

The Importance of Nature for Human Well-Being: A Cultural Geographer's Perspective on Nature and the City

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Overview

- **Social science of nature**
- **Culture of nature**
- **Social geographical research into the city, nature and human wellbeing**

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Social science of nature

1. **Rejects “view from nowhere”**

- **Society and nature intertwined.**
- **People are nature.**
- **It is more useful to talk about non-human and human nature.**

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Social science of nature

2. **Rejects people = “ecological disturbance” and associated disconnections.**

- **Creation of enclosures**
- **Contradictions**

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Social science of nature

3. **Accepts that nature is never singular – always manifested multiply, as natures.**

- **The “nature” of science is but one nature**
- **Natures, their meanings, and the uses to which they are put, are often contested.**

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Social science of nature

4. **Suggests that humans *and* non-human nature have agency.**

- **Hybridity**
- **Non-human nature not passive but also not deterministic**

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Culture of nature

- Human interpretations of non-human nature are cultural, emotional and have changed dramatically through time.
- Much of non-human nature, and the materials created from it, are taken-for-granted - "Dwelling".

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Culture of nature

- Human knowledge of nature is acquired directly from contact.
- But such knowledge is mediated by ad writers, product manufacturers, fiction writers, film makers, journalists, and to a much lesser extent eco-warriors and government regulators.

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Recent geographical and sociological research

1. Recreation.
2. Ecological restoration.
3. Urban environmental problems.
4. Individual and collective identity and sense of place.

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Recreation

a. Urban open space

- The pleasures of contact with nature and the natural world.
- Social and cultural values of open space.

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Recreation

b. Domestic gardening

- Pleasures of contact with nature.
- Creating a particular aesthetic.
- Creating a sense of home.
- Networking socially through gardening.

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Ecological restoration

Travis Wetland in Christchurch and the Otipua Wetland in Timaru.

- Restoration.
- Group involvement.
- Service to the community

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Urban environmental problems

- **Change to a defining aspect of urban environment.**
- **Urban infill, vegetation removal, heartfelt loss.**
- **Anti-urbanism and resistance.**

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Identity and sense of place

- **Engagement with non-human nature is very beneficial.**
- **Processes are very complex.**

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Concluding thoughts

- **Social aspects of urban ecology agenda for New Zealand.**
- **Urban ecology, urban studies and hybridity**
- **Methods, philosophy and social theory.**
- **Accommodating the multiple natures that exist in our cities. The inevitability of contest.**

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