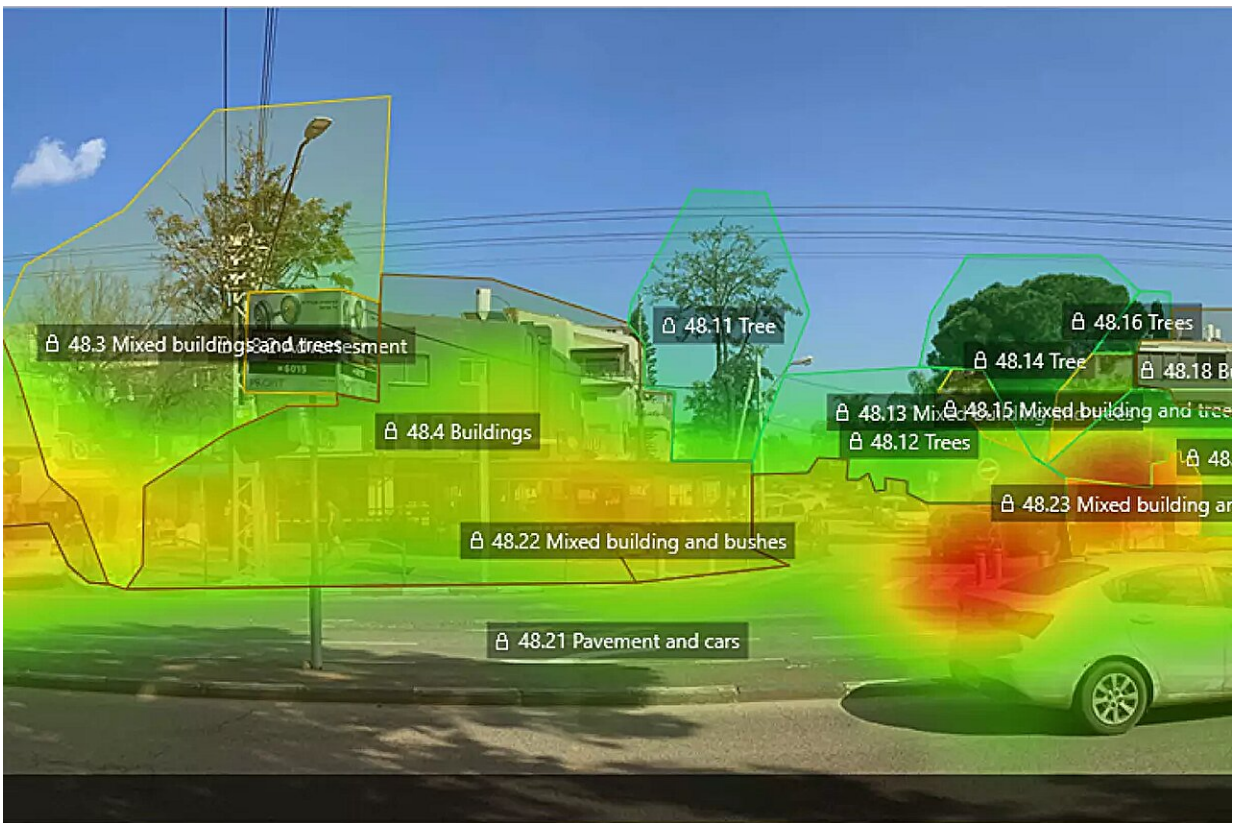


Eye-tracking study reveals that simply looking at the natural world in urban areas can reap well-being benefits

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A heat map showing all the most looked-at locations. Credit: *People and Nature* (2024). DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10648

Integrating more natural features into city landscapes can play a crucial role in enhancing the mental well-being of residents. [A study](#) by Bangor University and Technion- Israel Institute of Technology, published in the scientific journal *People and Nature*, involved city dwellers and showed how paying visual attention to greenery, rather than human-made structures, can alleviate anxiety and enhance restorative feelings.

The 117 [urban residents](#) who took part in the study, were guided on a 45-minute urban walk, while wearing eye-tracking glasses. They were instructed to focus their gaze on trees, plants, lawns and flowers, man-made structures or a mix of both. This unique methodology revealed that a participants' focus on nature was associated with improvements in various mental health metrics, including [anxiety](#) levels and feelings of restorativeness.

"We found that the individuals who were guided to direct their gaze more frequently at green elements reported a significant reduction in anxiety, with trees showing the most substantial positive effect. The study highlights a strong link between observing green elements, especially trees, and an increase in perceived restorativeness, suggesting that even brief interactions with nature can provide mental health benefits," says Dr. Whitney Fleming, lecturer in Human Geography at Bangor University.

Urban design implications

These insights offer valuable guidance for [urban planners](#) and architects, suggesting that integrating more natural features into city landscapes can play a crucial role in enhancing the mental well-being of residents. "The Nature Gaze" study supports the idea of urban environments that promote engagement with nature, highlighting a simple yet effective

strategy for improving urban mental health.

More information: Whitney Fleming et al, The nature gaze: Eye-tracking experiment reveals well-being benefits derived from directing visual attention towards elements of nature, *People and Nature* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10648](https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10648)

Provided by Bangor University

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