

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

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that nature offers many physical and mental health benefits, including restoration (recovery from mental fatigue). However, open questions remain about what in one's environment exactly is experienced as restorative and why. This study bridges environmental aesthetics, environmental psychology and cultural studies and establishes a connection between landscape and mindscape: for instance, an orderly environment is interpreted as an orderly state of mind and vice versa. The data is a qualitative survey targeting expatriate Finns (N=308), the method is content analysis and the conclusion is that restorative 'favourite place' is aesthetically appealing, enables actions that are experienced as restorative and is as much an interpretation of the place as a physical place.

KEYWORDS

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

1. INTRODUCTION

Research in environmental psychology, health and landscape studies has established that experiencing nature provides a range of physical, mental and emotional benefits such as restoration (WHO 2016). Restoration is usually defined as recovery from attention depletion, stress or low mood (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989). In the context of these empirical environmental preference (EEP) studies, nature is usually understood as greenery and water. Presumably we are conditioned to enjoy such life-sustaining elements for biological and evolutionary reasons (Grinde & Patil 2009, Steg et al 2013). But is this explanation too simplistic? If the mere presence of 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 people's preferences, I analysed subjects' own descriptions (N=308) about restorative places. This method also mitigated the risk of potential selection bias inherent in the most common study method in the EEP field: rating or ranking of pre-selected photographs of places (Wherrett, 2000). To my knowledge, this is the first large-scale qualitative survey about aesthetic and restorative qualities of restorative places. The analysis method is based on Grounded Theory and the findings are discussed in a framework of environmental and everyday aesthetics.

2 Theory

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 evolution-based and formalist explanations about environmental preference, focusing on surface qualities such as shapes and colours of things; whereas the latter is more interested in personal, cultural and symbolic meanings we give to environments, including place identity, place attachment and so-called favourite place. According to Christian Norberg-Schulz, a place is “a focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence”, or, “the spaces where life occurs are places...A place is a space which has a distinct character” (1971: 19, 1980: 5). Favourite place according to Kalevi

Korpela is an environment (type) that is used for self-regulating emotions, identity and restoration (Korpela 1992: 249) and the term is used in the same meaning in this article.

This paper discusses affordances in favourite place. James Gibson defines affordance as something the environment offers, provides or furnishes, including any fixed or mutable elements such as the terrain, vegetation, constructions, animals and humans. Affordances are opportunities to use the environment or objects in it (Gibson 1986). Discussing “environment”, Arnold Berleant in turn identifies four intertwining, overlapping meanings for it (Berleant 1997: 29-30). *Nature* means predominantly natural environment, flora and fauna – although also human-influenced nature such as gardens and parks are commonly 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 an integrated and an integral part. In this paper, environment primarily means landscape and surroundings, but at times, it encompasses all four definitions - the discussed facet hopefully comes clear from the context.

Both biology-based and culture-based positions acknowledge that aesthetic appeal or possibility for aesthetic experience influence environmental preference (Korpela & Hartig 1996: 221). However, contemplating the meaning or definitions of “aesthetic” is not usual in the EEP field, because aesthetic appeal is understood to arise from evolutionary or biological factors - 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 & Wilson 1993). In my view, such reductionistic approach strips away layers and complexities that aesthetic considerations have in our life.

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 is the noticed link between landscapes and mindscapes, a tool that artists have used for centuries

(Lörzing, 2001: 111). For example, during Romanticism (ca. 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 to it, and by modifying it to produce an aspired inner state. I discuss 1) primary sensory perception, *aisthesis*, and 2) aesthetic experience (judgements of taste and contemplation of valued sensory input) 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 environment more generally, enable restoration. Some influential biology-based theories include Roger Ulrich's psycho-evolutionary theory (PET), Rachel and Stephen Kaplan's attention restoration theory (ART) and the Kaplans' information gathering theory (IGT) (cited by Kirillova & 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, whereas nature's "softly fascinating stimuli" engage and restore the mind. IGT suggests that sufficiently complex environments prompted information gathering during our species' evolution, enhanced our survival abilities and consequently, became preferred (Kaplan, 1992: 558).

