

„From Childhood Exposure to Blue Spaces to Adult Environmentalism: The Role of Nature Connectedness and Current Nature Visits in an Austrian Sample“

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Abstract

Experiences with nature in childhood have been argued to predispose pro-environmental behaviours (PEB) later in life. The underlying mechanisms of this relationship are the focus of this study. A serial-parallel mediation model from childhood exposure to blue spaces, via nature connectedness and recent visits to green and blue spaces to adult PEB is proposed, using a representative sample from Austria ($N = 2370$). Results indicate a significant relationship between childhood exposure to blue spaces and PEB which is partially mediated by all proposed factors. The model provides significant direct as well as indirect effects, while controlling for known individual- and area-level covariates. Findings should be considered in the context of limitations associated with the cross-sectional study design and a possible recall bias for childhood memories. Despite these limitations, the findings highlight the potential importance of childhood contact to blue spaces as well as life-long nature contact for improving nature connectedness and PEB. The results further emphasize the need to protect and maintain natural water bodies and to improve their safety, so that outdoor recreation around those spaces can be expanded to positively affect nature connectedness and PEB.