

WATER VIEWS: THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER ON URBAN LANDSCAPE PREFERENCE

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Auckland possesses the privileged conditions for a strong character as a water city. However, the increase in population and the on-going densification of the city can negatively influence the intrinsic landscape value of the region. In the context of this issue, this study sought to uncover the role of visual access to water on urban landscape preferences.

An innovative method was developed and applied to explore the visual quality of Auckland's windowscape. 158 postgraduate students of two Auckland universities were requested to draw from memory the most significant features of their home and office window-views. Participants were also asked to give scores according to how much they liked each feature within their views and their windowscapes in general. Participants' sketches were then compared against photos taken from their views.

This paper presents and discusses preliminary findings of the research. The results of this study revealed that water is an important factor of urban landscape appreciation and preference was significantly higher for windowscapes with water bodies. Furthermore, the majority of those participants who have visual access to both greenery and water; omit to draw the former in their sketches and instead exaggerate the size of water, highlighting the significance of this feature. Blocking buildings in the foreground evoke negative feelings on most of the viewers and are the least preferred feature of windowscapes. However, preference was significantly lower for blocking buildings within waterscape views.

The findings contribute to the landscape preferences studies and provide information about the visual quality of the existing urban areas in New Zealand. The results obtained also supply guidelines for the future management of Auckland's built environment to develop positively perceived landscapes. In particular, urban planners and policy makers should take into account the view or waterscape preferences in allocating land to residential and business uses.

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