress," *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol 29, No 3, pp. 291-323.

[38] Roger Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (US: Yale University Press, 1967/2014).

[39] For example, Virgil's *Eclogues* (44-38 BCE), poems about Roman pastoral landscapes; I thank Pauline von Bonsdorff for this notion. Later, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525/1530 - 1569) set the example for painting town scenes with pastoral surroundings.

[40] Meaning signs of the past, such as heritage areas, and personal history and memories.

[41] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 86, 93-98.

[42] Dean Blake, "Roselands' $90m facelift sees 70 new retailers," *Franchise Business*, 27 August 2018, http://www.franchisebusiness.com.au/news/roselands-$90m-facelift-sees-70-new-retailers; and "Mexico City raises green awareness with vertical gardens," Reuters, 15 August 2016, https://www.reuters.com/video/2016/08/15/mexico-city-raises-green-awareness-with?videoId=369577981. I note that both examples contain green elements – my intention is not to dispute the aesthetic appeal of greenery, but to draw attention to also other important environmental aesthetic qualities.

[43] Berleant (1997), pp. 66-67.

[44] Florian Heilmeyer, "Architects in commercial estates," *The Style Guide*, 26 June 2017, https://www.stylepark.com/en/news/architecture-commercial-zone-supermarket-mcdonalds-burger-restaurant-electronics-consumer-culture; and Katherine Schwab, "Architects' Long, Love/Hate Relationship With The Mall," *The Fast Company*, 30 September 2016, https://www.fastcompany.com/3064173/architects-long-love-hate-relationship-with-the-mall. See also Rob Shields, (2004), 3-4.

[45] Anna Kortelainen, *Päivä naisten paratiisissa*, (Finland: WSOY, 2005), Introduction, my translation.

[46] Ram Bachan Singh, "Cities and parks in ancient India," *Ekistics* (1976), Vol. 42, No. 253, pp. 372-376; Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, "Greek and Roman Gardens," *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2 April 2015, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0134.xml

[47] L. Peter MacDonagh, "History of Street Trees in Paris: The Golden Age of the Boulevard," Smart Cities Dive, (undated),https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/history-street-trees-pariscity-making-and-golden-age-boulevard/149376/; Galen Cranz, "Urban Parks of the Past and Future," Project for Public Spaces, 31 December 2008, https://www.pps.org/article/futureparks; and Dean Kirby, "Derby Arboretum: How Britain's first public park inspired open spaces around the

world," *The Independent*, 30 August 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/derby-arboretum-how-britains-first-public-park-inspired-open-spaces-around-the-world-10478207.html

[48] Agnes van den Berg et al, "Environmental preference and restoration: (How) are they related?" *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2003), Vol 23, p.143.

[49] 'Perth aesthetics' site on Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/groups/145648992726100/

[50] Sandy Smith, "Nutritionists warn of dangers in Paleo dieting," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 2014, https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/nutritionists-warn-of-dangers-in-paleo-dieting-20140805-100iup.html

[51] Criticism towards urban or high-density environments has a long history. For example, Steven Conn has researched the deep-seated anti-urbanism in the US in *Americans Against the City. Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century*, (US: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[52] I thank the peer reviewers for their insightful comments that I have incorporated into this paper.

Study method: in-situ, mixed method or literature review			
By	**Title**	**Published**	**Summary of results**
Berto, Rita et al.	How does Psychological Restoration Work in Children? An Exploratory Study	Journal of Child & Adolescent Behaviour, (2015) Vol 3, No 3	Of three options, alpine woods was the most preferred environment, followed by mindful silence (in unspecified physical location) and school playground (the everyday recess environment).
Cheng, Chingwen et al.	Exploring Stakeholders' Perceptions of Urban Growth Scenarios for Metropolitan Boston (USA): The Relationship Between Urban Trees and Perceived Density	Cities and the Environment (CATE), (2017) Vol. 10, Issue 1, Article 7	A mixed method study consisting of workshops, group interviews and photo survey found that the increase in tree canopy appears to ameliorate the low ratings of high-rise buildings in urban development; and the use of participatory planning process where stakeholders are provided with information on sustainability is more likely to produce amenable attitude towards higher density.
Hartig, Terry & Staats, Henk	Linking preference for environments with their restorative quality	Chapter 19, Landscape Planning: Aspects of Integration, Education and Application, (ed. Bärbel Tress et al), (Netherlands: Springer, 2006)	Following a stressful experience, subjects had a more positive attitude towards walking one hour in a forest compared to walking in a familiar city centre; the effect is stronger in more fatigued subjects.
Korpela, Kalevi	Are Favourite Places Restorative Environments?	Healthy Environments EDRA 22:1991, 371-381	Finnish students' (17-18yr) favourite places were in order from most to least popular: private home, restaurant/ downtown, nature, sports facility, club, and other; favourite place assists in self-coherence and sense of identity, not only attention-recovery
Lorenzo, Esther et al.	Preference, restorativeness and perceived environmental quality of small urban spaces	Psyecology: Revista Bilingüe de Psicología Ambiental / Bilingual Journal of Environmental Psychology, (2016) Vol 7, No 2, 152–177	Restorative effect is chiefly explained by the combination of perceived amount of vegetation and social interaction (eg places to eat and drink). Place attachment may also play a role.
Maulan, Suhardi et al.	Landscape Preference and Human Well-Being	Sustainable Tropical Design Research & Practice, (2006) Vol 1, Issue 1, 25-32	A literature review found that objective study methods lead to landscapes being assessed as artwork, whereas subjective study methods acknowledge the many factors that influence landscape preference, including culture and personal attributes such as personal needs and knowledge about the landscape.

