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How a Lack of Green in the Residential Environment Lowers the Life Satisfaction of City Dwellers and Increases Their Willingness to Relocate

This paper investigates whether various forms of green spaces in the residential environment are associated with life satisfaction of city dwellers and their willingness to relocate. The state of research shows that having natural elements in the window view, having a garden, or doing exercise in a green environment improves physical and mental health, whereas health is connected to well-being. However, there is scarce research on the role of green spaces in the residential environment as a direct source of well-being, and we know little about whether it affects the decision to relocate significantly. We address this topic with a two-equation model that estimates respondent's plans to relocate while accounting for the endogenous satisfaction with one's residential area. With this strategy, we are able to test which residential features regarding greenery (e.g. window view, garden, balcony, green environment) are associated with one or both outcomes, controlling for life-course events and demographic characteristics. The data comes from a primary survey conducted in two large German cities, Hamburg and Cologne, in 2020/21 (N=1,800). The results suggest that experiencing a lack of green in the immediate vicinity decreases the satisfaction with one's residential area, and thus is significantly correlated with plans to move. Having a green yard and – exclusively for parents – having an own garden does deter city dwellers from moving. We consider these findings substantial, as they were obtained under control of relevant life-course events, subjective health, and household characteristics.