



“WHAT ABOUT US?” Diversity Review evidence – part one

Challenging perceptions:
under-represented visitor needs

JULY 2005

This qualitative research explored the needs and perceptions of under-represented groups in accessing outdoor recreation and the countryside. It is part of the Countryside Agency’s evidence for the Diversity Review, a DEFRA commitment set out in the Rural White Paper (2000).

“By 2005, we will carry out a full diversity review of how we can encourage more people with disabilities, more people from ethnic minorities, more people from the inner cities, and more young people to visit the countryside and participate in country activities. Initially we will do this by seeking their views on what they need to enjoy the countryside. Then we will draw up a plan of action.”

All the under-represented groups researched – disabled people, black and minority ethnic community and young people - are keen to access outdoor recreation once they have 'tasted' the experience, aside from young people who need more active engagement. Lack of information and confidence are key factors preventing independent access. Although significant - and linked to finances - lack of transport is less important.



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Executive Summary

Background

Certain groups are under-represented amongst users of the countryside and green outdoor spaces. People from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, disabled people, young people, people who live in inner cities, women, older people and people on low incomes all make limited use of the countryside and green outdoor spaces.

Aims of the research

The research explored the reasons for the current under-representation and aimed to answer four key questions:

- How do under-represented users perceive the countryside?
- What do they think are the benefits of countryside use?
- What are the factors that restrict their use of the countryside?
- What needs to be done to increase use of the countryside by these groups?

This research complements a study carried out by the University of Surrey on the attitudes, policies and practices of countryside service providers in relation to various under-represented groups.

Methodology

The current research investigated the views of three under-represented groups: people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds; disabled people; and young people.

The sample of BME research participants included Indian people, Pakistani people and Black-Caribbean people. The sample of disabled people included those with ambulatory problems (all were wheelchair users); people who were blind or visually-impaired (all were registered blind); and people with mental health problems (all had a clinical diagnosis). The sample of young people covered 14-16 year-old boys and girls, and 17-20 year-old young men and women.

All research participants were selected from inner city areas in London, Birmingham and Bradford. For analytical purposes, all the groups included in the sample of lay people were mutually exclusive (e.g. BME respondents could not be either disabled or young). In total, nearly 300 people took part in the study.

The research design combined a literature review, 15 interviews with experts on countryside use amongst under-represented groups and 32 individual interviews with countryside 'non-users'. There were 24 focus groups with countryside 'non-users' and eight focus groups with countryside 'users'. In addition, there were 14 escorted visits to country parks with 'non-user' families.

Key findings

▪ Representations of the countryside

People from all under-represented groups shared a common underlying representation of the countryside:

- opposed the countryside to the city;
- construed the environment of the countryside as natural and green; vast and open; pure, healthy and clean; and far away from cities;
- viewed the way of life of the countryside as slow and simple; based on traditional English values; set in close-knit communities; and for an old and socially conservative population.

In each under-represented group, people had different *attitudes* towards the various dimensions in this common representation of the countryside.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds valued the dimensions related to the natural environment and the slow and simple life of rural communities, but they expected to feel excluded and conspicuous in what they perceived as an exclusively English environment. Disabled people also valued the way of life of rural communities, but instead they expected to feel welcome. Although disabled people valued the natural or physical environment, they anticipated feeling vulnerable because of the inherent unpredictability of the landscape. In contrast, young people had mixed views in relation to the natural environment. They were negative when describing the way of life in the countryside and believed it lacked much of interest or excitement, with nothing for young people to do.

▪ Perceived benefits of countryside use

Across all under-represented groups, people thought that making more use of the countryside and green outdoor spaces would be good for them.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds perceived benefits in relation to:

- physical health: breathing fresh air and taking light exercise;
- psychological health and emotional well-being: getting away from the stresses and strains of everyday urban life, reconnecting with nature, finding inner peace, and spending time with family or friends;
- personal identity: reminiscing about life 'back home' and establishing psychological continuity between their former and current 'self';
- social inclusion and civic participation: meeting people from other social and cultural backgrounds, learning about English society, and feeling integrated, respected and empowered as ethnic minorities.

Disabled people perceived benefits in relation to:

- physical health: breathing fresh air and taking light exercise;
- psychological health and emotional well-being: getting away from the stresses and strains of everyday urban life, reconnecting with nature, having new and varied sensory experiences, finding inner peace, and spending time with other people;
- personal identity: establishing psychological continuity between people's non-disabled and disabled days, having a sense of achievement;

- social inclusion and civic participation: meeting non-disabled people, and feeling integrated, respected and empowered as disabled people.

Young people perceived benefits in relation to:

- physical health: breathing fresh air, taking light exercise and engaging in sports and challenging physical activities;
- psychological health and emotional well-being: getting away from various social pressures (family, peer, school and work), finding inner peace, and spending time with friends;
- personal identity: establishing psychological continuity between their childhood and early adulthood, exploring new identities, developing new skills.

While young people themselves did not discuss benefits of countryside use in relation to social inclusion and civic participation, there were some references to these in the literature and in interviews with experts.

▪ **Factors limiting use of the countryside**

Amongst people from ethnic minority backgrounds, the main factors restricting use of the countryside included the cost of visiting the countryside and problems linked to transport, a lack of knowledge of the English countryside and a lack of 'cultural habit' of visiting the countryside. There was a fear of discrimination, as well as different patterns of use and a lack of culturally-appropriate provisions.

For disabled people, the principal factors related to problems surrounding transport and the cost of visiting the countryside, a lack of knowledge of suitable facilities, as well as a basic lack of provisions for disabled people. Social isolation played its part and there was a feeling of vulnerability due to the inherent unpredictability of the countryside.

The main barriers to greater countryside use by young people were negative perceptions of the countryside, other priorities, peer pressure and a dependency on adults. Again, there was a lack of appropriate facilities for their particular group, as well as problems linked to transport and the overall cost of visiting the countryside.

It is important to note that the research focused on people's views and experiences in relation to 'the countryside'. The perceived benefits and factors limiting use of the countryside were therefore discussed with the remote and open countryside in mind. Many of the views expressed would be have very different had research participants been asked to consider 'outdoor green spaces' more generally.

Recommendations

There are a number of strategic recommendations put forward to increase and diversify participation in outdoor recreation:

- **Service planning:** The collection of baseline data by service providers should be prioritised, guidance needs to be provided on monitoring and evaluation, and potential organisations mapped out for multi-agency partnerships;
- **Site design and management:** There is a need to focus on spaces for people and encourage under-represented users, providing a range of experiences and appropriate on-site information;
- **Staffing:** The diversity of staff and volunteers must be enhanced, as well as basic diversity awareness;
- **Information and communications:** The terminology of countryside users needs to be made more user-friendly, an inclusive strategy needs to be adopted that takes into account people's perceptions in communications, and a centralised database on green outdoor spaces would help maximise access to information;
- **Building foundations for the use of green outdoor spaces:** More support for access to outdoor learning is necessary, including facilitated and escorted visits, well-advertised special events and long-term projects;
- **Rural attitudes:** A greater diversity awareness in rural communities is required so that welcoming attitudes are promoted.

Finally, the report identified research priorities aimed at improving the evidence base in relation to under-represented groups. These include 'action research' encouraging providers to integrate rather than segment existing functions, such as training and community consultation, education and outreach work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

While countryside activities have the potential to be inclusive and to provide many benefits to users, the current profile of countryside users does not reflect the diversity found in contemporary Britain. For complex reasons, many people do not take full advantage of the recreational opportunities afforded by the countryside.

In 2000, the Rural White Paper stated the Government's commitment to increasing and diversifying enjoyment of the countryside. It said:

“By 2005, we will carry out a full diversity review of how we can encourage more people with disabilities, more people from ethnic minorities, more people from inner cities, and more young people to visit the countryside and participate in countryside activities. Initially, we will do this by seeking their views and what they need to enjoy the countryside. Then we will draw up a plan of action.”

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) tasked the Countryside Agency with carrying out the Diversity Review.

The specific components of the Diversity Review were identified, based on the findings of scoping research undertaken by OPENSspace on behalf of the Countryside Agency. The scoping research investigated the availability of baseline data on countryside use by under-represented groups and sought to establish evidence of the factors that restrict participation. It found that there was a lack of baseline data describing the quantity and quality of visits to the countryside, as well as lack of data on the benefits associated with countryside use amongst under-represented groups. It recommended that research on such issues be carried out.

As a result, a wide-ranging programme of research commenced in December 2003 to better understand the current levels of under-representation in the countryside and in outdoor recreation in some social groups. At the most basic level, the Countryside Agency needed to determine whether under-representation was an outcome of institutional discrimination and exclusion on the part of service providers, or an outcome of choices and preferences of under-represented users themselves; or perhaps an outcome of interactions between these two sets of factors.

The research reported here focuses on the perspective of under-represented groups themselves in relation to the countryside. The Countryside Agency commissioned the University of Surrey to complement this work by examining the attitudes, policies and practices of a wide range of countryside service providers in relation to diversity, with the aim of determining the role service providers can and do play in attracting (or not) a broad range of users to the countryside. This research and a summary of relevant policy and legislation, is published separately.

The most recent data from the Day Visit Survey gives a demographic profile of current visitors to the countryside and shows them to be mostly white, usually aged 35-54 with a relatively high income (social groups A, B and C1) and who travel by car (State of the Countryside Report 2005). The following box

describes the proportion of the population in the target under-represented groups.

20% - 1 in 5 - adults are disabled in some way in England

(Department for Work and Pensions 2004)

1.5% - less than 1 in 50 - children are disabled in some way in England

(Department for Work and Pensions 2004)

9.6% - 1 in 11- people are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in England

(Office for National Statistics, 2001 Census)

20% - 1 in 5 people - are aged 8-24 in England

(Office for National Statistics, 2001 Census)

The population of England is 49.1million (Office for National Statistics, 2001 Census).

Aims of the research

The Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission posed four questions in their brief which this research sought to answer:

- How do under-represented users perceive the countryside?
- What do they think are the benefits of countryside use?
- What are the factors that restrict their use of the countryside?
- What needs to be done to increase use of the countryside by these groups?

A key assumption underpinning the research is that the countryside does not mean the same thing to everyone, and that it is not perceived in the same way by everyone¹. However, perceptions are not random. They are patterned to reflect people's social positions in relation to the cultural and political meanings that are already inscribed in the landscape and the way of life of rural communities, to reflect their participation in social groups that have their own cultures and norms, as well as to reflect individual abilities, preferences and experiences.

The first aim of the research was therefore to determine how people from under-represented groups perceive the countryside and whether there are any dimensions of their perceptions that would lead them not to use the countryside. The second aim was to find out whether people from under-represented groups thought there were any benefits associated with visiting the countryside and what they thought these were, if any. Perceived benefits, we assumed, would be a strong motivator to using the countryside.

The third aim of the research was to find out why people from under-represented groups currently make less use of the countryside. Clearly, use is related to people's perceptions of the countryside itself and of the benefits associated with countryside use. But we still needed to investigate whether other factors – economic, logistic, cultural, psychological, etc – also accounted for under-representation. Finally, the

1. The research was commissioned to find out people's representations and needs in relation to the 'countryside'. The precise meaning of the countryside was left for research participants to determine. However, countryside service providers need to interpret many of the findings as pertaining to all green outdoor spaces that can be used for recreation, education or tourism. These may include spaces located in rural areas, but also spaces located on the rural urban fringe and, indeed, inside the urban fabric.

research asked people from under-represented groups what they needed and wanted to increase their use of the countryside.

Methodology

A full methodological account is provided in Chapter 3. However, it is important to emphasise the following points here. The research is almost entirely qualitative in nature. Given the scarcity of research on the perceptions of the countryside amongst under-represented groups, the complexity of the issues involved and the need to be sensitive to people's own definitions and perceptions, we favoured qualitative methods of data collection: individual interviews, focus groups and escorted visits to the countryside.

Clearly, not all categories of under-represented users could possibly be included in the study. We therefore worked with a sample of groups – people from ethnic minority backgrounds (Black-Caribbeans, Indians and Pakistanis), disabled people (wheelchair users, people who are registered blind and people who have mental health problems), and young people (aged 14 to 16 and 17 to 20 years old) to reflect some of the diversity that exists amongst under-represented groups. All research participants were selected from inner cities (London, Birmingham and Bradford) and the sample was balanced in terms of gender to allow us access to the distinct experiences of men and women.

The research is the first occasion that the conceptions, perceptions and needs of all these under-represented groups are systematically investigated in a single piece of research. This ensures consistency of methods and comparability of findings, and it makes it easier to determine what is specific to each group and what is common to all. It is also the first time that such a study has been conducted on a national scale.

The results of the research should provide DEFRA, the Countryside Agency and countryside service providers with the knowledge and understanding they need to plan and deliver services that make the countryside accessible to all those who wish to take part in outdoor recreation.

Structure of the report

The research report begins with a review of the literature on the perceptions, attitudes and preferences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people, and young people in relation to the countryside. This is followed by a chapter on methodology detailing the rationale for the research design and the procedures followed for the research.

We then turn to our findings, which are presented in three sections, one for each of the under-represented groups:

- people from ethnic minority backgrounds
- disabled people
- young people

Within each section, three chapters are devoted to the following topics:

- people's representations of the countryside

- people's perceptions of the benefits associated with countryside use
- people's perceptions of the factors restricting countryside use

We then provide a summary chapter that draws out the similarities and differences between the various under-represented groups.

Finally, we provide a number of strategic recommendations – derived from the literature, an analysis of lay people's views, and from interviews with experts – to help countryside service providers address the needs of under-represented groups and to increase and broaden participation in outdoor recreation.

Introduction

People from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, disabled people and young people do not make full use of the recreational opportunities offered by the countryside and the green outdoors.

The economic and logistical factors restricting use of the countryside amongst under-represented groups have recently been thoroughly reviewed by OPENspace as part of the Diversity Review. Their scoping review identified many barriers to access and participation in outdoor activities amongst under-represented groups, including:

- the financial costs incurred in accessing the countryside;
- difficulties in gaining physical access to sites for activities;
- lack of time and other commitments;
- lack of appropriate activities to attract excluded groups and provide a positive experience;
- lack of awareness of local initiatives and lack of perceived relevance;
- lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment;
- lack of appropriate interpretative information at sites;
- a poorly maintained environment;
- negative feelings associated with previous experiences of the countryside.

Given this coverage, the scope of the current literature review rests exclusively on the underlying conceptions of and attitudes to the countryside amongst the various groups of under-represented users, and their impact on patterns of use².

The current literature review therefore seeks to map out how people from under-represented groups represent the countryside and how their representations may contribute to restricting their use of the countryside. The aim of the review is primarily to inform the design of the empirical study which is to follow and to provide a background for the contextualisation of research findings.

Overview of the literature

The published literature on perceptions and uses of the countryside is limited. There are very few studies which focus on urban residents' perceptions, experiences, attitudes and uses in relation to the countryside, and fewer studies still which directly enquire into such phenomena in relation to either people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people, or young people aged between 14 and 20 years old. The lack of research is particularly acute in relation to people with physical disabilities and mental health problems and in relation to *specific* minority ethnic communities.

The studies that do exist mainly fall under three disciplinary headings:

² The review excludes the literature on the benefits, or the restorative dimensions, of the experience of nature. However, there is now a substantive basis for believing that play, recreation and leisure in natural environments, and the experience of green spaces in general, can help individuals to improve and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being.

- cultural geography
- environmental (social) psychology
- leisure/recreation studies

The theoretical perspectives and empirical concerns of these three disciplines are very different but complementary.

▪ **Cultural geography**

Cultural geography starts with the assumption that the countryside both reflects and embodies social norms and power relations. Based on this assumption, a growing number of geographers over the past decade have attempted to recover the geographies of marginalised social groups (such as young people, disabled people and ethnic minority communities). However, this has remained a mainly theoretical endeavour in which the neglect of alternative geographies is stated, the mechanisms for their exclusion are explored, but the actual content of those alternative, marginalised perceptions and uses of spaces is rarely investigated.

▪ **Environmental psychology**

Environmental psychology is concerned with the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of people in relation to the environment. The literature in this field is much more empirically grounded. However, this is by and large a descriptive, individualistic and positivist research field. Very little attention is devoted to explaining the empirical variations observed in people's experiences, uses and preferences. The few studies that seek to understand the perceptions and uses of the countryside amongst non-mainstream social groups implicitly assume that all Black people, or wheelchair users, or children, see the world in ways that are fundamentally different from those of dominant groups (White, middle-aged, middle-class, able-bodied, sound-minded and male). The quest for universals that still characterises this field means that very little attention is paid to the ways in which attitudes and behaviours are context-dependent.

▪ **Leisure or recreation studies**

Research under the umbrella of leisure or recreation studies is almost exclusively driven by the practical concerns of landscape architects, service planners and providers and the needs of the leisure industry. The rationale for most leisure studies research is to find out about the perceptions and needs of different groups of potential users so that sites can be designed and managed to accommodate their tastes and preferences. While it is an important step that this field seeks out the views and needs of potential site users, and uses them to inform the design of recreation sites and the provision of leisure services, this field generally lacks any grounding in theory. As a result, the findings sometimes lack validity.

This brief characterisation of the literature highlights the complementary nature of disciplinary approaches to the study of human relations to the environment and the need to draw on all three approaches in order to understand how different groups of people perceive, experience and use the countryside.

Findings

- Shared symbolic constructions of the English countryside

The scoping review demonstrated that the countryside is not equally attractive to all. According to the literature it covered, one of the main reasons for this is that people from under-represented groups feel that the countryside is “not for them”.

There is plenty of literature suggesting that this feeling is due to the exclusionary nature of the dominant symbolic constructions of the English countryside (Cloke & Little, 1997; Matless, 1998; Sibley, 1995). The evidence we reviewed also points to highly structured and widely shared representations of the English countryside. These are articulated around a series of binary oppositions that are listed below.

Countryside	City
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Rural▪ Natural▪ Green▪ Vast and open▪ Healthy▪ Pure▪ Peaceful and quiet▪ Slow▪ Clean▪ Simple life▪ Englishness▪ Far▪ Timeless▪ Conservative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Urban▪ Unnatural▪ No specific colour/grey▪ Enclosed▪ Unhealthy▪ Polluted▪ Hectic▪ Fast▪ Dirty▪ Complex life▪ Multiculturalism▪ Near▪ Historical/Contemporary▪ Progressive

Figure 1: Dominant constructions of the countryside

For instance, a study by Askins (Askins, 2001, 2003, 2004) reveals that while the term ‘countryside’ does not have much currency amongst people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, the term ‘rural’ is commonly used and understood. The rural, Askins finds, is mainly constructed in opposition to the city: it is green, quiet, peaceful, unpolluted, hilly, a place that is far away and essentially uninhabited, where people go on trips and where there are no loud activities. This understanding is never in question: people from black and minority ethnic communities she interviewed are certain about their conception of the countryside and do not think it differs in any fundamental way from that of the general population.

Similarly, a study carried out by the Leisure Industries Research Centre (2001) amongst 1,000 boys and girls living in Hampshire found that young people think of the countryside as whatever is ‘not the city’, a place that is remote, vast, quiet, green, clean, nice and peaceful where one goes on an outing with family and friends to do activities such as walking, cycling, picnicking and visiting heritage sites and souvenir shops.

To our knowledge, there is no research that investigates perceptions of the countryside amongst people who are either physically or mentally disabled. However, there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that the basic perceptions found in these groups would be significantly different from those uncovered amongst the general population.

One of the main consequences of these symbolic constructions of the English countryside is that they exclude those who cannot easily be accommodated within them or for whom the imagery holds little appeal. For instance, the associations of the countryside with Englishness, conservatism and timelessness are alienating for many members of black and minority ethnic communities who may feel out of place and threatened in that environment (Agyeman, 1993, 1989; Agyeman & Spooner, 1997; Harrison, 1991; Kinsman, 1993; Macnaghten & Urry, 2000). Askins (2003) indeed found that many people from BME backgrounds thought the countryside appealed to only a very narrow band of people – White, ‘middle-class’ or ‘upmarket’, older or retired – and their group did not have these characteristics (Askins, 2003). As a result (and because of their limited awareness of the recreational opportunities it offers), the countryside was not a place where they considered spending their leisure time. Similarly, the associations with peacefulness, naturalness and a slow, simple life are likely to deter many young people from using the countryside, as many are keener to sample the experiences of the city, and thrive on the excitement, fast pace and hectic lifestyles found in urban areas (Leisure Industries Research Centre, 2001; Matthews *et al*, 2000).

Paradoxically, much of the literature reviewed either postulates exclusion or presumes a greater affinity with nature, but without actually seeking to explore how people from under-represented groups themselves view the English countryside. For instance, statements are made about that the fact that many ethnic cultures have a folklore or mythology that reveres and respects the countryside and which leads them to have a greater appreciation of and sensitivity to nature, but little evidence is summoned to support these claims.

One key aim of the present empirical study was to establish, from the perspective of members of under-represented groups themselves, exactly how they experienced the countryside, what they wanted out of it, and how their needs can be best supported by service providers.

▪ **Black and minority ethnic communities**

We now turn to the more specific experiences of the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in relation to the countryside. The literature that addresses how members of BME groups conceive and perceive the countryside in the UK context is limited. Because the majority of BME people in Britain live in urban areas, their perceptions, experiences and needs in relation to the countryside are rarely taken into account.

An early study commissioned by the then Countryside Commission (Ghodiwala *et al*, 1993) and carried out among Bolton residents originating from India, Pakistan, Africa and the Caribbean, highlights a variety of conceptions of the countryside. In the Indian and Pakistani communities, fields and farmland dominate the representations of the countryside; in the African communities, parks and game parks are the main notions associated with the countryside; and in the Caribbean community, parks, the remote ‘up-country’ and villages are the central notions. These conceptions reflect

the natural landscapes of the research participants' native countries. The Bolton study demonstrates that under-utilisation amongst people from BME backgrounds is linked to their experience of life in the UK (where most people live in urban centres and where many experience racism). It is not attributable to some negative attitudes to the countryside that would be linked to their ethnicity, culture or religion *per se*. Indeed, the Bolton study found that half of the research participants used to visit the countryside regularly in their home country. They most regularly went to farms and fields, but the seaside, mountains, villages, the 'up-country' and parks were also visited. The purpose of their visits was mainly to work, visit relatives, picnic, enjoy the scenery, go for walks, breathe fresh air, and pick fruit and vegetable. The vast majority of the people interviewed, however, had never been to the countryside since arriving in England. The Bolton study also showed that most first generation migrants had limited and mainly negative expectations of the English countryside before migration, assuming it would be dull, boring, grey, foggy and cold. Given that few people have visited the English countryside, their expectations have not been contradicted by experience, although many report being pleasantly surprised by urban parks.

Another study conducted with various Asian groups in Blackburn (Blackburn Groundwork Trust, 1999) also found that Asians used to make extensive use of urban parks in their home countries, where they would go with their extended family to stroll, enjoy food and socialise, but did not keep up this habit post-migration to England.

A more recent study on the perceptions and uses of national parks amongst people from various BME backgrounds (Askins, 2001, 2003, 2004) signals some important changes in relation to the Bolton and Blackburn findings. The focus groups and individual interviews conducted for this study revealed very few differences in the conception of the countryside between those of the BME people interviewed and those held by the general population and described in Figure 1 above. The countryside emerged as a remote place that people may visit on an outing, rather than the background to their everyday life or a place they routinely and regularly go to. Moreover, very much like the general population, members of BME communities discussed the therapeutic value of getting away from the city and the stresses of everyday life, of breathing fresh air, or experiencing new and different activities.

Although this is not made explicit in Askins's research, these findings are due to the fact that the vast majority of the BME research participants in the study were born and brought up in the UK and described themselves as Black British or British Asians. Their views were largely based on their UK experience rather than on their parents' country of origins. Askins (2003) also reports that some research participants categorically stated that their limited use of the countryside had nothing to do with their ethnicity *per se* and all to do with their lifestyle as urban-dwellers.

Research that explicitly compares the perspectives of different generations of BME people in relation to the countryside does not exist. There is much evidence to suggest, however, that first generation migrants, when they do visit the English countryside, anchor their experience in relation to the natural landscapes of their homeland. Capturing Richness (2003), a report produced by the Countryside Agency based on the work of the Black Environment Network (BEN) and the Countryside Agency, is replete with examples recounting the experiences of people from BME backgrounds when they go to the countryside. It tells, for instance, of how the cliffs of Margate reminded Turkish people of Cappadocia; of how refugees from Eastern Europe compared the Great North Forest to Bosnia; and of how Pakistani women

were triggered into discussing their homeland when they were taken to the Brecon Beacons or the Lake District. Many relished the possibility of connecting their new and past life through contact with the countryside.

Although the stories described in *Capturing Richness* are anecdotal, they are consistent with more robust scientific evidence. For instance, research has shown that displaced people tend to prefer landscapes that are similar to those found in their homeland (Brierley-Newell, 1997; Churchman & Mitrani, 1997; Orland, 1988; Sonenfield, 1966). There is also evidence to demonstrate that the natural landscapes of one's childhood are those most fondly remembered and that these memories may be particularly powerful amongst those who, through migration, have had to sever their links to such favourite landscapes (Lyons, 1983). Since many migrants to Britain come from rural areas, one may expect a widespread sense of loss and grieving for the natural landscapes of home and therefore a preference for landscapes that remind them of their native country.

