

# NAMED

## NAture impact on MEntal health Distribution

**DURATION**  
01/01/2017 - 15/04/2020

**BUDGET**  
353 822 €

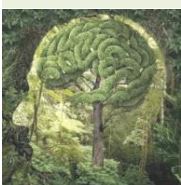
### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Mental illnesses appear as a growing problem in modern societies, tending to be more frequent in big cities. In Belgium, the national health surveys (Health Interview Survey, HIS) underlined a degradation of the mental health of the population: the proportion of respondents presenting psychological difficulties rose from 25% to 32% between 2008 and 2013. Strikingly, these symptoms are more prevalent in the Brussels-Capital Region (40%) than in Wallonia (35%) or in Flanders (29%) (Survey 2013). Several international studies have shown that the built environment has negative impacts on mental health, while others highlighted the beneficial impacts of natural areas on this component, stress, but also more generally on well-being. In Belgium, only limited research is currently available.

The NAMED project investigates how the built (i.e. existing buildings and infrastructure such as roads) and non-built (i.e. open public and private green/blue spaces) environments impact the mental wellbeing of Brussels' citizens. Research questions include: how built, non-built environments, air, noise pollution intertwine?; what are the relationships between these different factors and mental health?; how these associations are influenced by demographic, socioeconomic and lifestyle factors?; what are the built/non-built environments the most beneficial/detrimental for mental health and the populations who benefit/suffer the most from the urban environment?; what are the underlying mechanisms, including direct (stress buffer, recovery, etc.) and indirect (physical activity, social contacts) effects?; how inhabitants perceive these complex associations and how this influences their use of their environment?

To answer these questions, researchers combine information from existing databases (called further the "quantitative approach") with additional research specifically developed for this project (called further the "qualitative approach"). In the quantitative approach, HIS data are used to investigate the relationships between mental health and the built/non-built environments, while accounting for demographic, socioeconomic, lifestyle factors, air and noise pollution. To do so, indicators describing each participant's place of residence (in terms of building footprint, spatial organisation, height, type, proportion of vegetation, etc.) are developed using geographical information systems and monitoring tools. In the qualitative approach, Brussels residents are interviewed to record individual perceptions about the quality of their living environment, on their mental wellbeing and on the link between those two. Local stakeholders and experts are also consulted through focus groups and extended peer evaluation of the results. By gathering specialists in social, geographical, medical, epidemiology sciences and involving citizens and local stakeholders of the Brussels region, the project intends to combine disciplines and perspectives in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Conclusions of NAMED will be relevant for a wide audience and will have numerous impacts for the society. They will enrich the (inter)national scientific knowledge on the topic. Thus, results will be communicated through several articles published in international peer-reviewed journals and through conferences. In addition, NAMED will inform decision makers on the impact of built/non-built environments on mental health and provide concrete advices, significant for public health, urban planning and management of nature.



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Considering the attention the project will give to the role of demographic and socioeconomic factors, targeted interventions for vulnerable populations will be possible. One could for instance consider the development, together with the medical community, of health promotion campaigns intended to the general population or alternative therapies for patients suffering from mental disorders based on green spaces. These recommendations will be shared in the form of a final report as well as meetings with decision makers. Also, specific efforts will be done to translate/communicate research conclusions to the general population through media, local organizations, special events. More generally, this project will strengthen collaboration between science, medical, policy and civil society actors. It will contribute to the valorisation of federal databases too, suggesting possible improvements in their exploitation (including new questions and/or alternative data collection methods for future HIS for instance).

Key words: Mental illnesses; Urban environment; Health equity; Interdisciplinary approach.

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