



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Healing Through Urban Spaces Around Us

Yogith B

5th-year Student, Bachelor of Architecture
Faculty of Architecture
PES University, Bengaluru, India

Abstract: Urbanization is increasing daily, and cities and urban spaces influence the physical, mental, and emotional states of the inhabitants. This research paper explored the notion of 'healing' in urban spaces, and the writers identified multiple ways in which urban space can enable a citizen engaged in their purposeful choices be influenced by and healing for health and wellness. The paper synthesized a multitude of academic studies and life experiences that investigated how specific ordinary things in cities, such as vegetation, public art, community engagement, or urban closure and agency, can be determined as healing for resilience in city dwellers. The researchers presented ideas and strategies to move forward with a healing interpretation of an urban space while examining the potential and inevitability of challenges. The researchers presented support to understand that the way forward is to continue to view urban planning in the fullest way, and to accept by looking backward, and with intention; then we will be able to seek out the healing opportunities endowed by urban spaces in service of sustainable future cities, dwellers, and well-being. Ultimately, it is important to realize that we only seek the health, happiness, and lifeways as next steps.

Index Terms - Healing, Urban Spaces, Well-being, Green Spaces, Community Engagement, Urban Planning.

Introduction

The contemporary human experience has largely become one defined by urbanization. Cities worldwide are growing at record numbers, and it is predicted that by 2050, as many as 70 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas. Urbanization creates opportunities for economic development, cultural diversity, and technological innovation, and although it has many advantages, it can also have real obstacles to the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of urban residents. The elements of urban environments that can facilitate or disrupt quality of life, and especially health, for individuals living in high-density urban environments is often overlooked. This research article will firstly take a full critical dive into the concept of "healing through urban spaces" to illustrate the many ways that cities can be therapeutic environments to help improve the well-being of their inhabitants. The idea of healing within urban contexts is not limited to the traditional definitions of medicine or healthcare. Rather, to think about healing through urban spaces is to adopt a more comprehensive understanding of well-being.

Specifically, the concept of healing through urban spaces aligns with a holistic definition of health that recognizes the interrelationships between the physical, the psychological, and the social aspects of well-being. Healing through urban spaces considers how to create spaces that not only diminish or eliminate the stresses and ailments of urban life, but also build resilience, foster community ties, and uplift the human spirit. In contemporary discussions, urban settings have typically been defined as emotional or physical settings which are fast-paced, often stressful, and somewhat separate from nature. There are now understandable concerns about the implications of urban living on physical and mental health and the abundant, general worries related to city living and work. In light of the concrete and steel of most cityscapes, increasing demand for healthcare resources has made reactive healing increasingly relied upon, that often goes unnoticed or unutilized healing potential in our cities.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Urban Healing Paradigm

Healing through urban spaces proposes a paradigm shift in thinking and designing cities. Instead of only seeing our urban spaces as centers of commerce and industry, we as urban planners and designers will now be able to recognize urban areas as functioning ecosystems that have a substantial effect on promoting or impeding human health and well-being. Healing urban spaces include aspects, elements, and strategies to not only address the negative consequences of urban life but to also improve the quality of life of the urban inhabitants.

The Multifaceted Nature of Urban Healing

Urbanization is an event that is altering our planet more rapidly than ever, with over half of humanity now living in urban areas (United Nations, 2018). Though urban environments offer opportunities, conveniences, consumer goods, and economic productivity, urban living presents equally significant challenges to the potential of well-being (Carmona et al., 2010). Newly theorized during cities and concrete jungles, healing through urban spaces has become a field of inquiry in fields as diverse as urban planning, environmental psychology, public health, architecture, and sociology. This literature review intends to fully explore the interactions of the various ways urban spaces affect and/or influence human well-being, and the possibilities of urban contexts to be utilized as therapeutic environments.

A. PHYSICAL HEALING

Green Spaces and Nature

By far, one of the most important components of healing through urban spaces is related to green space and nature. Research has shown the physical health benefits of greenery in urban areas (**Lee and Maheshwaran, 2011**).

