Elizabeth K. Nisbet and John M. Zelenski (2011)

UNDERESTIMATING NEARBY NATURE

Affective Forecasting Errors Obscure the Happy Path to Sustainability



What is affect?

It is the experience of feeling or emotions and can be negative or positive

Carleton University students were randomly assigned to an indoor walking route (tunnel path) or an outdoor walking route (by the canal) in 2 studies

DITCH THE TUNNELS, WALK OUTSIDE!

The authors found that outdoor walks in nearby nature made participants happier than indoor walks did. Participants who walked outdoors reported more positive affect, relaxation, and fascination, and less negative affect than those who walked indoors.

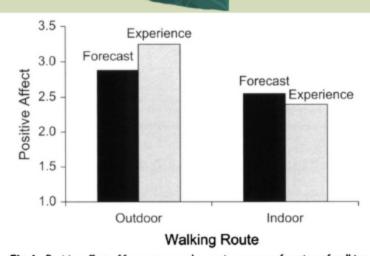


Fig. 1. Positive affect of forecasters and experiencers as a function of walking route (indoor or outdoor). Forecasters rated their anticipated affect, and experiencers rated their actual affect.



Participants make affective forecasting errors, such that they would fail to anticipate their enjoyment of the outdoors. Therefore people fail to maximize their time in nearby nature and miss opportunities to increase their happiness and relatedness to nature.

Their findings suggest a happy path to sustainability, whereby contact with nature fosters individual happiness and environmentally responsible behavior.