Study method: in-situ, mixed method or literature review			
By	**Title**	**Published**	**Summary of results**
Sahlin, Eva et al.	The Influence of the Environment on Directed Attention, Blood Pressure and Heart Rate—An Experimental Study Using a Relaxation	Intervention Landscape Research, (2016) Vol 41, No 1, 7-25	Subjects who rested in nature became more restored (regained their ability to focus) but not more relaxed than subjects who rested inside a stimulus-bare room. No physiological differences (heart rate, blood pressure) in subjects were identified between different rest locations.
Troffa, Renato & Fornara, Ferdinando	The relationship between restorative components and environmental preference in natural and built leisure environments.	Espacios urbanos y sostenibilidad: claves para la ciencia y la gestión ambiental, (Editorial Universidad de Almería, 2011), 231-237	The most salient feature for restorativeness was fascination, equally present in a historical downtown centre, a panoramic urban waterfront promenade and an urban park; and less in an urban mall.
Vidal, Tomeu et al.	Place identity as a useful psychological construct for approaching modern social challenges and new people-environment relations: residential mobility, restorative environments, and landscape	The Role of Place Identity in the Perception, Understanding, and Design of Built Environments, (ed. H. Casakin & F. Bernardo) (E-book: Bentham Books, 2012) 78-91.	A literature review found that place identity and place attachment play significant part in restorative experience and diverse landscapes and historic urban areas can be sources of restoration.
Yilmaz, Hasan et al.	Urban Living Area Satisfaction and Public Preference	Journal of Kastamonu University, Foresty Faculty (2015), Vol 15, No 2, 319-329	A survey found that respondents in two cities out of three in Turkey were relatively satisfied with their urban living environment (~60% were satisfied). Respondents preferred waterfronts (ocean, lakeside, riverbanks); residential areas over city centres; and green areas over city centres to escape urban stress such as urbanisation, lack of greenery, pollution, population density, traffic and psychological stress. The city that received lowest satisfaction rating has geographical obstacles for development and does not provide many parks, squares, pedestrian streets or public space for social use opportunities.

Study method: image- or video-based			
By	**Title**	**Published**	**Summary of results**
Alabi, M. & Oriola, E.	Analysis of image differences of roadside corridor and landscape preference in an emerging city in Nigeria	Ethiopian Journal of Environmental Studies & Management (2017) Vol 10, No 2, 192-207	Subjects indicated that a barren, chaotic, monotonous or ugly highway corridor can be visually improved by planting trees, which also reduce carbon emissions.
Berg, Agnes van den et al.	Environmental preference and restoration: (How) are they related?	Journal of Environmental Psychology, (2003) Vol 23, 135-146	When compared, natural environments were rated higher in beauty and restorativeness than urban environments. In particular stressed subjects rated nature more beautiful and more restorative than city views; with less stressed subjects, the difference in ratings was statistically unclear.
Bornioli, Anna	The influence of city centre environments on the affective walking experience	PhD thesis, University of the West of England (February 2018)	In an urban environment, pedestrianised settings with green and historic elements scored as the most restorative, followed by harborside places. Green spaces appear to deplete in restorative value the more crowded they become.
Cauwenberg, Jelle van et al.	Street characteristics preferred for transportation walking among older adults: a choice-based conjoint analysis with manipulated photographs	International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2016) Vol 13, No 6	In selecting an urban walking route, older subjects ranked their preferred conditions from highest to lowest: an even surface, low traffic volume, general upkeep, speed limit, separation from traffic, vegetation present, bench present.
Ginzarly, Manal & Teller, Jacques	Eliciting cultural heritage values: landscape preferences versus representative images of the city	Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development, February 2018	Urban landscape preference is related to personal engagement and context, including feelings, knowledge, memories and all the senses. Those places in Lebanon were preferred that show interaction between people and place, including history.
Khew, Joanne Yu Ting et al.	Public Perceptions of Nature and Landscape Preference in Singapore	Human Ecology An Interdisciplinary Journal (2014) Vol 42 No 6	In urban settings, landscape preferences tended towards manicured landscapes (parks, gardens) rather than naturalistic landscapes: scenic or picturesque landscape was most preferred.
Newman, Kevin & Brooks, Merrie	When are natural and urban environments restorative? The impact of environmental compatibility on self-control restoration	Journal of Consumer Psychology, 29 June 2014	The restorative effect of environment depends on the level of compatibility between the subject and the environment. Subjects low on neuroticism (tendency for anxiety) can experience hectic urban environments as more restorative than nature. [Note: this study was based on verbal descriptions and cues about places].

Shi, Shulin et al.	How does enclosure influence environmental preferences? A cognitive study on urban public open spaces in Hong Kong	Sustainable Cities and Society, (2014) Vol 13, 148-156	Subjects from Hong Kong tended to prefer open rather than enclosed spaces: paths, visual connection to adjacent spaces and clear and simple spatial structure of enclosure seemed to influence subjects' preference for such spaces. [Note: original pictures were decolorised to direct focus on spatiality].
Stamps, Arthur E. III	A Study in Scale and Character: Contextual Effects on Environmental Preferences	Journal of Environmental Management, (1994) Vol 42, 223-245	Subjects in the US preferred unified blocks of buildings (streets built according to similar parameters of building height, architectural style and attributes) over 'mixed' blocks, even if subjects preferred a different building style in individual settings.
Suppakittpaisarn, Pongsakorn et al.	Does density of green infrastructure predict preference?	Urban Forestry and Urban Greening, 2 March 2018	In urban conditions, subjects preferred maintained, dense tree canopy cover and maintained, dense understory vegetation (lawn and shrubbery) over low density vegetation; however, preference for bioretention (water runoff catchment fields) was unclear.

IV

BUILDING A PARADISE?
ON THE QUEST FOR THE OPTIMAL HUMAN HABITAT

by

Anu Besson, October 2017

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Building a Paradise? On the Quest for the Optimal Human Habitat

Anu Besson

Abstract
Do humans have a natural habitat? If yes, is it the original habitat of early hominids or the most optimal environment for today's humans? Are these two the same thing and, if not, what does 'optimal habitat' mean? I examine the concept of the optimal habitat from four viewpoints: 1) paradise; 2) urban design based on environmental psychology; 3) favorite places; and 4) environment as an invitation for action. I conclude that an optimal habitat is not a collection of more or less fixed elements but an environment that can be experienced as a beneficial feedback loop based on and responding to cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and other needs. Different environments can prompt or hinder this experience of optimal habitat and consequently improve or diminish subjective well-being.