What exactly is restorative in a "softly fascinating" or information-rich environment? ART proposes the following restorative qualities: (1) fascination, environment's ability to hold attention; (2) being away, the sense of distance to the usual, (3) extent, sufficient scale and scope; and (4) compatibility, a match between the subject's intentions and the environment. In their IGT theory, Kaplans suggest the following preferred qualities: (1) mystery, reason to explore, (2) complexity, a sufficient range of diverse elements, (3) legibility, the environment's

degree of readability, and (4) coherence, meaning 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, are restorative. Kalevi Korpela (2008) in turn has 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=3,000), 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, restorative (Korpela, 1991: 373; Korpela, 2008: 388). According to Korpela & 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 found that people seek nature to escape daily routine and feel “life-affirming” somatic sensations, which nature appears to offer more fully or in a different way than urban settings (2009: 22). Other studies suggest that nature is preferred as a source of restoration over urban greenery, because city noise is perceived as irritating (Hunziker et al, 2007: 55). In Natural England’s survey, in particular water elements were popular: seen as calming when still, exhilarating when in movement, and as something that “crowns the beauty” of a scenery (2009: 44). Natural England identified 17 nature experiencer profiles (2009: 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 daily rut and/or urban environment; and *the energised* want exercise and thrill. Nature provides a range of ‘services’, including aesthetic enjoyment, spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, recreation and self-reflection (2009:

4). These findings indicate, in opposition to biology-based positions, that people have a range of differing motivations for seeking certain environments.

2.3 Aesthetics of environment

What kind of aesthetic approaches or attitudes people may have towards their environment? Environmental aesthetics examines aesthetic perception and appreciation towards everything that engulfs us (Carlson, 2002: xvii). In recent decades, two distinctive streams of environmental aesthetics have emerged, cognitive and non-cognitive (Carlson, 2016). As an example of the cognitive position, Allen Carlson (2016) suggests that to appropriately appreciate environment aesthetically, cognitive viewpoint such as scientific or factual knowledge about what is being perceived, is essential or at least beneficial – just like knowledge about art may enhance the aesthetic experience derived from art. 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 by Carlson, 2016).

From the non-cognitive position, Arnold Berleant discusses aesthetics of engagement, the essentiality of a somatic, immersed, interactional experience about environment. Berleant emphasises that we always perceive through the lens of our values, sensory acuity, knowledge and memories; the human condition as a whole (1997: 24). Berleant's view is not devoid of cognitive aspects: for example, he discusses how we may learn to appreciate 'unappealing' features by acquiring knowledge about ecology (1997: 18-20). As a different angle to non-cognitive approach, Emily Brady has suggested that the use of imagination enhances aesthetic appreciation. The degree to which imagination is active, depends upon individual appreciator, the nature of the aesthetic object and the aesthetic situation itself (2003: 151).

Also the field of everyday aesthetics has expanded our understanding on what can be perceived aesthetically, and how. Yuriko Saito (2013) suggests that we take in the environment as a

whole, including the fixed and the mutable; built and natural elements; humans and animals; activities and cultural features; the season, weather and temporal changes (also von Bonsdorff, 1998). Saito also discusses the aesthetics of ambience and ‘appropriateness’: how we appreciate the atmosphere or a situation as a combination of its parts that ‘fit together’. For example, seasonal decorations add to the aesthetic pleasure due to their ‘appropriateness’ (2013: 105-109, 119-124). Saito guides our attention to the aesthetics of the quotidian, including aesthetic pleasure derived from restoring the ‘appropriateness’ of one’s surroundings, for example by tidying up. Saito notes that traditionally, acts of cleaning have been excluded from the focus of aesthetics as uninteresting, possibly due to gender bias where the traditional women’s sphere did not generate the same interest as more “complex” aesthetic questions (2013, 150-154).

