



Understanding the Drivers of Participation in Outdoor Recreation in Scotland - Summary Report



AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION IN SCOTLAND - SUMMARY REPORT

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Background

Visiting the outdoors and engaging with nature for leisure and recreation purposes has been shown to deliver a range of health, environmental and social benefits. Since 2012, there has been a significant increase in the number of adults participating in outdoor recreation on both an annual and a weekly basis. However, increased participation has not been seen across all groups, such as those with a long-term illness or disability, or among minority ethnic groups.

Since March 2021, participation in outdoor recreation has also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to social distancing measures and restrictions on travel and sports and exercise activities, with most people changing the amount of time they spend outdoors as a result.

In order to inform policy and the planning of future interventions and communications aimed at widening participation and addressing inequalities, the Scottish Government in partnership with NatureScot, commissioned this research to provide an improved understanding of the factors that are driving increased participation in outdoor recreation, the importance of the different drivers and barriers to participation, and how these differ among different population groups.

Aims and methods

The aim of the research was to understand current attitudes to and behaviours towards outdoor recreation, and to provide recommendations on how the increased participation observed since 2012 can be sustained over the long-term, with any barriers to participation among lower-participation and equalities groups overcome.

The research project was qualitative in nature and was conducted in two phases – in-depth telephone interviews and an app diary task.

Participants were recruited from the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) re-contact database - a database of people who have previously taken part in the SHS and agreed to be re-contacted for future research. This was supplemented with recruitment of minority ethnic participants via gatekeeper organisations. Participants were offered a £30 payment to thank them for taking part.

Recruitment quotas were set on ethnicity, disability or other long-term health condition and level of area deprivation to ensure participants from groups within the Scottish population that are less likely to take part in outdoor activities were included in the research. In addition, we set quotas on gender,

age, rurality, family type, employment status, and dog ownership to ensure that the sample was broadly representative of the Scottish population overall on these variables.

A total of 50 in-depth interviews with members of the public who took part in outdoor activities were conducted over the telephone or using Microsoft Teams between 30th November 2020 and 8th February 2021.

The second phase comprised an app diary task among 19 participants who had previously taken part in an in-depth interview. This task used Ipsos' mobile research app – AppLife – and took place over a two-week period, between 1st and 14th March 2021. Participants were asked to complete a diary task on their smartphone each time they took part in an outdoor activity over the two-week period – describe the activity their reasons for doing it, and to post a photo of the activity, if possible. They were also asked to complete two further one-off tasks: one to give their views on the open or green space nearest to them; and another to record a short video describing their experiences of taking part in outdoor activities during the fieldwork period.

The research employed a behavioural science approach to address the research aims in a systematic manner, by understanding the dimensions of behaviour that influence both why participation in outdoor recreation increases and whether or not it is sustained. Behaviour change research improves our understanding of why people demonstrate certain behaviours and a number of models exist to support this. In this study, we have used the MAPPS behaviour change framework¹, developed by the Ipsos Behaviour Science team, to ensure a structured approach and the systematic exploration of the specific behaviours of interest.

Findings

Perceptions of and participation in outdoor activities

Overall, participants' views on the outdoors, including local green or open spaces, and outdoor activities in Scotland were very positive. The outdoor activities they took part in fell into three broad categories: walking; outings (e.g. sightseeing/ visiting attractions); and other sports or fitness activities. Participation levels in these activities varied greatly, from occasionally going for a walk, at the lower end, through to committing substantial time, effort and money on a regular basis to several different activities, at the higher end.

¹ For a more detailed explanation of the MAPPS framework see: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/science-behaviour-change>

Factors motivating participation in outdoor activities

Participants identified a range of motivating factors that acted as drivers of participation in outdoor activities and that encouraged them to start or maintain their participation. The factors are summarised in Figure 1. Most factors motivated participants both to start and to maintain activities. The exception was mental health benefits, which were important in sustaining participation in outdoor recreation, but were not a factor that had encouraged participants to start doing outdoor activities in the first place.