Key Words

environmental aesthetics; environmental psychology; optimal human habitat; paradise

1. Introduction

Some scientists have proposed that humans, like other animals, prefer certain surroundings because they serve the species' instinctive needs, making that environment the species' natural habitat.[1] As a starting point, I have taken two concepts, paradise and the ancestral habitat where hominids evolved to examine whether they can offer insights to what might be the best environment for people to thrive in. Paradise is a long-standing, widely shared cultural concept of the ideal environment, and evolution psychologists have proposed the birthplace of the early hominids to be the most suitable environment for humans.[2]

My key question is, is it meaningful to say that the first environment of early hominids and the best-suited environment for today's humans are the same or similar thing? Instead of technical-economic or socio-political analysis, this article focuses on positive and negative valence: What kind of environment(s) people tend to like and dislike?[3] My method is a comparative and cross-polluting reading of texts in environmental psychology; biophilic design, that is, nature-based architecture and urban design; favorite place studies; and humanities like aesthetics, cultural geography, and history. I examine the following angles:

- Paradise as a culturally shared, ideal environment;
- Biophilic design: planning and building physically and psychologically beneficial or, at minimum, the least harmful environment;
- Favorite places as a means for self-regulation, like recovery from stress or low mood; and
- Environment as an invitation for action.

The term 'human habitat' is borrowed from Arnold Berleant, to whom it means a humane habitat, that is, an environment where people live, work, and socialize thrivingly.[4],[5] By the optimal habitat, I mean Berleant's human habitat, but I add the qualifier to distinguish from

those environments that people inhabit but do not thrive in; in ecology, a habitat is simply the residing area of an organism, not the best possible one. Paradise refers to a long-standing mythical-cultural concept of an environment that offers bliss, ease, and perfection; a place of ultimate harmony and lack of need. Aesthetic, in this paper, means a sensuous quality that is contemplated and valued from the pleasure and/or fascination it evokes.

2. Background

Children giggle and dogs bark, playing on perfectly green lawns. Adults lounge next to a pond, chatting lively. All ethnicities socialize under the golden sun or seek shade below the tall eucalyptus trees. The ambience is mellow, harmonious, inclusive: a Sunday afternoon in Kings Park, Perth, Western Australia. One word comes to mind: paradise. In today's parlance, paradise is usually understood as a lush and beautiful place of leisure and enjoyment, perhaps rare and longed-for, such as a holiday destination, spa, or tropical island.[6] It is conceivable that paradise represents the idealized environment for humans. Who would not dream of ease, joy, and harmony, lack of need and discord, and eternal sunshine?

3. Theory

3.1. What is paradise?

The word 'paradise' originates from the Persian apiri-Daeza, a walled orchard or garden. The earliest written records of the term date back 5,000 years to Sumerian culture.[7] Jean Delumeau has shown that, for centuries in Europe, paradise almost exclusively meant the Garden of Eden, treated in the Jewish and Christian traditions as a real, hidden, or lost place.[8] Also, ancient Persian and Mesopotamian cultures had a concept of paradise garden, and Greco-Roman culture envisioned Elysium and Happy Isles that later on merged with the Christian view about heaven.[9] Virtually all mythologies and religions recognize a primordial paradise, with the common denominators of lack of suffering and need, and prevalence of abundance and enjoyment.[10] Because life has never been perfect for the masses, the longed-for perfection often takes place in the otherworld, such as the dwelling of god(s) or the afterlife. Depending on cultural, geographical and other reasons, people have conceived different places or states of perfect life. For Vikings, the afterlife was a battleground with festivities; whereas for Christians, the afterlife appears to mean blissful communion with the divine.[11]

The Dutch sixteenth-to-seventeenth-century artist Jan Brueghel the Elder is perhaps one of the most renowned depicters of paradise as it appears in the Western imagination today. His paintings portray lush, semi-open landscapes, with short and long vistas, water framed by trees, and flowering, fruit-bearing plants. Biblical characters and various animals populate the landscape depicting harmonious leisure.

Brueghel's paradise was Eden at the perfect end moment of creation. His style became popular in the seventeenth century, perhaps still influencing Western views about what a paradise looks like.[12] But could such perfection ever exist? At first, the question seems nebulous, if not impossible. Whose views count, when a paradise is described or created? Different eras, cultures, and individuals hold different preferences. Yet, throughout history, the optimal human habitat has been a subject of not just contemplation but serious attempts to create it, by philosophers, idealists, and technical professionals.[13]

Attempts to build the perfect environment, a paradise of a kind, have been undertaken in many forms, for example, by aspiring towards utopia.[14] Utopia, an impossibly perfect ideal society, usually encompasses the ideal environment, which is seen as the enabling framework for the ideal activities or a reflection of those.[15] It can be argued that all planning aspiring towards a better city is to some extent utopic; perfection is unattainable, because each new generation finds new problems and suggests new solutions. The essential elements and qualities for the most optimal habitat have been conceived differently throughout history. For instance, for modernists like Le Corbusier, the essentials were sunlight, green lawns, motorways, and a quick access to the separate areas of a sectored city, whereas for today's placemakers, the essentials comprise a village-like, densely built, pedestrianized and green community that invites residents to interact and co-create.[16], [17]

Utopia is fundamentally elusive, always somewhere further ahead.[18] If the failed attempts to build utopia are understood as failed attempts to create paradise, is it possible to ever build a real version of the mythical perfection? In my view, the most important part of the question is, is a place of perfection the optimal environment? Optimal should not be understood only in positive terms of satisfaction, enjoyment, and ease. Landscape architect Jacky Bowring has raised the importance of places of sadness, reflection, and melancholy. Different environments can contribute to our well-being by offering an access to a full range of experiences, including negative, to help us feel whole.[19] Also, it must be acknowledged that the thrill of drama, danger, and dereliction appeal to many and are one draw-in factor to urban life.[20] 'Perfect' cannot thus mean only one color in the spectrum of experiences.