3 Data and Analysis

The survey (N=308, 88.6% females and 11.4% males)¹ was open online in April 2017, questions are provided in Attachment 1. The survey targeted current or recent Finnish expatriates and the top ten current countries of residence were:

- Finland 24%
- Australia 18%
- USA 7%
- UK 6%
- Germany 6%
- Spain 4 %
- United Arab Emirates 4%

¹ Participation to the survey was voluntary, based on interest, and it appeared to appeal more to women than men. It was advertised in three Facebook groups called ‘Finnish People Living Abroad’, ‘Expatriate Finnish Bloggers’ (Ulkosuomalaiset bloggaajat) and ‘Finns in Australia’ (Suomalaiset Australiassa).

- Belgium 3%
- Sweden 3%
- Netherlands 2%

The purpose was to source opinions from a relatively homogenic, yet diverse group, from people who have experience in a variety of geographical and cultural environments. The survey contained 10 questions, of which four were demographic, two were selection-based and four open-ended. The analysis method was based on Grounded Theory (GT) and sociological discourse analysis to identify values and stances or opinion positions in the responses (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009; Charmaz, 2006). GT is used to elicit descriptive statistical information from complex narrative information to identify themes and trends. The presupposition in GT is that what is discussed most often, is most pertinent to the subject group. The analysis 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 theory framework. 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 as 'experiencer profiles'.

3.1 Quantitative results

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

[Figure 1: Favourite places by type]

The survey contained two direct questions about aesthetics: how important the aesthetics of a favourite place are in general, and what are its most important aesthetic qualities.² The vast majority of 82% found the aesthetic appeal ‘very’ or ‘quite’ important and a total of 95% found it important to some degree. Of 308 respondents, 270 provided a description of the important aesthetic qualities. A phrase-by-phrase review identified a total of 550 concepts that could be labelled and categorised. The most used words to describe the most important aesthetic qualities were ‘beauty’, ‘silence’ and ‘nature’s sounds’. Aisthesis and aesthetic aspects overlapped in the answers as respondents described positive somatic sensations and 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.” Four sensuous categories were identified in the descriptions: visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile/kinetic. Nearly half of the respondents also described blended experiences that I categorised into two groups: ‘multisensory’ and ‘ambience’.

[Figure 2: The most important aesthetic quality of favourite place].

When the categories presented in Figure 2 are analysed further, the most often mentioned elements in the visual category were:

- Nature’s scenery, colours and forms 51.4%
- Cleanliness, tidiness 17.3%
- Sun, light, lighting 9.7%
- Balance, harmony, order 9.2%

² 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.

- 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, it was seen in nature as a whole or in its details: flora, fauna, topography, colours, shapes. However, of those who commented visual elements, nearly one third appreciated harmony, order, balance, cleanliness and tidiness; and nearly one in ten appraised built environment and humanmade objects.

In the auditory category, the most appreciated qualities were:

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

In comments about auditory experience, the aversion towards artificial sounds was evident: artificial sounds such as music or urban soundscapes were mentioned rarely and most often as 'noise'. This may have been influenced by the survey's name, "Favourite places and stress management", evoking connotation of artificial sounds as noise. The 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 surface, clean sheets and a relaxing position.

The most mentioned sources that produced a positive multisensory experience were:

- Natural greenery 52.8%
- Water element 24.5%
- Sky, horizon, openness 9.4%
- Urban greenery 5.7%

- Fresh air or suitable temperature 5%
- Mountains, cliffs, rocks 2.5%

The most discussed aspects of a positive ambience were:

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

What makes ‘ambience’ an aesthetic category? Unaware of each other’s answers, many subjects answered as ‘the most important aesthetic quality’ a combination of affordances, sensations, perceptions, feelings and often also memories and interpretations of the place, producing a web of inseparable aesthetic and other considerations forming the experience, as suggested by Saito in her theory about aesthetics of ambience.