Figure 1: Motivations to starting and sustaining outdoor activities

	MOTIVATIONS FOR STARTING	MOTIVATIONS FOR SUSTAINING
Physical health	Desire or need to improve physical health and fitness	Experiencing the physical health and fitness benefits
Mental health	[Not mentioned]	Experiencing the mental health benefits
Social and family benefits	Way of spending time with family and friends; benefits to others in their household	Existing role played by outdoor activity in social lives
Desire to be closer to nature	Wanting to see more of Scotland's scenery and wildlife	Satisfaction and enjoyment gained from being closer to nature
Learning or discovering new places	Desire to learn something new and expand own/family's horizons	Experiencing the benefits of learning and discovery of the outdoors

Motivations particularly relevant to the lower participation groups of interest in this research included:

- Participants with long term health conditions – motivated to start outdoor activities as a way of managing their condition (including being advised to do so by their GP)
- Younger minority ethnic participants – motivated by concerns about developing Type 2 diabetes
- Minority ethnic participants new to Scotland – inspired by Scotland's scenery, using outdoor activities as a way to get to know their area and to meet new people.

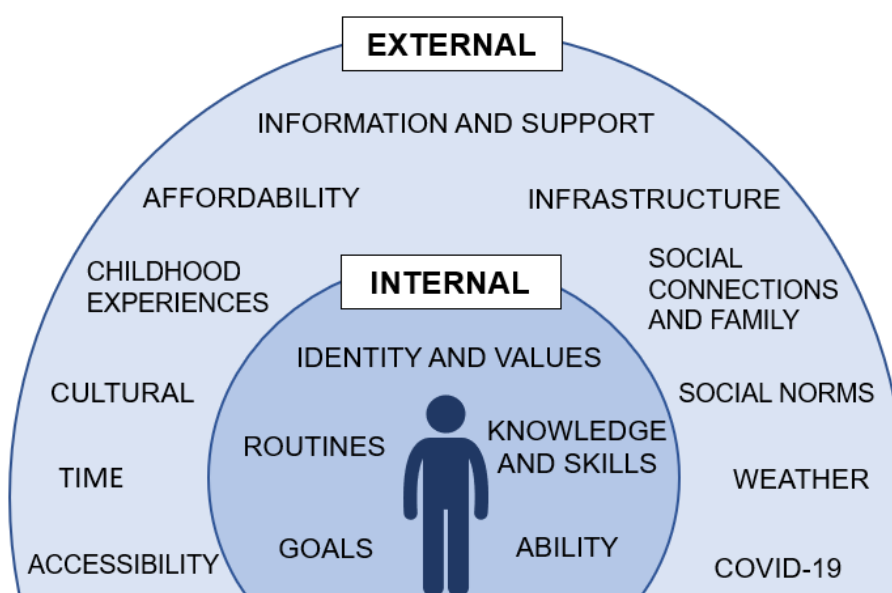
Enablers and barriers to participation in outdoor activities

Alongside the motivations above were factors that acted as enablers or barriers to starting or maintaining participation. These were factors that made it easier or more difficult for someone to participate in an activity. These included both individual, internal factors, such as having the knowledge or confidence to do the activity, and external factors, such as being able to access locations at which to do the activity or being able to afford the equipment required (Figure 2).

Lockdown restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic had acted both as a barrier to participation in outdoor activities and as an enabler. Factors such as concern about the risks of going out, certain local spaces being busier than usual, group activities not running, less free time for some participants due to increased work and the pressures of home-schooling, and having had health procedures delayed for conditions that interfere with outdoor activities had all acted as barriers.

Ways in which COVID-19 had acted as an enabler for some participants included having had increased time available (for example those who were furloughed); more flexibility to go out during daylight hours and in good weather; having undertaken increased outdoor activity because of a lack of other things to do and the focus on exercise as an 'essential purpose' for leaving home; and the only way to see friends in person. There is potential for interventions to encourage participation in outdoor activities in future by building on the positive changes the pandemic has brought about.

Figure 2: Motivations to starting and sustaining outdoor activities



Barriers/enablers particularly applicable to lower participation groups included:

- Minority ethnic participants – a lack of knowledge of the benefits of outdoor activities as well as where to do activities; outdoor activities not being a traditional part of their culture; activity groups acted as an enabler
- Participants with long term health conditions – limited in extent and range of activities
- Participants in more deprived areas/on lower incomes – lack of high quality spaces available locally; affordability and transport barriers.