Access to green spaces and places in communities (such as parks, urban forest, community gardens, green roof-top installations, etc.) has been associated with enhanced physical activity, reduced stress, and improved cardiovascular health (**Gladwell et al., 2013; Lee and Maheshwaran, 2011**). Studies have also shown that access to nature in urban settings is related to lower blood pressure, lower cortisol levels, and better overall immune function (**Keniger et al., 2013**).

In addition, many urban trees provide biophysical and mental health benefits; and they are especially important for urban air quality, whereby they act as air filters, reducing pollutants like particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide (**Nowak et al., 2006**). Elimination of or alleviation of these pollutants is important to minimize the risk for respiratory diseases and optimize respiratory health.

Physical Activity and Walkability

Healing urban spaces help to promote physical activity and reduce sedentary lifestyles, which ultimately contribute to health challenges related to obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes (**Frank et al., 2010**). Well-designed urban spaces with walkable areas, adequate sidewalks and safe cycling lanes can facilitate active transportation, walking and cycling more robustly. This contributes to a healthier lifestyle and reduces automobile dependency (**Saelens and Handy, 2008**).

Restorative Urban Environments

Urban settings can also serve as restorative environments that help with recovery from mental fatigue and stress. Places that provide solitude, reflection, and relaxation have a restorative potential that associated with recovering mental clarity and emotional resiliency that are critical in the rapidly moving nature of urban life (**Hartig et al, 2014; Berto, 2014**). Restorative environments also help with stress reduction in these places, as well as other beneficial effects on mental health.

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING

Aesthetics and Emotional Well-being

The aesthetics of urban spaces significantly affect emotional states. Research shows urban spaces with good aesthetics (public art, vegetation, and nice architecture) stimulate positive emotions, relieve stress, and promote better mental health in general (*Dallimer et al., 2012; Nasar and Terzano, 2010*). Aesthetics in the urban space positively impact emotional states and psychological resilience.

Biophilic Design

Biophilic Design is based on a set of principles that emphasize nature within the built environment, and urges us to connect to the natural world. Natural light, plants, and using natural materials have been shown to bias the way urban inhabitants think, act, and create because of improved cognitive function and reduced stress (*Kellert et al., 2008; Browning et al., 2014*). Biophilic design impacts psychological well-being, in that it allows people's environments to connect with our psychological and biological thirst for nature.

Urban Identity and Place Attachment

Urban places that recognize and echo the cultural identity of those who inhabit them contribute richly to place attachment. In turn, this attachment to place enhances emotional health and facilitates social cohesion (*Bonaiuto et al., 2003; Lewicka, 2011*). Individuals with place attachment to their urban environments are more likely to experience positive emotion and engage in pro-social behaviors.

C. SOCIAL HEALING

Community Engagement

Healing through urban spaces not only encompasses individual health but also addresses social healing. Communal initiatives that spur community connectedness and social engagement enhance emotional resilience and sense of belonging. Community parks, community gardens, public gathering places, and participatory processes within urban planning processes both connect communities and dampen social inequality (*Francis and Giles-Corti, 2009; South et al., 2018*).

Cultural Identity and Place-Making

Urbanization can lead to social isolation where individuals may live close to one another but feel emotionally detached. Decreasing loneliness through interactions between community members in social spaces like community centers, public squares, and publicly inclusive events help combat social isolation and promote emotional resilience (*Gehl, 2011; Kuo et al., 1998*).

D. SOCIAL HEALING

The literature indicates the opportunity for healing in urban places. However, research also provides insight into some of the challenges:

Equitable Access: Young suggests that to facilitate healing spaces in urban populations, equitable access of high-quality healing space is essential. Socioeconomic factors create barriers for many residents in accessing green spaces, quality natural environments, or the services offered by community groups. Health inequities limit resident's potential to promote healing.

Gentrification: Gentrification threatens the opportunity for healing in urban spaces, in the changing physical landscape, often tear down existing communities, and perhaps even dismantling existing cultures and community ties, and replace them with new cognitive connoisseurs who choose to be from this new place.

Environmental Sustainability: While providing healing urban spaces, environmental and social sustainability challenges of the new urban development, such as maintaining the integrity of nature systems and minimizing carbon footprint are also important.