3.2 Qualitative analysis

Most respondents discussed aisthesis and aesthetic experience – pleasant sensory perception and judgements of taste – closely intertwined. Also, as evidenced later, places and activities 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 activity and restorativity of a place, I categorised the response types from most to least common into ‘experiencer profiles’ and the following five emerged: *a water-loving forest dweller*, *horizon-gazer*, *reflective introvert*, *seeker of order*, and *energiser*. All profiles overlapped and what profile was ‘active’, appeared to depend on the subject’s expectations and mood. Some respondents indicated they use certain places at specific time for specific purpose (including skiing in wintery forest or motorcycling in countryside in summer), recognising their ability to affect their mood through place selection:

I have many favorite places, I choose the one according to my current mood. Sometimes I seek for calmness, sometimes a lively environment with lots of activities.

The following section presents the identified experiencer profiles.

Water-loving forest dweller

My favourite place is in the forest trail and I run it and it goes around lakes.

Lake side forest with pines and birches.

Lake (I do standup paddling and chanting at the same time).

Walking path in the forest by the lake Saimaa [in Finland].

House in the forrest by the lake in the middle of nowhere!

The most common 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. Some added conditions: if this environment was not accessible, a substitute was sought for, such as a tropical forest or an ocean beach. 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. It is conceivable that at least some of the appeal towards this kind of environment originates from a nostalgic or idealised summer holiday (Periäinen, 2004: 45-46). This profile connects to Korpela’s (2008) findings that childhood experiences and memories strongly influence favourite place selection, as demonstrated by this response: “[my favourite place is a] simple cabin by the sea where I spent my childhood summers.”

Horizon-gazer

Home/someplace high where i can see around (a hill, a room in tall building etc.)

Place that 'help' me breath - where I feel there's space and air around me.

[S]ame time to see an ocean and mountains.

Seashore, a beach, with lapping waves. Air, breeze, freshness.

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.

This profile was equally popular with the water-loving forest-dweller and its preferred places with long vistas and openness, typically at the mountains, the seashore, or rarely, in a tall building. The respondents indicated that the following is restorative: being near the sky, seeing the horizon, looking far away or deep down, sensing the ocean, pure air and spaciousness, feeling that one is connected to a larger whole, or able to, at least in theory, travel afar. This links to the Natural England (2009) finding about 'the escapees' – both Brits 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.

[W]arm, quiet, where I can be alone, eg sauna.

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.

Possibility to think ones t[o]ughts in their 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.

Happy childhood places like home or 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.

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. Answers included, in addition to quiet nature, one's own home or other quiet indoor location such as library, museum, café or church. A tranquil place appears to allow quieting of one's inner world. Aesthetically appealing surroundings or activities appear particularly suitable for this calming, as evidenced by the following: “[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

[C]alm, serene, doesn't need to be one certain place but a place with these characteristics.

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.

Favourite place/places in my home city are public parks for me: they have harmonical plantations and well thought desing. They are well kept and clean, and everything seems to be fitting in.

The most important quality is that it is tidy (no rubbish left lying around).

[A] "sorted" or "simple" view with not too many elements; no mess or chaos.

Like the reflective introvert, the seeker of order did not prioritise the place type – urban or natural, indoors or outdoors -, but strongly preferred organised, clean and tidy environment, echoing Saito’s (2013) suggestion about tidiness being a salient source for aesthetic pleasure. Responses ranged from orderly flower beds and gardens to tidy, harmonious homes. Quite literally, for this group, organised surroundings translated into calm headspace. This profile may reflect the respondents’ cultural background, as cleanliness and tidiness are highly appreciated in Finland (Embassy of Finland Washington, 2009); and ‘Scandinavian design’, neutrally coloured and minimalistic decoration style remains popular (CorD Magazine, 2018). This profile is captured by the following response: “[my favourite place] is clean, as untidy surroundings make me anxious.” Again aligning with Saito’s notions, 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.