However, precisely because people draw on their previous life experiences to make sense of real or imagined encounters with the English countryside, some people from BME backgrounds may be reluctant to visit the countryside in the UK. This is because the countryside may be associated with hard labour rather than leisure, with an instrumental need to feed the family, or with unpredictable and dangerous things (unclean or treacherous waters, wild animals, natural disasters, etc). Indeed, Burgess (1995) reports that people from BME backgrounds were somewhat fearful of encountering wildlife in woodlands and that this was based on their experiences in other countries. Macnaghten & Urry (2000) also report that Asians in their sample were likely to consider woodlands as a source of firewood. In *Capturing Richness* (2003), it is suggested that some Vietnamese refugees may have a deep-seated unease with water since they escaped as 'boat people'. In a general sense, for many communities around the world, walking is something only done by poor people (i.e. those who cannot afford a car). It is not a source of pleasure but a painful outcome of necessity. Such distinctive experiences must be understood if they are to be overcome. To our knowledge, they have not been the objects of systematic research until now.

While seeking to replicate the familiar may be a powerful drive, it should be borne in mind that there is also much joy in experiencing something totally new and different, and that the countryside allows for very different activities from those usually available in urban settings. As the anecdotes recounted in *Capturing Richness* (2003) indicate, for people who spend their lives in deprived inner city centres, discovering how black the sky is at night, listening to the sounds of birds in the early morning, going on country walks, climbing, horse riding, canoeing and building dens all open up a whole world of new experiences. City-bound people can develop new skills and competencies, and feel empowered as a result. Again, however, the specific (or perhaps disproportionately positive) value of the countryside in the lives of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds has not been researched.

A study of perceptions of urban fringe woodlands, *Growing in Confidence* (Burgess, 1995), captures some of the ambivalence found among the BME communities in relation to the countryside. It shows that Asian and Black Caribbean women were mainly positive in relation to the countryside, although this was not always the case. The author describes how most Asian and Black Caribbean women taking part in escorted visits to urban fringe woodlands enjoyed the physical features of the sites they visited. They found interest in the vegetation and wildlife, and enjoyed just sitting in the sun and relaxing. Despite overwhelming concerns over personal safety, people

talked about the pleasure of seeing large trees and hearing the wind, the surprise of views across open countryside, the smells and freshness of the wood, the sense of naturalness and the possibility of adventure. The woodlands were enjoyed both for their inherent beauty and as the setting for a social occasion. However, a group of Asian women found their experience unpleasant, unrewarding and irrelevant. Indeed, this last group had so little to say about their experience of the local woodland that the focus group discussion that followed the visit had to be abandoned altogether.

The literature reviewed so far clearly indicates that conceptions and perceptions of the countryside impact on the patterns of use. However, other factors are also involved. Askins (2003) argues that a major factor limiting use of the countryside is the lack of awareness of existing resources (national parks, nature reserves, country parks, etc), and the lack of knowledge of what would be encountered in the countryside, of the facilities and activities that would be available or provided, and of what they would be allowed or forbidden to do. Since limited efforts are made by service providers at communicating with potential BME users and at reaching out to them, and since few people from BME backgrounds actually go and visit the countryside, there is no pool of information to draw on within the communities. There are few people to recommend good destinations, suitable activities, appropriate clothing and to take away the fear of the unknown. This results in a collective lack of confidence in relation to the countryside, and which is sometimes exacerbated by lack of fluency in English or illiteracy and by the direct or indirect experience of racism.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most people from BME backgrounds visit the countryside or green outdoors in the company of large groups of people they can trust: their family, friends or schools. Very few ever visit on their own and most claim that they would need to be in a group before contemplating a visit of the countryside, even in the urban fringe (Askins, 2003; Burgess, 1995). Actually being taken to the country by some relatives, friends or institutions are often the only ways in which some BME people will overcome the initial barriers linked to accessing the countryside. However, this pattern of visiting as a group is also partly linked to the cultural preferences of BME people and mirrors the patterns of use traditionally found in their countries of origin (Rishbeth, 2001).

There is also some indication that BME people may not visit the countryside because they are concerned that some of their basic needs may not be recognised and catered for. For example, research on visits to national parks (Askins, 2003) shows that people from BME backgrounds, when they visit the countryside at all, generally do not contemplate an overnight stay. This cannot be explained only in terms of financial costs and lack of time. Concerns over the lack of cultural and religious provisions (such as appropriate dietary options and praying facilities) may play a part in this reluctance to extend the visit.

A large-scale American study on the provision of outdoor recreation for ethnic minorities (Dunn, 2002) goes further. It argues that the sense of being accepted in society *as a whole* has a considerable impact on BME people's intention to take part in outdoor leisure, regardless of the strength of people's distinctive ethnic identity. It would seem that when people feel that they cannot engage with mainstream society on their own terms, they curtail to a minimum their contact with the dominant groups. Leisure pursuits are likely to be disproportionately negatively impacted by this coping strategy. This important conclusion can almost certainly be extended to other groups of under-represented users.

There is also some limited but consistent literature in environmental psychology that suggests that patterns of use may be linked to ethnic differences in preferences for the landscape qualities of places³. The literature reviewed by Kaplan & Talbot (1988) and Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) shows significant differences in the landscape preferences of Black and White people. While members of both groups highly value their nearby natural surroundings, studies consistently indicate that Black people prefer places where they can meet people, as opposed to places to 'get away'. Moreover, they strongly prefer more developed, manicured, structured recreational facilities which include man-made features, over more preserved natural or wild environments (Kaplan & Talbot, 1988; Zube & Pitt, 1981). Black people also tend to prefer places characterised by greater visibility and openness, and feel less at ease in environments that are less legible and more enclosed. The dimensions of complexity and mystery in the natural environments matter less to Black people than those of coherence and legibility, while the opposite is found in the White populations studied.

Finally, there is some evidence that people from various BME communities have different patterns of use of green outdoor spaces. Studies (Hutchinson, 1987; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995) comparing the spatial patterns and activities of American park users of Hispanic, Black, Chinese and White backgrounds show quite different patterns of use and activities. White Americans tend to use city parks on their own to walk or jog, and almost half of all White park users value the parks mainly for their aesthetic qualities. By contrast, Hispanics usually visit as a group. They tend to engage in more sedentary activities, to settle in one particular spot and to personalise this area by bringing food, music and games for the family. Black city parks users may come as families or as groups of friends. They make more active use of a larger area of city parks and usually engage in sporting activities, although many also value the social and relaxing benefits of park use. Chinese people are infrequent park users. They tend to be elderly men who come to park to socialise with each other or who use urban parks to practice Tai Chi in small groups. Qualitative research amongst Chinese respondents reveals that they think of parks as idealised aesthetic environments that are heavily designed, and not at all as expanses of green space for active recreation, sports and picnicking.

This kind of research strongly suggests that different provisions are needed to cater for the different requirements of various communities. Research is urgently needed to ensure that the cultural preferences of different ethnic groups are understood and built into the design of outdoor green spaces. The present study will seek to provide some evidence that can be used for this purpose.

▪ **Disabled people**

Perhaps the most complex group of people targeted by the current empirical study is those that are collectively labelled 'disabled'. There is a growing recognition, at a theoretical level at least, that the lifeworlds of physically and mentally disabled people can be very different from those of able-bodied citizens who have no experience of disability. Cultural geographers are beginning to explore the 'excluded geographies' of disabled people (Butler & Bowlby, 1997; Butler & Parr (eds), 1999; Kitchin, 1998;

3. This research is methodologically limited. It relies overwhelmingly on assessments of photographs of places to determine preferences. Photographs, of course, offer only limited psychological access to the places subjects are asked to rate. They also exclude any reference to the social dimensions inherent in the landscapes. Moreover, this literature generally compares 'Blacks' and 'Whites' without further differentiation between ethnic groups. Nearly all of it is based in America and may only partly map on the UK context. Yet, given the paucity of research in the field, we felt it was important to account for this body of work.

Matthews & Vujakovic, 1995; Sibley, 1995; Vujakovic & Matthews, 1994). However, nearly all of this literature relates to the various forms of exclusion disabled people experience in the built environment, and especially in urban areas, and nearly all of the research focuses on wheelchair users. There is very little research, which seeks to explore the views and experiences of disabled people themselves – either as a general group or in relation to specific disabilities (visual impairment, mobility restrictions, mental health difficulties) – in relation to the countryside.

Attention must be paid to the key issues of physical and social access, changing social attitudes towards different forms of disability, promoting universal design and to generating high-standard accessibility guidelines. This kind of work is carried out by organisations such as the Fieldfare Trust and the Sensory Trust. However, if experiences of the countryside are to be satisfying and rewarding, attention must also be paid to the perceptions and preferences of people with disabilities. To our knowledge, there are no published British studies addressing such issues⁴.

We found one immediately relevant American study that explores the preferred natural environments of people with mobility restrictions (Brown *et al*, 1999). The study asked 116 disabled people and 81 of their carers or companions to rate their preferences for particular parks and nature parks on the basis of photographs of particular landscapes. The research participants had different mobility impairments and used a variety of walking aids: 74% were dependent on either manual or motorised wheelchairs. The remainder were equally divided between those regularly using canes or walkers, and those who only used walking aids on occasion. The results provide strong support for similarities in preferences, regardless of the degree of limitation or restriction experienced by the research participants. Forested scenes were by far preferred over open field scenes, regardless of ease of negotiating the area. Within both types of landscapes, however, the scenes that suggested relatively easy motion through the landscapes – with wide pathways, smooth ground surfaces, low gradients, etc – were rated more positively. Dense, wild woods were not as well liked as more open, slightly manicured mature woodlands with relatively little undergrowth, where abundant light filters through the trees. Pathways were important because they provided reassurance with respect to safety, way-finding, and ease of locomotion. Unfortunately, this type of research says nothing about the motivation of people to access to countryside and the green outdoors. There may well be important differences in people's motivation between those with various degrees of disability.

▪ **Young people**

Young people include individuals with very different lifestyles, resources, needs and expectations. The specific age groups targeted by the empirical study are those aged between 14 and 16 years, and those aged between 17 and 20 years. The literature review concentrated on these groups. While there is slightly more evidence in relation to the views and experiences of younger children (e.g. Crowe & Bowen, 1997; Macnaghten *et al*, 1998; Woolley & Amin, 1998), the literature is extremely limited with respect to teenagers.

⁴ In 1999, the Fieldfare Trust did produce a report entitled *The Recreational Needs of Disabled People* for the Environment Agency that probably contains a wealth of relevant information. We have been unable to obtain a copy of this report.

We found one UK-based study focusing specifically on teenagers' participation, perceptions and preferences in relation to countryside leisure. The study was carried by the Leisure Industries Research Centre for Hampshire County Council in 2001. The research is based on a survey of over 1000 pupils aged between 11 and 15 drawn from six schools in Hampshire, as well as five focus groups with youth who made greater use of the countryside and had developed a degree of 'countryside literacy'.

The study found the following patterns of countryside use amongst young people in Hampshire: on a monthly basis, about 90% went to a city park or some other urban green space, roughly two-thirds visited a country park, a historic building or had a picnic in the country, nearly 60% went cycling, half visited a nature reserve, and about 20% took part in guided walks, horse riding or fishing.

The availability of green space locally seemed to be the greatest determinant of use. While it is clear that activities that required time, money, skills, equipment and planning were less often practised, there was little sense that young people felt constrained by this situation. The Hampshire study also sought to determine whether the factors usually thought to impact most adversely and significantly on demand – lack of access to transport, lack of time, financial constraints, worries about safety and household composition - affected demand for countryside. It found that these barriers had little effect. Contrary to expectations, the study found that the main barriers were of an altogether different nature: more than half (52%) of the teenagers sampled stated that they would rather do other things than visit the countryside. They preferred going to the cinema, watching television, playing computer games and engaging in sports, to going to the countryside. Between 25% and 40% of the survey respondents thought the countryside was a 'boring' place with 'nothing to do when you get there', where you 'get rained on' and where 'your footwear gets dirty'. The authors therefore concluded that young people's patterns of use of the countryside were not so much due to 'barriers to participation' as to the 'tastes and preferences' of young people themselves.

This finding is consistent with experimental research carried out in America. One early study (Balling & Falk, 1982, cited in Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) investigated preferences for differences landscapes in different age groups, ranging from primary school children to retired citizens. The study found that 15 year-olds had consistently lower preference ratings than the other age groups, and this in relation to all the different landscapes presented to them. Interest in the countryside seems to decrease markedly, but temporarily, during teenage years.

Despite a tendency towards disinterest in countryside issues around adolescence, it is clear that many teenagers still value the countryside and make use of it. This emerged from the Hampshire study, which included focus groups with young people who were regular countryside users. These young people liked the countryside, felt that it was good for their physical and mental health, that it was readily accessible, that it required no specialist knowledge or fanciful equipment, but only a modicum of common sense.

A study of people's use of woods (Macnaghten *et al*, 1998; Macnaghten & Urry, 2000) that included different age groups also showed that the outdoor recreational needs of people change over the lifecycle, as well as being influenced by people's socio-economic conditions and geographical location. It found that older children want open-air facilities for strenuous outdoor pursuits and that adventurous young people want places 'to get away from it all'. Some want man-made facilities to play,

others prefer more natural, undisturbed places for their leisure practices. It is impossible to determine from either study what generated the enthusiasm for the countryside and for specific types of activities amongst research participants.

Some partial answers to these questions are provided, however, by two recent research studies funded by the Forestry Commission England (Bingley & Milligan, 2004; Ward-Thompson *et al*, 2004). These studies found that the main predictors of woodland use amongst young adults, besides the availability of woodlands locally, were parental attitudes, the frequency of childhood visits to woodlands, and the quality of childhood experiences. Positive parental attitudes and the experience of safe childhood play in the woods led young adults to feel secure and confident in the woods. They were at ease both on their own and with others in the woods, and could therefore gain a broader range of benefits from their local woodlands. This was true regardless of whether the young adults considered were from urban or rural backgrounds. Bingley & Milligan (2004) report that many of the young adults (aged between 16 and 21 years) who took part in the research used the green outdoors to help them relieve stress associated with family life, school and personal problems. Although both studies focus on the perception and use of local woodland, the findings can probably generalise to other green outdoor environments.

The Hampshire study also enquired into how young people visit the countryside. It found that, overwhelmingly, young people visited with their family (93%), but that friends (56%) and schools (44%) were also involved in their visits. Only 10% ever went to the countryside on their own. This is similar to the experience of ethnic minority people described above. It would seem that the idea that the countryside is a place visited in a quest for solitary engagement with nature, for contemplative purposes, is challenged by studies that look at the preferences and needs of under-represented users in relation to the countryside. Only a small, middle-class, middle-aged, urban, White group actually uses the countryside in this fashion. A substantial number of people from BME backgrounds and young people value the countryside as a place for social recreation more than for the inherent qualities of the landscape to be appreciated in peace and quiet.

Indeed, Burgess (1995) describes how the teenage girls (of unspecified ages) she accompanied to woodlands showed little interest in the various aspects of the woodlands, but chatted confidently amongst themselves and appeared to want to use the countryside more as a backdrop for social activities than as a landscape to be explored in and of itself. However, a recent study by Bingley & Milligan (2004) partly contradicts this picture: it reports that when young people go outdoors when they are stressed, it is largely because they want to be alone.

Researchers who are investigating the experiences of children and young people who are growing up in the countryside (e.g. Matthews *et al* (2000), Philo, 1992; Valentine (1997)) report that teenagers, in particular, are not making use of the recreational opportunities afforded by the countryside. This is in part because 'open' spaces are in fact largely fenced-off as private land. Without access to farmland, young people find themselves confined to villages that, surprisingly, have very limited public land, and that this is fiercely defended by adults. The limited use of the countryside amongst young people is also due to the fact that young people, especially when they are in a small group, are often perceived by adults as rowdy, noisy, potential troublemakers and even petty criminals. Indeed, the Hampshire study found that the young people who had visited the countryside sometimes encountered unfriendly and even aggressive farmers and landowners whilst out in the country

(Leisure Industries Research Centre, 2001; p.47). This was a deterrent to future participation.

Finally, it would seem that young people are mainly concerned with meeting other teenagers like themselves, away from the adult gaze, to simply chat and 'hang out'. Spatial restrictions placed on them by parents, together with limited access to transport and lack of public spaces in villages, mean that young people often meet in places left vacant by adults. Many of those are unsightly but, as Matthews *et al* (2000) report, like their urban counterparts, rural young people put greater emphasis and value on the social dimensions of places than on their natural and physical attributes.

Those young people that do make use of the countryside appear keener on high-energy activities in outdoor settings (such as climbing, canoeing, swimming, horse riding) than on more contemplative, slow paced ones (such as walking, rambling, bird watching). Overall, it would seem that they prefer settings that suggest activities, places to do things (Medina, 1983, cited in Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Leisure Industries Research Centre, 2001; Macnaghten & Urry, 2000). Again, however, the Bingley & Milligan study (2004) partly contradicts these results and indicates that many young people do seek solitary respite in local woodlands rather than activities and social company.

Conclusions

The shortage of evidence on perceptions, preferences, uses and needs in relation to the countryside amongst various under-represented groups underscores the need for the current programme of research. Despite the paucity of the research currently available, however, some themes emerge quite strongly.

First, it is clear that the various target groups considered in the review all have different attitudes, different preferences and different needs in relation to the countryside, despite sharing an underlying conception of the countryside. Moreover, their attitudes, preferences and needs are sometimes far removed from what experts with responsibility for the countryside assume potential countryside users want. While many experts now seek to use the word 'countryside' in a very inclusive fashion to refer to urban green spaces, allotments, gardens, playing fields, woodlands, and so on, lay people oppose such an encompassing definition. They think of the countryside as whatever is 'not the city' and a remote place to 'go and visit', rather than one in their immediate environment.

Second, it is clear that despite all the variations across groups, there are also substantial consistencies. Chief amongst them is the importance of the countryside itself in people's lives. Indeed, very few dispute the value of the countryside itself, even though some express preferences for safety over adventure, for activities over calm, for the local green spaces over the remote and wild countryside, and so on.

Third, the review establishes that there is considerably more evidence in relation to the BME population than to either young people or people with disabilities. However, even in relation to the BME population, all ethnic minority communities tend to be grouped together, with little or no differentiation in terms of the ethnicity of respondents, of their social class, generation, gender, area of residence, level of acculturation, etc. Research in this field is in its infancy. We found no study on either the conceptions, perceptions, attitudes or needs of people with mental health

difficulties and only one study which went beyond issues of physical 'access' to explore how people with restricted mobility perceive the countryside and what landscape features they prefer. With respect to young people, there is only one study that explored young people's attitudes and needs in relation to the recreational opportunities offered by the countryside.

Fourth, the literature shows that there is very little differentiation in terms of the types of green spaces being investigated. Some studies are extremely inclusive and pertain to nature, the environment or the countryside in general; others have a narrower focus on urban fringe woodlands, national parks, urban parks, a particular county, and so on. Only woodlands have been more systematically researched. On the basis of the evidence reviewed, it would seem that a narrower focus generates more useful research, as it does justice to the complexities of local contexts.

Finally, research shows that the qualities that define a place (physical attributes, people's behaviours and activities, people's perceptions, and wider symbolic constructions) must all be taken into account if service providers are to understand patterns of use and to design outdoor spaces that truly meet the needs of Britain's diverse population.

Many of the gaps identified in the literature will be addressed by the present empirical study. As mentioned earlier, this is the first occasion that a systematic assessment of the conceptions, perceptions and needs of various under-represented groups are investigated together. Also, this research has an explicit and sustained focus on people's representations of the countryside, and not only on the barriers restricting use. This means that the result should provide an exhaustive and robust insight in the views, experiences and needs of various under-represented groups in relation to the countryside.

As we present the findings from the empirical research, we will relate them to the literature, highlighting what is new, what confirms the existing body of knowledge, as well as what challenges it.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes in detail the methodological decisions and procedures that were followed in the research. This detailed account is necessary to explain why particular under-represented groups were included in this study and specific methods used, and how the data has been elicited and the findings derived.

Under-represented groups in this study

In line with the Rural White Paper, we carried out the research with people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people and young people. All research participants were recruited in inner cities.

The sample of black and minority ethnic research participants included people from the Indian, Pakistani and Black-Caribbean communities. These three were selected because they are the largest minority ethnic communities in England⁵ and have very different migration histories and patterns of settlement in England. They also interact differently with the majority population and represent some of the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity found within the BME communities as a whole.

The sample of disabled people included people with ambulatory problems (all were permanent wheelchair users), people who are blind or visually-impaired (all were registered blind) and people with mental health problems (all had a clinical diagnosis). These specific groups were selected because they include both physical and mental impairments. This was particularly important because the literature review had yielded some limited evidence on the perceptions and needs of wheelchair users in relation to countryside recreation, but nothing on physically-disabled people who are not wheelchair users (such as blind or visually-impaired and deaf or hearing-impaired people), and on people with mental impairments (such as mental health problems or learning difficulties). The study could not sample all these groups but it aimed to fill at least some of the knowledge gaps identified in the literature.

The sample of young people included 14-16 year-old boys and girls, and 17-20 year-old young men and women. These two age groups were chosen because the literature review had identified relatively good evidence in relation to young children and countryside use, but had highlighted a considerable knowledge gap in relation to the perceptions and needs of adolescents and young adults.

All research participants were selected from three inner cities: London, Birmingham and Bradford. These cities were chosen because they have a high proportion of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Disabled people and young people are more evenly distributed across urban areas; while the sample also included an equal number of men and women. Thus, insights on inner city residents and on women – two further under-represented groups identified in the literature and in the Rural White Paper – could also be gained from the sample of respondents.

⁵ Indian people make up 23% of the total BME population, Pakistani people 16% and Black-Caribbean people 12%.

Research design

The entire study included a literature review, interviews with experts, focus groups and interviews with under-represented groups and escorted visits with families from under-represented groups to country parks.

Individual interviews with experts on countryside and diversity

The first part of the research consisted of 15 in-depth individual interviews with people who had dual expertise on both outdoor recreation and under-represented groups. The expert interviews intended to capture published and unpublished information on:

- use of the countryside in each under-represented group;
- conceptions, perceptions, attitudes towards the countryside;
- preferences for particular countryside settings;
- impact of the above on countryside use;
- needs in order to increase participation;
- examples of good practice and recommendations to increase countryside use amongst ethnic minority, disabled and young people.

The information gathered through these interviews was used as data in its own right, but it also informed the design the instruments of data collection used in other components of the research.

The list of the experts and organisations consulted can be found in Appendix 1. The expert interview schedule can be found in Appendix 2.

Focus groups and individual interviews with under-represented groups

The bulk of the data in the research was generated through focus groups and individual interviews with people drawn from the under-represented groups. Focus groups and individual interviews are two qualitative research methods that offer the advantage of being very flexible and relatively unstructured and open-ended.

These methods are better suited to explore such complex topics as people's perceptions, experiences and needs in relation to the countryside than more structured methods. They allow research participants to define the key terms of interest (e.g. 'countryside') and they leave plenty of scope for research participants to expand on themes of importance to them.

Compared to individual interviews, focus groups allow relatively quick access to a broad range of opinions and experiences. Because each participant prompts other group members into discussing their own views, the dynamics of focus groups stimulate reflection and can produce more perceptive insights from each participant than may have emerged from each participant in isolation. The benefits of group interactions in galvanising discussions are particularly important when working with people whose ideas about the topic may not be fully formed and who, for a variety of reasons (linguistic restrictions, youth, physical or mental impairment, lack of experience of the countryside, etc), may not be entirely articulate about the topic at hand. However, compared to focus groups, individual interviews enable the researcher to explore in greater depth very personal experiences, emotions,

memories, and to access the cultural meanings that shape individual perceptions and actions. Individual interviews are also less reactive than focus groups because interviewees are not subject to group dynamics and peer pressure in a one-to-one situation. Combining focus groups and individual interviews generates both depth and breadth of understanding.

In total, we conducted:

- 32 individual interviews with countryside non-users⁶
- 24 focus groups with countryside non-users
- 8 focus groups with countryside users

The focus groups and individual interviews both explored:

- people's representations of the countryside
- the reasons why they do or don't visit the countryside
- the benefits people derive from the countryside
- the factors that restrict use and how these may be overcome

Where appropriate, we ensured that the researcher shared the ethnic background of the research participants and could speak their preferred language.

The sample of lay research participants for both focus groups and individual interviews can be found in Appendix 3. An example of the topic guide for the interviews and focus groups can be found in Appendix 4.

Escorted visits with families from 'non-user' groups

The third component of the research involved accompanying families on visits to country parks located on the rural urban fringe of major cities.

Escorted visits offer many advantages. Because the study focuses mainly on the perceptions and needs of people who do not make use of the countryside, we felt it was necessary to provide a sub-group of research participants with at least some first-hand experience, albeit limited, of the countryside. By providing a very specific, real countryside context, research participants were better able to discuss their views of the countryside in a meaningful fashion, based on a real experience. And because researchers were with research participants on sites, they could relate directly their perceptions and actions to the context that elicited them. Escorted visits allowed us to explore, through actions as well as words, people's impressions of the countryside, how these mapped onto or challenged their expectations, what they liked and disliked, and what they would need to carry on visiting the countryside.