HARNESSING THE POSSIBILITIES OF NEURO-ARCHITECTURAL SOLUTIONS: DESIGNING SPACES FOR WELL-BEING:

As modern life hustles by, with the average person spending 80% to 90% of their waking hours in buildings, architectural design matters to our emotional and physical health. Understanding the built environment and its impact on our well-being is important, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Our experiences within these architectural spaces is influenced, at least in part, by aspects other than the appearance of the space.

Color palette, atmospheric light, and ventilation all contribute to the atmosphere and experiences we have, or do not have, within these spaces. In moving through these environments, we might not consider how design elements along with perceptions of one another shape responses of our body, mind, emotions, and can even affect how we think.

Acknowledging the impact of architectural contexts on human experience, neuroarchitecture is an emergent profession seeking to marry the aesthetics of design with understanding the mind of the user it affects. Neuroarchitecture goes beyond previous struggles with form and function; the intention is to comprehend the consequences of an architectural context on brain function and behavior. Exclusively, neuroscientists and architects are collaborating to design spaces in which everything from spatial organization to the color of the walls is purposeful downtime to the flow of neurons in the brains of the users who will occupy the space.

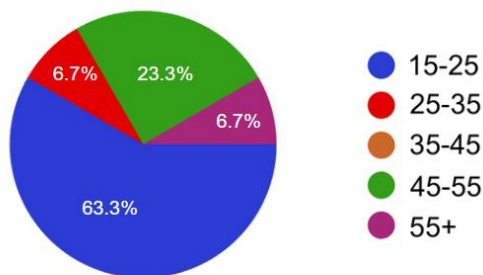
The goal is to discover the reasons why certain places elicit specific feelings and how design can be used diversely regulating to meet specific aims. The conditions presented to neuroarchitecture are many and great. As varied as spaces of use, neuroarchitecture can involve designing a less stressful office environment, the hospital that helps the user recover faster, or the school that helps students learn better. It also involves a complete understanding of the psychological elements connected with each architectural aspect and creating designs that intentionally promote specific outcomes.

As mentioned above, "fully neuro-architecture" relies on advanced tools from neurobiology including sweat sensors and other physiological monitors, to start studying human response to the large number of gestural stimuli offered by architecture. In more basic analytical ways architects can now use sensors to measure actual emotions when designing, compared to typical emotions about a particular site, or on structural elements. Designers can be guided to consider the emotions created by any architecture in all the process they use to create architecture, and that everything is considered to create a positive consequence to those that will be there. Practical considerations do pose some barriers to using these scientific tools in architectural education. Some issues exist not least the relatively small number of accessible tools currently available, and the time required to collect and assess data is enormous. When the knowledge and effects of perceptual data become more known by the populations involved in design and the public, it will present more practical benefits as well.

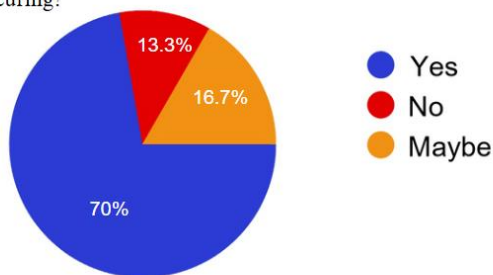
So, this will help to further an even wider embrace of neuro-architectural processes in conventional architecture. Research related to neuroarchitecture has already accomplished making progress towards understanding behavioral patterns of stimuli and this information intended to explain behaviors rather than predicting them. Therefore, the vision of creating urban areas could be entirely on these ideas of experience and cognitions in relation to preferences of future users is likely to remain elusive. Clearly human perception alone, and the relationship with both dynamic elements of architectural form with cognitive responses is going to take considerable further study, experimentation, and technology.

II. PRIMARY ANALYSIS

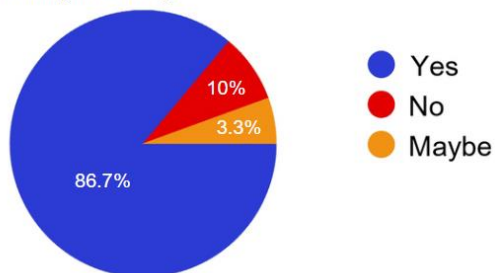
Please specify the age category.