[...], a walk in a forest with dogs and watching their running about.

Training studio for kickboxers and skydivers clubb house.

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.

It is seldom just a place, it could be a good movie, teathre, time with friends. If only alone, then a place where I can be relaxed, in peace: home, summer cottage, even a hotel room.

A relatively small but evident category of energisers appeared: these seekers of vibrancy preferred signs of vitality, including socialising with people and animals. Another defining feature was an attempt to recharge through movement (gym, golf, jog, motorcycle ride) or busy-ness (shopping, cafés, crowds, people-watching). This matches Nature England's profile of 'energisers' who seek 'life-affirming' sensations; however, those sensations are not solely available in nature, but also in urban and social environments. The favourite place of an energiser enables reinvigorating activities, sometimes an adrenaline rush, or at minimum, connection with the aliveness of the world, for example: "[my favourite place is] Starbucks to see people o[r] a nature park where is lots of animals."

4 Discussion

The main findings were: 1) subjects have a hierarchy of favourite places depending on the places' affordances and availability; 2) the different experiencer profiles speak against universal preferences presumed in 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.

4.1 Hierarchy of favourite places

This study did not define 'aesthetic' to the respondents. The purpose was twofold: to gauge what respondents understand as 'aesthetic' and to avoid any overtly academic or narrow definition. This approach also aligns with the usual position in the EEP studies where the terms aesthetically appealing, pleasant and restorative are used almost interchangeably. It appears that most respondents interpreted 'aesthetic' as 'appealing' or 'pleasant' features that are

available in the environment via multiple senses and intertwined with one's own internal musings and feelings about it. Aisthesis, (positive) sensory perception, and aesthetics, judgements of taste and contemplation of valued sensory qualities, overlapped and interlinked in discussion and both appeared equally important in a favourite place.

The most noticed aesthetic quality of a place was visual appeal, including 'beauty', nature's colours and forms, but also harmony, order, tidiness; and to a minority, architecture, design and people. Typically, sight is our primary sense and when people are asked about '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, 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. The 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 a secondary favourite place(s) if the first choice is not available due to distance, season or weather. Similarly, multiple subjects discussed several places stating their selection depends on the aspired mood which is achieved through the affordances and activities available in each favourite place. This indicates that subjects have a hierarchy for choice and it appears to be culturally influenced. For example, Finns appeared to find being surrounded by a tall, dense forest soothing, whereas the Natural England study found that Brits valued admiring a dense woodland from afar but not being inside it (2009: 29).

4.2 Personal vs 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 due to evolutionary reasons. Yet, in my study, corroborating Kalevi Korpela's earlier findings, subjects found a variety of aesthetic appeal in built environment, including indoors. Secondly, my subjects explicitly discussed both, pleasant sensations and experiences of beauty, indicating that both are essential in the favourite place. These two are not interchangeable, as it is quite possible to find beauty in unpleasant things as argued by Arnold Berleant in his discussion about negative aesthetics (Berleant 1997: 64-74); and it is also possible to sensuously enjoy things that one would not describe as beautiful. This indicates a more personal and symbolic understanding of beauty than what is common in the EEP field.

In this survey a notable minority - one third - named indoor or urban places more restorative than nature. Also, of those subjects who discussed positive multisensory experience in the favourite place, a half expressed that nature is its best source, whereas less than 6% thought so about urban greenery. This challenges the biology-based position that there is a universally shared understanding on 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 maintained urban greenery does not allow similar distance from threats and stress of urban environment (Ulrich), development of fascination (ART and IGT by Kaplans) or imagination-enhanced aesthetic experience (Brady) as untouched nature; and contains stressors such as traffic noise (Hunziker et al. 2007). Nevertheless, every third respondent prioritising something other but nature warrants further research.