In conjunction with the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission (England), it was decided that country parks located on the rural fringe of London, Birmingham and Bradford would be used to carry out the escorted visits. While country parks offer relatively sanitised versions of the countryside and are places where no one actually

⁶ For sampling purposes, we considered people to be 'users' if they had been to the countryside – which ever way they themselves defined the countryside – at least once in the 12 months preceding the research. Reciprocally, 'non-users' were those who had not been to the countryside over the previous 12 months. In reality, the boundaries between users and non-users were blurred both because people interpreted 'countryside' differently and because some people had not recently been but had made extensive use of the countryside over the years.

resides, it was thought that they would allow research participants to discuss precisely in what way such environments could actually be considered 'countryside' or not. The commissioners also wanted to ensure that research participants who had enjoyed the visits could return by themselves in the future. It was therefore important to select sites that were easily accessible.

The country parks selected for the visits were identified with the help of Greenspace, the organisation which manages the country parks network. We asked GreenSpace to select from their database country parks that were located near London, Birmingham or Bradford and contained a mixed natural environment (e.g. woodlands, lakes, fields), included some man-made facilities (e.g. play areas, sporting facilities, picnic areas, visitor centres) and were 'neutral' in terms of any obvious social, political, historical associations.

We eventually arrived at the following four country parks for the study:

- Aldenham Country Park near London
- Sutton Park near Birmingham
- Ogden Water Park near Bradford
- Anglers & Newmillerdam Country Park near Bradford

We chose to escort families rather than *ad hoc* groups of people both because many people visit the countryside as families and because rearranging visits with families was much easier than with unrelated individuals, in the event of bad weather or other unforeseen difficulty.

Each escorted visit involved an initial discussion with all family members; on-site data collection, with a researcher tape recording the participants' reactions and their own analytical comments as the visit unfolded; and a short questionnaire at end of the visit (see Appendix 5).

Two escorted visits were conducted in each group of under-represented users, except for young people aged 14 to 16, as their views were accessed as members of the family groups. In total, we conducted 14 visits. For the escorted visits with people from ethnic minority backgrounds, we ensured that one of the researchers would share the ethnic background of the family and speak the preferred language of the research participants.

Recruitment

The recruitment of lay research participants for the study was done by a team of professional recruiters from Ethnos and was carried out according to the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. The recruiters specialise in accessing 'hard-to-reach' populations for research purposes.

For this project, the recruiters combined different strategies, such as positioning themselves on busy streets in areas of high ethnic minority concentration or outside Connexions Centres, and asking community organisations, disability representative organisations and youth clubs to advertise the research and ask members if they wanted to take part. Each research participant was selected according to criteria spelled out in a recruitment questionnaire (see Appendix 6). Incentives were offered to research participants to facilitate recruitment.

Data analysis

All interview and focus group data were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The text was then coded thematically using the software N'VIVO. This software allows both for the quick retrieval of themes and segments of text and for the quantification of each theme, to determine how widespread particular issues are in various groups of research participants. Further analysis of specific theme can also be carried out by ethnicity, disability, age, user status and region, for instance. This method of analysis means that any hypothesis can be tested empirically against the data set, and this helps to ensure that conclusions are exhaustive and robust.

Conclusions

The research design for this study involved a combination of research methods – individual interviews, focus group discussions, escorted visits to country parks and exit questionnaires following the visits – and drew on the perspectives of experts as well as lay people. This mix of methods was chosen because it would elicit behavioural as well as verbal data, and data based on actual experiences as well as perceptions and expectations.

The particular groups of under-represented users included in the study are people from ethnic minority backgrounds (Black-Caribbeans, Indians and Pakistanis), disabled people (wheelchair users, people who are registered blind and people who have diagnosed mental health problems), and young people (from the ages of 14 to 20). Within these groups, we mainly sampled the views of non-users of the countryside to find out why they are not visiting and what can be done to increase participation. However, we also included some focus groups with people who are making use of the countryside to find out how they had overcome the barriers restricting use in others, what benefits they derived from the countryside, and what could still be done to improve their experiences.

The views expressed by these eight groups of under-represented users cannot fully capture the representations, experiences and needs of other categories of under-represented users, such as deaf people or people with learning disabilities, young children or older people, Chinese or Bangladeshi people, for instance. However, within time and budget constraints, the sample gives a very good sense of the great diversity of potential countryside users and allows us to understand their needs in relation to outdoor recreation.

We spoke mainly with lay people to discover their perceptions and needs, but also included interviews with experts in order to get a more objective perspective based on accumulated experiences and observations with a large number of people, rather than on personal experiences.

In total, nearly 300 people took part in this research. Their views have been carefully recorded and systematically analysed, so filling important gaps in the knowledge and understanding of under-represented groups and of their needs in terms of outdoor recreation.

SECTION I: BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The expression ‘ethnic minorities’, ‘people from ethnic minority backgrounds’ and ‘BME people’ are used indistinguishably throughout the report. However, we favour ‘people from ethnic minority backgrounds’ for two reasons: first, it sounds less technocratic than the abbreviation ‘BME’ for ‘Black and minority ethnic’ groups; second, it captures the fact that many people may not think of themselves ‘ethnic minorities’ and would want to be considered as simply ‘British’ (especially amongst the second and third generations), but would recognise that they come from an ethnic minority background.

Chapter 4: Representation of the Countryside

Introduction

This first empirical chapter discusses the representations of the countryside held by people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The aim is to understand how ethnic minority people construe the countryside and to assess whether there are any symbolic barriers that may restrict use of the countryside in these groups.

It is important to stress that ethnic minority populations are highly heterogeneous communities, characterised internally by different traditions, religious beliefs, languages, social classes, and patterns of participation in British society. For instance, amongst the South-Asian groups, self-definitions sometimes rely on national origins (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), sometimes on ethnicity (Gujarati, Punjabi, Kashmiri and Sylheti) and sometimes on religious affiliation (Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism). Each can be mobilised according to changing needs and circumstances. Similarly, Black-Caribbean people sometime trace their origins to the Caribbean Islands in general, sometimes to their own native island; many simply think of themselves as Black British and define themselves in relation to their experiences in the UK. Thus, it is difficult to speak of simple ‘communities’. Any discussion of the attitudes, representations and needs of the ethnic minority communities in relation to the countryside must recognise the diversity inherent in these populations.

Common representation ‘not the city’

Across all the under-represented groups included in the research, we found a common underlying representation of the countryside. While the word ‘countryside’ was not one that most BME people would spontaneously use themselves (they tended either to use the terms ‘the country’ or ‘rural’ or to name specific places) all understood it and had quite a strong view of what it embodies. Their representation was articulated through a series of binary themes that opposed the countryside to the city, as represented in Figure 1.

Countryside

- Rural

City

- Urban

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ▪ Natural and green | ▪ Unnatural |
| ▪ Vast and open | ▪ Enclosed and built up |
| ▪ Pure, healthy and clean | ▪ Polluted, unhealthy and dirty |
| ▪ Peaceful and quiet | ▪ Hectic |
| ▪ Slow and simple life | ▪ Fast and complex life |
| ▪ Englishness | ▪ Multiculturalism |
| ▪ Close-knit communities | ▪ Anonymous society |
| ▪ Conservative and old | ▪ Progressive and young |
| ▪ Far | ▪ Near |

Figure 1: Representation of the countryside (negative associations in bold)

Indeed, research participants think of the countryside in the sense of what is ‘not the city’. It is rural, not urban; natural and green, not unnatural; vast and open, not enclosed and built up; pure, healthy and clean; not polluted, unhealthy and dirty. The countryside is perceived as a peaceful and quiet place where people lead simple lives. Cities, by contrast, are perceived as spaces where lifestyles are fast, complex and hectic. The countryside is seen as a collection of close-knit, conservative communities that keep themselves to themselves and are negative towards outsiders. By contrast, cities are perceived as dynamic, progressive, multi-cultural spaces. The countryside is far; the urban environment – where research participants lived and were sampled – is near and familiar.

These representations underpinned the discourses of all under-represented groups. What changed were people’s attitudes to specific dimensions in this binary structure. Positive associations can be seen as symbolic resources to draw on to attract people to the countryside. Negative associations (identified in bold) can be seen as barriers that will have to be countered to diversify access to the countryside.

Positive associations

Across all ethnic minority groups, research participants hold very positive representations of the English countryside as a *natural or physical* environment. They describe it as beautiful open spaces (with fields, farms, forests, lakes, hills and mountains), where there are animals (both wild and domestic), where the air is pure and fresh, and where the slow pace of life in small close-knit communities means there is peace and quiet. Such positive associations are found regardless of ethnicity, gender, geographical area or level of countryside use. They may be particularly salient amongst people from ethnic minority backgrounds, since many of them lead their lives in deprived, polluted and hectic inner city areas.

“Open space! Greenery, cows, sheep, maybe a few horses, tractors, hedges, fresh air. Healthy. A place to spend a relaxing Sunday afternoon as a family.” (Indian woman, Birmingham)

“Mountains, rivers, trees, birds, rabbits, deers, horses. Quietness, peacefulness. Quite positive things really.” (Indian woman, London)

“In a town, no matter where you go, there’s shops and business and people. When you go to the country, it’s just the reverse because you got open fields. You ain’t got roads running everywhere, you ain’t got

cars, you ain't got people and shops all over the place.” (Black Caribbean man, Birmingham)

Beyond these common positive representations, there are some variations in what ethnic minority people consider to be ‘proper’ countryside, both based on the degree of naturalism and remoteness of specific areas, and on the physical attributes of the landscape.⁷ For first generation migrants who come from rural areas, there is sometimes a sense that the English countryside is so developed and densely populated, compared to rural areas in their home countries, that it does not properly qualify as countryside.

“In our country, when we talk about countryside, we talk about places where there is no water, no electricity, no telephone. Completely remote. I can't think of anywhere in England that I could call really “countryside”. It's all villages. There is no forest, no wildlife, nothing. Rich people live in the country. In Pakistan, it's the poor that live there because they can't afford to come to the cities. There is nothing in the country.” (Pakistani woman, Birmingham)

“I know what countryside is really because I was born in it. Where I was born, there were no cars, there were no buses. If you have to come where we lived you'd have to walk about ten miles. You got donkeys and horses but that's it.” (Black Caribbean woman, Birmingham)

“I think it's two completely different kinds of countryside. The scenery in Pakistan is stunning. You've got mountains, lakes, valleys. Here you haven't got mountains, just a few hills. And river is like a little stream, isn't it? It's like everything is on a smaller scale.” (Pakistani man, Bradford)

By contrast, second and third generation migrants who have been brought up in inner cities and who have had very little experience of rural environments tend to have undifferentiated representations of the countryside.

“[The countryside is] anywhere that's green.” (Pakistani family, Bradford)

“To me, mostly everywhere outside London is countryside [laughs]. I went to visit my niece in Bristol and to me that was out in the country.” (Black Caribbean woman, Birmingham)

Many research participants also discussed in positive terms the simplicity and slow pace of rural life and the quality of social relations they expected to find in rural communities. Some imagined the countryside as a warm and friendly place, where inhabitants still take time to talk to and care for each other.

“What I see is really nice people to get along with. Very friendly.” (Black Caribbean woman, London)

“People live as a community. They all know each other, like in the villages [in India]. Very close knit.” (Indian man, Birmingham)

⁷ The research participants' representations of the countryside did not change as a result of people being taken on escorted visits to local country parks. While they much enjoyed discovering local green spaces and making use of the facilities they provided, the research participants never considered that they had been taken to the ‘countryside’, only to a place that seeks to emulate, in a more or less contrived way, many of the physical attributes of the countryside.

Negative associations

While positive associations dominated discussion in relation to the physical or natural dimensions of the countryside, negative associations tended to come to the fore in relation to the social or human dimensions. Indeed, there was a clear sense amongst BME respondents that close knit communities in rural areas excluded them. They perceived the latter as older, wealthier and more traditional and conservative than city people. They felt that rural people wanted to preserve their way of life and were resistant to change.

“It’s probably because they only know their own little community. They don’t really see that difference of people. They don’t see other cultures, cos if you see a typical English village culture, it’s very much within themselves, isn’t it?” (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

“I think people in the countryside are quite rude to outsiders. Within their community they can be really friendly and really nice, but when it comes to those from outside, they can be not so nice. I don’t think they are hostile. They’re set in their own little ways and they don’t want their way of life to be disturbed.” (Indian woman, London)

“They’ve got their own core values and sometimes they are a bit on their guard with outsiders, that’s my perception, because they feel like their territories are being invaded. They don’t accept that change.” (Indian man, Birmingham)

Some commented on the stark contrast between the attitudes of English rural dwellers towards outsiders and those of rural people in their country of origins.

“[In Pakistan], you go into the country and people there are very simple, very welcoming, very accommodating. You drive through their land and they will wave at you while the dust is flying around. Simple and hospitable people. They see you as their guests if you’re on their land. They go out of their way even to feed you.

Interviewer: Would you expect the same attitude in England?

Oh no!” (Pakistani man, London)

These conservative and parochial attitudes were discussed in relation to all outsiders, but were assumed to be particularly virulent in relation to visible ethnic minorities. The perceived lack of contact between rural White communities and urban ethnic minority communities was thought to result in stereotypical views, mutual distrust and, in some cases, plain racism.

“The White community in the countryside, probably they have a more stereotyped view of us because obviously they won’t see a lot of us around the streets. I don’t like to use the word “racist”, but there might be a tendency, no doubt based on sheer ignorance, because obviously they are not in day-to-day contact with us, to see us as dangerous.” (Black Caribbean man, Bradford)

According to many research participants, prejudiced attitudes towards ethnic minorities were one of the main factors that accounted for the under-representation of BME people in the countryside. They anticipated that they would feel ‘out of place’ and ‘uncomfortable’, and that they would ‘stick out like a sore thumb’ and be ‘the odd ones out’ in the countryside. Such feelings acted as powerful symbolic barriers to

countryside use amongst BME communities. These issues are further explored in the chapter on barriers to countryside use.

“They are all White. They are all White. So immigrants, like most of us, when we go, we feel we are intruding.” (Pakistani man, London)

“To be honest, I just haven’t seen Black people use the countryside. I wouldn’t feel comfortable there.” (Black Caribbean woman, Bradford)

“You don’t see that many of us there. It’s very rare. It would be nice if a lot of us visited the countryside because then you would feel more comfortable.” (Indian woman, London)

Another dominant association in relation to the countryside was that is perceived to be ‘far’ and therefore inaccessible.

“Country is somewhere which is far off from where you are.” (Pakistani man, London)

“I think the countryside can start along the border of the cities but it’s slightly further out, away from cities, away from pollution. Remoteness is important, small communities, farms.” (Black Caribbean man, London)

Perhaps this association with remoteness is not surprising given that the sample focused only city dwellers. Nevertheless, it is likely to be an important factor restricting use, because distance implies that one needs transport, time and money to make use of the countryside. Any effort at promoting the countryside amongst under-represented groups will have to address this issue.

Conclusions

Across all ethnic minority groups, people seemed to have a common understanding of what the countryside actually is; and that perception was largely positive, at least in relation to the physical or natural attributes of rural areas. They contrasted the countryside to the city and, from their perspective as city dwellers, longed to have more exposure to the peace, quiet and beauty they expected to find in the English countryside. *Perceptions of the countryside as a physical environment therefore cannot be said to act as barriers to countryside use, except to the extent that the countryside is thought of as a far away, remote place that is not easily accessible.*

But the countryside was also seen as a conservative and parochial social environment. Research participants described rural people as distrustful of outside influences in general and of ethnic minorities in particular. Because of these attitudes and because of the lack of ethnic minority people visible in the countryside they anticipated that they would feel conspicuous and uncomfortable if they went to rural areas. This perception of the countryside as an unwelcoming social environment acted as a powerful barrier to countryside use amongst people from all ethnic minority backgrounds, but especially amongst Pakistani and Black Caribbean people.

The research findings confirm the evidence reported in the literature review which established that under-utilisation amongst people from BME backgrounds is linked to people’s experience of life in the UK (where most people live in urban centres and where they fear racial prejudice and discrimination in rural environments) rather than to some negative attitudes towards the countryside itself. The findings also support

our contention that there are important differences between first generation migrants and subsequent generations. The first group have more detailed representations of the countryside which draw on their experiences 'back home', while the latter have largely undifferentiated representations which are not significantly different from those of other people who live in inner city areas.

Chapter 5: Benefits of the Countryside

Introduction

Understanding the perceived benefits that ethnic minority people associate with using the countryside provides insights into their motivation for using the countryside in the first place, and gives some sense of the kinds of environments, facilities and amenities they are likely to prefer. The perceived benefits are clearly linked to their views of the countryside (as described in the previous chapter) and relate to physical health, psychological well-being, personal identity and social inclusion and civic participation.

Physical health

A tangible benefit associated with the countryside is physical health gains. Many research participants discussed how people who live in the countryside seem healthier, fitter and more relaxed than most city residents, including themselves. Their comments were based on experiences in their country of origins as well as in the UK.

“My great aunt she’s about seventy or eighty and she’s in the village and she’s cutting and harvesting and doing this and doing that. All my other aunts are in the city in Pakistan. They’re the same age, but they’re just sitting there, they’ve got servants doing everything, they can’t move, they can’t do anything. It’s the lifestyle. The ones in the village are fitter. In Pakistan, in the countryside, people are thin and fit.” (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

“The countryside is good environment. The people who live there, they probably have a better life, better than the city, more healthier. All that clean fresh air, you know, is good for you. Us [urban] people, we work so hard, we are sick and we are dying. We look at people in the country and they are strong. They work hard but they have good health.” (Pakistani man, Birmingham)

Research participants mentioned a whole series of health benefits associated with breathing fresh air and with taking physical exercise (e.g. walking, climbing, cycling) in a countryside setting.

“I suggested [going to the countryside] to my dad simply because of high blood pressure and because the stress element of it. Doctors advised him to relax more so then I thought I should tell him to go to the country.” (Indian woman, London)

“It’s much healthier, it’s cleaner. We did walking and orienteering and we did caving. We did abseiling and climbing and I enjoyed myself. I enjoyed it and I lost a lot of weight. When I came back, I’d lost a stone from being there and I’d only gone for four days! It was really good for me.” (Black Caribbean woman, Birmingham)

“The clean fresh air does make a difference with kids who have asthma, house mites and asthma. We used to take our daughter to the countryside for two weeks to detox her, and it did make a lot of difference.” (Pakistani man, Bradford)

Psychological well-being

Nearly everyone discussed, in one way or another, the psychological benefits of experiencing the countryside. Like both disabled and young people, people from ethnic minority backgrounds have a very rich repertoire of positive feelings and experiences to draw on when they describe the psychological benefits of experiencing vast green outdoor spaces. In fact, the idea that the countryside is good for your mental health dominated the discussion in all ethnic minority groups, and was common to both users and non-users of the countryside. All saw the countryside as a place where they could escape from the stresses and strains of everyday life in the city, and those who had experienced it talked at length and in great detail about feeling more relaxed, calmer, freer, at peace with themselves, rested, refreshed, recharged and rejuvenated in the countryside.

“The countryside is an escape. Very quiet. Very peaceful. You feel free and you actually start looking around as if to say: “Wow! This is fantastic! This is lovely!” Like when I went to the Lake District, it was the first time I’ve been out of the city, initially after a couple of days I was quite bored, initially. But then I started to appreciate the surroundings and the fact that, well, no mobile phone reception, so I can’t ring round. By the end of the week I started to notice exactly what you actually achieve by going to the countryside and getting away from the city life. You get time to think and sort things out in your head.” (Indian mixed group, Birmingham)

“I feel totally rejuvenated when I get away anywhere from the city. Just that feeling of liberty, immense liberty, space, newness and just rest! More than anything, there is a feeling of rest, like switching off something. [...] I really think that as a community, Black people would benefit enormously from going to the countryside because there is so much benefit in terms of getting away from the humdrum the every day life in the town, from all the stresses, all the constraints, all the frustrations.” (Black Caribbean mixed group, London)

“I’m sure that country life isn’t all fabulous. It must have its downside. But as a visitor, when you come away from London, I think the stress levels come down just because you don’t have to do all that battling that we just incorporate in our everyday lives here. I don’t think we are even aware really of how much stress we have just even to get to work and to take the kids to school and to pay the bills and to look after the family. We fight. We fight all the time. So I think the more stress you have, the more you would benefit from the countryside, except you’ll never be able to take time to go and you probably can’t afford it anyway.” (Black Caribbean woman, London)

“When you’re in a room in a city, everything is confined. You’ll see a wall, you’ll see a window but your mind is not free. When you have the countryside all around you, it does mentally refresh you. It has a lot of psychological benefits.” (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

Experts who have worked with people from ethnic minority backgrounds, taking them on escorted visits to the countryside or interviewing them on their perceptions and uses of the countryside confirm the findings reported here.

“The open space gave a kind of grounded physical sense of feeling freedom, an embodied feeling of freedom. Fresh air was very highly valued in particular. And then there was the stuff around psychological well being.

The idea that it's good for your mental health to get out of the city and it's peaceful and relaxing and calm or it's a place for meditation or thinking."
(BME expert)

Experts also argued that people from ethnic minority backgrounds may benefit disproportionately from being in the countryside because they are subject to greater stresses than most White people – in terms of their economic position, their larger households, their experience of exclusion and discrimination, and so on.

"I believe the countryside has that power to regenerate something within us, whether you call it our spirit, our soul, or whatever. For Black people who experience exclusion, deprivation, this is especially important."
(BME expert)

Many research participants discussed the rewards and pleasures of being in the countryside by themselves. Some felt that going to the countryside was a private affair whose purpose was precisely to find solace in solitude. The possibility of 'getting away from it all' and of having some time and space to oneself in a beautiful natural setting was very attractive to many, perhaps especially second or third generation migrants and those who felt burdened by the competing demands of working and looking after their family.

"If you live in a city and you are working hard all day and taking care of kids and family, you just want to have some time to yourself as well. It's a place to get away from everything. It really works. It just feels nice. It's hard to express it though; it's really hard to express it. It's nice, it's calm."
(Pakistani woman, Bradford)

"Sometimes you have to clear your mind of all the stress. I've learned that because I've got a big family. I've got seven kids. They're all grown up now but I had to fight every inch of the way. I've never had any stress relief. My wife works nights and I work days. We pass each other on the way like this. It's very stressful. But if I could just jump in my car and just drive round and just go in a village or a little cabin in the woods or sit by a lake or something like that and just spend a couple of nights just lying there, you know, that would help me a lot. That would help me. It is very important because it gives you a sense of calmness. You look and you think: "Oh, I've never seen a tree that tall or a bird that colour." You watch an insect crawl across the ground and it takes your mind away from everything else. You lose all the stress. You're in open space, fresh air." (Black Caribbean man, Birmingham)

But many also discussed the benefits of using the countryside as a background for familial or social activities. They liked the idea of spending 'quality time' with family and friends in a beautiful environment, playing games together, having a picnic, chatting and otherwise relaxing in good company. They also discussed how being in the countryside provided happy memories for all the family. These served to create bonds and they could help carry people through difficult times.

"I take my sons to the country and then, with my boys, we'd encourage them to draw from memory what they have seen. They we spend time talking about what we did and what he drew." (Black Caribbean man, London)

"I went ten years ago to Beacon Hill and it is lovely because you've got the hills and that, and the kids loved it, and my sister went and she just sat there with her book, and my brother went and they took their cricket bats. It's just

something nice for a family to do. It brings us all closer together.” (Pakistani woman, Birmingham)

“It’s a great family outing. There can be things to do for everyone and we all come back feeling a bit closer. Maybe that’s a bit personal, but I find that it gives us happy memories and this is good when things are not so happy.” (Indian man, London)

For some respondents, the countryside also brought spiritual benefits. From this perspective, the countryside was experienced as an opportunity to experience God’s creation and to feel closer to their God. There was also a sense that, in front of nature, all are equal and that any experience of division and exclusion appear only in the social realm.

“We would go to the countryside, because it was a way of meeting with God, being able to worship being with friends, to share God’s creation...” (Black Caribbean man, London)

“Just see the nature is good. God’s nature. It broadens your mind. It links to other people and living things.” (Pakistani family, London)

Personal identity

Another important benefit that is specific to first generation migrants is the fact that experiencing the countryside in England gives them the opportunity to create links between their current life and their experiences prior to migration. Whether the memories evoked are happy or sad, they nevertheless allow people to experience a greater sense of continuity and integration in their personal identity.

“The countryside reminds me of my home. I grew up in the Punjab and with my father we were travelling in villages all over the place and it brings that back for me. Just squinting your eyes, you could almost be back home, the smells, the cows, you could be there.” (Pakistani man, Bradford)

“When you are actually going into the countryside, you are thinking: “This looks a bit like my village here; this road looks like my village, the way it turns. Doesn’t this remind me of the lake back home?” When you have that feeling, you feel like getting your ticket and flying back home. And when you get there, you relax for a bit then you want to get back here. You realise that there are some good things about this country. It’s also your home.” (Indian woman, Bradford)

“That feeling of freedom I associate with Jamaica, but then when you go to the countryside here, you do get some of that experience here as well.” (Black Caribbean woman, Birmingham)

Social inclusion and civic participation

Another key benefit ethnic minority people derive (or would want to derive) from the countryside is a greater sense of social inclusion and civic participation in English society. Many research participants, including experts, felt strongly that ethnic

minority people in England were confined to inner city areas, that they had restricted their lives to accommodate to these surroundings, and that they were missing out on many of the benefits associated with the countryside, including a sense of belonging in England. They claimed a right to belong in English society as a whole, including rural areas.

