

WIKI n°15 : Solastalgia

Solastalgia describes the sorrow and psychological distress experienced due to awareness of the degradation of the surrounding natural environment and climate. It manifests itself as a deep-seated anxiety and a sense of loss—a form of grief for nature—arising from the deterioration of landscapes, ecosystems, and climatic conditions.

The term "solastalgia" was introduced by Australian philosopher and ecologist Glenn Albrecht in May 2003 at an Eco-Health Forum in Montreal, Canada⁵⁹. Etymologically, it derives from the Latin word *sōlācium*, meaning comfort or relief (the sense of well-being and reassurance experienced in a familiar and reassuring environment), and the Greek suffix *-algia*, signifying pain or suffering, whether physical or moral⁶⁰.

It is important to distinguish solastalgia from eco-anxiety, as they are often conflated. Solastalgia is experienced in the present, driven by current environmental degradation, whereas eco-anxiety pertains to anticipatory feelings of distress about future environmental changes and the planet's uncertain natural state⁶¹.

The scientific literature on the concept remains limited. However, 2018 saw a peak in publications on the matter, indicating growing interest in solastalgia.⁶² Researchers suggest the phenomenon is likely to become more prevalent due to climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental crises.

⁵⁹ Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2007. <https://www.hpaf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Solastalgia-The-Distress-Caused-by-Environmental-Change.pdf>

⁶⁰ Albrecht, Glenn. Solastalgia: The Definition and Origins PSYCHOTERRATICA, décembre 2018. <https://glennaalbrecht.wordpress.com/2018/12/17/solastalgia-the-definition-and-origins/>

⁶¹ Galway Lindsay P. et alii, « Mapping the Solastalgia Literature: A Scoping Review Study », International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, vol. 16, n° 15, juillet 2019. URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/16/15/2662>

⁶² Galway Lindsay P. et alii, "Mapping the Solastalgia Literature: A Scoping Review Study", International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, vol. 16, n° 15, juillet 2019. URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/16/15/2662>

Solastalgia has gained significance across disciplines. In healthcare, for example, professionals recognize the impact of environmental changes on mental well-being. Solastalgia can contribute to mood disorders, anxiety, and despair⁶³.

In the social and human sciences, the concept provides insights into how communities respond emotionally and culturally to environmental transformations. Moreover, solastalgia can be a catalyst for overcoming inaction, both collectively and individually.

Laure NOUALHAT, author of "*Comment rester écolo sans finir dépressif*," observes that "everyone must go through the stages of grief for our planet - shock, denial, depression, acceptance - before being able to overcome this ordeal and hope to return to life"⁶⁴.

Addressing solastalgia in sustainable development policies is essential. Initiatives such as creating green spaces and open-air areas for physical exercise, as well as fostering environments that encourage positive social interactions, could contribute to improved mental health⁶⁵.

Education plays a crucial role by raising public awareness of solastalgia, promoting greater understanding and encouraging initiatives to limit the harmful effects of human activity⁶⁶ and, consequently, preserve the environment.

⁶³ Climate Change 2022, Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Summary for Policymakers, Technical Summary and Frequently Asked Questions; Report IPCC; 2022

⁶⁴ https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryVolume.pdf

⁶⁵ <https://usbeketrica.com/fr/article/solastalgie-comment-militer-soulage-notre-eco-anxiete>

⁶⁶ <https://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/how-urban-design-can-impact-mental-health.html>

⁶⁶ <https://gteccanada.ca/reader/solastalgia-the-rise-of-climate-anxiety-in-young-people/>