Since the research was not a longitudinal study, it cannot tell us with any certainty how participants' behaviours and attitudes towards outdoor activities have changed over time. However, it does highlight some key factors that may have played a role in increasing participation in outdoor recreation in Scotland:

- patterns laid down in childhood
- trying outdoor activities as a result of friends or family
- greater leisure time being available at particular lifestages
- an increase in dog ownership
- advice from health professionals
- technological advances (such as apps and smartwatches)
- the establishment of more activity-based social groups.

Guiding principles

A set of guiding principles that could help to sustain participation in outdoor activities, and in some cases to widen participation among lower participation groups, were developed on the basis of the research findings using the MAPPS behaviour change framework. These guiding principles can be used to inform the design of interventions to help increase participation in outdoor activities in future.

The guiding principles are grouped as follows:

Motivational ('do I want to do it?')

- Health professionals play an important role in prescribing outdoor exercise – particularly for minority ethnic groups where the benefits are not as well known.
- There may be scope to further advocate the mental health benefits of outdoor activities – these play a key role in sustaining participation but are not currently a main driver to starting activities.
- Strengthening the sense of identity people feel with an activity can help sustain and deepen participation.

- In designing interventions to encourage families to take part in outdoor recreation, there is scope to build on the view that doing outdoor activities with children is part of being a 'good parent'.
- Challenges and goals (e.g. walking 10,000 steps a day, running a 10k) act as useful ways of sustaining motivation. The use of technology, such as apps and fitness watches, can support these goals.

Ability ('am I able to do it?')

- There is a role for greater information provision and communication of the benefits of outdoor activities, particularly among minority ethnic groups.
- There is scope to emphasise the range of activities that can be enjoyed, including by people who are less physically mobile.
- Childhood experiences can strongly influence sustained participation in outdoor activities in adulthood.
- Encouraging the development of new or adapted routines can help to build motivation for participation in outdoor recreation.

Physical ('does the context encourage the behaviour?')

- Availability of good quality, easy to access local spaces helps to facilitate regular participation, while a lack of these can be a barrier in more deprived areas.
- The physical infrastructure and maintenance of outdoor spaces affects their accessibility, appeal and usage.
- Improvements to cycling infrastructure, and ways to help people build their cycling confidence and manage challenging cycling situations, may address some of the barriers to this activity.
- Available resources (financial, transport, equipment) affect both the range of activities people can do and the extent to which they can engage with them.
- The role played by life stage and personal and family circumstances – such as parenthood or retirement - should be borne in mind when considering opportunities to encourage participation.

Social ('what do other people do and value?')

- Activity groups and organised trips can help both to initiate and to sustain participation.
- More informal social meetings for outdoor activities can also help to initiate and sustain participation.
- Cultural norms strongly influence knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, acting as both an enabler and a barrier.

Conclusions

The overarching aim of the research was to understand current attitudes to, and behaviours towards, outdoor recreation, and to provide recommendations on how the increased participation observed since 2012 can be sustained over the long-term, with any barriers to participation among low-participation and equalities groups overcome.

The study has achieved this aim using a behaviour change approach to first *understand* the behavioural dimensions influencing participation (of which there are many) and second to use this understanding to develop a set of guiding principles to inform any future interventions aimed at sustaining participation and overcoming barriers for low-participation and equalities groups.

The findings of the study offer much to build on. Current attitudes towards the outdoors in Scotland are very positive overall with participants taking part in a range of outdoor activities – to a greater or lesser degree – with recreational walking being particularly popular. While reasons for participating in outdoor activities were fairly individual, there were common themes that drove motivation – primarily the benefits to both physical and mental health and the social contact offered.

The extent to which participants chose and were able to participate in outdoor activities was influenced by a number of internal and external factors. Again, while these were often very personal to the individual, key themes emerged. It was clear that cultural and social factors were particularly influential with participants' attitudes and behaviours being shaped both by their personal experiences during childhood and the wider social and cultural norms. Having accessible outdoor spaces locally and having the means (e.g. financial, transport) to access spaces and activities was also key.