“I don’t want my community to just look at pretty pictures of the English countryside. We have been here long enough. Now we have to build that emotional connection which says this is my countryside, this can be my home too.” (Black Caribbean woman, London)

“The countryside shouldn’t really belong to the people who just happen to live there. It should belong to the whole country. We don’t own the cities. The countryside should represent all the people that live within the country, Caribbean people, Chinese people, Asian people.” (Indian mixed group, Birmingham)

Those who had been to the countryside often claimed that getting to know England and English culture better had been a key motivation for going. Visiting the countryside exposed them to a different aspect of the English way of life and made them feel more ‘at home’ in this country.

“When you go outside, you see lots of different people, different communities, you can meet English people, you can share and everything. That’s important, the whole kind of social side of things.” (Indian man, London)

“A lot of people should visit the countryside so they get to know how the other half live in the countryside.” (Indian woman, London)

Many of the families we took on escorted visits to country parks were positive about the experience. They often commented that they had not realised how much they had missed out on by not making more use of green outdoor spaces close to home. Being exposed to the countryside and discovering another aspect of England felt like a revelation. However, there was a sense that people in the countryside may not be as keen to discover the heritage of ethnic minority communities as they themselves were to discover rural England. Discrimination and prejudice in the countryside were invoked again as barriers to full social integration and to the development of a sense of civic participation based on mutual respect and equality. We discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter.

Conclusions

The research shows that people from ethnic minority backgrounds perceive many varied benefits to making greater use of the countryside. This is true both amongst those who make use of the countryside and those who currently do not. Across all ethnic minority groups, people were aware of the health benefits that derive from taking physical exercise in a countryside setting. They discussed at length and in great detail the tremendous sense of well-being, calm and freedom they have in the countryside, whether they are on their own or with others. Some also reported a feeling of spiritual connection in the countryside.

Experiencing the countryside also fulfils important identity needs. Many people from ethnic minority communities originate from rural areas. They discussed how, in their

native countries, the countryside was an intricate part of their identity that was lost as people migrated to the UK and settled in inner cities. Those who have experienced the countryside in England made links between their past and present lives and clearly benefited from this sense of continuity in their personal identity.

Finally, ethnic minority people talked about the social benefits, in terms of social inclusion, integration and civic participation, of being able to use the countryside in England. Those who had been to the countryside discussed how this had enhanced their understanding of English culture. Those who had not been stressed how important it was for them to feel included in all aspects of British life and claimed an equal right to the countryside.

While the literature review did not specifically cover the benefits of countryside use, many of the benefits identified by research participants in the study were highlighted in the evidence reviewed. For instance, it was clear from the review that people from ethnic minority backgrounds who recently migrated from rural areas relished the opportunity of accessing the countryside, and that they often anchored this experience in terms of the landscapes and lifestyles of their homeland. It was also clear that being able to access the countryside contributed to BME people's sense of social inclusion and participation as full and equal citizens. Perhaps one of the most surprising elements of the research, which was not captured by the review, is the depth of people's feelings when they described the psychological benefits of being in the countryside. This suggests that there could be considerable latent demand for the countryside and green outdoor spaces amongst people from all ethnic minority backgrounds, if issues of racial discrimination are addressed.

Chapter 6: Factors limiting the use of the Countryside

Introduction

Despite generally positive representations of the countryside and the perception that accessing the countryside would be beneficial for them, people from ethnic minority backgrounds make limited use of the English countryside. We now turn to the factors restricting access to the countryside amongst ethnic minority people. These are:

- cost of visiting the countryside;
- problems linked to transport;
- lack of knowledge of the English countryside;
- lack of cultural habit of visiting the countryside;
- fear of discrimination;
- different patterns of use, and;
- lack of culturally-appropriate provisions.

Cost of visiting the countryside

Studies have shown that cost is a significant barrier to greater use of the countryside by ethnic minority people, which is hardly surprising given that they are more likely to be less well off than White people.

For most ethnic minority respondents, accessing the countryside raises issues of transport (which is expensive, whether it is private or public) and issues of accommodation and food (if they want to do more than a day visit). If visitors also want to take part in activities or visit heritage sites, the total cost of a visit will almost inevitably be beyond the financial means of most ethnic minority households.

“If you just want to go out and walk or just to have a look at the scenery, that doesn’t cost anything. But when you start getting on to the activities, then you’re priced out of it, aren’t you?” (Black Caribbean man, Bradford)

“Twenty years ago, you wanted to visit the Roman Baths in Bath and you were free to walk in. Today I think you pay twelve pounds to go around it; twelve pounds per person. Same thing with Windsor Castle. Same thing with Cheddar Gorge. If you want to see Cheddar Gorge, it’s going to cost you an arm and a leg. Everywhere, they’re putting up barriers. They’re putting on entrance fees to the nearest points of interest. If they want people to visit, what are they doing with these prices everywhere?” (Pakistani man, London)

The financial difficulties are compounded by the fact that BME people like to visit the countryside with family and friends. However, given that many ethnic groups have large families, the cost of organising an outing for the whole family becomes prohibitive.

“Everyone is not middle class in Bradford. It’s not affordable and we’ve all got large families.” (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

“Some of the places, they charge forty, fifty pound a room or something. For two people, that’s a lot of money. But how many rooms would we need? At least three, right? We can’t afford that.” (Indian man, London)

Attitudes to cost varied between users and non-users. For most non-users, cost represented a major barrier. By contrast, those who did use the countryside considered it a cheaper alternative to many city-based leisure activities. Thus, it would seem that the issue of cost is strongly linked to people’s perceptions of the countryside and to their patterns of use in relation to the countryside. Those who are happy to just go for walks and engage in other contemplative activities find it a cheap option; those who want to take part in structured activities that require specialist equipment and facilities, or who assume that being in the countryside requires specialist equipment, find it unaffordable.

Transport

Studies on the barriers to countryside use also identify transport as a key factor, a point echoed here by this current research. Again, it is not surprising given that residents of large urban centres are much less likely to own a car than rural residents. For many, access to the countryside would have to be via public transport. This, in turn, raises issues linked to the cost of transport, to the knowledge people have of transport links, to the efforts involved in using public transport, and to the lack of freedom linked to the paucity of transport infrastructures in rural areas.

“Transport is a big issue. You need a car really, don’t you? Otherwise you don’t have that flexibility to take whoever you want to take, to make a stop wherever you want, to carry all your stuff in the boot, to take a picnic with you.” (Indian woman, Birmingham)

“If I want to go to the Cotswolds or something, I’d have to take a train to some large town. But then, how am I gonna get into the countryside and visit within that as well? That’s off putting.” (Black Caribbean man, London)

Even those who do own a car argue that the cost of petrol to reach their destination and the stress of driving for long distances in largely unknown areas are deterrents. This is linked to the representation of the countryside as a remote place.

“Even if you have a car, it can easily be ten, twenty pounds in petrol to get there and back.” (Black Caribbean family, Birmingham)

“Because you live in London, there’s nothing near where you can go and do that sort of activities. It’s the distance more than anything. You have to travel like mad, go miles to do anything like that. On a Sunday, you don’t want to even think about driving. It might be relaxing when you get there, but the stress would come back if you had to drive for 2 hours.” (Indian woman, London)

Lack of knowledge

Another common issue restricting access to the countryside is people’s lack of familiarity with the countryside and what it has to offer. This issue appears very frequently in discussions with ethnic minority people. Since most BME people live in urban areas and have traditionally spent much of their leisure time there, they have

not developed an informal pool of knowledge about areas to visit, places to stay and eat, activities to do, and what is deemed appropriate behaviour in rural settings.

“It’s not knowing what’s out there. It all boils down to that.” (Indian woman, Birmingham)

“Only a few weeks ago, I tried to go to Stonehenge but I didn’t know where it was. I don’t know really where most of the countryside is.” (Indian man, Birmingham)

“[People don’t know] what sort of activities are going to be there. If they go there, what facilities are going to be there, what to do, what not to do.” (Pakistani man, London)

“I’ve never been to the countryside but, let’s say if rain pours down, where are you supposed to cover yourself from rain? Do they have any facilities or do you just have to cover yourself with an umbrella? (Pakistani woman, Birmingham)

“I’d love to take my kids horse riding but where do I take them? I don’t know where to take them. I don’t know what’s available for them to do.” (Black Caribbean woman, Birmingham)

Fear of trespassing, in particular, is often mentioned. While young people also expressed concerns about trespassing, this may be a particularly salient issue amongst ethnic minority people who have experienced the countryside in their country of origins, since rural attitudes to outsiders were perceived to be much more welcoming there than in England.

“In the early days when we arrived here, we used to think it was all open and we found that it wasn’t. There are rules that you cannot walk into another farm. You have to keep onto the pathway. You can’t wander off into a farm, whereas in our country the distinction between a path and a farm isn’t there. Usually when you are on somebody’s farm, they treat you as their guest. Here, you are intruding on somebody’s privacy and they make it clear that you are intruding. There are notices saying trespassers will be prosecuted.” (Pakistani man, London)

“You see a nice piece of land or a lake and you feel like stopping there to have a small picnic, but you can’t do that because maybe it’s private owned. I don’t know whether it’s the countryside or not, whether it’s alright for us to be there or not. That’s an issue that we are worried about.” (Indian woman, Birmingham)

Because many ethnic minority people anticipate that they could experience racism or discrimination in the countryside and thus feel threatened as a result (see below), it is particularly important for them to have positive recommendations about places to visit and things to do from other community members.

“We usually go out on recommendations. If my friend tells me this place is nice, we would go there, but we will not venture out in a strange place, because the ultimate priority for us is that the place is safe for us, whether that place offers us welcome as ethnic minorities, whether people are friendly to us, whether there are amenities which are suitable for us.” (Pakistani man, London)

Lack of cultural habit

The lack of knowledge discussed above largely stems from the fact that there is no 'cultural habit' of visiting the countryside in England amongst ethnic minority communities. The patterns of settlement of first generation migrants in inner city areas mean that most people from ethnic minority backgrounds have been raised in urban environments in England, so that they will have had little exposure to the countryside. Many people therefore fail to even consider the countryside as an option for their leisure activities.

"Our parents never used to go to the countryside. It's just lack of awareness. It doesn't really cross our minds to go into the countryside. It just never has." (Indian woman, Bradford)

"It's not a popular thing that we would do. Like if I went to my cousin and said: "Let's go to the countryside", he wouldn't comprehend why. It's not the typical thing for an Asian family to do. We have parties and eat and dance at home. We don't go to the country." (Pakistani man, Birmingham)

"I've never really known anybody that said: "Alright, we'll go to the countryside for a couple of days or a weekend. We'll just take a day out to go to the countryside." Never. Those sorts of conversation never really come out, to be honest with you." (Black Caribbean man, Birmingham)

"Ethnic minority people nearly all live in inner city areas. Now, the city has many things to offer, very interesting and happy experiences. So you can actually live without the countryside if nobody keeps dragging you up and telling you what you are missing. But it does not mean that you are not objectively missing out just because you have curtailed your life to fit into reduced circumstances. Unfortunately, if the countryside disappears in the daily life agenda for anybody for one generation, then you can wipe it out forever because if parents don't go, their children won't go and then their children won't go either. After a while, it feels like a way of life. It achieves an identity as well, so people begin to think [the countryside] is not really for people like us." (BME expert)

Research participants (and women in particular) often reported that they lacked the time to use the countryside and that they had other priorities, such as working, looking after children, and visiting family and friends. While leisure time is certainly at a premium in many ethnic minority households, we would argue that it is because visiting the countryside is not part of the cultural repertoire of most people from ethnic minority backgrounds, rather than because they lack time per se, that they tend to under-utilise the countryside. This is confirmed by our experience of taking ethnic minority families on escorted visits. Nearly all families planned to come back to the country parks we had visited. In other words, as a result of their positive initiation to the countryside, they were going to make time.

This lack of cultural habit leads to lack of ease and to a heightened feeling of vulnerability in the countryside. This, together with the fear of racism to which we turn now, largely explains why ethnic minority people make less use of the English countryside.

Fear of prejudice, discrimination and racism

We have discussed BME people's perceptions of rural dwellers as inherently more conservative, resistant to change, less open to outsiders in general and to ethnic minorities in particular, than urban people. We now explore these issues in greater depth and address the specific problem of racial prejudice, discrimination and racist incidents in the countryside.

In all the BME communities researched, interviewees discussed their fear of feeling excluded in the countryside, of being 'the odd ones out' and 'getting funny looks', and of experiencing racist incidents and hostility. These perceptions are grounded in reality. Indeed, many respondents recounted (personal and vicarious) experiences of exclusion, prejudice and discrimination.

"My brother went to the Lake District last year. Being an Asian he got funny looks. That puts you off, because English people don't associate us with the countryside and the Lake District. I've never been but I've heard it's beautiful, but people there think it's their place and they don't want foreigners and outsiders. They don't want you coming in and invading their territory." (Pakistani man, Birmingham)

"My cousin went to Blackpool and he got beaten up there for being Asian. People feel insecure for that reason." (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

"You go to a countryside hotel and you can see there is vacancy out there and when you ask for it, they say: "Sorry, it's all booked." It has happened to us personally. It happened to us in Lake District, honest to God! And you can see vacancy sign outside. Sometimes you phone and they say yes because they can't make you out on the phone. But we know if you go to these places it would be difficult to find a decent place to live in, and that puts us back." (Pakistani woman, London)

"I have not had any bad experiences, only very good welcoming people in the country. But in Scotland, there was a shop that displayed golliwogs, which is a part of history I hadn't seen in years and it was a real one - the good Robinson with the check trousers and everything. I took photographs of it because I was really quite shocked. And because of that, although people were actually welcoming, I still felt that the people may have had the same reservations about Black people. Even though they had been welcoming, that made me feel it was almost like fake. I can't explain it, but that golliwog's changed my whole perspective." (Black Caribbean woman, London)

"I'll tell you something that happened this year. This [Black] guy I work with went to a pub with a friend of his in the country. As they go in, everybody just turned. They ordered the drinks and they were talking and then the owner of the pub came to them and said: "Excuse me, I'm sorry, I'm not racist, you know, but you see the thing is these guys here, some of them have been my customers for 20 years, but they are not happy with you being here. So I'm not going to charge you for these drinks but you have to leave because they say if you don't leave, they're gonna leave." (Black Caribbean man, London)

As the quotes above demonstrate, experiences of racism and discrimination are widespread, especially in the Black Caribbean and Pakistani communities. Such negative experiences circulate in the informal networks of the communities and they have ramifications far beyond the people who are directly affected by them. It would seem that when people feel that they cannot engage with mainstream society on their own terms, they reduce their contact with the dominant groups to a minimum.

Leisure pursuits are likely to be disproportionately impacted by this coping strategy. It is certainly the case in this research that anticipated experiences of racism acted as a powerful deterrent to countryside use. They also prompted some research participants to choose to take their holidays in places where they are part of the ethnic majority and can therefore truly relax.

Different patterns of use

The research also found some differences in the dominant patterns of countryside use between BME people and the general population. While most English users (including the disabled people we spoke to in this research) valued the solitude and contemplative activities which the countryside affords, the tendency for ethnic minority people was to prefer social company (family, friends, schools). Very few of the users we interviewed visited by themselves. This pattern of use seems to be linked both to some lack of confidence and fear of discrimination – the feeling that there is safety in number - and to a cultural preference for group-based activities. It may be changing as ethnic minority people are becoming acculturated in English society and develop greater confidence in green outdoor spaces.

There was also a preference for more managed and developed sites that include man-made features and provide opportunities for structured recreational activities over naturalistic landscapes. Indians and Pakistanis, in particular, emphasised the importance of food on outings – picnics and barbeques were very popular – and all wanted more activities and things to do.

“R1: I just don't think Asians see an attraction in the countryside. We don't really see anything to do there. Go there and do what exactly? There isn't even a place to sit and eat, to have a barbecue.

R2: Fair enough, if you like walking and stuff like that, then fine. But if you're going for three days, one of your days might be spent walking around sightseeing. But what do you do for the rest of the days? There's no activities there.

R1: We also seem to travel in big families and you have to please everyone, which is a really hard thing to do. So maybe there are people who want to go round in the countryside but there should be activities for everyone to do there. I wouldn't know where to find that.” (Indian woman, London)

“In the White culture, the countryside is seen as somewhere where you can go and be relaxed whereas sometimes in our culture, we want something more hands on things to do. So what's on in the countryside?” (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

“We love picnics. You can take the whole family, gran and everybody, providing you've got space in the car and you've got enough cars.” (Pakistani man, Birmingham)

“When you say “countryside”, I'm thinking of walks. That seems boring. But if they provided more activities, sports, events, concerts, food festivals or whatever, if they market it right, pitch it to the right audience, I think they'd get a lot of us using the countryside.” (Black-Caribbean woman, Birmingham)

The research therefore found that, across all ethnic minority groups, there was a sense that the English countryside⁸ did not offer much in terms of recreational activities and, therefore, that countryside service providers did not cater for BME people's preferred patterns of use.

Lack of culturally-appropriate provisions

Some ethnic minority people did not visit the countryside because they were concerned that some of their basic cultural or religious needs would not be recognised and catered for. Pakistani people, in particular, explained that they were prepared to undertake day visits, but would not contemplate overnight stays because of concerns over the lack of cultural and religious provisions, such as appropriate dietary options and praying facilities.

“It's alright for the day because you can go and take your own food, but not longer because we only eat halal, they don't got that. For us to be there for longer than a day, food is a big thing really. I know for a fact that my husband won't go anywhere or he won't be able to eat anything.” (Pakistani woman, Bradford)

The lack of culturally-appropriate provisions in the countryside prevented some people from using the countryside altogether, and confined others to daily visits only. Across all groups, however, it reinforced the sense that the English countryside is not for them.

Conclusions

People from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to live in inner city areas and to be poorer than the general population. For these reasons alone, they are less likely to access the countryside because of the cost, time and transport issues linked to accessing the countryside from an urban base. Moreover, as a result of this traditional confinement to inner-city areas, ethnic minority communities have not developed a cultural habit of going to the countryside and they have not developed the informal pool of knowledge of the recreational opportunities afforded by the English countryside that would facilitate access.

The confinement of ethnic minority communities to inner cities also resulted in mutual lack of knowledge, reductive stereotypes and distrust between themselves and predominantly White rural dwellers. This tacit divide has engendered a deep and largely substantiated fear of prejudice, discrimination and racism in the countryside amongst ethnic minorities. It has also contributed to producing rural spaces that assume a relatively homogeneous type of visitors and undifferentiated patterns of use – that favoured by White, middle-aged, middle-class users – and therefore fail to cater for the specific recreational preferences or cultural needs of ethnic minority groups. Together, these factors are the main barriers restricting use of the countryside amongst ethnic minority people.

⁸ It is more precise to use the word “English” than “White” in this context because the English have evolved a very distinct culture in relation to nature and the countryside that has been largely influenced by the Romantic Movement. This view stands in stark contrast with, say, the French perspective on nature and the countryside, which has been thoroughly influenced by Cartesian rationalism.

In relation to the existing body of evidence on the barriers to countryside use, the empirical findings of the research confirm that the cost of visiting the countryside, problems linked to transport, lack of knowledge and cultural habit of visiting the English countryside, fear of discrimination and negative experiences of the countryside because of racism, preferences for slightly different patterns of use, and the lack of culturally-appropriate provisions are all factors restricting use of the countryside amongst ethnic minority people. We found no evidence, however, that people from ethnic minority backgrounds were fearful of encountering wild animals (as had been suggested in the literature), although some Muslim research participants did display a strong dislike for dogs during escorted visits.

The research also introduces finer distinctions between the various BME communities than were found in the literature. It was clear from the current study that Pakistani and Black Caribbean people (especially men) were much more likely to fear racism and to report racist incidents than Indian people. It was also clear that Black Caribbean people, who have been established in England for a much longer period of time than either Indian and Pakistani people and who are native English speakers, experienced fewer problems in relation to lack of knowledge of the countryside and had little need for culturally-appropriate provisions.

SECTION II: DISABLED PEOPLE

Chapter 7: Representations of the Countryside

Introduction

It is important to stress, from the start, the great diversity that exists amongst disabled people. Indeed, disability takes many forms and impacts in different ways on people's lives. Some impairments are physical; others are mental. Some impairments are permanent; others are intermittent. Some are very severe; others are relatively mild. Some disabled people have been physically or mentally impaired from birth; others have become suddenly disabled in later life; others still have conditions that slowly reduce their ability to cope and gradually erode their self-confidence; but most disabled people are simply people who are getting older and frailer and who develop impairments in the normal course of life.

There are also very great differences in the economic circumstances as well as in the level of emotional and logistical support disabled people enjoy and, therefore, in their ability to lead fulfilling lives. While disabled people are more likely to be old, unemployed and poor, more likely to live in urban areas, and more likely to experience social isolation than non-disabled people, some disabled people are young, well-off and lead full social and personal lives.

With this diversity of experiences and needs in mind, we now explore the ways in which disabled people – in our sample, people who are wheelchair users, people who are blind or visually-impaired, and people with mental health problems – think and feel about the English countryside. The aim of the discussion is to identify whether perceptions of the countryside may act as barriers to countryside use amongst disabled people.

Common representation: 'not the city'

As discussed in the chapter on representations of the countryside amongst ethnic minority people, a common representation of the countryside cuts across all the under-represented groups in the research. This representation places the countryside opposite the city, as represented in Figure 1 (see below). From this perspective, the countryside is seen as an inherently natural, beautiful, peaceful, pure, healthy, clean physical environment. This contrasts with the urban environment, which is deemed unnatural, unhealthy, hectic and stressful.

However, while most people from ethnic minority backgrounds positively valued the natural and physical environment, but held negative attitudes towards the social or human environment of rural communities (because they feel it excludes them), disabled people have an almost diametrically opposed perspective. They perceive the physical environment (either built or natural) of rural areas as inherently threatening (associations in bold in Figure 1), and perceive the social and human environment positively. They believe that rural communities are, in the main, friendly and welcoming places for disabled people.

Countryside	City
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rural ▪ Natural and green ▪ Vast and open ▪ Pure, healthy and clean ▪ Peaceful and quiet ▪ Slow and simple life ▪ Englishness ▪ Close-knit communities ▪ Conservative and old ▪ Far 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urban ▪ Unnatural ▪ Enclosed and built up ▪ Polluted, unhealthy and dirty ▪ Hectic ▪ Fast and complex life ▪ Multiculturalism ▪ Anonymous society ▪ Progressive and young ▪ Near

Figure 1: Representation of the countryside (threatening associations in bold)

The opposition to the city was found across all groups of disabled people, both in relation to the natural and built environments and to the ways of life found in rural and urban areas.

“The landscape is different, beautiful, rolling hills. But also, people have got a different life in the country. The cities are all a rat race, whereas the countryside is a bit more easy-going.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Bradford)

“The countryside, to me, is like not urban built up areas. It could be small villages, mountains, forests, moor lands, the seaside even. Sometimes, the coast is free from urbanisation, isn’t it? So it could be countryside. Most of the Devonshire, Cornish coast would count as countryside, whereas the whole of Sussex seems to be a building site. I would not regard that as countryside.” (Visually-impaired man, Birmingham)

“To me, there’s a whole different way of life in the countryside. It’s not just hills and trees and streams. It’s also people and their lifestyle, no traffic, no noise, people on horses, farmers, that’s what makes it the countryside.” (Man, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

Positive associations

In general, disabled people associated the physical environment of the countryside with highly positive images of farmland, forests, rivers and lakes, hills and mountains, wild and domestic animals, and so on. While representations were more detailed amongst users than non-users, most disabled people’s representations were complex, nuanced, rich in detail and very much rooted in the English countryside, with abundant references to place names (e.g. Cotswolds, Shropshire, Devon, Cornwall, Derbyshire, Severn Park, Brecon Beacons, etc) and to specifically English landscapes features (e.g. dales, moors, commons, the shires, country lanes, hedgerows, etc).

“I have a general enthusiasm for the countryside, in small doses! Beautiful green landscape and hills and dirt tracks, gates, styles, nice rocky pathways. Beautiful scenery basically.” (Man, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

“Fields, open spaces, villages greens, commons, hills, trees, forests, woods. Driving through tiny country lanes. Rivers, lakes, trees, and lot of villages, but not really built up areas.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

“Woods and trees and just open common land. Forest. When you walk, you can feel the different surfaces under your feet and the leaves and the twigs. It just feels spacious. More airy. More smells. You can smell the water or the trees. (Visually-impaired woman, London)

There were significant differences in people’s representations of the countryside as a function of their disability. For wheelchair users and people with mental health problems, the countryside is perceived as inherently remote from urban areas, isolated, vast and open. However, blind people perceive the countryside very differently, since their senses of smell, hearing and touch give them a more immediate focus. It does not need to be remote open spaces, because they derive no visual pleasure or cognitive clues from large vistas. A secluded local park that would offer a rich array of sensory experiences related to nature would perfectly qualify as ‘countryside’.