If the EEP studies are not correct about universal preferences regarding restorativeness, do they have some other or any explanatory use? In this study, some similarities emerged between Kaplans' theories (ART and IGT) and the experienter 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, on the onset, corroborate Kaplans' theories, although all profiles had a different angle to what was experienced as restorative. However, it could be asked are Kaplans' frameworks too generic to pinpoint what elements – objects or features - in the environment are 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 also nature presents stressors such as poor weather, challenging terrain and pesky or dangerous animals, questioning Ulrich's and Kaplans' position that nature is innately de-stressing. The prevalent responses about tidiness and order raise questions about cultural background and gender (roles) as potential influencers in favourite place selection; but 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 survey subjects' exposure to and experience about different geographical locations, the majority prioritised a certain type of nature: Finnish

lakeside forest, indicating that personal experiences, memories and culture strongly imprint on preferences.

Most often, subjects chose locations that enabled activities that supported the aspired mood. Mentioned activities were, for instance, thinking, relaxation, self-reflection, hobbies, socialising, movement (e.g. jogging, hiking, motorcycling, horse-riding, sauna) and implicit or explicit appreciation of the environment's aesthetic qualities. Favourite place can be a specific location with defined boundaries, but 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, motorcyclist on a country road, a skier in a forest or a mountain hiker on a trek. Thus, 'place' of the favourite place is less of a physical location and more of an interpretation or multifaceted experience.

The prioritised activity depended on each subject's experienter profile: for example, a reflective introvert may most enjoy sauna, whereas an energiser seeks urban buzz – and people may occupy another experienter profile in some other circumstances. This survey did not attempt to identify the root causes for experienter profiles, such as personality type or situational variables. The most important finding in my view about the experienter profiles is 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 purpose.

4.4 Aesthetics of engagement

As discussed, the subjects' experience in the favourite place was often defined or enhanced by actions in the environment – even if the actions were relatively passive such as self-reflection. The purpose of visiting the favourite place was being receptive to its affordances to positively influence one's inner state. The theories about environmental aesthetics discussed in this paper were not introduced to the subjects to gauge what kind(s) of approaches or attitudes they

display unprompted. The respondents appeared to corroborate Berleant's aesthetics of engagement: to fully or appropriately appreciate environment aesthetically, one is to immerse oneself in it, instead of being a Kantian disinterested observer. Another identified attitude towards favourite places aligns with Saito's aesthetics of ambience and parts fitting to 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. But, none of the respondents raised the relevance of scientific or factual knowledge to the aesthetic experience, beyond their own perceptions and memories. Nor did this study find 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 most value their previous personal positive experiences in the favourite place (type) in addition to the immersed somatic experience.

5 Concluding comments

This study found that restorative favourite places are selected based on their aesthetic affordances: 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 places than assumed in the EEP field and the biology-based position about restoration.

As the most mentioned aesthetic qualities, positive visual and multisensory input were almost equally valued, raising questions about the appropriateness of a common research method used

in the EEP field: image ranking or rating. The whole-of-body, lived, multisensory experience, including ambience or a subjective experience of the place's 'feel', had a notable effect on the place's perceived restorativeness. Thus, image-based studies may not capture all or most relevant reactions to environments.

Based on my findings, it appears that positive somatic experience coupled with aesthetic experience (positive judgement of taste) are essential for restoration and they 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 towards the environment while engaged in internal musings, which in turn was prompted or supported by the environment.

This study's limitations include the unintended gender bias and the theme, 'stress management'. We are not always stressed and hence, this study cannot conclusively answer what kinds of environments people prefer in other circumstances, such as for work or other everyday life. This study raises further questions about gender or gender roles in experiencing places and how personal history or cultural traditions affect favourite place selection.

FIGURES

Figure 1: Favourite places by type.