3.2. Longing for ancestral home

It has been proposed that the natural habitat for humans is the environment where the first hominids apparently evolved, the savanna.[21] Gordon Orians and Judith Heerwagen stated in their savanna hypothesis that our evolutionary, instinctive landscape preferences include open areas of low grasses with some bushes and trees; water nearby; opening to at least one direction, with vantage to horizon;

evidence of animal life; and greenery, including flowering and fruiting plants.[22] The savanna hypothesis has been empirically tested a number of times, for example, on eight-year-old children, and results cautiously support the theory. But, the hypothesis has also been contested as lacking in cultural depth. Children may be conditioned to prefer savanna-like environments because similar elements are often found in parks and playgrounds, not vice versa.[23]

A current urban design stream that subscribes to the natural habitat theory, at least in principle, that is, that humans feel most at home surrounded by nature, is called biophilic design.[24] The term for innate affinity with living things originates from biologist Edward O. Wilson's book, Biophilia (1984), and it has been actively promoted by his collaborator, architect Stephen Kellert. Kellert, with his later co-authors drawing from the work of well-known environmental psychologists, such as Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, Roger Ulrich, Terry Hartig, and so on, whose research on the restorative and healing effects of nature became renowned in the 1980s to 1990s. Ulrich found that patients recover faster if they can experience nature, and Hartig has continued to provide support to Ulrich's findings.[25] The Kaplans' attention restoration theory states that directed attention, or cognitive task-executing, fatigues the brain, whereas nature offers content that effortlessly fascinates and hence revitalizes the mind, and their information gathering theory states that preferred environments are those that, in the past, have served our species' need to gain (spatial) knowledge and make sense of it.[26]

Biophilic designers think that humans evolved in a sensorially rich environment and that similar sensations continue to be crucial for our well-being. Kellert et al. state that the past 10,000 years of agriculture, technology, and, increasingly, urban life have not changed our species' underlying aptitudes, skills, and preferences, and hence nature-filled environment is where we belong. Building on the restorative effects of nature, Kellert et al. argue that experiencing organic forms, such as fractals, are a biological necessity for well-being as they offer "neurological nourishment."[27] In a biophilic design handbook, a chapter titled "Can Biomimicry Bring Us Back Home?" communicates a wish to return to or recreate the mythical original habitat. Kellert et al. even propose that any debate on aesthetic value has been settled: Nature provokes bio-neurological activity that the mind translates as an aesthetic experience due to evolutionary reasons, or what has been useful for our survival has become understood as beautiful.[28] Another example is by Katya Mandoki, who recently presented a similar view of the origins of aesthetic experience.[29]

Is experiencing beauty simply reacting to forms or features of nature? Arnold Berleant has discussed authentic and false environments, the former meaning an environment that allows people to grow and flourish, and the latter reflecting only a technical or economic solution to a problem, for example, a desolate parking lot of a hypermarket is not a human-centered solution for better city life but a corporate solution to a financial and logistical problem. Berleant argues that we inherently attach values to experiences. We discriminate against environments that confine or physically or mentally restrict us and prefer and thrive in those that allow expansion. Berleant calls this expansion "productive awareness," encompassing curiosity, interest, exploration, discovery, and wonder.[30] Berleant indicates that aesthetic experiences are also drawn from environments or objects that allow expansion. Authentic and false environments parallel with Kellert's nature-filled and nature-deficit environments but Berleant has shown that aesthetic perception always takes place in subjective, cultural, and social contexts. Each society in history has had its own manner of perceiving aesthetically.[31] In my view, the current fascination with nature-like design can be seen as a counter-movement to the modernist, standardized, mechanical and nature-void city machine.

When the first humans emerged, everything was natural. Is it meaningful to say genes favored nature, versus urban areas, if non-natural habitats were not selectable? When environmental psychologists or biophilic designers discuss nature, it appears they mean environments with certain types or certain amounts of vegetation. However, for millennia, humans have chosen to live in vegetation-barren areas, such as deserts and mountain tops, and in arctic conditions. Another challenge to the presumed innate affinity towards nature is that attitudes towards nature are subject to change. Cultural geographer Yu-Fu Tuan, among others, has shown how wilderness has been a source of fear throughout history.[32] Ecological philosopher Gilbert LaFreniere has argued that aesthetic and ecological appreciation of nature only became possible with urbanization. By the twelfth century, enough people in Europe lived in urban settings to be able to admire the "civilized nature" of pastures and tamed woodlands in between, instead of being threatened by the hostile unpredictability of nature.[33]

3.3. Place, mind, and well-being

Are we more suited to live in nature than in an urban environment? Yes, has been the answer of the Garden City movement, by Sir Ebenezer Howard, in 1898, and its relatives. But, we are not just passive recipients of influences; we actively interact with and take action regarding our environment. The use of environment for emotional self-regulation, like management of emotions and mood, has been studied since the 1980s. A study using 473 Norwegian students found that classic nature, namely leafy daytime forest, had the highest positive emotional potential, that is, expectation for positive feelings, followed by the other options: "urban environment with people," "shopping mall," "living room," "urban environment without people," and "unsafe nature," namely dark night-time forest.[34] Despite its limitations, the study offers insight into positive and negative valence.[35] Interestingly, nature was only appealing when perceived to be safe, something the habitat of early hominids most certainly was not.

Psychologist Kalevi Korpela has found that people actively use places as a pick-me-up to improve mood. Visits to favorite places are used for regulating feelings of pleasure, pain, and self-experience, and place identity is partly formed by these experiences. Importantly, favorite places offer experiences of beauty, control, self-expression, and freedom from social pressure, which all contribute to the therapeutic effect of the place.[36] Often, favorite places are in nature but preferences depend on subjective attributes, such as disposition towards greenery and childhood experiences. For example, a study in 2008 found that 43% of respondents named a place in nature, 23% chose built-green environment, 19% a waterfront location, 9% a hobby setting, and 6% an urban location, either indoors or outdoors, typically a city center, in general.[37] Another study found that disliked places were urban, crowded, traffic-filled, mechanistic, and, most importantly, lacked beautiful views, whereas favorite places were marked with high scores in factors of "being away," fascination, coherence, and compatibility to the subject, that can all also contribute to aesthetic experience and be present in human-made environments in addition to nature.[38]