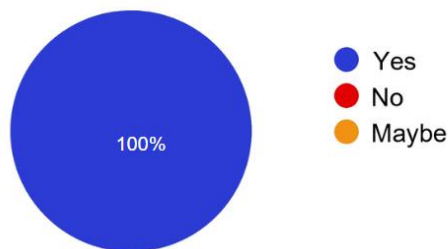
Do you comprehend the distinction between healing and curing?



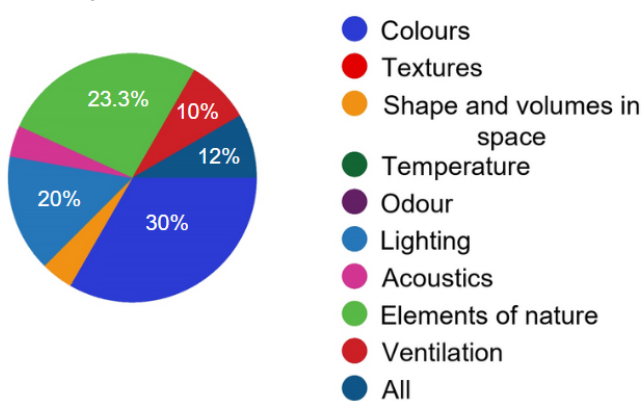
Do you concur that there is a distinction between healing and curing?



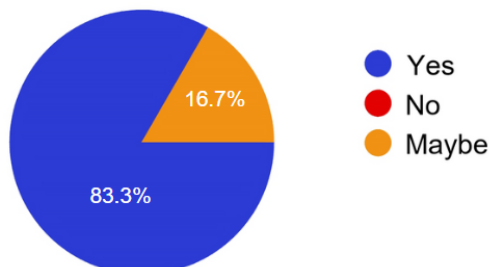
Have you grasped the distinction between physical, mental, and emotional health?



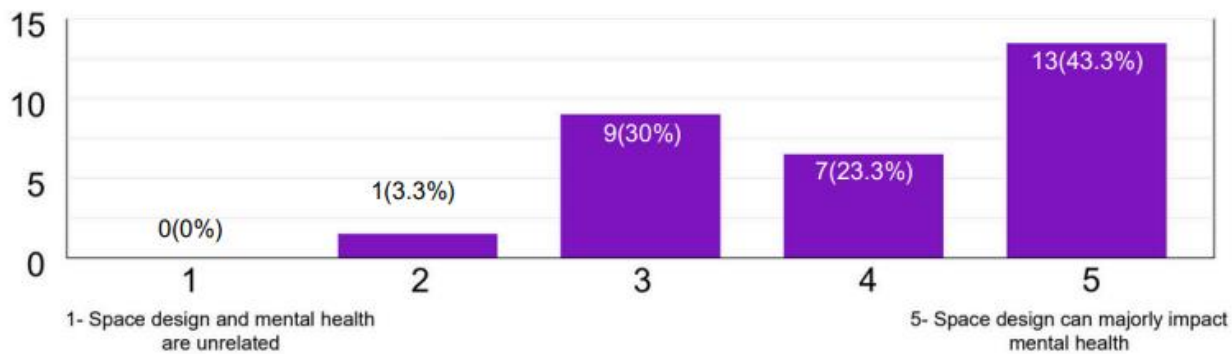
What are the most noticeable factors you observe in the spaces around you?



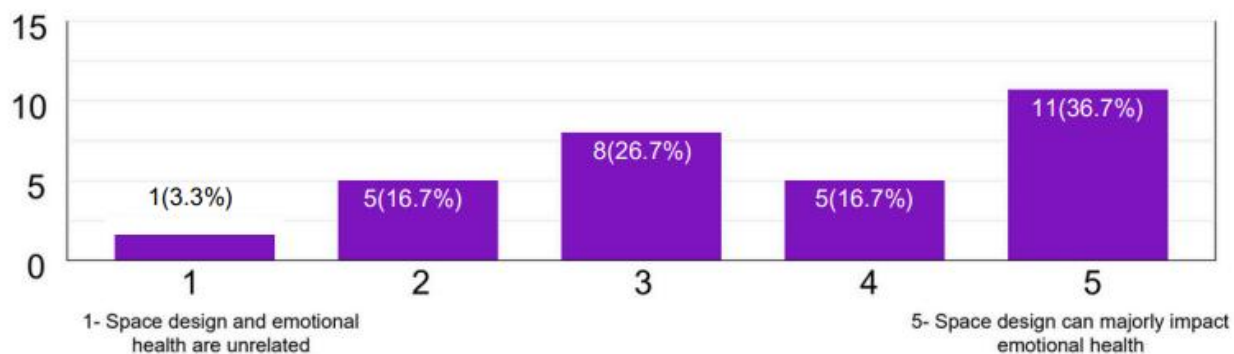
Have you ever considered whether specific colors, textures, shapes, and other elements of urban spaces impact your emotions or perceptions of them?