“It depends how you define the countryside. Parks can be classed as countryside. It’s just big open spaces, fields and all that. Royal parks. Country parks. It can be in your immediate environment as long as it’s big and green and open.” (Visually-impaired man, London)

“Near where I work, there’s a beautiful park which goes on forever and a day and you can get completely lost into the tick of woods. I wouldn’t really know the difference between that and the proper countryside.” (Visually-impaired woman, London)

“I don’t picture the countryside as a great expanse of openness. In a way, I picture it as a series of physical experiences, like walking across fairly tough grasses, climbing over gates, going up a hill, being in a boat trailing your hand in the water and finding the weed, that sort of thing. For me, it’s very physical. I like to deal with what I can touch and taste and feel and experience. When people say the countryside is more than that and it stretches as far as it stretches, well no. For me, it only stretches as far as my body can reach. I don’t often get that sense of space that so many people say they go to the country for.” (Disability expert)

Unlike most people from ethnic minority backgrounds and young people in the study, disabled people generally felt that the social environment of the countryside was very positive. Many did mention the parochial nature of village life and the fact that rural communities could be unwelcoming towards outsiders, but did not seem particularly exercised by that.

“Sometimes they can be friendly and sometimes not. Some people can be quite ignorant really, not very good with other people, not very keen on outsiders generally I should think.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Bradford)

“Sometimes they can make you feel welcome, but sometimes you get that feeling that you’re not a local, you’re not from around here, you don’t understand our ways. Certain areas are more insular than others as well.” (Woman with mental health problems, London)

“When you arrive [to the countryside] from London, one of the first things you notice is it’s not very cosmopolitan. It’s so White! There’s no ethnic minorities at all there. It’s just a little odd, a different feeling. I couldn’t say if it’s positive or negative even. It’s just strange and perhaps it doesn’t feel quite so welcoming. I don’t know.” (Woman with mental health problems, London)

Research participants valued the slow pace of life, the traditional lifestyles, the fact that the countryside stood as a symbol and guardian of a particular version of Englishness (which they recognised as being stereotyped and somewhat of a myth), but which they nevertheless wanted to preserve and enjoy.

“You can’t go back to the past, but there are certain things that are quite traditional and I would value that. I know there’s got to be change and progress, but it’s nice just knowing that you can go to these little oases that are quite a superficial reconnection to the past. It’s like a chocolate box sort of image of England, I suppose, and you see blacksmiths and people making jam, and just this basic sense of community as well.” (Man with mental health problems, London)

“It’s like stepping into an almost fairytale-like side of England, where everything is nice and rosy. We all know it’s not quite like that but it’s nice to pretend for a little while.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

In contrast to ethnic minority people and young people, the vast majority of disabled people anticipated that they would receive a warm welcome in the countryside, specifically as disabled people. In fact, they expected rural people to be friendlier and more helpful than most urban dwellers because, they argued, the slow pace of life in the rural communities would make rural residents more tolerant towards disabled people. There was no sense, in any of the groups, that people would experience prejudiced attitudes towards disabled people – although they expected plenty of institutional discrimination, especially in terms of absence of specific provisions.

“I might be wrong but in villages I am sure there’s a number of elderly people who have mobility problems too. So I expect there would be people who are using wheelchairs in the countryside. They’d be used to that.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

“Probably in respect of my disability, people would be more friendly to me, because they have got more time to be tolerant, because their life is so much easier than in big cities.” (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

“I go on holiday to various parts of the country and 99% of the people are really helpful and caring. They couldn’t be more so. If you get on a bus down there, they wait for you to sit down before they pull off. They don’t do that here.” (Visually-impaired woman, London)

“I don’t suppose people would relate to me any differently because they can’t see my disability. And the whole way of life is slower so I think people would be friendlier as well.” (Man with mental health problems, Bradford)

Negative associations

Despite these broadly positive representations, however, most disabled people perceived the countryside as a threatening physical environment. By its very nature, the countryside is vast and open, natural, unmanaged and therefore unpredictable and uncontrollable. It is also far and isolated. This enhanced disabled people's sense of vulnerability.

"The countryside is full of open spaces and open spaces don't give you information, except that you are in an open space. From a blind person's perspective, I would call the countryside a hostile environment. Everything about it is unpredictable, everything is potential dangerous."
(Disability expert)

"I haven't been to the open country because it's a very open space and you would find it very difficult to orientate yourself there. I would be quite afraid, to be honest. And if you got stuck or needed help or anything, there wouldn't be that many people to help." (Visually-impaired woman, London)

"In your own environment, you develop your own mechanisms and your own responses to lack of safety, so if something did go wrong, you would know what to do. But the countryside would be somewhere where you haven't got any structure. You couldn't even expect what could go wrong. It would be very challenging." (Visually-impaired man, Bradford)

"When you've had mental health problems, the one thing you want to be is safe. Wherever you go, you want to have this safety line that you can always pull the cord and it drags you back home to safety. The problem with the countryside is you're far from your safety zone and that could be quite problematic." (Man with mental health problems, Birmingham)

Such negative associations acted as barriers to countryside use amongst disabled people. They are discussed in more detail later in the report. These barriers need to be addressed if disabled people are to make greater use of the countryside and to be safe in that environment.

Conclusions

Across all groups of disabled people, the representations of the countryside are detailed, nuanced, complex and firmly grounded in the English countryside. Discussions are replete with references to local landscape features and local place names. Like research participants in other under-represented groups, disabled people define the countryside in opposition to the city. In this binary structure, all attributes associated with the countryside are positively valued, except for the fact that the countryside is construed as vast and open and therefore unmanageable and unpredictable. In that respect, and uniquely for disabled people, the countryside is inherently threatening and difficult to access. As a result, very many disabled people feel highly vulnerable in that environment and many will remain reluctant to go.

The study also highlights some differences in disabled people's representations of the countryside as a function of their specific impairment, notwithstanding the partial coverage of this research. Most notably, visually-impaired people stand out for not necessarily conceiving of the countryside as a far away, remote place. Their representation of the countryside seems to emerge from a succession of sensory

experiences in relation to various natural environments within a relatively confined and secluded outdoor space. From their perspective, such a space could be located in close proximity to urban areas without losing either its essential quality as 'countryside' or its pleasurable and beneficial attributes.

The research findings on disabled people's representations of the countryside make an entirely original and important contribution to the literature. In the UK, there was simply no evidence at all on the ways in which disabled people perceive the countryside. What little American evidence there was related exclusively to landscape preferences amongst people with mobility impairments. All the research findings that pertain to blind people and to people with mental health problems are breaking new ground. They highlight both what is common between various groups of disabled people, and indeed between disabled people as a whole and other under-represented groups, and what is specific to each type of impairment.

Chapter 8: Benefits of the Countryside

Introduction

This chapter examines the perceived benefits that disabled people believe the countryside brings. They fall into four broad groups: physical health, psychological well-being, personal identity and social inclusion and civic participation.

While the dimensions are identical, the actual benefits associated with each are different amongst disabled people compared to BME people and young people. There are also differences in perceived benefits according to people's specific impairment.

Physical health

As with the other under-represented groups, all disabled people shared the view that being in the countryside is good for one's physical health, largely because one can breathe fresher, cleaner air and be away from all the stresses of urban life.

"Breathing decent oxygen as opposed to car fumes. There's the health benefits as well." (Man with mental health problems, London)

"When you work and your job is in London with all the fumes and everything going around, it's just nice to go out. It's good for your health." (Man wheelchair user, London)

"Well it's exercise. Going walking in the country is good for your health. Generally, to get away from the hustle and bustle of town and basically to get away from the traffic can only be good for your health." (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

For blind people who have guide dogs, the countryside offers the additional benefit of providing space for their dogs to exercise.

Psychological well-being

All groups of disabled people articulate the psychological well-being they derive, used to derive or would like to derive from the countryside. For many research participants, the countryside constitutes an ideal environment to relieve the stresses of everyday life, to find peace, quiet, freedom and various sensory pleasures. It offers many psychological rewards in a world largely devoid of pleasures.

"There is little to find leisure and pleasure in when you have a disability. The countryside is some source of pleasure." (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

"I don't think people realise how hard life is when you're disabled. Anything that can take you away from all the pains and strains would just

be great. It would just give you a break.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Bradford)

Important differences in the experiences of the countryside emerged, however, as a function of people’s specific impairment. Wheelchair users who are assisted by carers or who use a motorised wheelchair, for instance, do not feel in their bodies the experience of physical exertion that able-bodied people associate with physical activity. Their pleasure stems both from the inherent aesthetic qualities of the landscape and from the tremendous sense of achievement they experience from having overcome the many barriers that impede access to the countryside.

“It’s just beautiful, isn’t it? Just so lovely to look at and to experience. Trees, lakes, valleys. I don’t know why it has this effect on you, but it really calms you down and gives you hope again.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

“For us, it’s more psychological relaxation or the emotional side because the physical side, for us [manual wheelchair users], that would be more tiring. It could be really exhausting. But it can just refresh you mentally. You are there, which in itself is a huge achievement.” (Man, wheelchair user, London)

Visually-impaired and blind people who use the countryside discussed how being in the countryside was deeply relaxing, as open outdoor spaces offered the possibility of a break from the mental strains of urban life: in the countryside, blind people could stop making continuous and strenuous efforts to orientate themselves in space, counting their steps between landmarks, avoiding still and moving obstacles, interpreting a stream of complex auditory clues, and so on.

“For some visually-impaired, walking up and down the street is one of the hardest things you can do cos you got people who don’t always move out of the way for you. So you’re always watching what other people are doing, you’re concentrating on what cars are doing and things like that. You’re avoiding obstacles and people and cars but you’re also concentrating on counting roads to where you’re going. It’s quite exhausting really. In the countryside, there is not so much happening; you can take your time, switch off. You also have time to listen, to notice small changes around you. You don’t feel threatened.” (Blind man, London)

“It’s just calming rather than being out on the street trying to avoid cars and people and things like that. It takes you away from all the hustle and bustle.” (Blind woman, London)

Blind people (at least those who have been blind from birth or youth) tend to describe with great precision what falls within their immediate perceptual reach, whether this relates to touch, hearing or smell. While beautiful vistas hold very limited appeal to them, small-scale and varied environments offer plenty of sensory stimulation.

“I can tell there’s a lake on my left because of the wind on my cheek and the sound of the waves on the jetty and you can hear some ducks in the distance. And there are trees, not very near but there are trees on the right. You can hear the birds singing and the sound of the wind in the trees. I think maybe the trees are also different here to what they were earlier because the feel of the leaves under your feet is different. The leaves are smaller here. They were bigger and heavier before, in the woodland part. Also the smell of the forest, you know, the autumn leaves

on the ground, the moisture, that has gone. It's much fresher, crisper here." (Blind woman, escorted visit, London)

"I enjoy thunder, I enjoy storms. Rain paints a picture for blind people, it almost photographs the landscape because normally, for us, if the landscape isn't making a noise, it doesn't exist. Rain falling on grass is different to rain falling through trees, and rain falling on gravel is different to rain running down pipes or running off roofs. So suddenly when it rains, you are having a picture painted for you that you don't normally have." (Disability expert)

The countryside can also be the source of very specific experiences, such as when this visually-impaired woman saw stars for the first time because city skies were never sufficiently dark at night to allow her to perceive the contrast with the brightness of the stars.

"It's very difficult for somebody who hasn't got a visual impairment to understand and appreciate this but if I looked at the sky at night I wouldn't see any stars at all because of the smog and the city lights where we live. There's not enough contrast. But when I went to Herefordshire, I looked at the sky one night and I just saw a mass of stars. I was so surprised. Obviously I know that stars existed but actually having the opportunity to see them, that was magical." (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

Such benefits are difficult to qualify, let alone to quantify, but they undoubtedly enrich life.

People with mental health problems were the most eloquent in their descriptions of the psychological benefits associated with countryside use. Nearly everyone – users and non-users, men and women from all regions - described at length the feelings of calm, peace, well-being and freedom they experience in the countryside, and the therapeutic value of the countryside.

"The countryside can sort you out, it really can. When you're in the countryside, you're away, you're free. All you have to do is look up at all the birds flying about and you're as free as that. It opens your mind, opens your spirit, looking at the hills and dales, following those trails, walking along the rivers and the streams and all that, walking through cow or sheep filled fields. Cities are depressing but the countryside is not depressing. There's no hassle there and you can find your freedom, breathing deeply and relaxing." (Man with mental health problems, Bradford)

"There's less people in the country and to me that's good because my problem is being with other people. I can't be in a crowded city or a built-up area where there's a lot of people around." (Woman with mental health problems, London)

"It de-stresses you when you have worries. I think most people gain something from being in the country. If I don't see the country for a long time, it affects the way I feel. I feel hemmed in. The countryside is uplifting. We all find it a positive experience to be able to go to the country, just be in the country, just walk and breathe the air and see the animals, be by the sea, feel the nature. You can just let your mind fly. You ain't got to keep alert like in the city." (Man with mental health problems, London)

Being away from city stresses and from crowds seems particular beneficial. In fact, many research participants with mental health problems attribute the onset of mental illness to being in a big city, with all the attendant demands this puts on people.

“I didn’t have any mental illness when I lived there [in the countryside]. It started eventually when I came back to London. The various pressures and things that happened over a course of years caused me to have mental illness. When I came back to London, I couldn’t speak properly, couldn’t sleep and stuff like that.” (Man with mental health problems, London)

“The reason why people have mental health problems is there’s too much pressure in cities, too much people living on top of each other, not enough patience. Everybody’s rushing here and rushing there. London makes you ill.” (Man with mental health problems, London)

Some argued that people with mental health problems would benefit disproportionately from accessing the countryside.

“That’s the paradox, because I know for myself I could benefit from going to the countryside and yet it’s actually harder for me to access it than people without mental health problems. I might get more benefit from going - the peace and quiet and just the rejuvenating aspects of it might have more value if you’ve got very frayed nerves and it’s all getting to you – and yet, the irony is you’re actually less likely to go there.” (Woman with mental health problems, London)

It is clear that the countryside is perceived as having immensely beneficial impacts on mental health patients. Despite various issues related to access, virtually everyone in the sample was very keen to go. Indeed, those we took on escorted visits reacted most positively.

“It’s like someone has taken a concrete jumper off you. In town, you feel like a prisoner. This has been a fantastic, mind-blowing day! If I were a bird, I would be right up there, flying.” (Man with mental health problems, Bradford)

Personal identity

Many physically disabled people became aware, through taking part in the research, that they had given up on accessing the countryside. Since developing an impairment, they had simply assumed that they would have to curtail their aspirations and lead their lives within the narrow confines of their immediate urban area. Going to the countryside was perceived as a luxury, as something they should not even think of being able to do. And yet the research somehow allowed the participants to feel entitled to more. They realised they could lead fuller, more rewarding lives.

“Now that you ask, I do [miss the countryside]. But I am so busy getting used to everything else that goes all wrong in my life, just adapting to this wheelchair and sorting out the house and all, that I hadn’t given it a thought, to be honest. I should, I really should go, you know?” (Man, wheelchair user, London)

“The visit has opened my eyes up. It has opened up the possibility of living more fully. I had not realised how much I had given up on.” (Man, wheelchair user, Bradford)

“I did not think the countryside was for me. Not anymore.” (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

It was very clear in the interviews and groups discussions with people who became severely physically disabled in adulthood that disability brings about a kind of ‘identity break’, with a marked separation between one’s ‘able-bodied days’ and one’s disabled present. Against this background, accessing the countryside – for people who used to do it in their able-bodied days – allows them to bridge these separate identities and to experience some sense of continuity in their lives. This is an important psychological benefit, from which people can apply to other situations and emerge empowered.

“An able-bodied person will get a great deal of physical pleasure in their own bodies, in the nicest sense, from exercise. For us, the equivalent is the sense of achievement, of having gone to somewhere that you never thought you’d be able to get to anymore. It’s a great sense of achievement for a mobility-impaired person to visit the countryside. It’s a mental thing.” (Disability expert)

“It brings back all your memories. Childhood memories. Walking through the forest has reminded me of all the things I used to do as a kid, going fishing with my dad and building dens and running and hiding and playing and just being free [...] The thing is I did go with you today. I can go to the country. I can do more things than perhaps I thought I could.” (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

“Walking along the grass is a nightmare. Even with trainers, there’s lots of lumps and bumps. But it’s the experience. It’s something you’ve achieved.” (Visually-impaired man, London)

Interviewer: Tell me more about that experience of climbing a mountain:
“It was interesting, it was hard work, but it was rewarding to know that you’d done it really. You become much more confident, not just in climbing but, after that, in all sorts of things because you’ve overcome this barrier.” (Visually-impaired woman, London)

There is a great sense of achievement and increased self-confidence when disabled people can continue to participate in outdoor activities that they enjoyed before they developed impairments. Unfortunately, too many are still deprived of these benefits. Unless service providers actively and positively expose disabled people to the recreational opportunities afforded by the countryside, very few are likely to take them up by themselves.

Social inclusion and civic participation

Disabled people are excluded in most environments, rural or urban. For many disabled people, this is not because of their own physical or mental impairment, but because of the way society handles their difference. Just as being able to pursue leisure activities in the countryside enables disabled people to find some continuity between their past and present identities, it also enables them to retrieve some kind of connection between the often separate worlds of disabled and non-disabled

people. More than anything else, disabled people want to feel that they can take part in all the activities they have an interest in, with some tailored support, but as equal citizens.

“Just because you’ve lost your vision, you’re still the person you were before that. So you still want your freedom even though you’re scared to go and get your freedom. You still need to have all the things every other person has, you still want to do all the same things the other person does, but you’ve got a disability that you have got to overcome and I think we just need easier access to do this thing.” (Visually-impaired woman, London)

“When you have mental illness, it’s like people cut you off from the rest of society. We’re not contagious, you know? It’s not catching. We just want to be out there, doing the same as everybody else.” (Man with mental health problems, Birmingham)

“It would be brilliant if able-bodied people were put, just for one day, in a world that had been created for disabled people. They would not be normal anymore, even though there is nothing wrong with them. They would want to do what they like. They would understand the frustrations of being forced to be in an environment that’s not made for you. That’s how we feel as disabled people: not wrong, just different and made to feel out of place.” (Disability expert)

“Most people become disabled in some way when they get older. They have arthritis, restricted mobility, their sight deteriorates, they are not fit enough to go on a long walk, but they still want to carry on enjoying what they used to enjoy. So it’s about seeing disability as part of life, not as a something that affects only a small group of people.” (Disability expert)

Conclusions

Most physically disabled people who did not use the countryside assumed that rural areas were simply not for them and that it would be inappropriate to even want to pursue outdoor activities. They had given up on the idea of leading a full life and had resigned themselves to reduced circumstances. Most people with mental health problems believed they could access the countryside and perceived immense psychological benefits out of doing so but, as we discuss in the next chapter, needed support to do so.

In most of our discussions with disabled people, the countryside was perceived as having inherently rewarding and beneficial aspects, especially for people’s psychological health. But the countryside also symbolised all the pleasures that disabled people had had to give up as a result of wider society’s reaction to their impairment. Accessing the countryside mattered to them, not just for its intrinsic benefits, but also because it allowed disabled people to find some psychological continuity between their own non-disabled and disabled identities, and between the often separate worlds of disabled and non-disabled people. Overcoming the barriers linked to accessing the countryside provides disabled people with a sense of achievement from which they can apply to other aspects of their life and feel empowered. It gives them a greater sense of connection with mainstream society.

While the literature review did not cover the benefits of countryside use, one may safely assume that the literature on this topic in relation to various groups of disabled

people would be either very limited or non-existent. It is likely, therefore, that the findings from this empirical research provide entirely new and original information on these issues.

Introduction

Some of the barriers that restrict access to the countryside by disabled people (and to people with particular impairments) are specific to them, while others are common to all under-represented users. Overall, the main factors limiting use of the countryside amongst disabled people are:

- cost;
- transport;
- lack of knowledge of provisions for disabled people;
- lack of provisions for disabled people;
- sense of vulnerability due to the inherent unpredictability of the countryside;
- social isolation.

All these barriers undermine people's motivation to make full use of the countryside, despite generally positive representations of the countryside and despite perceptions that accessing the countryside would be beneficial for them.

Cost

The cost associated with visiting the countryside emerged as a key issue for disabled people, since many are retired, long-term unemployed or in part-time employment and cannot afford to spend large sums of money on leisure activities.

“Finance is a key issue because you find that being disabled, everything is more expensive.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

“When you are living off benefits, it's not easy. You haven't really got spare money.” (Visually-impaired woman, London)

“At this period of my life, I'd like to get away to the countryside but it's just really the financial part. A lot of people with mental health difficulties are on benefits. To spare that kind of money is going to be really hard.” (Man with mental health problems, Birmingham)

Transport

For disabled people, transport is a critical issue. In fact, research participants explained that the vast majority of disabled people live in cities precisely because of transport facilities, general mobility and access to services. Many disabled people do not drive and, as we discuss later, have few friends who can drive them to rural destinations. They therefore have to either rely on public transport or use taxis⁹, and both options are expensive and fraught with difficulties.

The recurrent concerns associated with public transport to, from and within the countryside are that it is expensive, unreliable, ill-adapted to people's specific impairment, stressful and that it lacks the flexibility people want – especially when

⁹ Specialist mini-bus services such as Ring and Ride do not cover the large distances required to access the open countryside.

they go to the countryside to relax and be free from the stresses and strains of city life. The poor disabled facilities available on public transport are a major deterrent in terms of accessing the countryside.

“I heard that they had rambles for visually-impaired people. Information was sent to people who live in North London and I thought: “This is great!” I rang up and they said: “Well, we’ve got one on Sunday but you’ve got to meet in central London and then we’re off to Sussex.” And I just thought: “For goodness sake! There’s no way I’m going to tube it and possibly get lost or pay a massive taxi fare to get there. It’s crazy!”” (Visually-impaired woman, London)

“There is no local train station near. You have to go to the main station. You try travelling from Walsall to Coventry. You have to ring New Street station to arrange to be met and there would never be anybody there to meet me, to take me from one platform to the other. So in the end I didn’t bother because all the provision that was made was completely useless. That was just getting twenty-five miles. If you want to get from Penzance to Aberdeen, no chance! Absolute nightmare.” (Visually-impaired man, Birmingham)

“When I had a car, I used to disappear into the countryside and go for walks all day. But now I ain’t got a car and it’s so expensive getting the bus, train and going to the countryside. And then you’ve got to really work out the train and bus times, so you’re not that free. The buses are no good and the trains, if they do run on time, are expensive.” (Man with mental health problems, Bradford)

People with mental health problems discussed at length the stresses and anxieties associated with using public transport. While most would have loved to find themselves in a rural environment, they dreaded the idea of getting there and back.

“I wouldn’t go on a train because of the crowds of people. I couldn’t tolerate that well.” (Man with mental health problems, London)

“Getting on buses and trains and the feeling of being claustrophobic if it starts getting full up, that could be very stressful.” (Woman with mental health problems, Birmingham)

“The idea of getting away is nice, but it can also be quite scary as well, the logistics of the journey. A friend of mine’s moved to Devon and asked me several times to go and visit and I haven’t been. It’s the thought of trains. The thought of the journey is quite overwhelming.” (Man with mental health problems, London)

Lack of knowledge of provisions for disabled people

While people from ethnic minority backgrounds and young people tend to lack general knowledge of the countryside and what it has to offer, most disabled people were relatively familiar with the English countryside. What they lack is knowledge of places or activities that are suitable for people with their specific impairment. Since little promotional effort is made to reach out to them, there is a dearth of knowledge about what disabled people can do and where they can go in rural England.

“We never get to hear of anything. We’d like some short walks around different areas, but we never get to know until it’s in the paper and it’s

happened. It's wonderful but it's passed you by. If we knew that there were places that we could go that were easier to get to, that we would feel secure that you could negotiate, then we would go." (Man with mental health problems, London)

"I had a Data Opportunities Officer. It was just somebody who could find out the things that I was interested in, and so I gave her a list of things to look into for me and she found out and gave me this list of places. I rang them and found out what their facilities were and if they could accommodate me. That was great and I made use of the countryside then. But I've moved since and I don't know if there is a Data Information Officer in Birmingham." (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

Lack of provisions for disabled people

Research participants complained about the lack of actual provisions for their specific impairment. High-quality sites that are truly accessible to a range of disabled people remain relatively few. Our direct experience of taking physically disabled people on escorted visits to country parks – arguably some of the most accessible green outdoor spaces available – has certainly highlighted the paucity of provisions in many places.

"Access is one of the most fundamental things for any disabled person, not just for me, but for all disabled people. In the countryside, it's pretty rough, it's pretty dismal. Just look at all the barriers: this gate there, no toilets, the steep paths, the leaves, the gravel, the big branches on the paths. I don't know where to begin to list all the problems with this place from a wheelchair user's perspective. It makes me so angry. It really does." (Man, wheelchair user, Bradford)

Disabled people discussed issues of access both on and off sites. On sites, they mentioned that pathways were often unsuitable either because of their surface texture (e.g. mud, stones, gravel), gradient (e.g. steep inclines), physical barriers impeding access (e.g. stiles, gates, cattle crossings), or because of their length and trajectory (e.g. long, non-circular walks). These issues were particularly prominent for physically disabled people.

