

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 to access nature and have led to a re-evaluation of 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 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 individuals. Are we heading towards major upheavals in terms of urban planning? Will these changes profoundly transform the relationship between individuals and their environment?

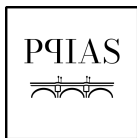
Several research works in the WPRN database offer interesting avenues for reflection.

Lockdowns have led part of the population to become aware of the benefits of the proximity with 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 to access nature (parks, beaches, mountains, etc.). These restrictions caused a feeling of lack among people, leading to an increase in the expression of the need to connect with nature can be observed.



and 18 on 1000 respondents representative of the population, 67% of French people intend to enjoy this nature during the summer. Major protests against 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 natural spaces by regular practitioners of outdoor activities. Moreover, half of the respondents believe that the pandemic will change their behavior. The most 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 more numerous. The more remote and in the wilderness trails were, the more people went. The study also shows 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

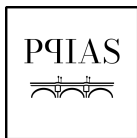
As the previously mentioned [American study](#) reminds us, important eco-systemic interaction with the natural world leads to reduced stress and improved well-being, thus alleviating the psychological and physiological effects of crises. These benefits are supported by numerous studies and are summarized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

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 promote access to nature instead of roads in the heart of cities. Urban parks could have extended time slots for walking and hiking trails. Access to peri-urban natural spaces should be facilitated. The creation of new green spaces in the heart of cities and the safeguarding of existing green infrastructure is recommended during the crisis.

The evolution of individual aspirations and in the representation 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 echo 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, there was a surge in people mainly going to the countryside close to nature. This renewed enthusiasm has been confirmed by an OpinionWay [survey](#) in October reported that a quarter of Ile-de-France residents now want to move to the countryside.



that the number of people looking to buy a home with a garden increased by 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. A 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 also consumed 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 perceive one's environment also appears to be more contemplative: 27% of respondents say they spend more time in nature. 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 and how lockdowns lead to stronger care for other animals.

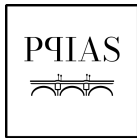
A temptation of urban exodus that is not without risk for

The expressed desire for a stronger connection with nature suggests a significant awareness is a source of hope in the context of the major environmental problem.

However, as mentioned above, the pandemic has also been able to give concrete results. Access to nature of life is becoming more and more accessible for part of the urban population. An urban exodus, thus encouraged and facilitated, should be carefully assessed. A [study](#) shows that urban sprawl leads to a lifestyle that increases greenhouse gas emissions, promotes biodiversity loss, and reduces biodiversity. 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 no epidemic. It shows that it is primarily the quality of the public health policies and the level of spread of the virus.

Nature as a vector of resilience

Ultimately, these different analyses demonstrate the important role of contact with nature. It 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 emphasizes that access to nature in the immediate environment of citizens must be facilitated. For urban dwellers could limit the temptation for part of the population to leave the city, thus generating major negative externalities for the environment. Resilience is a concept that has been studied for decades. Several ongoing studies of the WPRN database propose to reflect on the role of nature in the climate challenge. A [study](#) from the University of Amsterdam seeks to under



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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