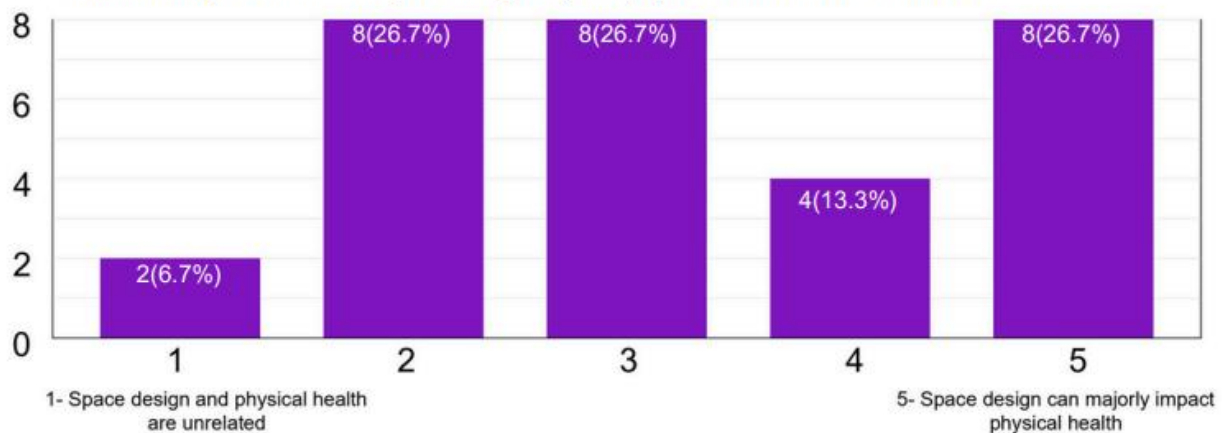
How much do you believe that space design impacts mental health, on a scale of 1-5?



How much do you believe that space design impacts emotional health, on a scale of 1-5?



How much do you believe that space design impacts physical health, on a scale of 1-5?



III. INFERENCE

The preliminary analysis of individuals' preferences and perceptions related to healing and curing, and the implications of spatial design contrasts, uncovered a complexity in the responses:

Awareness of Healing vs. Curing

Over half of the individuals surveyed, indicated awareness of the difference between the two groups of healing and curing. This awareness was not specifically constrained to age grouping, indicating that individuals across several ages, expressed a common desire to understand each of these terms in depth. Providing feedback, based on feelings about understanding space design, across several age groupings, shows a general agreement of acknowledging the building aspect of their surroundings.

Observation of Space and Mood

Individuals generally tended to observe many aspects of their spaces, and associate things observed in space to their mood or behavior. The general awareness of associating their surround top their personal lived experience, indicates sensitivity of individuals to the influence of spatial design regarding personal experience. The general acknowledgment among participants suggests a collective knowledge of their acknowledgment that space, is important to influence states of being for individuals.

Awareness of Different Health Parameters

The respondents have a common perception that physical, mental, and emotional health are separate parameters that require a different approach to maximize management. This layered sentiment indicates a certain collective thought about health being multi-dimensional, and thereby needing differentiated methods.

Belief in an Influence of Design Parameters

There is a substantial number of respondents that believe in the significant impact of several design parameters, including colors and textures, on their health. The idea that certain colors emit calming frequencies and certain textures are more desirable is consistent with a conscious consideration of design parameters with respect to their emotional and mental states.

Impact on Mental Health

Many may still believe that physical and emotional health may not be completely dependent on the design of the environment, but all respondents suggested mental health has substantial influence with respect to spatial design. Together, this suggests a widely held belief with respect to the spatial characteristics and arrangement of the environment in respect to mental health and overall well-being.