"The paths may not be in good repair. There are loads of pot holes. You can step in mud. You could twist an ankle quite easily." (Visually-impaired man, Birmingham)

"You need clear pathways, with sharp contours to guide you." (Visually-impaired woman, Bradford)

"R1: The countryside, by nature, it's not man-made so it's not for us. I can't go there. I ride over bumps and my legs just go into spasm. It's really painful.

R2: You need level ground but it's all steep hills.

R3: It's like lots of stiles and gates and things you can't get through." (Mixed group of wheelchair users, Birmingham)

"Anything steeper than 30 degrees is not accessible, unless you're really strong or you have an electric scooter." (Man, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

“There’s one canal stretch where the occupancy of the canal is disabled access, but to get to it I have to sort of bend forward because there’s this wooden plank that’s set high and I have to bend forward, get over the other side, and then I have to pull back on the wheelchair to get this side over. It’s a hell of a lot of bother. There’s only one access, which is totally gravel and in one of these chairs, it’s terrible. In a manual chair, you haven’t got a chance. It’s a nightmare. An absolute nightmare. You can’t get on it because you sink, unless you have an electric chair with back wheels.” (Men, wheelchair user, London)

“It’s like the weakest link situation. It takes just one small patch, one barrier, one gate for a whole stretch of lovely countryside to become inaccessible.” (Disability expert)

Some mentally disabled people also had specific design requirements. They stressed, in particular, the need for short, easy walks, because they are slowed down by heavy medication and do not feel safe venturing far out.

“Because of the medication, you get to be very slow, quite lethargic really. You can’t go on along walks. Most people couldn’t do anything too strenuous.” (Woman with mental health problems, Birmingham)

“Who actually walks in a straight line? Don’t people want to get back to their car, their B&B or what have you? I wouldn’t want to be stuck in another village at night. It needs to go round in circle and not to be too long, thank you!” (Man with mental health problems, London)

In relation to off-site provisions, disabled people complained about transport problems (as discussed above) and about such things as the scarcity or absence of wheelchair-accessible toilets and pavements on country roads and in villages, as well as the low curbs where there are pavements. They also criticised the lack of navigational devices for visually-impaired people (e.g. textured pavements and aural and visual prompts at traffic crossings) and the scarcity of wheelchair-accessible pubs, tea rooms, restaurants and accommodation. This lack of provisions was generating much frustration in its own right, but it was also taken as symptomatic of a wider disregard for the most basic needs of disabled people. It led to the assumption that the countryside is simply “not for them”.

“It’s too much trouble. You want to go. You think it would be nice but there are so many “buts” - you can’t go into a shop because they’ve only got tiny doors, you can’t eat in that pub because there are steps to get in. It’s just a lot of bother. It’s not for us.” (Woman, wheelchair user, Birmingham)

Sense of vulnerability due to the unpredictability of the countryside

As discussed earlier, disabled people perceive the English countryside as inherently complex, unpredictable, unmanageable and socially isolated. As a result, they expect to feel vulnerable and to be at greater risk in that environment than in their familiar urban environment. This feeling is reinforced both by the actual paucity of targeted provisions and by people’s lack of knowledge of such provisions if and where they exist.

“It’s not as controlled an environment as cities and towns. It’s not paved; the terrain can be quite rough and difficult to cope with. Walking across

fields is really quite daunting because it's less easy to orientate yourself. There are far less landmarks you can use. There are no corners or buildings or railings or pathways because it's an open environment." (Disability expert)

"There is a lot of danger in the countryside. If you walk off the beaten track, just being on your own, getting lost in a remote area. You can't read any of the signposts to help you get back. How do you even explain to someone that wants to find you where you are? Farmers put up electric fences that stop the animals roaming too far, but if you can't see the electric fence and you walk into it, you've had it." (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

"I got lost in my local park once. The worst feeling you get is the panic, like you can't breathe, you're suffocating. It's horrible when you're feeling totally lost." (Visually-impaired woman, London)

"Vulnerability is a key issue. In my own case I would never go on these rambles on my own. Because you are vulnerable, you are aware all the time of the limitations. I'm also aware that certain gates are hard to open on my own. I am very aware that if I come to a difficult bit of bank that is soft, I could be completely stuck. I would be isolated." (Disability expert)

The feeling of vulnerability was shared across all groups of disabled people, but seemed particularly acute for visually-impaired people. As a result, many disabled people didn't even consider the countryside as a leisure option, and those who did always had a non-disabled escort to accompany them.

Social isolation

To overcome a lack of confidence and feelings of vulnerability, disabled people who use the countryside always do so with a non-disabled escort. However, the company of other people when undertaking activities and outings is a prerequisite that few disabled people can fulfil because physical and mental disability brings about social isolation.

"I live on my own. I don't see anybody. If I had a friend or someone that said: "Do you fancy coming?" I'd say: "Yes! Absolutely!" (Man with mental health problems, London)

"I haven't really built up a network of friends, so I'm very limited as well just with family really. I have taken myself once in a while down to the park, walked around, sat there and cycled down there, but I don't like being on my own for long. I prefer to be with someone but it's hard when you're disabled because you tend to only be with your family or with other disabled people." (Visually-impaired woman, Birmingham)

"I can't do it by myself, of course. Unfortunately, my friend who used to take me out a lot passed away at the beginning of the year. With me being a single person, not having a partner or anything, it's rather hard." (Visually-impaired man, Bradford)

"Because of my disability, I don't see my friends as much as I used to. I don't really see them at all to be honest. I have got different sorts of friendships with other disabled people but they're not going to go to the countryside either, are they?" (Man, wheelchair user, London)

Limited social networks restrict disabled people's use of the countryside because they need company to access green outdoor spaces, especially if those places are remote, open and little managed. This reliance on relatives, friends or carers¹⁰ itself creates further barriers. It means that disabled people have very few opportunities to enjoy the solitude which many non-disabled people seek in the countryside, and that destinations and activities are selected to suit the preferences of the many. There was a constant tension in the discussions with all the disabled people sampled, between the need for autonomy and self-sufficiency versus the recognition of their dependency on others.

“The problem for most disabled people is you can't go to the countryside on your own and that might put you off doing it. One of the most common reasons for doing it, which is getting away from people, you can't actually do, because you need somebody to push your wheelchair or, in my case, to guide you. I expect that's also why there is less use. For myself, I think that's why I don't do it regularly because I can't do it alone and I would want to do it alone.” (Disability expert)

Conclusions

Disabled people are more likely to be retired, unemployed and poorer than members of the general population, and more likely to live in urban areas. They are also much less likely to be able to drive a car. For these reasons alone, it is less probable that they will access the countryside because of the overall cost and the need to arrange transport from an urban base.

Transport emerged as a key barrier to countryside use amongst disabled people because it was deemed expensive, unreliable, ill-adapted to people's specific impairments, stressful and inflexible. Given that disabled people tend to suffer from social isolation, they could not rely on friends to drive them to the countryside and accompany them on outings.

Another important barrier was the perception that the countryside is a threatening environment for disabled people because it is vast, open and unmanageable. This feeling of vulnerability and lack of confidence was heightened by the scarcity of provisions, both on and off sites, that catered for the specific needs of disabled people in rural areas. Because there were few provisions targeted at people with mental and physical impairments, and because disabled people may not be aware of these provisions when they do exist, they felt reluctant to even attempt to visit the countryside.

The study broadly confirms the findings from a national survey of disabled green space users reported by the Sensory Trust in 'Making Connections', a guide to accessible green spaces. The main obstacles to green space use reported in the survey were, in order of importance: physical barriers on sites, the need for more information, the absence of disabled toilets, not wanting to visit on one's own, green spaces being too far to access by walking, shops and cafes being inaccessible, sites not having enough rest places, worries about personal safety, the lack of public

¹⁰ We prefer to use the word 'escort', rather than 'carer', to refer to the people who accompany disabled people on their visits to the countryside and other green outdoor spaces. 'Escorts' can include spouses, relatives and friends, as well as institutional carers. Moreover, the word 'carer' implies a relation of dependency which many disabled people would oppose, rather than the more positive notion of companionship associated with 'escort'.

transport facilities, cost, and the need for clearer information about suitable sites. Only a very small proportion of respondents in that survey had no interest in going, had never thought of going or reported lacking time to access green spaces. This is very much in line with our own findings, although the relative importance of each factor may vary (partly because the national survey was carried out with users and partly because the sample probably included only physically disabled people).

However, our findings challenge the notion that fear of prejudice towards disabled people is an important barrier restricting access to the countryside. Wheelchair users, blind people and people with mental health problems all expected that they would be treated more kindly and patiently in the countryside than they are in cities.

SECTION III: YOUNG PEOPLE

Chapter 10: Representations of the Countryside

INTRODUCTION

In this final section of the report, we consider the views of young people in relation to the countryside. In our sample, these are young men and women aged between the ages of 14-16 years and 17-20 years. The aim of this chapter is to explore how the young people who participated in the research think and feel about the English countryside, and to determine whether their representations of the countryside could act as barriers to countryside use.

Common representation: 'not the city'

Like people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people, young people think of the countryside very much in opposition to the city.

“My vision of the countryside is an open area with a lot of greenery and anywhere really where there's no cement.” (Young man, London)

“When I moved up to Bradford, I thought Bradford was the countryside because I could see hills from my window. I came from a big metropolitan city, so it depends where you come from.” (Young man, Bradford)

“There's loads of people, loads of different cultures and everything in the city. It makes you more open minded about other people's beliefs and their ways of doing things. You can pick up stuff off them. It's interesting, making friends, finding out about their cultures and stuff like that. Whereas in the countryside, you don't find that. The same people live in the same villages for generations.” (Young woman, Birmingham)

“People in the city have got the choice to do things. People in the countryside, it's like the opposite, they don't really do stuff.” (Young man, London)

Like other under-represented users, young people perceive the countryside as a natural, pure, healthy, and clean physical environment, while they think of cities as polluted, unhealthy and dirty. They also imagine people in the countryside to be leading peaceful, quiet, slow and simple lives within the confines of close-knit communities, compared to the fast, hectic, complex life they associate with multi-cultural, anonymous urban centres. Thus, their representations are not substantially different from those uncovered in the other under-represented groups.

The major difference between young people and other under-represented groups pertains to their *attitudes* towards these attributes. Young people are by far the most negative about many of the characteristics they associate with the countryside, as indicated by the associations in bold in Figure 1.

Countryside	City
▪ Rural	▪ Urban
▪ Natural and green	▪ Unnatural
▪ Vast and open	▪ Enclosed and built up
▪ Pure, healthy and clean	▪ Polluted, unhealthy and dirty
▪ Peaceful and quiet	▪ Hectic
▪ Slow and simple life	▪ Fast and complex life
▪ Englishness	▪ Multiculturalism
▪ Close-knit communities	▪ Anonymous society
▪ Conservative and old	▪ Progressive and young
▪ Far	▪ Near

Figure 1: Representation of the countryside (negative associations in bold)

Positive associations

In common with other under-represented groups, young people generally held positive representations of the English countryside when they described its physical or natural environment.

R1: Green! Big open spaces, animals, lakes, clear skies. Large open fields, hills, streams, forests, farms, little country lanes, hedges.

R2: It's like on the aeroplane when you look out it's always green, that's what I picture the countryside.

R3: Just peaceful really and tranquil." (Young women, London)

"For me, the countryside is farms and rolling hills, the seaside, forests, animals. Quaint little villages with pretty window boxes! Something my gran would love." (Young woman, Birmingham)

Amongst young people, there were also more significant differences between the representations held by users and non-users than were found amongst either ethnic minority or disabled people. Young people who have little or no experience of the countryside were very negative about it, while young people who are regular users were very positive and perceived many benefits to countryside use. This is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

However, for most young people, such positive attributes did not suffice to counter the very many negative characteristics they associated with the English countryside.

Negative associations

While some young people imagined that rural people lead a nice, quiet and peaceful life and valued that aspect of rural communities, the vast majority pictured life in rural communities as backwards, stifling, unappealing and just plain 'boring'. They imagined small villages peopled by elderly, grumpy, conservative and anti-social residents and visitors, where there is nothing to do for people in their age group.

“R1: Like grumpy old people...They see it as their place to get away from young people. They're protecting noise up there and they're going up there to get rid of that. Get away from children and all the people. If a lot of kids started going up there, then probably older people would stop going up there.

R2: I think we should leave it until we get older and wrinkled. As you get more bitter and twisted: “I don't want to be around people!”” (Young women, Bradford)

“It's has too many old people who are just moaners.” (Young man, Birmingham)

“I just tend to think about older people when I think of the countryside, rather than like younger people. People go there to retire.” (Young woman, Birmingham)

“If I'm bored, I can go and meet my friends and go clubbing, shopping or whatever. Older people don't want something to do; they just want a bit of peace. In town, there's younger people around, but older people just want to get away from that, which is why they tend to go to the countryside and then, if there was younger people there all the time, that would really irritate them. But because the countryside is for older people, it means there's nothing for young people to do there.” (Young man, Birmingham)

The close-knit character of rural communities was not something young people valued either. From their perspective, this resulted in 'weird' people who are inward-looking, unwelcoming towards outsiders and even resentful of their presence.

“There's some very weird people in the countryside, kind of in-bred type of people. Keep it in the family and that. Pretty hostile about people coming into the countryside.” (Young man, Bradford)

“It feels like they resent you being there, like you're disturbing their little life.” (Young woman, Birmingham)

“They don't like tourists. They don't because you're walking through forestry thing and it's like: “Get off my land! “It's happened to friends of mine before, they didn't know they weren't meant to be there.” (Young woman, London)

“It's not very welcoming. They're a bit cold. They just keep themselves to themselves. Village people I think are a very closed little group of people.” (Mixed group, Bradford)

In other under-represented groups, research participants tended to be positive about the fact that the countryside was traditional, but for young people this was seen as backward. The countryside was not only spatially remote; it was also situated in another era.

“I'm thinking of Jane Austen, having a game of chess, talking about your neighbours. The traditional ways of keeping yourself occupied, I suppose really. The stuff you're meant to be doing with your family, like board games and sitting round the fire talking. Going for long walks, visiting your relatives. Things like that, really, like they did in the old days.” (Young man, Bradford)

“It's just backwards, really. If you went to the pubs and stuff, it's very old-fashioned, Victorian, like old traditions.” (Young woman, Birmingham)

“Do they have electricity? They’ve got like candles.” (Young man, London)

“I’m sorry but the idea of going to fetch my water to prepare supper is not appealing to me!” (Young man, London)

“There’s no reception on your mobile.” (Young woman, London)

Generally, it is very clear that for most young people, cities are where they want to be. Cities are exciting, fun, dynamic, multi-cultural and varied. Cities are where they can socialise with friends and experiment with the new-found freedom from constant parental supervision that usually accompanies teenage years. Cities have good transport links, which means that young people can more easily access leisure activities by themselves, and cities are perceived to offer a wide range of recreational opportunities. Although most young people discussed rather mundane activities, such as eating out at fast food outlets, shopping with girlfriends, going to the cinema and playing computer games, they were much happier with the latter than with the prospect of an outing to the countryside. Indeed, some even felt pity for those poor young people who were ‘stuck’ in the countryside.

“I feel very sorry for them [young people who live in the countryside] because they are so alone, they’re stuck. All they’ve got to look at is grass, sheep, cows, chickens, and just old people. I mean they can’t even have any fun unless they go down to the pub with their parents. They are looking at the same people every day. It must get so boring. There’s a bus that comes once a day and if they miss it? It’s sad.” (Young woman, Birmingham)

“They [young people who live in the countryside] don’t have any social life, and they don’t have many friends. Even when they want to go to the pub, or to shops or something, they can’t just walk there so they’re stuck. I just see them hanging around not doing anything, talking to the cows.” (Young man, London)

Conclusions

Like other under-represented groups, young people think of the countryside as ‘not the city’. However, for most people from ethnic minority backgrounds or people with disabilities this holds at least some positive value, but for the majority of young people it appears as almost entirely negative. Young people clearly like cities and the excitement they find in cities. They like the freedom of movement and the range of activities they can pursue in cities. They like the feeling that cities are modern, dynamic and multi-cultural, so that from their perspective the countryside holds very little appeal. This is particularly true amongst non-users, who have very stereotypical views of the rural communities as traditional, backward, boring, stale, unwelcoming towards outsiders and generally geared towards the needs and desires of old people. Users broadly shared this assessment, but they still believed there were benefits from the countryside as a physical environment in terms of different recreational opportunities compared to those found in cities, as we discuss in the next chapter.

The findings from this research are entirely aligned with those of the only survey of young people (aged 11 to 15 years-old) that explored perceptions of the countryside which we described in the literature review. The study had found that, in comparison

to a selected group of other pastimes, countryside recreation was consistently shown to be least favourite amongst young people.

The findings help explain the research evidence which describes a significant decline in levels of interest and actual participation in countryside recreation during adolescence, compared to childhood and adult levels.

Chapter 11: Benefits of the countryside

Introduction

It is interesting that despite very negative perceptions of the countryside, young people actually believe that there are many potential benefits associated with the use of green outdoor open spaces *closer to home in the urban fabric*. Like people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people, young people associated benefits of the countryside with physical health, psychological well-being and personal identity.

However, young people interviewed did not often mention issues surrounding social inclusion and civic participation in relation to the countryside. Since the research focuses exclusively on the perspective of users and non-users themselves, we do not discuss such benefits in any detail here. It is crucial to stress, however, that the literature we reviewed and the experts we interviewed for this project, as well as some parents of young people we spoke to in the ethnic minority and disabled groups, all suggest that experience of the countryside is highly beneficial to young people. Greater knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment and of the rural way of life, participation in challenging outdoor activities, and supervised, well-organised group activities away from the family are deemed extremely positive. Such experiences, it is argued, can give young people a sense of purpose and achievement, help counter social exclusion, and promote greater environmental awareness.

Physical health

Young people, like the rest of the research sample, highlighted the importance of the countryside for their physical health. They all recognised the value of breathing clean, fresh air and getting away from car fumes in the city. In addition, some recognised that their lifestyles are too sedentary and that taking part in outdoor physical activities would be good for them.

“It’s a bit nicer than the city in my eyes. The city is like a concrete jungle. It’s nice to get away, to get out and have some fresh air with no fumes and crap.” (Young man, Birmingham)

“You can burn off a few calories there.” (Young woman, Bradford)

“Look: I think it would be good to go out more, to go to the countryside and do stuff over there. Only watching TV, sitting in front of a computer and studying and working, after a while that can’t be good for you. I’m sure it would be better to be running up and down hills.” (Young woman, London)

“You can use it as a place to improve your health. You can do activities and stuff.” (Young woman, Bradford)

“They say that kids are getting fatter and fatter because they don’t exercise and they just eat crap. But, you know, like when I was a kid, we used to go on outings all the time, we’d run around and build dens and climb on trees.” (Young man, London)

Psychological well-being

Given the negative representations young people have of the countryside, it was surprising to hear them expound the psychological benefits they felt they derived or could derive from being in the countryside. Many young people, like those from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people, believed that the slow pace of life in the countryside could be good for them. They regarded the countryside as a good place to unwind, relax, 'chill out', 'switch off' and 'clear their heads'.

"I see the countryside as somewhere to go and chill out, relax and have time to yourself really. It's less busy and stressful than here. It's kind of important for me to get that. You can get your head clear." (Young man, London)

"There's no noise in the countryside. It's nice, it's refreshing. I think it does motivate you a bit when you do go out into the countryside and you're relaxing yourself as well. You can see things better, put things in perspective." (Young man, Birmingham)

"It's the whole relaxation thing, just going out and spending the day out here. If you can get away from the city and spend a day out in the countryside and have a complete change of scenery, that's obviously good as far as improving your lifestyle: walking, running and sightseeing." (Young man, Bradford)

"It depends what mood I'm in. If I'm in a happy mood where I want to do lots of things and I feel I've got lots of energy, then probably not. But if I am in a sad, depressed mood, if something is annoying me, like if my sister is really bugging me, I'll go away and stay with my nan. She lives in the countryside. So I get away from it I go all and escape to my nan's place in the countryside." (Young woman, London)

"Going in the middle of Scotland, like in the middle of nowhere right and just sit down on a hill and looking, you'd be more relaxed than you ever will round here." (Young man, Bradford)

Some young people (and especially young men) also reflected on the pressure towards conformity amongst adolescents. They hinted at the psychological burden of having to define and establish your own personality while keeping in line with the norms of your social group.

"I always go for a weekend in the field. Why? I'm not too sure. I don't know. As a young person, I feel quite barraged by it all: the adverts, the city, the media, the pressure to buy stuff. Everything is quite materialistic and it's really nice just to get away from that. It's good not to have those stimuli that are constantly feeding you: "Go and buy this, you must have this, otherwise you won't be cool."" (Young man, Bradford)

From discussions with many young men, the countryside emerged as a place of freedom – from the materialistic pressures of contemporary society, the social pressures of the peer group, the pressures of school and from family life in the parental home. Having a space to be free is extremely important for the development of young people's personal identity.

"You can do anything, it doesn't matter. There is space to do whatever you want. In the city, there's too much stuff, you're always having to do certain things. But out here, you're just free. You can do what you want. There's not so much pressure." (Young man on an escorted visit, London)

"It's like when you're on a bike and you can go wherever you want. You just sort of feel free because you can go through the woods and stuff like that. There's no boundaries really. You can go wherever you want to go, you won't get told you can't go there, you can't do this, you can't do that. You just go wherever you want to." (Young man, Birmingham)

"You can just be yourself. There's nobody there to impress. There are just trees and birds. Nobody cares what you do and what you look like." (Young man, Bradford)

Young people clearly benefit from experiencing a degree of solitude, calm and freedom from a range of pressures when they go to the countryside, and some obviously value this very much.

Other young people, or indeed the same young people at different times, think of the countryside as a physical environment that affords a whole range of new and different activities and experiences. In this context, the countryside is a place to spend quality time with their friends *doing* activities as a group.

"Quad biking thing is a good idea cos there's like loads of open spaces." (Young woman, Birmingham)

"I really enjoy camping! Having fun round a bonfire, being with other guys around the fire." (Young man, London)

"We do cycling, hire bikes and go along railway tracks and all around the forest, which is quite nice." (Young man, London)

"I'd love to go horse riding. I love horses. To me, that would be the best. If it was really nice weather, I'd probably go with friends for a picnic or something." (Young woman, London)

"R1: You go there and you can spend all day just going to pubs looking round, playing football, take a bike and a backpack and everything with you that you need and you don't need to do anything else all day.

R2: It's a whole day out. You can do so many different things in one day: walking, biking.

R3: You can camp there. It's quite good fun. You're with your mates." (Young men, Birmingham)

"It's pretty good, you just sit there and wait for your fish to come. You're with your mates and you're sitting there waiting to see the fishes come. It's just a nice thing to do." (Young man, Bradford)

"For young people, the key issue is friends. It's about friendships and going off with your mates and having a good time. All our research shows that's the reason that young people do it. It's kind of setting an agenda to do with their mates and to make friends and to be with friends." (Young people expert)

It is clear that young people derive little pleasure from rural communities. They like the green outdoors either for the sense of peace and freedom induced, or for the potential for activities and sports they afford. They did not think they could derive any benefits from many rural communities themselves.

Personal identity

Because young people are at that crucial stage when their personal identity is still taking shape, the boundaries between the broader psychological benefits of the countryside and those that relate more specifically to their personal identity were not always well delineated. As young people discover new worlds and develop new skills, they also discover themselves.

The countryside offers plenty of opportunities for young people to learn different skills from those they will normally develop in cities. Depending on the specific activities, young people can develop new physical skills (e.g. new abilities, greater agility and motor co-ordination), new inter-personal and social skills (e.g. co-operation, team building, leadership), new artistic skills (e.g. painting, photography) and new cognitive skills (e.g. understanding of rural economies, observation of flora and fauna).

Exposure to these various options means that young people come to think differently about themselves and about what they can and can't do, and what they like and dislike. This enhances self-knowledge and can trigger a great sense of achievement and empowerment. Indeed, those young people who have pushed themselves to achieve more in a countryside setting (through such programmes as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award) found the experience extremely enriching. They enjoyed taking responsibility for their own actions and responding to the challenges placed before them, which in turn increased their autonomy and self-confidence.

"R1: You sit in a field or under a tree, you don't get that in the cinema or Starbucks, do you? It's not the same. You don't see a car every two seconds.

R2: You have to make your own fun as the country is an open land, so you have to do something interesting.

R3: It's probably more worthwhile. Because in the city you've just got it there. You just go to the cinema because there's nothing else to do, or go shopping, but in the countryside you haven't really got that privilege. It forces you to become a bit more creative. It makes you feel good about yourself." (Young mixed group, London)

"Getting the Silver [in the Duke of Edinburgh Award] is the best thing I've done in my life. That's one thing I'm really proud of." (Young woman, Birmingham)

"You just get hooked on it, everyone who I have done it, they come back. It's just like a hook, like an addiction. It makes you feel competent, good and sort of useful." (Young man, London)

In general, young people need to be exposed to a wide range of opportunities so that they can weigh up the various options and decide for themselves what suits them. The countryside is a particularly good environment to develop their creativity and imagination.

