

## The psychological experience of “flow” in natural surroundings.

This is a sense of deep absorption in a task or activity, which is meaningful to the individual, & intrinsically gratifying.

Almost 50 years ago, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) began a program of research with the aim of understanding the common experiential characteristics of so-called “optimal experiences,” as well as the conditions which promote these experiences.

Based on this research, Csikszentmihalyi developed the concept of “flow.”

It is often accompanied by a pleasurable distortion of the sense of time, sometimes with a feeling of time passing quickly, but simultaneously enduring.

Few of us are lucky enough to experience this in our work, at least not for most of the time. Furthermore, we all have different contexts, points of focus & stimuli which work for us. Being out in nature or engaging in some creative activities are a couple of examples. What works for one person could leave another completely indifferent.

Whilst there is no guarantee that an open space surrounded by nature will create the right conditions to calm our minds, it often helps. Many mental health practitioners recognise that enjoyment of nature is an important need for many and vital in keeping us emotionally, psychologically and physically healthy.

Such conditions may be found in green spaces like parks, woodland or forests and blue spaces like rivers, wetlands, beaches or canals. It also includes trees on an urban street, private gardens, verges and even indoor plants or window boxes.

Dr Peter Smith

The Psychology of Happiness - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi 1975