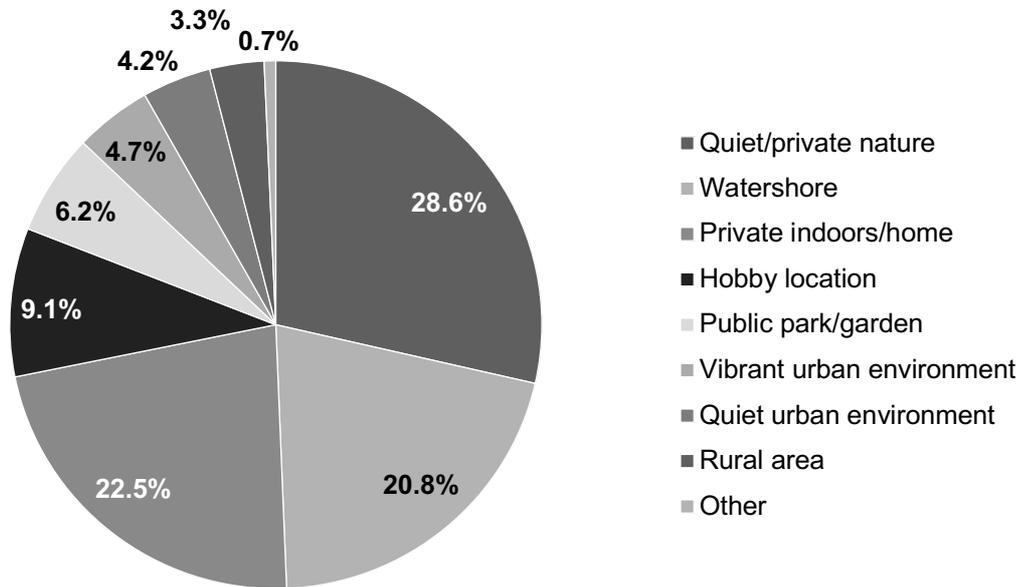
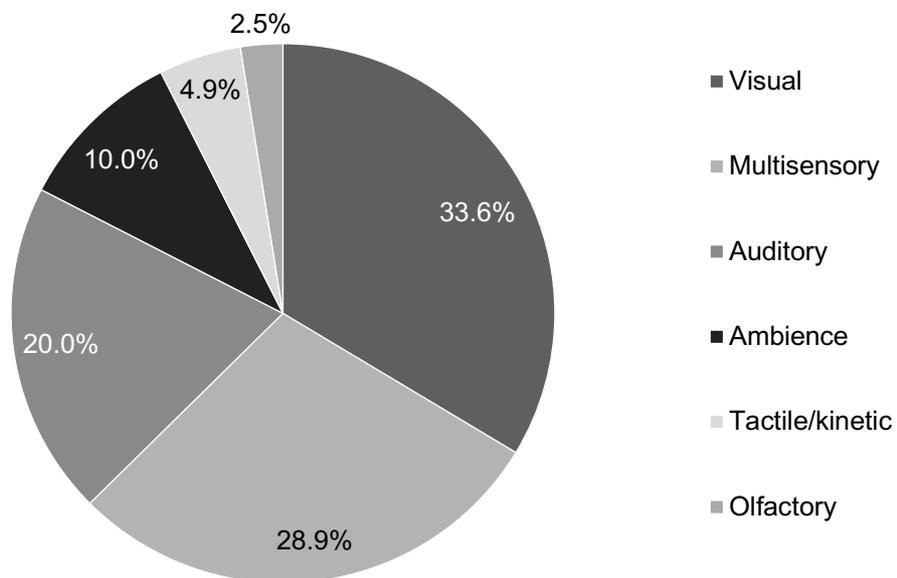


Figure 2: Most mentioned aesthetic quality in favourite place.



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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 (eg 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 (eg music, photography, writing, art, galleries, theater etc.)?
8. What is your age?
9. What is your gender?
10. What is your country of residence?