“It gets your imagination going. You can imagine war games and you could like camouflage yourself. You can imagine a survival scenario and having to survive with almost nothing for a few days.” (Young man, London)

“Sometimes when I need inspiration, or I need to write music, then I got this little place I go to. There’s a huge valley going up and just on top of that, there’s a rock jutting out. It’s a Druids’ altar. It’s nice, eerie, magical.” (Young man, Bradford)

“My parents would take me to this place they called “the enchanted forest”, it really was a local wood up the road but, and we’d have magic treasure hunts in there and we’d just be out all day, running, throwing stones in a pond to kill the dragon that was lurking in there, searching for chocolate coins!” (Young man, London)

Conclusions

While young people initially think of rural areas as boring and may not enjoy visiting rural villages with their parents, they nevertheless believe that the countryside is good for their physical health and for their psychological well-being. Many find solace in the peace, beauty and relative solitude it offers. Many others like taking part in the activities which the countryside affords: camping, orienteering, mountaineering, mountain biking, fishing, climbing, horse riding, and so on. Moreover, it is clear that through experiencing the many facets of the countryside, urban young people in particular get to develop new personal and social skills, and greater self-knowledge, autonomy and creativity. Although young people themselves do not discuss social inclusion and civic participation as benefits associated with countryside use, other sources (experts and parents of young people) suggest that young people would benefit from the countryside in these respects as well.

The current research also lends support to the findings, reported in the literature review, according to which many young people seek solitary respite in green outdoor spaces, especially when they are stressed and depressed, and that outdoor contemplative activities bring many psychological benefits to young people. While these findings related exclusively to the use of woodlands, the research shows that they can be generalised to the countryside as a whole.

Chapters 12: Factors limiting use of the Countryside

Introduction

Some of the factors restricting use of the countryside for young people are similar to those affecting other-represented groups (although their relative importance is much smaller); others are specific to young people. They are:

- negative perceptions of the countryside;
- other priorities;
- peer pressure;
- dependency on adults;
- lack of appropriate facilities;
- transport;
- cost.

Negative perceptions of the countryside

As discussed earlier, attitudes to the countryside are very negative in this group, especially amongst girls and young women, and amongst those who have not had any exposure to the countryside as they were growing up.

Symbolic barriers, more than anything else, seem to be restricting use of the countryside in this population. Young people perceived the countryside to be boring and geared towards the needs and desires of older people. They imagined rural communities to be close-knit, unwelcoming and even hostile towards young people, feeling quite strongly that rural residents have preconceived ideas about teenagers as 'trouble-makers'. They believed that the countryside offers few recreational opportunities of interest to young people.

"I think the best way to put it is the countryside is inconvenient. Irrelevant. You know what I mean? Spend a weekend in Bradford and you've got plenty to do: you've got swimming, you can go dancing, shopping or whatever. But you go to the countryside and there's not that many things to do. It's limited stuff to do and if you don't like them, then it's crap, ain't it?" (Mixed group, Bradford)

"You don't have as many opportunities [in the countryside]." (Young woman, Birmingham)

"I just don't see the point really. I mean of course it's quite relaxing but, for me, I don't want to relax: I want to have fun! I want to be with my friends and do stuff and go out and you know? All young people want to be in London. I'm in London. I'm not going to leave and go some place else really!" (Young woman, London)

From this it would seem that the main factor limiting use of the countryside amongst young people is their own lack of interest in countryside pursuits, based on their depiction of the countryside as a boring place with nothing to do, a place for older people, a place where they do not feel welcome.

Other priorities

Young people between the ages of 14 and 20 have very many competing interests and priorities. These are summed up perfectly by an expert on young people and outdoor recreation:

“I think it’s fair to say that young people are obsessed with themselves at that age. Their preoccupations are pretty much centred on their little selves, frankly. They have to deal with their own biological changes! They’re discovering themselves. They have their first girlfriends and boyfriends. They want to explore. They just want to get away from their parents. They’re also trying to figure out what they’re going to do with their lives. They’re stressed out by their schools and their exams. A lot of them are working part-time at the week-end or in the evening. A lot of them are starting their first jobs and, you know what I mean, they’ve got a lot on their plates. It’s a hard phase in most people’s lives, I should think. I just think that it’s normal that young people don’t really think about the countryside, which is not to say that they shouldn’t and that it wouldn’t be good for them to go there more. But you can understand why it’s not a priority for them, which is why we need to go out and do the hard sell!” (Young people expert)

Young people themselves constantly spoke about the city-based activities that they preferred: clubbing, shopping, eating at fast food outlets, socialising with friends, and so on. They described a wide range of gregarious activities, but very few meditative, solitary pursuits, such as those that the countryside readily offers. As a result of these other interests and priorities, the countryside receded in the background and was not considered by many as a place for leisure activities.

The importance of tastes and preferences in shaping the use of the countryside amongst young people (as opposed to economic or logistical factors) was also evident in the preference young people expressed for spending their holidays abroad, and in hot countries where there is a vibrant nightlife. These places are clearly more expensive and difficult to access than the local countryside, but this did not prevent young people from going there.

“Young people like to go abroad on holiday.” (Young woman, London)

“I usually go to hot countries, party islands really. That’s where I went this year...I went to Zante, a Greek island. It was like an all party island, with bars and clubs and things like that.” (Young woman, London).

“Okay, it’s true that it’s more complicated to organize and of course you have to fly to get there [to Ibiza]. But it’s worth it cos you know you’re going to have fun and you won’t get rained on. Also once you’re there, it’s quite cheap. The drinks are much cheaper than here.” (Young woman, Bradford)

Peer pressure

Young people’s limited use of the countryside was not only due to their own negative perceptions of the countryside and to their preferences for other leisure activities and destinations. It was also due to their assumption that the countryside would not be seen as ‘cool’ by their peers. As a result, they assumed that they could not suggest

outings and activities in the countryside to their friends without losing some of their 'street cred' and looking slightly 'uncool' themselves.

Even young men who actually enjoyed the recreational benefits of the countryside did not always pursue them because it was not deemed socially acceptable amongst their peers. While the countryside could be a good resource to escape from the multiple demands placed on young people, it was not used as much as it could because of peer group influence.

"It sounds silly but you couldn't really walk up to your mates and say: "Let's go to the countryside!" It's alright to say: "Let's go to Starbucks, let's go clubbing, let's go and watch a DVD." That's alright, but not the countryside though." (Young man, Birmingham)

"If you had a chance and if someone, a friend came up and said to you: "Do you wanna go to a party?" Then you'd think yeah. But if someone come up to you and said: "Do you want to go to the countryside?" You'd give them... It's not the same thing. The countryside, I don't think my friends would think that was a great idea." (Young man, Bradford)

"Your average young person is not likely to express, to say: "I'd like to get away from it all and meditate". They wouldn't. That wouldn't be very cool. They'd be more likely to say: "I'd like to go there because I can take my mountain bike and we can have a lot of fun doing mountain biking there". (Young people expert)

Dependency on adults

Like most disabled people, many young people (and especially younger boys and girls) are reliant on others to access the countryside. Depending on their age, degree of confidence, resourcefulness and financial autonomy, the young people in the study were more or less dependant on adults to take them to their destination, supervise at least some of their activities, guarantee their safety and pay for their expenses. However, unlike many disabled people, most young people did not seek the company of adults and were averse to spending their leisure time with them - they wanted to make full use of their independence. For the younger age group especially, there was no possibility of them accessing the countryside without parents or adults. They therefore preferred not to go.

"It would be alright if you go with your mates, but you normally go with your family first, like you can't really all get there, you know. If you go with your family, it's normally boring!" (Young man, Bradford)

"It's was alright when I was a kid but I mean spending the day walking with mum and dad isn't exactly my idea of fun. Sorry mum!" (Young man on escorted visit, Bradford)

"It's not fun to go out with your parents. Maybe if it's something not involving your parents, then it will be a little bit more fun." (Young woman, London)

"When you're younger you have to go with your parents. But now if I went, I would want to go with my friends, not my parents." (Young man, Birmingham)

Lack of appropriate facilities

Young people were adamant that there is 'nothing to do' in the countryside, besides walking through quaint villages, sipping tea, feeding ducks and (to them, at least) other similarly unattractive activities. They were keen to have access to various forms of entertainment in the countryside.

"The point of it is, one, it's very boring really if you do go down to the country. I went down to Dorset once, I think there was one bus stop, one pub, five houses and there was nothing there and it's not what I'm obviously used to. Very nice, lovely you know to stay for a little while, but it's not somewhere that I would probably go quite a lot. To really encourage people to go there, you need to have some kind of an attraction cos there's just nothing to do when you get there." (Young man, London)

"If I was to go away for a weekend in England, it would probably be to go up to Alton Towers and staying there for the weekend. Something where there's something to do, as well rather than just going away with not much around. We'd need something to do." (Young woman, London)

"It wouldn't bore me to tears but I would just prefer if there was something to do in the evening. I wouldn't mind relaxing during the day and walking around the villages and things like that if there was just something to do at night rather than during the day." (Young woman, London)

There were gender differences in the kinds of outdoor activities young people wanted to do, and these were divided along quite stereotypical gender roles. Young men became very enthusiastic about the countryside when they started to contemplate doing challenging, high-octane, physical activities with their 'mates' in an outdoor setting.

"If you've got things to do like white water rafting and stuff, you know, like rock climbing, paintballing, things like that, that's cool, that's fun." (Young man, London)

"Yeah! I'd love to do that: big challenges, orienteering and survival games, extreme sports. That would be great!" (Young man, Birmingham)

"Quad biking, mountain biking. I'd like that." (Young man, Bradford)

"I went with a bunch of mates and we were camping and doing canoeing and having bonfires at night and having a drink – maybe I shouldn't say that! – but it was just lovely really. It's an amazing feeling to look at the stars at night." (Young man, London)

Young women were keener to have opportunities to socialise and eat with friends and simply do different activities. They liked relaxing activities such as having picnics and barbecues with friends, sunbathing, swimming, horse riding, and attending rock and pop concerts in stately homes.

"Horse riding outdoors, going through fields. Actually on the beach would be even better!" (Young woman, London)

"On a really hot day, I like to have picnic with friends and lying on grass to take a bit of sun." (Young woman, Birmingham)

However, most young people felt that their choices of outdoor-based recreation were generally not catered for and, if they were, tended to be physically inaccessible and unaffordable.

Transport

Like other under-represented groups in the study, young people argued that issues of transport restrict their access to the countryside. Although gaining physical access to the countryside is not nearly as difficult for young people as it is for disabled groups (because they are able to use public transport), most young people did not actually think of using trains and buses to access rural places. Those were regarded as expensive, unreliable, inconvenient and 'uncool'.

"The countryside is far and it costs too much to get the train. It's also about time, travelling, how long it takes. It's not worth it for a day."
(Young woman, London)

"It would take too long travelling for a day, the motorway is always packed. You would spend most of the day just travelling in a stinking bus that probably stops everywhere along the way or that actually stops nowhere at all so that you're stuck in a town but can't get anywhere else more remote."
(Young man, Birmingham)

"Before you could go paint balling, you have to incredibly go out of the way. You have to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning to catch your train cos it takes forever."
(Young woman, Birmingham)

"For those who don't drive, then it's quite limited. There are buses only a few months a year, or maybe only on a Sunday. It's like one there and one back. So you're quite tied in these public transport, which is quite a shame."
(Young man, Bradford)

"You've got to look at how young people get to the countryside. Unfortunately not a lot of young people like taking public transport and things like that. They like cars, and if they haven't got a car to take them, forget it! That's another point of getting there and getting back. I just can't imagine queuing at the bus stop, looking totally daft with my gear."
(Young man, London)

Since most teenagers do not drive or own their own vehicles, they cannot access the countryside other than with adults (not a popular option), their few friends who do drive (which are likely to be very few, especially amongst younger people), or through school outings and other organised programmes (if and where these exist).

Cost

Young people rarely have much money to use at their own discretion. Either they are totally financially dependent of their parents, or they are only just beginning to earn their own money. In all cases, they have little disposal income. The cost of getting into the countryside and making use of all the recreational opportunities once there is simply beyond their means.

“When we went to the Lake District it cost you a fortune. The train ticket, and you have to buy all the food, and the camping equipment. I can’t afford that by myself. No way.” (Young man, London)

“In London, you can go to McDonald’s and that’s quite cheap. But in Cornwall, if you want to eat out, there is nothing the equivalent price. Even a jacket potato is more expensive.” (Young man, London)

“I suppose it does depend on how much money you’ve got. Students and that can’t afford to be going away to adventure weekends and quad biking and stuff like that. They’d probably have to save up for that. People that couldn’t manage it. I know students that don’t work that just live off their loans.” (Young woman, London)

R1: You get charged a lot of money to actually do their activities.
R2: For caving and rock climbing, you’ve got to have a lot of money.
R3: You have to pay loads because of the insurance and stuff, you can’t just go out and get a canoe on your own. You’ve got to do all the training cos they won’t let you just go out and do it.” (Young mixed group, Bradford)

Conclusions

The empirical research has confirmed the findings of the literature review which had established that the main factors restricting use of the countryside amongst young people were their tastes and preferences, rather than any form of social exclusion. The research went further, however, in uncovering *why* young people exhibited such tastes and preferences. It showed that the latter were intrinsically linked to young people’s negative perceptions of the countryside, their positive perceptions of city-based leisure activities, the fact that they had different priorities due to their position in the lifecycle, and their reluctant dependency on adults to access the countryside when younger and lack of independent transport when older. This is a very important contribution, especially given the paucity of evidence in relation to young people and outdoor recreation.

The findings are also perfectly consistent with existing evidence on the preferences of young people for recreational activities. They support the view that very many young people prefer such leisure activities as going to the cinema, shopping, watching television and playing computer games to any kind of countryside-based activities. And yet they also support the research findings which show that some young people do want to access the countryside and green outdoor spaces for recreational purposes. Amongst them, some prefer organised, high-energy, group-based activities; others prefer to wander in the countryside in their own, at a slow pace, in a meditative fashion. The latter feel better catered for than the former.

The current research partly challenged findings in relation to the importance of transport and cost as barriers to countryside use. It found that these factors did impact on countryside use amongst young people, but that they mattered relatively little compared to teenagers’ own tastes and preferences. It also found that issues of transport and cost mattered less amongst young people than in other under-represented groups.

The research also confirmed the findings reported in the literature review, according to which lack of time, lack of knowledge and concerns over safety – other factors

generally assumed to limit countryside use – did *not* play a significant role in restricting participation in outdoor activities amongst young people.

The literature review added much depth to this research, however, and established that under-utilisation of the countryside in adolescence and young adulthood is normal and should not be seen as particularly problematic, so long as young people have had some earlier exposure to the countryside and have had the opportunity to develop a 'cultural habit' of using green outdoor spaces in childhood. The literature review also showed that early outdoor socialisation is the single most important determinant of adult use.

Chapter 13: Comparisons between groups

Introduction

This chapter seeks to draw out the similarities and differences between ethnic minority people, disabled people and young people as they perceive the countryside, their understanding of the benefits associated with the use of green outdoor spaces, and the key factors restricting their participation in outdoor recreation.

Representations of the countryside

There were similarities in structure and content across all the under-represented groups, and while there were differences between groups in terms of the detail and complexity of their representation, all groups conceived of the countryside in opposition to the city. What differed considerably across groups were people's *attitudes* towards specific attributes associated with the countryside or the city.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds tended to be positive in relation to the countryside as a natural environment. They liked English landscapes and the perceived simplicity of country life, valued the purity and cleanliness of rural environments and the peacefulness and quietness of small villages, and thought the countryside was good for their physical and psychological health. In contrast, disabled people – although relishing the aesthetic or sensory pleasures associated with the countryside – felt threatened and vulnerable in relation to the natural and built environment in the countryside because of the inherent predictability of open outdoor spaces, lack of facilities available for disabled people (and their limited personal knowledge of such resources), as well as the remoteness of the countryside and their concomitant social isolation.

Black and minority ethnic research participants tended to be negative in relation to the countryside as a social space. They imagined old, conservative English people living in close-knit communities, anticipated feeling conspicuous and unwelcome, and feared racism and discrimination. By comparison, disabled people were very positive about the social environment found in the countryside. Unlike ethnic minority people and young people, they expected to feel welcomed and to be treated kindly and with patience by rural residents. Young people, on the other hand, imagined the countryside to be 'boring', full of 'grumpy old people', and a place where there is 'nothing to do' for their age group. They rejected the countryside in favour of the city which, from their perspective, offered exciting and easily accessible entertainment, and a fast and dynamic pace of life.

However, these attitudes were mainly found amongst those young people who had had very little experience of the countryside or green outdoor spaces as they were growing up, and they were more common amongst young women than amongst young men. They also had much to do with social pressure from peers, because visiting the countryside was deemed 'uncool'.

Unlike young people, we found no differences between men and women from ethnic minority groups in their representations of the countryside, although women were more likely to express concerns over safety. There were very few specifically cultural dimensions to their representations of the countryside overall, although some

differences emerged in relation to the points of references people used to define and describe the English countryside. Those born abroad and those who regularly visited their parents' native country often compared the English countryside to the countryside 'back home'. In a few cases, this meant that the countryside was not perceived as a leisure resource and that certain landscape features (e.g. mountains, farmland, forests, the seaside) were preferred because they were familiar.

Among disabled people, some differences in representations of the countryside emerged as a function of people's specific impairment. For instance, blind people mainly experienced the environment immediately within their perceptual reach (smells, sounds, textures, air quality) and imagined social worlds around these sensory perceptions (rural communities, childhood memories). They were not necessarily keen to visit the open, remote countryside, but were satisfied with experiencing local green outdoor spaces, especially given the relative ease of accessing those compared to rural areas. Blind people felt the most vulnerable of all disabled groups in the study because they found it extremely difficult to orientate themselves in vast open spaces.

Meanwhile, wheelchair users were very sensitive to the aesthetic quality of landscapes. They were also keenly attuned to physical features that could jeopardise their visits to the countryside (e.g. gradients and ground texture, stiles and gates, lack of disabled toilets and pavements, inaccessible restaurants and hotels) and imagined that they would feel very vulnerable in the countryside.

People with mental health problems valued both the natural and the social dimensions of the countryside. They valued the pace of life and the relative absence of people in the countryside, and of all the under-represented groups, they were the most eloquent about the benefits of the countryside and in particular valued the presence of animals in the countryside. People with mental health problems also felt vulnerable in the countryside, but less so than physically disabled people.

Finally, people who had a permanent and predictable impairment felt less insecure than those who had a degenerative condition or one that sporadically and unpredictably affected them. There were no differences between disabled men and women in terms of their representations and attitudes towards the countryside.

Benefits of the countryside

Across all under-represented groups and regardless of people's current level of participation in countryside activities, research participants associated numerous benefits to green outdoor spaces. These were analytically grouped into the following categories: physical health, psychological health, personal identity, and social inclusion and civic participation.

Every group mentioned, however briefly, physical health benefits, and these mainly revolved around the benefits of breathing fresh air and of either taking light exercise or engaging in active sports. People from ethnic minority backgrounds thought that making fuller use of green outdoor spaces would help them prevent or overcome many health problems associated with their sedentary and stressful urban lifestyles, such as heart disease, hypertension, obesity and asthma. Similarly, disabled people briefly mentioned the benefits of breathing healthy levels of fresh air and of taking exercise outdoors. However, young people found fewer benefits to countryside use and did not feel that they were missing out on valued experiences. Young people

were more likely than other under-represented groups to emphasise the health benefits of engaging in active sports.

The psychological benefits associated with countryside use dominated the discussions in all groups. Research participants were remarkably vocal about the psychological well-being they associated with the countryside, even if they never actually used green outdoor spaces. They saw the countryside as a place where one can relax, 'clear one's mind', 'get away from it all', feel free, spend 'quality time' with family and friends, be creative and so on. The depth of feeling was quite striking in all groups.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds, like the other groups, perceived the countryside as a place to get away from the stresses and strains of the city, but there were differences appeared between ethnic minority respondents who were born and brought up in the UK and those who had lived abroad. The latter were spontaneously comparing and contrasting the English countryside with rural areas 'back home'. Being in the countryside enabled them to experience some psychological continuity between their previous and current selves. This feeling of psychological integration was very positive, even when the memories were nostalgic.

Although people from minority ethnic backgrounds spoke positively about the psychological health and well-being of countryside access, disabled people were the most eloquent of all under-represented groups on this subject. They perceived the countryside as an ideal environment to relieve the stresses of everyday life, find peace and quiet, feel free and to experience various sensory pleasures. Disabled people put great emphasis on the psychological and emotional rewards of being in the countryside, especially given what many described as the lack of pleasures and joys in their lives. Indeed, one of the most striking findings of the research was the strength of disabled people's feelings in relation to the psychological benefits of the countryside, particularly amongst those with mental health problems, some of whom even attributed the onset of their own difficulties to living in stressful urban environments. They argued that the pace of life, the relative absence of people and the attributes of the landscape in rural areas suited most of them very well.

By comparison, discussions with young men revealed that they, too, needed a place to retreat from social pressures and 'clear their minds', somewhere to enjoy greater freedom, develop their creativity and to socialise with peers away from adult supervision. There was a powerful sense of the difficulties adolescents and young adults experience and of their need to 'get away from it all'. The countryside was perceived as positive in that respect – as long as young people did not need to be accompanied by adults.

Differences appeared between ethnic minority communities (and indeed between men and women) in the emphasis BME respondents placed on the social inclusion and civic participation benefits of countryside use. Those who were most likely to experience exclusion and racism in society as a whole – Pakistani and Black-Caribbean men – were also those who were most keenly aware of the benefits of feeling welcomed and included in the countryside. Exclusion from the countryside, from their perspective, was a reminder of how segregated British society remains, even if they had managed to create little niches for themselves in inner city areas and even if they wanted to believe that racism was a thing of the past. For some ethnic minority respondents, taking part in the research itself made them realise how much they had curtailed their own participation in wider society in order to stay within the safer, multicultural urban zones where they are 'tolerated'.

In contrast, young people did not often mention issues surrounding social inclusion and civic participation in relation to the countryside. However, the literature reviewed and the experts interviewed suggested that experience of the countryside can give young people a sense of purpose and achievement, help counter social exclusion, promote greater understanding of rural communities and help develop environmental awareness.

Similarly, disabled research participants also discussed at length how accessing the countryside would give them a tremendous sense of achievement because they would have surmounted many difficulties in order to simply be there. It would also mean that they would be able to carry on doing what they used to enjoy (for those who have developed an impairment later on in life) and allow them to participate fully in wider society, rather than remaining confined to their immediate local areas and to a very small circle of family, friends and carers. In this way, using the countryside carries enormous health, psychological, identity and social benefits for all disabled people. Paradoxically, many disabled people felt very frustrated that they could not access the countryside, but most had also given up the very idea as some kind of unreasonable luxury.

Factors limiting use of the countryside

The research showed that some factors restricted access to the countryside in all groups: the cost of visiting the countryside, issues linked to transport and lack of knowledge of the facilities available in the countryside and lack of confidence in outdoor settings. All of these played a role in limiting access to the countryside for at least some people in the under-represented groups. In addition, there were barriers specific to each group.

Cost and transport were important factors restricting access to the countryside amongst people from ethnic minority backgrounds, since many are poor and live in inner cities. Similarly, using public transport to access the countryside was a barrier to young people, who considered it expensive, inconvenient, unreliable and 'uncool'.

However, the group for whom cost and transport were critical factors in restricting access to the countryside were disabled people. Like ethnic minority people, disabled people are more likely to be poor and to live in urban areas than the general population. However, for disabled people, there are additional barriers linked to transport. Very few are able to drive because of the very nature of their impairment. As a result, they must either rely on other people to drive them or use public transport. The first option is often ruled out because disabled people suffer a great deal from loneliness and social isolation and don't have people who can take them to the countryside. The second option is often ruled out because of the endless logistical problems disabled people encounter when using public transport. Those who have the support of carers may be able to overcome these problems.

Lack of knowledge of the countryside – where to go, where to stay, what to do, how to behave – was also an important factor among ethnic minority people, especially since there was no cultural habit of visiting the countryside and therefore no pool of informal knowledge to draw upon in these communities. The lack of formal and informal knowledge meant many people were reluctant to risk their free time and sparse money choosing the 'wrong' destination. Many expected that there would be little for them to do in the countryside. They wanted green outdoor sites that offered,

in a single place, recreational opportunities that met different needs (e.g. eating, socialising, playing games, observing farm animals, doing sports) and catered for different abilities, preferences and requirements (e.g. activities for young people as well as elderly people, vegetarian and halal menus). Some ethnic minority people also preferred to spend their holidays abroad to visit relatives and maintain links with the wider community 'back home'.

In contrast, most disabled people were quite familiar with the English countryside. Their lack of knowledge mainly related to the facilities that were offered specifically for people with their impairment. Without any idea of what they were going to find in the countryside for disabled people in terms specialist facilities and provisions, and with the assumption that there would not be even the most basic facilities in most places they would visit, very many disabled people did not want to risk going.

Like disabled people, young people were unable to access the countryside on their own and still needed the company of adults – but at the same time did not want to be with parents or other figures of authority. Some young people did want to access the countryside with their peers - either to simply 'chill out' or to engage in high-octane, challenging activities – but they felt their leisure preferences were generally not catered for in the countryside and, when they were, would be too costly.