Definition of healing space

When participants were asked about the types of spaces preferred for finding healing, many participants specified both recreational spaces or parks. This indicates a combined preference for calming and less disruptive spaces for healing. The disagreement of whether the urban design currently supports healing, underscores the need for a review of urban planning.

Ways to improve

The participants in the survey suggested a number of helpful ways to enhance urban spaces including adding peaceful pockets in busy spaces, and to intentionally include more natural elements like trees throughout the city. These suggestions demonstrate an intention to create urban spaces that support calming breakthroughs through nature or calming activities, reinforcing their role in the healing process.

The analysis demonstrates a shared awareness of participants regarding the complexities of spatial design and wellness. The results illustrate the importance of creating urban environments that accommodate individuals' preferences for healing, cautioning urban planning to seek the features that would influence their mental, emotional, and physical health.

IV. CONCLUSION

The considerable effect that our environment has on our health and wellness requires that we rethink how we view, engage and design our environments. We do so at peril, because the environment is much more than merely a stage on which our lives play out, as it is a powerful agent in which we have the potential to stimulate our senses and provide an opportunity for us to heal. Our understanding of the connection we have to our environment provides us with a mechanism to fully engage the body's ability to heal itself.

At the core of our understanding is that the environment makes us aware of a coordinated response that will elicit positive health and wellness response both emotionally and physically to the situation we encounter. This is a coordinated response that will simultaneously reduce the negative physical impact of stress on the body and demonstrate an increased effectiveness of the medical treatment or procedure. These insights underscore the need to recognize the importance of the environment when looking at health, healthfulness, and sustainable health outcomes and hence the approach and encounter of the design of the environment in which we live.

In the overwhelming pace of everyday life, we are invited to take time for intentional contemplation of our experience of nature. This practice of daily, deliberate contemplation is not just an invitation; it is a prescription for well-being. While experiencing our world—from the sun bouncing off leaves, to the new life of spring breezes, to the rejuvenating love of salty air—subtle reminders of our lives, whether in health or illness, give attention to our sensory experience. This is about allowing these natural experiences to wash over us as we invest in the care of ourselves, whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Additionally, recognizing the positive or negative memories we attach to our environment creates another layer of healing as well. Allowing those memories to surface and choosing to engage with them in the context of how they affect our feelings brings our connection to our environments deeper. It becomes a form of self-reflection where daydreaming takes us to the depths of who we are.

A powerful realization comes from the connection of nature and healing, which is apparent in studies that reveal that patients who view nature heal quicker than patients who do not. The point being if we can get natural elements into our environments, we can create healing environments to align with the body's natural rhythms.

In the end, healing is a whole-body process that involves more than just the physical processes. There must not be any environment-based stressor that weakens, rather the environment must be a supportive shelter for the body to use its healing pharmacy. Our best place for healing is inside of ourselves - in our vault of memories, our territory of thoughts, and our foundation of beliefs. Our mind can create healing in any of these areas, reminding us that the connection of environment, consciousness, and self creates health possibilities.

As we work towards new relationships with our surrounding environments, we show the reality of environments that maintain life, strengthen the foundations of life, and preserve the human spirit.

V. REFERENCE

“The Healing Environment: Without and Within” by Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan.

“Healing Spaces: The Science of Place and Well-Being” by Esther M. Sternberg.

“Your Brain on Nature: The Science of Nature’s Influence on Your Health, Happiness and Vitality” by Eva M. Selhub and Alan C. Logan.

“The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative” by Florence Williams.
“Healthy Urban Planning” by Barton, H. & Tsourou, C. (2000).

“The Role of Nature in Coping with Psycho-Physiological Stress: A Literature Review on Restorative Ness” by Berto, R. (2014).

“Multidimensional perception of residential environment quality and neighborhood attachment in the urban environment” by Bonaiuto, M. et al. (2003).

“14 Patterns of Biophilic Design” by Browning, W. D., Ryan, C. O., & Clancy, J. O. (2014).

“Public Places, Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design” by Carmona, M. et al. (2010).

“Many Pathways from Land Use to Health” by Frank, L. D. et al. (2010).