



How deep is your love - of nature?

A psychological and spatial analysis of the depth of feelings towards Dutch nature areas

Research article (work in press)

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The most legally binding nature protection policy in the Netherlands and the EU (Natura 2000) designates sites based on ecological value, ensuring their sustained protection. Of less concern to this policy are the current and future nature-based needs of the public, who is experiencing increases in education, income and health. This paper assesses the overlap between favorite natural places and Natura 2000 sites, and delves deeper into the nature-based emotions of individuals and whether they differ for different nature areas. Two samples answered the Hotspotsmonitor survey - one representative of the Dutch population (N = 8,908), and one comprised of members of a Dutch nature conservation organization (N = 1,715). While both selected their favorite natural place in the Netherlands, the latter also answered the open question, "Why is this your favorite place?". Spatial analysis revealed nearly identical clusters for the two samples, indicating their proximal representativeness. Results revealed a large overlap between Natura 2000 and favorite natural places. Content analysis determined that the three emotional experiences identified - peace & quiet, let's explore and peak - manifest in mostly different, but some similar nature areas. The important societal benefits of augmenting ecologically based nature protection policies with emotional valuation are discussed.