It appears that, at least in part, favorite places are selected to experience beauty, and those places that do not offer beauty are more likely disliked. Music theorist Giorgios Tsiris has proposed that aesthetic appreciation is an intrinsic human quality arising from our need to find meaning in the world. According to Tsiris, an aesthetic experience can be re-invigorating, ranging from refreshment to symbolic or mental rebirth: "[a]esthetic experience is transformative in its very nature, as both aesthetic experience and transformation lie in a process of creating or participating in something where means and ends do not exist as independent entities; a process which activates processes of self-growth and self-actualization in the person."[39] Tsiris' notion may help explain

why favorite places have a therapeutic effect, perhaps arising from aesthetic experience rather than naturalness.[40]

Using urban environment for self-regulation has been studied much less than nature, possibly because of the view that urban environments contain stressors that are absent in nature, rendering urban environments less restorative. However, many seem to also find urban environments restorative, if vacations are understood as attempts to become restored. In 2015, the British association for travel agencies, ABTA, found that, in the United Kingdom, 54% of holiday makers planned a city break, whereas 50% planned a beach holiday, 11% a lakeside or mountain trip, and 10% had a cruise in the pipeline.[41], [42] Among the most popular tourist destinations, cities with interesting architecture, busy urban life, and/or historical elements feature year after year. Rome, New York, London, Tokyo, and Las Vegas do not attract tourists mainly with nature.

"Peninsula Tokyo" by heiwa4126 (2008) https://www.flickr.com/photos/heiwa4126/2603466049/. Attribution (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/). Photo Attribution by PhotosForClass.com

If people are biologically predisposed to enjoy nature more than urban life, from where does the appeal to urban life arise? Marcel Hunziker et al. remind us that people also have cognitive and socio-cultural needs. We do not function only as biological organisms but attempt to make

sense and create narratives about our surroundings, with attached personal memories, shared symbolic meanings, and so on, turning spaces into places.[43] To examine how an urban environment can serve a range of complex needs, Berleant has drawn analogies between a city and a ship, circus, cathedral, and sunset. A city is a logistically and efficiently functioning place of economic and social activity (ship); it offers myriads of experiences ranging from culture to entertainment, wonder, thrill, and fright (circus); it manifests and immortalizes the ideas and ideals of people in its architecture, functions, customs ,and layout (cathedral); and it anchors us to something larger (a cosmological viewpoint of the sunset).[44]

3.4. Environment as an invitation for action or in defense of cities

Environmental psychology has provided evidence that urban life can cause stress whereas nature restores the mind and body. But, when harms of cities are discussed, are we bundling Delhi with Dallas and Mombasa with Melbourne? Are we disregarding qualitative differences? Geographer William Meyer has debunked many assumptions about the harms of urbanism, ranging from poverty and dangers to pollution.[45] Meyer argues that cities do not cause poverty, even if they house poor people; rural poverty is far less visible and harder to tackle. High-density urban settlement causes less ecosystem alteration, whereas low-density settlement disrupts much larger areas per household. Denser living is less dependent on petrol-powered vehicles and allows more efficient use of infrastructure and key resources. Third-world cities may be polluted but third-world rural areas also suffer, from indoor air pollution from burning biomass. Cities often offer better shelter against natural hazards; fatal traffic accidents are less common in urban than rural areas; and dangerous primary resources and agricultural work do not take place in cities. Also, cities harbor fewer insects with infectious diseases, and urban areas tend to offer better health care.

If we innately prefer nature, or rural life, why does the majority of the world's population live in cities? Economic opportunities are not the only reason. Humans have always explored, altered, and exploited their surroundings. For the past ten millennia, alteration has become increasingly large-scale, beginning from agriculture and the domestication of animals leading to today's dam and bridge projects, megacities, and so on. Philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and John Dewey pondered the environments' invitation potential. Merleau-Ponty noted that every environment invites us to take some action in and as a response to it.[46] Dewey discussed how every being attempts to live in sync with its environment and if the sync is disrupted, the being attempts to restore it; the struggle enables learning and growth.[47] Learning, in turn, enables expansion or migration to another or different habitat. It can be argued that the ability of humans to construct and alter things is one of our key characteristics, in the same way beavers, ants, and bees build nests and societies. Also, our ability to collaborate leads to increasingly large-scale, shared building projects.

The information gathering theory of Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) provides another angle to examine the need to interact with one's surroundings. The theory states that people prefer landscapes that, in the past, stimulated the primitive human's rapid acquisition and processing of information because they developed the capacity to plan successful action in the environment.[48] The Kaplans identified four key qualities of preferred environment, of which complexity and mystery relate to the need to gather information, while coherence and legibility serve the need to make sense of it. The information gathering theory has been contested because of the lack of solid empirical support.[49] Nevertheless, indirect support can be drawn from a popular leisure activity: video games. Many of today's most popular games, such as Horizon Zero Dawn and Subnautica, are based on virtual exploration, foraging, and altering one's surroundings for survival. The endless possibilities to learn and find something useful from the landscape seem

to keep players hypnotized.[50] I note that cities also serve information-acquisition needs, for example, through navigating the traffic, work life, shopping, and so on, and research has not been carried out to explain why the information-gathering needs could only be satisfied in nature. Logically, the need to learn and make sense seems to indicate an innate preference for those environments that have not been experienced before.

Chances to explore or alter one's environment also appear important based on the dislike towards environments that cannot be personalized. An anecdotal, common complaint by first-world city dwellers is how councils restrict alterations of dwellings. Another angle is a 2011 meta-study about open offices, reviewing over one hundred earlier studies. Open offices were found to be damaging to the workers' attention span, productivity, creative thinking, motivation, and satisfaction, but demotivation was not only caused by distractions. When employees could not influence how things looked or felt, including lighting and temperature, their spirits plummeted.[51] What if the appeal of nature does not arise directly from naturalness but from the perceived freedom to roam and explore; gather information, resources, and experiences, for example, pick berries or firewood and admire views; alter surroundings; and be free of others' control? What if that invitation for perhaps innately appealing action can be offered in an urban environment? Does that make the city, then, the optimal habitat?

