

PRESS RELEASE

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Going with the flow: study shows the blend of blue and green space at former industrial canals helps boost your mood

- Time spent by canals and rivers is associated with better mental wellbeing and this association is stronger compared to environments that have greenspaces alone
- National canal charity says modern-day canals offer wellbeing for millions of people in our towns and cities
- The powerful mix of blue, green and wildlife-rich space shows that although built for industry, repurposed canals are amongst our most important places for health and wellbeing in our towns and cities.

The results of a real time study, the first of its type, carried out by King's College London, Nomad Projects and J & L Gibbons in partnership with the Canal & River Trust, shows that spending time by canals and rivers is linked to feeling happy and healthy.

Researchers report that the combination of blue and green space with wildlife, has a greater impact on wellbeing than spending time in an environment that is characterised by only green space.

The researchers used Urban Mind, a smartphone-based app, to collect thousands of real time audits about participants' location and mental wellbeing.

Results showed positive associations between visits to canals and rivers and mental wellbeing, as well as a positive experience for feelings of safety and social inclusion relative to all other types of environments (such as indoors, or outside in an urban environment, or near green spaces).

Andrea Mechelli, Professor of Early Intervention in Mental Health, King's College London, commented: "Canals and rivers contain not only water but also an abundance of trees and

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plants, which means their capacity to improve mental wellbeing is likely to be due to the multiple benefits associated with both green and blue spaces. Canals and rivers also provide homes to a range of wildlife, and we know from other research that there is a positive association between encountering wildlife and mental wellbeing. Taken collectively, these findings provide an evidence base for what we thought about water and wellbeing and support the proposal that visits to canals and rivers could become part of social prescribing schemes, playing a role in supporting mental health.”

The study found that visiting canals and rivers was associated with a greater improvement in mental wellbeing, and this relationship was still present when accounting for individual variation due to age, gender, education, ethnicity, and a diagnosis of a mental health condition. People also reported continued improvements in their mental wellbeing for up to 24 hours after the visit had taken place.

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, responded: “Once the arteries of the Industrial Revolution, canals are today playing an equally important role in society as green corridors that bring nature into cities, improving community wellbeing and tackling health inequalities, as well as supporting jobs and local economies.

“The powerful mix of blue, green and wildlife-rich space shows that although initially built for industry, repurposed canals are today amongst our most important places for health and wellbeing in our towns and cities.

“With the 250-year-old canal network vulnerable to climate change, keeping them safe and attractive requires significant ongoing expenditure and – to retain these benefits – it is vital that the necessary funding to maintain their condition is secured.”

Dr Amir Khan, Canal & River Trust Ambassador stated: “As a GP and nature lover, it’s great to see that scientific studies have confirmed what many of us intuitively knew: that spending time by water, and canals in particular, is good for your wellbeing.

“An astonishing nine million people live within 1km of a canal and whether you’re looking for a free alternative to the gym, a car-free commute to work or the shops, or perhaps just somewhere to hang out with family or friends, I really do urge everyone to find their #HappyPlaceByWater this summer.”

For further information on how you can find, and enjoy your local canal, including information on the fantastic places to visit, go to www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/happyplacebywater.

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For further media requests please contact:

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Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

Project Sponsors

Urban Mind was jointly conceived in 2014 by King's College London, Nomad Projects and J & L Gibbons. The team won a pilot research grant from imperial College's Sustainable Societies network, led by King's College London in collaboration with their non-academic co-applicants. The study is part funded by National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centre at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, King's College London, and the Brain and Behavior Research Foundation.

In 2019 they went on to set up a unique and site-specific project with the Canal & River Trust

<https://www.urbanmind.info/canal-and-river-trust-study>

Urban Mind

To improve understanding of the mental health benefits of its waterways, Canal & River Trust developed a new collaboration with Urban Mind. Urban Mind is a uniquely cross sector research platform interlinking spatial, cultural and health perspectives. More information can be found at:

www.urbanmind.info.

Participants were recruited to the citizen science study through Urban Mind Ambassadors. The participants were invited to complete an assessment three times a day for fourteen days which collected real-time information on their mental wellbeing and their location. A total of 7,975 assessments were completed by 299 participants including 87 with a diagnosis of mental illness. The majority of participants identified as white and had university education.

Publication

This research paper can be found in full at PLOS ONE. Reference:

Bergou N, Hammoud R, Smythe M, Gibbons J, Davidson N, Tognin S, Reeves G, Shepherd J, Mechelli A (in press). The mental health benefits of visiting canals and rivers: An ecological momentary assessment study. PLOS ONE.