Swedish University of Agricultural Science – SLU

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**Nature as a source for human health and well-being**

There is increasing evidence that nature can have a positive impact on human health and well-being. Surprised? Well, the fact is that our origin is in nature, i.e. we as humans are born and raised in the arms of nature. However, in recent decades, we have become distanced from nature because of urbanisation. Nature deficit has been identified as one of the main challenges we face, both in terms of overconsumption of natural resources and raising the next generation without contact and connectedness to nature. Living in harmony with nature could be argued to be not only a matter of human health but also about total survival of the human species. Through interaction with the environment, the social, physical and mental well-being of humans can be enhanced, and environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary research field that studies this interaction.

My research focus in environmental psychology has mainly been on scientific evaluations and conceptual development and of nature-based interventions (focus on the outdoor milieu) and nature and animal assisted interventions (NAAI focus on activities) for different target groups. Interdisciplinary research is crucial for a broader understanding of the relationship between nature and human health and how health outcomes can be improved through nature-based occupations and activities. Through different studies and collaborations together with fellow researchers both in Sweden and abroad, my research has explored how nature can promote a person’s mental, physical and social health. Over the past 15 years, I have worked with many different target groups and in multi-disciplinary research teams, providing me with unique expertise in the development and integration of nature-based programmes with traditional medical treatment and rehabilitation. In particular, the specific qualities needed in the environment to support the recovery process for each target/patient group, i.e. supportive environment. My scholarly work covers mixed methods research, including variation of qualitative methods, as well as quantitative methods. Study designs have encompassed randomised controlled trials and prospective longitudinal studies, systematic reviews and action research for conceptual development. This has included being part of teams conducting research in a living lab as well as in the field (i.e. real-life situations). Since 2007, I have been involved specifically with research at Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden, Uppsala as a case study where focus has been on three main target groups: individuals recovering from stress-related mental disorders (as PhD), individuals recovering from post-stroke fatigue (as a post-doc) and migrants in need of vocational rehabilitation (as a principal investigator). In a collaboration with governmental and private stakeholders, I have also evaluated nature-based vocational training programmes for migrants in urban agriculture and nature conservation in Skåne.

It is also important to me to work towards achieving the *Global Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG) for improved living conditions for both nature and humans. The aim is to contribute to both theoretical and practical understanding of how nature can offer suitable possibilities for health promoting interventions, with a focus on both basic research and applied science. A close cooperation with governmental and commercial stakeholders is of importance in order to shorten the gap between research and practice, thereby contributing to sustainable communities, good health and well-being.

In this lecture, I will give you an overview of my research within environmental psychology, especially on nature-based and assisted interventions and the impact these may have on human health and well-being. I will also provide examples of how the results have been implemented to benefit people in their everyday lives.