4. Discussion

4.1. Is primordial paradise the optimal human habitat?

Savanna theory has been contested because it is unclear whether people like open parks innately or because of being used to them, that is, biology vs. culture. The design and preferences for parks and gardens have varied throughout history and across regions. From an architectural history point of view, it appears a stretch to assume that the current Western playground or park design is the most liked in history, or in the future. Furthermore, recent archaeological findings suggest that humans may have evolved in a number of places simultaneously, or perhaps migrated to the savanna from some other environment.[52] Given that we do not know the exact birthplace of the human species, there is no solid support to name one habitat type the original one. It is also unexplained why our instinctive responses would echo one specific time and place in history when evolution is an ongoing, never-ending process, and genes mutate at every living moment.

But, what if the ancestral environment is not understood as the savanna but nature in general? Environmental psychology also lends support to the idea that modern humans naturally feel better in nature; for example, people recover faster from stress or illness in nature. However, favorite place studies partially challenge the view about nature's healing power. When a person visits his or her favorite place, positive emotions dominate over the negative regardless of whether the place is in nature, an urban area, or indoors.[53] The restorative effect of a place appears to stem from varied notions of beauty, positive self-image, and feelings of being in control, not merely from instinctive cues from nature. Favorite places appear to be a feedback loop of means and ends in one. People choose certain places not just to relax and improve their mood but to enjoy a range of qualities, including aesthetic ones, that, in turn, help them feel restored and whole, and enjoy the place more.[54] The pitfall of favorite place studies is that they usually focus on a specific effect on mood: uplifting or soothing. Thus, the findings do not explain what kind of environment is preferred for everyday activities and chores. After all, we are not always stressed or feeling down. Favorite place studies currently tell about preferences to visit but not about preferences to live or work.

Biophilic design aspires to provide a sensorially rich and aesthetically rewarding environment. Nature is undoubtedly a generous source of aesthetic experiences but the risk is the presumption that only those elements and qualities that have empirically measurable effects on people, for example, lower the blood pressure, are what matter, and only natural forms can be aesthetically valued. For example, Kellert instructs that non-natural colors should be avoided in architecture. Focusing on measurable effects may exclude or dismiss those aesthetic experiences that do not manifest as accepted measurable reactions. Also, if beauty is understood to be present in nature's forms only, will that leave room for art and architecture that seek to imagine non-nature-like things? Our interest, fascination, and sense of beauty are piqued not only by what is known and natural but by what is new. For example, the video games mentioned earlier are set on alien planets, where the player encounters hostile nature and interacts with robots. Beauty can be present in both nature and human-made environments. If beauty is the draw-in factor in favorite places, that explains why a favorite place can be anywhere, not only in nature.

An essential question about the most optimal habitat is, if perfect environments for humans exists, such as the savanna or a paradise garden, is perfection, in itself, optimal? The intuitive answer may be yes but contemplation raises pertinent issues. John Dewey said that every organism lives in rhythm with its environment and, as a result, its knowledge of itself and its environment expands.[55] Evolution means the ability of organisms to adapt to something new or changed. As an everyday example, a forest may appear soothing to one person and threatening to another, but the latter can learn to enjoy the wilderness through exposure and expansion. Will perfection lead to complacency and lack of learning and evolution? Should optimal equate with comfort zone? Humans have spread around the globe and colonized almost every thinkable living environment. It appears that the ability to grow, learn, and adapt are characteristic to our species, even if they are not characteristics of each individual. Culture, social relationships, and adaptability are what define humans as a species, and hence focusing on biology and instinctive responses is too narrow a viewpoint.

4.2. Restorative and fatiguing environments

Is an optimal habitat inherently oppressive because what suits one person may be wrong for another? Can conflicting preferences be resolved or is the optimal habitat doomed to an eternal mediocrity that is not the best suited to anybody? Some studies suggest that a place's restorativeness depends most on the compatibility between a person's motivational orientation, that is, expectations and personality attributes, and the environment's characteristics.[56] The key to studying what people like or dislike in their environment appears to be inside rather than outside the human mind.

Tsiris, Korpela, and Hartig discuss, from different viewpoints, that places that offer aesthetic experiences can prompt transformation of emotions and a greater sense of unity and coherence, potentially helping to find meaning and order in life. Berleant discusses "productive awareness," attention towards something fascinating, worth admiration, enjoyment, contemplation, or intellectual effort. According to Berleant, environments that enable or encourage productive awareness are human(e) habitats or, in my terminology, optimal habitats. I suggest that Berleant's productive awareness links to the Kaplans' information gathering theory and attention restoration theory, and to Korpela's findings on favorite places: 1) certain surroundings feed productive awareness; 2) experiencing productive awareness appears to reinvigorate the brain; which, in turn 3) enables more productive awareness, prompting a beneficial feedback loop.

From where, or in what circumstances, does the productive awareness emerge? To further elaborate on the Kaplans' theory, that is, the mind

seeks to learn and make sense, yet is subject to fatigue, but can be restored, and Berleant’s productive awareness theory, that is, the mind thrives when it is fascinated by something, I propose that we have six different mental operational states or tracks that the mind regularly locks on. Some tracks require active directing and effort by the brain; some are based more on observing the content of one’s mind or the outside world, either absent-mindedly or in an engaged manner. Laborious tracks require fatiguing effort, like paddling a canoe upstream, whereas restorative tracks allow the mind to ride more freely, like a piece of bark sailing downstream. I propose that what track the environment prompts the mind to take is the key to liking or disliking the environment.

I propose that the potentially restorative tracks are:[57]

- Meandering internal track: dreaming, daydreaming, and musing.
- Meandering external track: being fascinated by or in sync with one’s environment.[58]
- Directed engaged track: curious making-sense, creative problem-solving, or flow.[59]

The potentially fatiguing tracks are:

- Directed rational track, cognitive task-executing, for example, errands, studying, or menial work.[60]
- Distressed track: mental, emotional, or bodily discomfort, including worry and pain.
- Confused track: a prolonged or repeated state of distraction or fogginess, caused by, for example, stress, busy-ness, Alzheimer’s disease, mental illness, or substances.

I do not claim that the mind cleanly switches from one track to another but rather all the tracks intermingle, overlap, and switch back and forth all the time. For example, watching TV can activate the meandering external, the directed engaged, and the directed rational tracks, when one attempts to make sense of the news or follow a plot of a film. Also, all tracks have different strengths. Watching birds on a feeder and having an aesthetic experience in the Louvre can be at different spots of the axis of the external meandering track, overlapping with the directed engaged track. Building on Berleant’s productive awareness and humane environments, I suggest that environments that enable or encourage restorative tracks can positively impact well-being and be understood as the optimal habitat.

