

# COVID-19 and Environment: Citizens in Search of Proximity with Nature

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ABSTRACT

*The measures taken by governments to limit the spread of Covid-19, particularly lockdowns, have restricted the opportunities for citizens to access nature. This article debates the role of the link to nature for mental and physical well-being. Beyond this, the pandemic and lockdowns have led to changes in the perception of nature and its relationship with its surroundings and its way of life. Memorandum 9 : overview of the studies and projects registered on the WPRN database.*

The measures taken by governments to limit the spread of Covid-19, particularly lockdowns, have restricted the opportunities for citizens to access nature. These restrictions have affected individuals and put at the heart of the debate the role of the link to nature for mental and physical well-being. Beyond this, the pandemic and lockdowns have led to changes in the perception of nature and its relationship with its surroundings and its way of life. According to research, nature is becoming a central element in the lives of citizens. Are we heading towards major upheavals in terms of urban planning and the environment? How can we profoundly transform the relationship between individuals and their environment?

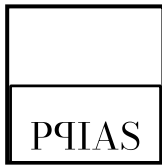
Several research works in the WPRN database offer interesting avenues for reflection.

Lockdowns have led part of the population to become aware of the benefits of time spent in nature, leading to a willingness to leave the city, raising fears about the risk of negative environmental impacts.

## The need for access and proximity to nature

### *Free access to nature called into question by health measures*

During the first lockdown in France and in several countries, the possibilities of access to nature (beaches, mountains, etc.). These restrictions caused a feeling of lack among people.



because an increase in the expression of the need to connect with nature can be and 18 on 1000 respondents representative of the population, 67% of French people intend to enjoy this nature during the summer. Major protests and the reopening of natural spaces, which shows that the ban was difficult to implement. Available on WPRN measured changes in outdoor activity practices at the height of the pandemic. The study found a sharp decline in the use of outdoor activities. The study found a sharp decline in the use of outdoor activities. Moreover, half of the respondents believe that the pandemic will change their lifestyle. The study mentioned is a more frequent use of local natural areas.

Symmetrically, when access to nature was possible, it was strongly favored. In Norway, access to nature was encouraged. A [study](#) of the city of Oslo surveyed on WPRN measured changes in outdoor activity practices at the height of the pandemic. It shows that the use of nature has increased considerably during the pandemic, on average of the previous three years for the same period. People going out in nature were regular practitioners of outdoor activities. The more remote and in the wilderness trails were, the more people used them. That nature provides a refuge from the stress created by the crisis. They also highlighted that allowing social distancing, played an important role in the fight against the pandemic. This is summarized in this [study](#).

## *The proven beneficial role of contact with nature on mental health*

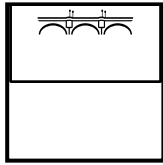
As the previously mentioned [American study](#) reminds us, important eco-systemic interaction with the natural world leads to reduced stress and improved well-being, alleviating the psychological and physiological effects of crises. These benefits are supported by numerous studies and are summarized in detail in an American [study](#) and a WHO Europe [report](#).

Thus, the analyses all come to the same conclusion: public authorities must ensure that, in the long term, everything must be done to avoid a new ban on access to natural areas. To this end, instead of roads in the heart of cities. Urban parks could have extended time slots for hiking and walking trails. Access to peri-urban natural spaces should be facilitated. The reopening of the heart of cities and the safeguarding of existing green infrastructure is recommended during the crisis.

## The evolution of individual aspirations and the new representations of the ideal lifestyle

### *New representations of the ideal lifestyle*

Before the pandemic (in 2019) an IFOP [study](#) noted that 81% of French people are anchored in and echoes the dream of the single-family house with a garden. But the pandemic may have been a trigger to make this wish a reality. During the first lockdown, the desire for a house with a garden increased significantly.



mainly going to the countryside close to nature. This renewed enthusiasm has been noted by An OpinionWay [survey](#) in October reported that a quarter of Ile-de-France residents said that the number of people looking to buy a home with a garden increased by 15% during the lockdown. The reasons put forward are the search for peace and nature.

More broadly, this desire seems to be part of a change in perceptions of the relationship with nature. The search for proximity and a link with the local environment is noted. A [study](#) by the French government by YouGov illustrates this evolution. The study, with a rigorous methodology, surveyed a representative population. Only 9% of the British people want everything to return to the way it was before the lockdown. 41% consider that their relationship to food has changed and 38% believe that they have started to consume local products for the first time during the lockdown.

We can thus note a search for proximity in the food supply and a willingness to consume local products. Perceiving one's environment also appears to be more contemplative: 27% of respondents said they spend more time observing wildlife more often (a figure that can also be explained by the increase in wildlife sightings during the lockdown). On this theme, a [study](#) carried out by researchers affiliated with the CNRS and the Sorbonne University will be followed closely. The study seeks to analyze the relationships of humans with nature during lockdowns lead to stronger care for other animals.

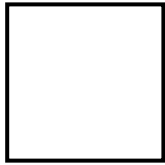
## *A temptation of urban exodus that is not without risk for*

The expressed desire for a stronger connection with nature suggests a significant awareness of environmental issues. This awareness is a source of hope in the context of the major environmental problems of our time.

However, as mentioned above, the pandemic has also been able to give concrete meaning to the idea of urban exodus. If the exodus of life is becoming more and more accessible for part of the urban population, the exodus, thus encouraged and facilitated, should be carefully assessed. A [study](#) by the French government shows that urban sprawl leads to a lifestyle that increases greenhouse gas emissions, promotes biodiversity loss, and reduces the quality of life. In addition, the study analyses 271 Israeli cities using population density as a factor in the spread of Covid-19. The study found that population density is a factor in the spread of Covid-19. The study found that the level of spread of the virus is primarily determined by the quality of the public health policies.

## Nature as a vector of resilience

Ultimately, these different analyses demonstrate the important role of contact with nature. The pandemic has been a trigger for this awareness. As a Swedish [study](#) reminds us, access to nature, defined as the capacity to absorb an exogenous shock, is a crucial notion for resilience. It is important to emphasize that access to nature in the immediate environment of citizens must be facilitated. The exodus of urban dwellers could limit the temptation for part of the population to leave the city.



risks generating major negative externalities for the environment. Resilience is a decades. Several ongoing studies of the WPRN database propose to reflect on the climate challenge. A [study](#) from the University of Amsterdam seeks to understand and rapidly change their behavior to fight the pandemic but are not able to do seeks to find the ideal combination of public policies and changes in individual l

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