

Understanding engagement with the natural environment

9 key things we've learnt so far, and what that means for where next

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Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)

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Captures data on use and enjoyment of the natural environment by members of the English adult population (aged 16+)



Visit
levels



Visit
takers



Destinations



Activities



Motivations
& barriers



Appreciation
& enjoyment



Other
engagement &
protective actions

How was MENE different to previous surveys?

- Focus on **all visits** to the natural environment
- **Continuous** interviewing
- **Origin and destination** of visits
- **Why** people don't visit
- **Attitudes** towards the natural environment
- Pro-environmental **behaviours**
- **Other ways of engaging** with the natural environment

Other developments...

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- ONS standardised wellbeing questions
- Children's engagement with the natural environment
- Indicator for connection to nature

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment

The national survey on people and the natural environment



Headline Report from the 2014-15 survey



www.naturalengland.org.uk
Natural England Joint Report JRD14
ISBN 978-1-78354-262-8
First published 2 December 2015



National policy and strategy

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- Defra 25 Year Environment Plan
- ONS Natural Capital Accounts
- Public Health Outcomes Framework
- Wellbeing What Works Centre
- National Ecosystem Assessment
- ORVal - Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool
- Biodiversity 2020



Science is a progression of answering good questions

The key question: what's the balance between tracking changes overtime and asking new questions, adapting methods, based on insights thus far?

1. Importance of local greenspace – visits close to where people live

- Important for policy – development standards for ANGSt.
- How important is number of visits?
- 7 day recall period – bias routine visits, dog walking?
- Develop understanding of ‘special’ visits – perceptions plus observational data – e.g. Zoomiverse?



2. Type of place visited important for individual benefits.

- Importance of knowing visit location, quality of habitat.
- Develop perceptions of quality, importance of identifying with place, perceptions of wildness, species richness.



3. Social divide – with key groups less likely to visit the environment and when they do it is ‘a means to an end’.

- Key policy area; challenges representative sample.
- Provision and practice (identity, language, accessibility).

| MENE | BAME | Urban deprived | DE groups | Over 65 | Disability |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Size of population | 5.4 million (13%) | 4.2 m (10%) | 11.5m (28%) | 8.1m (19%) | 7.4m (18%) |
| Visits /p/yr (national ave = 65) | 27 | 40 | 50 | 55 | 56 |
| Frequent place | Urban parks | Urban Parks | Urban parks | Countryside & coastal | Wide range |
| Activities & motivations | Playing with kids, spending time with family & friends | Playing with children, dog walking. | Dog walking, health & exercise. | Fresh & scenery, walking for health & dog, wildlife. | Health & exercise, dog walking. |

4. Different age groups use the natural environment differently – development of children's dataset

- MENE: 12% children do not visit the environment
- Important for future policy, especially for Defra 25 Year Plan
- Ethical issues
- Can we build a longitudinal element to address research question: does early engagement support engagement in adulthood?



5. MENE has shown an (albeit weak) association between attitudes, nature connection, visits and other behaviours.

- Direction and strength of association uncertain.
- Develop: composite for 'engagement', likert scales, proxies.



6. Understanding why people don't visit is crucial to developing interventions to change behaviour

- MENE tells us that lack of time, lack of means to access, are key barriers.
- Develop: the 'real reason why' based on qualitative research:
 - Identity - 'people like me, the kind of things my friend do.'
 - Weather, mud, I prefer to be inside.



7. Trends typically constant over time – but highly variable week by week

- MENE is a continuous survey. Shows that visits are season / weather dependant.
- Winter visits – more routine (dog walking, regular exercise).
- Summer visits for pleasure.
- What effect does weather have on visits? Long-term climate change?



8. MENE has shown huge variety in what people 'do' outside

- Dog walking, walking, playing, exercise, picnicking, sports.
- Potential to better understand 'practices' e.g. running in a gym vs running outside; meeting friends in a park vs at the shops. Can we 'grow' the outside practices?
- Potential to use observational data as well as self-reported.
- Understand what people do on their terms – opportunities moving online via automation.



9. Processing, analysing and interpreting the data - as much work as collection ?

- MENE is the biggest survey of its kind – half a billion variable data points.
- Wide range of users – how do we better develop what they need?
- Can we use automation and IT innovation to process data quicker, smarter?
- What further analysis?

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The national survey on people and the natural environment



Headline Report from the 2015-16 survey



Report Version 2
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Conclusions

1. What we've learnt from MENE has thrown up lots of new research questions – how do we balance exploring those, with continuous tracking?
2. If we want to change behaviour (more people engaged), focus on understanding inferential relationships; understanding non-visits as important as visits.
3. Potential benefits to moving online (more representative population level, automation questions and analysis) but challenges too.



Thank you!

The logo for Natural England, featuring a green square above the text "NATURAL ENGLAND" in white, uppercase letters.

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MENE reports, data viewer and data available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results>