5. Concluding comments

This paper examines different aspects of the optimal human habitat by reviewing studies in environmental psychology and contrasting them with theories and findings in the humanities, like aesthetics, cultural geography, and history. I aimed to show that the enjoyment of or thriving in urban and natural environments are not mutually exclusive, and nature, understood as rich vegetation, is not necessarily a habitat everybody instinctively longs for. For example, for millennia, people have also inhabited vegetation-barren areas, and nature or wilderness has been seen as bewildering in many cultures and eras. I defended cities as a habitat; after all, cities vary in quality and many presumptions about the harms of city life can be debunked.

As a response to the question, what is the natural habitat for humans?, I argued that the savanna or other specific nature environment types should not be labeled as the natural habitat, meaning the most suitable.

I suggested that the appeal of nature may arise not from nature's instinctively appealing forms but from the perceived freedom to roam and explore, forage, for resources and/or information, alter and personalize surroundings, and obtain aesthetic experiences. I propose that these activities may be innately appealing to us as a species and, if they are available in a good-quality urban environment, drawing from Berleant's analogy of a city as a ship, cathedral, circus, and sunset, the city may be our optimal habitat.

Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, Dewey, Berleant, and the Kaplans, I suggest that our natural habitat is any environment that allows us to be curious and fascinated and, as a result, grow, expand, and evolve. Hence, the optimal habitat is diverse, offering variety, challenges, and even negative experiences, not eternal bliss and ease. By building on the Kaplans' attention restoration theory and information gathering theory, and on Berleant's productive awareness theory, I suggest that the restorative potential of a place depends on whether it enables productive awareness via restorative mind tracks. Experiencing restorative mind tracks may prompt the experience of the most optimal habitat. This study does not intend to claim that nature is not important to well-being but raise the idea that urban areas containing nature have the potential to be the best suited environment for today's humans.[61]

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Endnotes

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[1] An overview of evolution-oriented studies that have attempted to identify the original or the most preferred environment for humans is provided by Marcel Hunziker et al., "Space and Place – Two Aspects of the Human-landscape, Relationship," *A Changing World. Challenges for Landscape Research* (Netherlands: Springer, 2007), Volume 8, pp. 49-50. Researchers in this area include for example Gordon Orians; and John Balling & John Falk, "Evolutionary Influence on Human Landscape Preference," *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol 42, Issue 4, 2010.

[2] Katya Mandoki, "Bio-aesthetics: The Evolution of Sensibility through Nature," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2017), Vol 15, Section 7.

[3] Instead of focusing on a specific group, demographic or culture, this study draws together different aspects of like and dislike based on findings in a variety of fields.

[4] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) pp. 93-98. The term is also used by Pauline von Bonsdorff, *The human habitat. Aesthetic and axiological perspectives* (Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics Series Vol 5, 1998).

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] For example, an image search on Google for "paradise" produced 597,000,000 results on 19 April 2017: the first two hundred images depicted a tropical resort or a swimming pool.

[7] The origins of the paradise myth have been comprehensively discussed by Nancy Marshall, *The Eden Paradox: Humanity's simultaneous desire for and rejection of earthly paradise* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015). In the earliest written records of paradise, gods roamed in walled orchards, protected from the surrounding desert sand and animals, pp. 13-15. Marshall argues that people have a tendency to long for absolute yet unattainable security (of imagined perfect childhood), manifesting as paradise archetype, pp. 115-118.

[8] Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: the Garden of Eden in myth and tradition* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 10-22.

[9] *Ibid*., pp. 3, 5-6.

[10] Jane Garry & Hasan El-Shamy (edit.), *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature. A Handbook* (US: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 2005), pp. 197-198.

[11] Heather Pringle, "What You Don't Know About the Vikings," *National Geographic*, March 2017.

[12] Leopoldine Prosperetti, *Landscape and Philosophy in the Art of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625)* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 18-19.

[13] One example is the Venus Project by engineer Jacque Fresco (1916-2017): he worked on his sustainable, happy, utopian city from 1975 until his death. https://www.thevenusproject.com, accessed 29 September 2017.

[14] The term utopia was famously coined by Sir Thomas More in 1516 by combining two Greek terms, *outopia*, "noplace" and *eutopia,* "good place."

[15] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Germany: Peter Lang AG, 2010), pp. 19, 161, 209.

[16] Gili Merin, "AD Classics: Ville Radieuse / Le Corbusier," *ArchDaily*, 11 August 2013. http://www.archdaily.com/411878/ad-classics-ville-radieuse-le-corbusier, accessed 10 May 2017.

[17] Project for Public Places: *Placemaking and the Future of Cities*. UN-HABITAT, United Nations. https://www.pps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Placemaking-and-the-Future-of-Cities.pdf, accessed 10 May 2017.

[18] Levitas (2010), 23.

[19] Jacky Bowring, *Melancholy and the Landscape. Locating sadness, memory and reflection in the landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[20] For example Doreen Massey et al., *City Worlds* (Cornwall: Routledge, 1999), pp. 49-50. David Bell, ed., *Pleasure Zones: Bodies, Cities, Spaces* (US: Syracuse University Press, 2001). Valerie Voon, *Why danger is exciting – but only to some people*, *The Conversation* (2016), 6 September, http://theconversation.com/why-danger-is-exciting-but-only-to-some-people-64680, accessed 25 August 2017.

[21] Mandoki (2017); reference to Jerome Barkow et al., *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (US: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[22] Gordon Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, "Evolved responses to landscapes," *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, eds. Jerome Barkow et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 555-579.

[23] Hunziker et al. (2007).

[24] The importance of nature in human habitat becomes evident not only from utopias but dystopias. As a topical example, nature is completely non-existent in the dystopian future of the movie *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), set in an ultra-consumerist Asian megacity, where the only remaining signs of nature are the weather and a polluted harbor. The movie explores individuality and humanity (the heroine is a human mind unwillingly locked in an artificial body) but it is also a dystopia of over-exploitation of nature and living things.

