Humans relate to nature in many different ways, filtered through culture and social contexts. These relations and the values we see in nature are often positive, but their implications for sustainable governance and governance change towards ecosystem stewardship social-ecological system dynamics remain incompletely understood. We use the conceptualisation of cultural ecosystem services (CES) as a platform to explore and better understand how cultural values shape human-nature interactions and how that in turn contributes to the emergence of stewardship.

Drawing on a set of urban case studies and the literature on environmental stewardship we suggest that human-nature connections through cultural ecosystem services, such as aesthetic experiences, sense of place, and recreation, can lead to engagement in stewardship activities and transformative processes to improve protection, restoration, and overarching governance of urban green spaces and ecosystems. We argue that the recognition and consideration, in for example urban planning, of CES and the positive connections between people and nature, have potential to build social-ecological resilience and act as levers for transformations towards ecosystem stewardship.

Keywords: human-nature connections, values, resilience, social-ecological systems