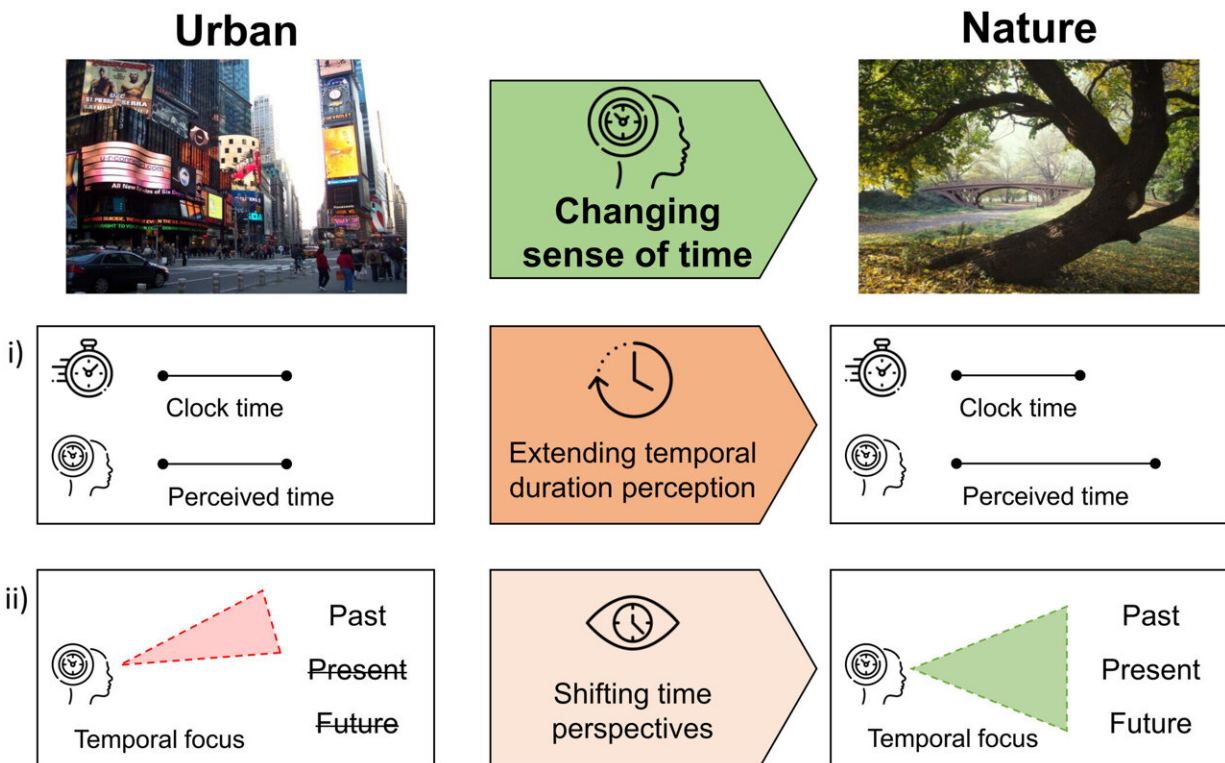


Nature experiences may hold the key to a healthier relationship with time

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Illustrative representation of how exposure to nature environments may positively influence human time perception when compared to urban environments by (i) expanding temporal duration perception and (ii) shifting temporal perspective. The icons used in the figure were obtained from flaticon.com. Credit: *People and Nature* (2024). DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10601

According to a [new study](#) published in *People and Nature*, there is

mounting evidence that nature can help humans address the time pressure of contemporary urban lifestyles by contributing to the regulation of the human sense of time. A better understanding of the relationship between natural environments and human time perception can help design healthier living environments.

Time is a central dimension of present-day lifestyles, and popular expressions such as "time is money" or "spending time" showcase the importance humans attribute to time. This is particularly true for people living in fast-paced urban environments who are often forced to regulate their daily dynamics according to the ticking clock rather than the rhythms of nature.

This emphasis on clock time is taking a toll on human cognitive processes and affects people's well-being negatively, as evidenced by a growing number of people reporting a feeling of time scarcity. Could reconnecting with nature and its rhythms allow us to regain a healthier relationship with time?

"Time perception in humans is highly subjective and regulated by a complex interaction of factors related to attention, memory, emotions and physical status. As an example, time may seem like it is standing still while stuck in traffic on the way to meet a friend, and then it may fly by quickly while having fun together," says Dr. Ricardo Correia, Assistant Professor at the University of Turku, Finland.

"Living in cities and everything it entails puts a strain on the processes that influence how we perceive time. In contrast, nature is known to have a restorative effect for humans and may help us to recover a more balanced sense of time."

In a recent study, Correia reviewed the [scientific literature](#) on the relationship between human temporal perception and [natural](#)

[environments](#) and found that nature experiences contribute positively to at least two dimensions of human time perception: temporal duration and temporal perspective.

Temporal duration relates to how humans understand and experience the length and flow of time. Various studies suggest that people experience the same duration of time spent in urban or natural environments differently.

Specifically, people tend to overestimate how long they have been in nature and thus time seems to last longer in natural environments. This may give people a sense of "gaining time" while experiencing nature and can help to balance feelings that time is always rushing by and is never enough, which are commonly associated with a perception of time scarcity.

There is also strong evidence that people's temporal perspective changes between natural and urban environments. Temporal perspective reflects the [human capacity](#) to focus on the past, present or future and mentally "time-travel" between them. Some people have a tendency to reminisce about the past, for example, due to trauma or nostalgia, while others live in the present and seek to enjoy the moment.

In addition, there are people who are goal-driven and thus tend to focus on the future. Too much emphasis on a single negative perspective is often associated with risky behaviors and can be indicative of poor mental well-being. Being in nature can help people to flow between different temporal frames and develop a more positive and balanced time perspective.

"Put together, the existing evidence strongly suggests that nature experiences play an important role in regulating and maintaining a healthy sense of time, and I think the impact of nature on human well-

being should be better recognized," states Correia.

"Furthermore, we lack detailed information about which elements of nature or nature experiences regulate our time [perception](#) the most. Developing a better understanding of these aspects can provide important information that helps us to design our cities and parks so that they boost our collective well-being."

More information: Ricardo A. Correia, Acknowledging and understanding the contributions of nature to human sense of time, *People and Nature* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10601](https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10601)

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