[25] For an overview, see Rebecca Clay, "Green is good for you," *Monitor on Psychology Journal of American Psychological Association* (2001), Vol 32, No 4, p. 40.

[26] Rachel & Stephen Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature. A Psychological Perspective*. (US: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 185-197, and Stephen Kaplan, "The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (1995), Vol 15, 169-170.

[27] Stephen Kellert et al., *Biophilic Design. The Theory, Science and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), Chapter 5: *Neuroscience, the Natural Environment and Building Design.*

[28] Kellert (2008), sub-chapter: *Biologically Based Design*. Similar idea is discussed in the field of neuroesthetics: for an overview, see Marcos Nadal & Martin Skov, "Neuroesthetics," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd Edition (Elsevier, 2015), pp. 656–663.

[29] Mandoki (2017).

[30] Berleant (1992), pp. 86, 93-98.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[32] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Pantheon Books, 1979/2013 Kindle Edition).

[33] Gilber LaFreniere, *The Decline of Nature: Environmental History and the Western Worldview* (Oregon: Oak Savannah Publishing, 2009), p. 99.

[34] Svein Johnsen & Leif Rydstedt, "Active Use of the Natural Environment for Emotion Regulation," *Europe's Journal of Psychology* (2013), Vol 9, No 4.

[35] The study was based on photographs, not experienced locations; it measured only two emotions, happiness and sadness, and only six environments were offered as options.

[36] Kalevi Korpela & Terry Hartig, "Restorative Qualities of Favorite Places," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (1996), Vol 16, 221.

[37] Kalevi Korpela et al. "Determinants of restorative experiences in everyday favorite places," *Health & Place* (2008), Vol 14, 636–652.

[38] Results depended considerably on each subject's personal, and, no doubt, cultural, characteristics. Korpela & Hartig (1996), 221–23.

[39] Giorgios Tsiris, "Aesthetic Experience and Transformation in Music Therapy," *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* (2008), Vol 8, No 3, Section: 'Transformation and Its Relation to Aesthetic Experience'. https://www.voices.no/index.php/voices/article/view/416/340, accessed 29 September 2017.

[40] Kellert's claim that experiencing nature is *the* aesthetic experience and vice versa is too simplistic, considering Berleant's notion about

every society having its own way of perceiving aesthetically.

[41] Holiday types could be combined or people took more than one trip per year, hence the percentage exceeds 100%.

[42] ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents), *Holiday Habits Report. ABTA Consumer Survey 2015*, p. 3. https://abta.com/assets/uploads/general/HOLIDAY_HABITS_REPORT.pdf

[43] Hunziker et al (2007), pp. 49-50.

[44] Berleant (1992), pp. 72-79.

[45] William Meyer, "Urban Legends," *Colgate Scene* (Colgate University News, 2014) November, http://news.colgate.edu/scene/2014/11/urban-legends.html, accessed 24 August 2017.

[46] Taking action encompasses all forms of reactive and proactive responses in and towards the environment, including doing nothing (also perceiving is action). Komarine Romden-Romluch, "The Power to Reckon with the Possible," *Reading Merleau-Ponty. On Phenomenology of Perception*, Thomas Baldwin, ed.) (Great Britain: Routledge, 2007), p. 55.

[47] Philip Zeltner, *John Dewey's Aesthetic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner 1975), pp. 15-25 and 32-33.

[48] Arthur Stamps, "Mystery, complexity, legibility and coherence: A meta-analysis," *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24 (2004) 1–16, 1.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[50] Horizon Zero Dawn is currently the second-most sold game for PlayStation4. Brian Crecente, "Sony: PS4 owners spend about 50,000 years a week gaming," *Polygon*, 5 June 2017, https://www.polygon.com/2017/6/5/15728406/ps4-sales-stats, accessed 24 August 2017. Subnautica is highly acclaimed by critics: James Plafke, "Why 'Subnautica' Is Already One Of The Best Survival Games Ever Made, Before It's Even Released," 22 March 2017, *Forbes*, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jplafke/2017/03/22/why-subnautica-is-already-one-of-the-best-survival-games-ever-made-before-its-even-released/#5dc1841d13f8, accessed 24 August 2017.

[51] Maria Konnikova, "The Open-Office Trap," 7 January 2014, *The New Yorker*. http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-open-office-trap, accessed 24 August 2017.

[52] A fossil of possibly the earliest hominid, *Graecopithecus* was recently found in Greece. "Many mammals, including apes, giraffes, antelopes and hippos, lived in Africa and in Europe's eastern Mediterranean region between 9 million and 7 million years ago [with Graecopithecus]. These creatures probably moved back and forth between continents […] making it difficult to pin down where each line of animals originated. Graecopithecus could have evolved in either Europe or Africa." Bruce Bower, "European fossils may belong to earliest known hominid," *ScienceNews*, 22 May 2017, https://www.sciencenews.org/article/european-fossils-may-belong-earliest-known-hominid, accessed 24 August 2017.

[53] Johnsen & Rydstedt (2013).

[54] Tsiris (2008), section: "Aesthetic Experience and Its Relevance to Music Therapy."

[55] Zeltner (1975), pp. 15-25 and 32-33.

[56] Kevin Newman and Merrie Brucks, "When are natural and urban environments restorative? The impact of environmental compatibility on

self-control restoration," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (2016), Vol 26, Issue 4, 535-541.

[57] Restorative should not be understood narrowly as "calming": for instance, flow is experienced positively, even if or because it is also invigorating, for example, during extreme sports.

[58] By 'in sync,' I mean Dewey's notion about every being either being in or out of rhythm with its environment, e.g. the environment enables or disables the being's intended actions.

[59] Flow means the sense of effortless action, when one's skills are fully involved or pushed to overcome a challenge or achieve a goal that acts as a magnet for learning and mastery. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, "Finding Flow," *Psychology Today*, 1 July 1997, https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199707/finding-flow, accessed 11 May 2017.

[60] These tasks are offered as an example, but the same activities can also be refreshing depending on a person and situation: for example learning a new skill can produce flow.

[61] I wholeheartedly thank the peer reviewers of *Contemporary Aesthetics* for assisting with sharpening the focus and key arguments of this article.