Meanwhile, the key factors limiting use of the countryside amongst inner city young people were their own negative attitudes to the countryside, their preference for city-based leisure, and the fact that they had other priorities at this stage in their life. Thus, this was the only under-represented group where limited participation could not be explained by social exclusion and discrimination - although there was an element of young people feeling unwelcome by rural residents.

This perceived lack of welcome was shared by ethnic minority respondents, who expected rural populations to be unwelcoming and plain racist. Indeed, fear of racism was a key barrier to countryside use for this group, and very many had experienced, either personally or vicariously, racism in various forms. They felt safer in the familiar, multi-cultural world of the city.

However, unlike ethnic minority people and young people, disabled research participants expected to feel welcome in the countryside. While they anticipated institutional discrimination – in terms of lack of provisions both on and off sites for disabled people – they did not fear direct prejudice and discrimination from rural residents.

Chapter 14: Recommendations

Introduction

This last chapter discusses two sets of recommendations in relation to outdoor recreation policy and practice. The recommendations pertain to:

- increasing and diversifying access to the countryside and green outdoor spaces amongst under-represented groups
- enhancing the evidence base on under-represented groups

Increasing and diversifying use of green outdoor spaces

The research indicates that current provisions are not meeting the needs of many people in under-represented groups. It also suggests a number of recommendations to increase use of the countryside and other green outdoor spaces amongst those who are currently under-represented. While the recommendations are derived from the study of people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people and young people who live in inner cities, many of the recommendations would also have a positive impact on other groups at risk of social exclusion – such as older people, women, people in low income, faith communities, refugees and asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers – as well on the general population¹¹.

We believe that a national strategy to increase and diversify use of countryside and green outdoor spaces should be developed. Unless under-represented users are specifically targeted, and systematic efforts are made to understand and meet their needs, they will continue to have low participation levels and to miss out on the benefits of green outdoor use.

The following recommendations detail how policy and practice could be developed to both support and influence countryside service providers¹² through the provision of clear leadership, robust evidence and detailed guidance in relation to outdoor recreation amongst under-represented groups^{13,14}.

¹¹ The OPENspace Scoping Review rightly suggested that there was a need to distinguish between under-representation – a descriptive assessment of people’s behaviour in relation to other groups – and social exclusion – an explanatory assessment implying that those who would want to access outdoor recreation are actually denied access to the countryside. However, there is likely to be much overlap between under-representation and social exclusion in many of the vulnerable groups listed above and the recommendations proposed here should go some way towards making the countryside and other green outdoor spaces more accessible to them.

¹² ‘Service providers’ refer to policy-makers, funders and front-line delivery organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

¹³ The Diversity Review itself should be seen as a major component in the strategic approach that needs to be developed. The Scoping Research [has] established the type of knowledge currently available and identified key gaps to be filled. The research on the attitudes, policies and practices of countryside service providers has highlighted the major areas where progress is required. The current research has established how a selection of under-represented groups view the countryside, what benefits they believe are associated with the use of green outdoor spaces and what are the factors limiting their use. The Countryside Agency has developed an evaluation framework and toolkit.

¹⁴ We are not able to discuss the resource implications of the recommendations made.

The recommendations pertain to:

- service planning;
- site design;
- staffing;
- information and communications;
- facilitation of use of green outdoor spaces;
- public education in rural communities.

As the strategy is developed, it should build upon and contribute to the work carried out by various government departments and national agencies, and by a range of regional and local other initiatives. For example:

- Education programmes;
- Social inclusion strategies;
- Health promotion strategies;
- Regional economic strategies;
- Regional transport plans;
- Sustainable development strategies;
- Regeneration and planning strategies;
- Diversity and equality strategies.

Service planning

- Establishing the ‘baseline’

The collection of baseline data by service providers needs to be prioritised to be able to set objectives, targets and means, to allocate resources and to measure any changes in levels of use and satisfaction with outdoor experiences amongst various groups.

Baseline information is required on:

- current green outdoor provision
- current levels of use by under-represented groups
- reasons for under-representation by various groups

In order to find out more about the reasons for under-representations, information needs to be gathered both on and off sites. ‘On-site’ surveys are useful to determine current type of use of green outdoor spaces, satisfaction with various dimensions of provision (e.g. quality of sites, range of experiences, attitudes of staff, quality of information), and needs for alternative provisions or improvements. ‘Off-site’ surveys (such as surveys of catchment areas for specific provisions) are useful to find out more about the attributes, leisure patterns and needs of potential users who do *not* currently make full use of green outdoor spaces.

- ***Providing guidance on monitoring***

Relevant organisations need to be supported by the provision of clear guidance on monitoring. It is important for a national agency to take the lead on this because

countryside service providers and other relevant organisations need to use homogenous monitoring categories so that results can be comparable over time and across organisations. This may wish to draw on existing guidance from the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission on monitoring¹⁵.

▪ ***Providing guidance on evaluation***

Once evidence-based initiatives are developed and implemented, they should be subjected to rigorous evaluation to ensure that they meet their objectives as a project and for participants, and to identify areas for improvement. Without proper evaluation, there is a danger that already scarce resources could be used in less than optimal ways and that current under-representation could remain unaddressed.

Evaluation should be a pre-requisite for securing funding and should be included in the project budget. The Countryside Agency has already produced an evaluation framework and a 'tool kit' to evaluate specific initiatives. This is available at: www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Recreation/DR/Evaluation

▪ ***Sharing good practice***

The collation of good practice can be a vital resource that can then be diffused to relevant organisations. Specific criteria may be required to determine precisely what counts as 'good practice', based on systematic evaluation. It may be useful to include examples of 'bad practice' so that lessons can also be learned from unsuccessful attempts.

▪ ***Diversity proofing***

Service providers should 'diversity proof' all relevant policies, programmes and practices to ensure that these are aligned and consistent with the aim of increasing and broadening access to green outdoor spaces and the countryside.

An emergent method for doing such diversity proofing is to carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs), the aim of which is to ensure that key policies, programmes and practices do not discriminate unwittingly against specific groups of potential users and that, should any negative effect be anticipated, remedial action can be taken to eliminate or minimise such an adverse impact.

Support with various forms of diversity proofing can be sought from a range of agencies – either from community, voluntary, charitable organisations representing the interests of under-represented groups, or from specialist research and consultancy companies. To be most effective, the process should be carried out by external agencies.

¹⁵ There are many problems inherent to monitoring such fluid and political issues as ethnicity and disability. All administrative procedures used to monitor are, by their very nature, 'essentialist'. In the case of ethnicity, they assume a stable and monolithic ethnic identity over time and across situations. In the case of disability, they individualise disability and implicitly revert back to a medical model of disability. Despite these flaws, monitoring is the only way of ensuring that service planning and delivery meet the needs of all categories of users.

National guidance should be produced on diversity proofing in relation to outdoor recreation for other organisations.

▪ ***Mapping potential organisations for multi-agency partnerships***

Service providers need to work in multi-agency partnerships to bring in expertise on under-represented groups in relation to outdoor recreation and access to green outdoor spaces and to ensure that their work is harmonised with, and contributes to, all the key strategic sectors identified above.

Multi-agency partnerships can take different forms and achieve different purposes, which all contribute to building organisational capacity. For instance, they can involve:

- exchanging information between agencies:
 - on what people from under-represented groups want and need
 - on special language skills
 - on inclusive design
 - on strategies for communicating with target under-represented groups
- offering joint training and development for staff
 - on diversity awareness
 - on benefits of outdoor recreation
 - on good practice
- commissioning joint research or services
- developing and agreeing common working procedures and protocols:
 - on community engagement
 - on diversity proofing
 - on site audits from the perspective of under-represented groups
 - on the provision of information
- facilitating access/organising escorted visits to green outdoor spaces

Multi-agency work can be facilitated by mapping the relevant national and regional organisations that can support the aim of broadening access to green outdoor spaces. There would remain the need for this 'centralised' mapping process to be supplemented and adapted by local agencies to reflect local circumstances.

In developing multi-agency partnerships to increase and diversify access, there is a need to think very broadly about where the expertise and support may be found in relation to under-represented groups. This could include:

- Local Strategic Partnerships;
- Education and Employment Programmes (New Deal, Learning Zones, Connexions);
- Sure Start;
- ethnic minority and refugee community and voluntary organisations;
- faith groups;
- local disability groups;
- special schools;
- Community Mental Health Teams;
- youth clubs;
- youth representative organisations.

Site design and management

▪ *Focusing on spaces for people*

The culture of many organisations with responsibility for the countryside focuses on resource management for its biodiversity, rather than embracing the needs of existing and potential users. There is a very real need for a 'cultural shift' amongst service providers so that, wherever this is possible and appropriate, sites are designed with a clear awareness of how they will be used by diverse people.

The current research on the perspectives of under-represented users in relation to the countryside and green outdoor spaces provide much evidence that should be used to design sites and routes that are more attractive to, and focused on the needs of, a wider group of potential users.

▪ *Engaging under-represented users*

One way of ensuring that spaces are designed with people in mind and that the diverse ways of using green outdoor spaces are catered for is to engage people from under-represented groups in the planning, design and management of sites, routes and services.

Participatory initiatives should be encouraged and considered a potential funding requirement.

Under-represented groups may be involved in such activities as:

- planning and designing new and existing sites and routes;
- making improvements to existing sites and routes;
- helping with site audits for accessibility and cultural sensitivity;
- designing facilities and running activities;
- volunteering and site management.

▪ *Investing in high-quality, well-managed local green spaces*

There is a need to invest in local high-quality green spaces and linear routes (such as urban parks, country parks, community woodlands, greenways and rights of way) that are easily accessible by public transport. All under-represented groups would disproportionately benefit from investment in free, high-quality, well-managed local green spaces because they:

- are easier to access than the more distant countryside;
- overcome issues associated with transport, money and lack of time;
- require less confidence to use;
- overcome fears over negative rural attitudes towards outsiders;
- help develop a cultural habit of using green outdoor spaces;
- slowly foster confidence and autonomy in outdoor environments;
- afford many of the benefits associated with the more distant countryside.

The importance of green outdoor spaces close to home cannot be emphasised enough. Close partnerships between government departments, national, regional and local agencies, including the private and voluntary sectors, are needed to ensure

that high-quality green spaces are accessible to all people close to where they live and work.

Investment in high-quality, well-managed local green spaces would help deliver on a number of other agendas (e.g. health, regeneration, education). It would bring about significant (though not always measurable) gains in terms of physical, psychological and spiritual well-being, as well as in terms of social cohesion, civic participation, community sustainability and environmental awareness.

- ***Providing a range of experiences***

The current research shows that there is a need to develop green outdoor spaces that provide a wide range of experiences, based on the needs of diverse groups of users. The range of provisions should reflect the varying degrees of confidence people have and their need for greater or lesser support, freedom and autonomy. Some sites should be easily accessible, highly-managed and manicured, and cater for novices; others should be wild, challenging and cater for outdoor enthusiasts.

Information on the types of experiences people from under-represented groups seek in relation to green outdoor spaces should be widely shared. The current research contributes to this aim. It shows that many people from under-represented groups want green outdoor spaces that provide diverse opportunities on a single site so that all group or family members can find something of interest to them. Moreover, because many people from under-represented groups tend to be less experienced users and may have impairments that constrain their use of sites, they often prefer environments that are not too challenging, such as short circular walks and relatively flat surfaces, and that provide opportunities to rest, such as benches, cafes, attractive displays and natural vantage points.

- ***Providing appropriate 'on-site' information***

People from under-represented groups tend to lack confidence in outdoor spaces. On-site information that can help increase people's confidence in outdoor settings is therefore essential

A consolidation of guidance is needed covering all on-site information. This will assist in designing and managing sites and routes that are welcoming and where people feel safe.

Staffing

- ***Increasing staff and volunteer diversity***

People from under-represented groups hardly ever see people from their own social group working outdoors. For complex reasons, they are unlikely to be working, either in paid employment or as volunteers, for countryside service providers. This virtual invisibility of under-represented groups in the sector as a whole means that service providers fail to reflect Britain's diversity, and that they cannot learn and benefit from a diverse workforce. It also reinforces the perceptions, amongst under-represented users, that the countryside is "not for them". There is an urgent need for countryside service providers to increase the diversity of their paid and volunteer staff.

The majority of service providers are required under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Disability Discrimination Act not to discriminate against people covered by the legislation.

There is a need to influence and work in partnership with training, education and skills programmes to develop apprenticeships for people from under-represented groups, in order to ensure that there is a pool of talent and specialist skills to draw on in the future.

- ***Increasing diversity awareness amongst all staff and volunteers***

In addition to recruiting and developing more staff and volunteers from under-represented groups, service providers need to ensure that their existing staff and volunteers are aware of diversity and of its implications for their work. This could take the form of:

- diversity awareness training, with priority being given to front line workers and service planners;
- appointing representatives of under-represented groups on their board;
- creating a panel of experts to diversity proof and providing guidance on key policies and programmes;
- offering secondment opportunities to develop expertise on issues of interest to under-represented groups;
- carrying out training visits to outdoor sites, with service providers, volunteers, under-represented users and community groups all carrying out the visit accompanied by a specialist trainer to support productive learning from all involved.

Information and communications

- ***Changing the terminology***

There is a need to change the terminology used by countryside service providers to make it more user-friendly. Specifically, there is a need to think hard about the best words to describe what is generally referred to as ‘the countryside’, versus the more encompassing but awkward and technical term ‘green outdoor spaces’.

The research findings show that the countryside is associated with remote and inaccessible places and that it is often associated with unwelcoming rural communities. Generally, the countryside is perceived in opposition to the city and, therefore, its very mention reinforces the symbolic divide between rural and urban areas and lifestyles.

Changing the terminology in favour of something which encompasses all ‘green outdoor experiences’ would allow many people from under-represented groups – who currently feel daunted by the prospect of making a visit to the remote countryside – to make more use of the green outdoor spaces located on the rural urban fringe and inside the urban fabric, and therefore to reap the benefits associated with these environments.

- ***Taking account of people’s perceptions in communications***

To maximise effectiveness, the communication strategies – marketing, advertising, promotion – produced by service providers should build upon the positive associations and the perceived benefits in relation to the countryside and green outdoor spaces found in each group of under-represented users. Conversely, they should also challenge the negative associations highlighted in the study or use them in a productive fashion.

▪ ***Carrying out market research to determine the best ways of communicating with under-represented groups***

People from the under-represented groups lack information that is targeted at them as a potential ‘customers’. They lack information about places close to where they live and work, as well as about more distant locations.

Market research needs to be undertaken at national level to determine the most effective ways of diffusing information to people from under-represented groups about opportunities for outdoor recreation. Currently, there is little information about the media consumption patterns of the various under-represented groups and it is difficult to assess whether it would be best to provide information through ethnic or mainstream radio, digital and satellite television, mainstream or specialist newspapers and magazines, or websites. Similarly, little is known about the alternative networks – word of mouth, community groups, disability associations, youth clubs – people may use to access relevant information.

Market research would be needed to determine:

- what precise information people need by under-represented groups;
- how best to present it to them (any specific requirements in relation to the format (e.g. language, size of print, pictorial symbols) of the information provided);
- which medium to use to diffuse the information most effectively.

Regional and local regional market research is also needed to gather more specific information.

▪ ***Increasing awareness of current opportunities through a centralised database on green outdoor spaces***

There is a need to maximise access to information about the countryside and green outdoor spaces so that potential users can be aware of the opportunities they afford. Potential users need information to reach them where they are before they can decide to venture out to green outdoor spaces.

There is a need to develop a high-quality centralised database on opportunities in green outdoor spaces that:

- is web-based;
- is regularly-updated;
- is inclusively-designed;
- contains detailed and targeted information on sites and routes;
- contains detailed and targeted off-site, ‘pre-visit’ information.

Such a database would make an enormous contribution to meeting the information needs of all people in relation to the green outdoor spaces. However, this important initiative would have to be subjected to an Equality Impact Assessment to determine

whether it would leave some groups unable to access information and what could be done to compensate for that.

▪ ***Developing inclusive information and communications***

People from under-represented groups (especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people) hardly ever see people from their own social group in information, advertising and other forms of public communications in relation to the countryside and green outdoor spaces.

It is essential that all information and communication activities are inclusive in order to reflect the diversity found in today's society. At minimum, this means using non-stereotypical images of people from all walks of life carrying out a range of activities in green outdoor settings.

In some sites, the development of inclusive information and communications may extend to issues of 'interpretation'¹⁶ as well. The techniques used to convey particular messages may need to change as a function of their target audiences. The messages themselves may need to vary. Guidance should be provided on inclusive information and interpretation, based on the findings of the current research, as well as on market research.

Building foundations for the use of green outdoor spaces

People from under-represented groups need help to access the countryside and green outdoor spaces and to build a lifetime habit. Indeed, a degree of organisational support in accessing, discovering and making full use of green outdoor spaces would come some way towards overcoming the fact that many people from under-represented groups:

- are poorer than the general population;
- do not own a car;
- may have problems accessing public transport;
- lack knowledge of provisions;
- do not have a habit of using green outdoor spaces for recreation;
- lack social company to do activities with;
- lack confidence to use green outdoor spaces on their own;
- may be extremely vulnerable on their own;
- lack the motivation, knowledge and resources to organise an outing.

Service providers need to work with a range of community groups and representative organisations to offer direct support for the use of green outdoor spaces amongst under-represented users. This 'handholding' is important to kick-start the habit of using green outdoor spaces more autonomously later on. Facilitating the use of green outdoor spaces can be done in a number of different ways, some of which are detailed below.

¹⁶ Interpretation refers to the communication process that enables members of the public – through first-hand involvement with artefacts, objects and landscapes, as well as through the provision of information – to discover and explore new meanings and relations between themselves and the sites they are visiting. Interpretation should take full account of people's social positions and identities as it is being devised.

- ***Supporting access to outdoor learning***

Evidence from the literature review indicates that fostering early use of the outdoor is critical to the development of a long-term habit of use. It is also clear the outdoor environments offer unique learning opportunities, both as topics in themselves and as places to support learning about other issues. There is a need to fund school programmes that make sound and creative use of green outdoor spaces.

- ***Supporting facilitated and escorted visits***

Voluntary, community and charitable organisations working with under-represented groups can provide some of the infrastructure to access people to take part in visits to the countryside or other green outdoor spaces. Their expertise can be used to facilitate visits and to ensure that they meet the specific needs of their client groups.

To maximise their value, facilitated group visits should be preceded by some work to identify:

- who should be taken and why;
- how to inform the target groups of the opportunity to take part in visits;
- what are the specific requirements or interests of these groups;
- whether there are barriers on sites which may hinder group visits;
- which measures are in place to make visits safe and enjoyable;
- what staff have the necessary skills to accompany visitors.

The capacity of service providers to act as enablers and facilitators needs to be developed through training, skills, and personal development. These enablers and facilitators should be recruited from within the under-represented groups themselves.

- ***Developing commitment through lasting projects***

Access to high quality green space close to home and work has been identified as a key to building confidence in venturing further afield. Some organisations are playing a key role in engaging under-represented groups in the planning, design and management of greenspace. This helps to develop people's autonomy in relation to green outdoor spaces so that they can carry on using without tailored support. It is important that more service providers see themselves as 'enablers' in this way and not just as 'providers'. One way of enabling access and of developing commitment and confidence in people is to actively engage them in long-term projects. For instance, this could take the form of regular involvement in:

- regeneration work;
- site and route maintenance;
- gardening;
- city farms and animal husbandry;
- art projects.

Effective evaluation and promotion of the benefits to project participants is essential, as well as sharing best practice.

- ***Stimulating access through well-advertised events***

Many people who are not regular countryside users would be keen to attend events held in green outdoor spaces if the events were targeted at their groups (e.g. music festivals and concerts, cultural fetes and 'melas', wheelchair rallies, etc.).

To maximise their value, events should be preceded by work with local representative organisations to identify:

- who should be targeted;
- what is the most effective way of making contact with the target group;
- what networks can be used to promote the event;
- how to present the event in the most attractive but honest fashion.

Sharing experience of 'hosting' events through a practical, 'toolkit' guidance is recommended. This needs to be a 'live' document which included a simple, but effective evaluation process to capture the short and long term benefits of events.

Rural attitudes

▪ *Providing diversity awareness in rural communities*

It is crucial that people from under-represented groups who overcome the barriers associated with accessing the countryside and green outdoor spaces have a positive experience once they get there. A key part of this is feeling welcome in the countryside.

The Commission for Rural Communities and Natural England have a shared strategic role to play in ensuring that people in rural areas adopt a positive approach to diversity in rural areas. They could:

- work with farmers and landowners to ensure that they are friendlier to people who use public rights of way near their land or who unknowingly walk on their private land
- work with those more likely to be in contact with under-represented groups to ensure that their provisions and services are inclusive and that their approach to diversity is positive. Key targets would include:
 - B&Bs, hotels, camping and caravan sites
 - restaurant owners
 - private tour operators
 - post offices
 - souvenir shops
 - tourist information offices

▪ *Building incentives to promote welcoming attitudes*

Changes in attitudes do not come easily or quickly. Incentives may need to be designed to support rural communities in becoming more welcoming. For instance, it may be necessary to make the 'Welcome Host' approach a prerequisite of access-related agri-environment funding.

Enhancing the evidence base on under-represented groups

Research in the field of environmental conceptions, perceptions, attitudes, preferences and needs amongst under-represented groups is clearly in its infancy. All ethnic minority people, all disabled people, all young people tend to be lumped together, with little sensitivity to issues of social class, generation, level of acculturation, severity of impairment, etc. Any research that pushes this agenda forward would be very valuable.

However, the evidence base is sufficiently robust – especially if one is prepared to think laterally and to learn from other fields – for countryside service providers to actually do a lot of productive work in increasing and diversifying access to the countryside and green outdoor spaces.

Generally, research that supports the strategic agenda set out above is required. More specifically, we recommend that:

- baseline data should be gathered through surveys of ‘catchment areas’ to identify the characteristics and needs of potential users;
- baseline data should be gathered on the uses and experiences of current visitors (with analysis to be carried out separately for each under-represented group to identify any significant patterns in the data);
- the same research design as used here should be replicated with other under-represented groups, most notably people who are registered deaf and people with learning difficulties;
- research should be carried out on the role of the countryside and green outdoor spaces in terms of promoting social inclusion and civic participation;
- research should be much more specific in its assessments of the attributes or qualities of places (physical and social), so that these can then be related more systematically to people’s perceptions, attitudes and uses;
- research should be carried out in landscape preferences amongst all under-represented groups;
- market research should be carried out to identify the best ways of communicating with and promoting activities for different groups of under-represented users;
- examples of good practice in increasing and diversifying access to green outdoor spaces should be collated, and secondary analysis of the later should be carried out to identify common principles.

We also recommend carrying out ‘action research’ by adapting the current model for escorted visits so that these visits can serve a whole range of organisational purposes very efficiently. Currently, many of the functions of organisations – such as doing outreach work, engaging in community consultation, providing or accessing training, educating the wider public, building capacity and so on - are segmented and carried out autonomously. There is scope for much greater integration across these functions.

Using ‘escorted visits’ would be a productive way of achieving this. In this model, we envisage carrying out escorted visits in outdoor green spaces that would be attended by:

- countryside staff and volunteers;
- organisations working with under-represented groups;
- lay people from under-represented groups;
- diversity trainer;
- outside evaluator.

By visiting the site together, and by talking and interacting in the process, all participants would learn from each other. The trainer would observe concrete reactions from staff, organisations and lay people. S/he would make sense of what is happening and relate it back to others in the groups. This would help develop the staff's expertise in relation to under-represented groups. The countryside staff would learn, directly and in context, about the preferences, attitudes and needs of under-represented groups.

The organisations working with under-represented groups would develop their capacity to carry out escorted visits and would have acted as enablers for their community. The lay people from under-represented groups would have benefited from accessing the green outdoors. They would have been consulted, informally and in a user-friendly fashion, about their needs and preferences.

The evaluator – necessary at the beginning to formalise the process, to provide an objective perspective on the benefits and disadvantages of the methodology and to systematise the learning gains – would be withdrawn once the methodology is established and people are autonomous in carrying this type of action research.

Appendices

This section contains the following appendices:

- Appendix 1: Experts and organisations consulted
- Appendix 2: Interview schedule for experts
- Appendix 3: Sample of lay research participants
- Appendix 4: Interview schedule/topic guide for under-represented users
- Appendix 5: Exit questionnaire for escorted visits
- Appendix 6: Recruitment questionnaire

Appendix 1: Experts and organisations consulted

Target groups	Experts/organisations
Disabled people	
Ambulatory impairment	Dr Mike Bruton, Disabled Ramblers Association
Visual impairment	Peter White, BBC
Mental health problems	*
Generic	Jane Stoneham, Sensory Trust
BME groups	
Generic	Judy Ling-Wong, Black Environment Network
Generic	Dr. Clare Rishbeth, Sheffield University
Generic	Dr. Kye Askins, Durham University/National Parks
Generic/South-Asian	Jessica Memon, Mosaic
Generic/Black-Caribbean	Audrey Stevens, El Shaddai
Young people	
Generic	Ashley Sweetland, UK Youth Parliament
Generic	Prof. Hugh Matthews, Centre for Children and Youth
Generic	Richard White, Duke of Edinburgh Award
Generic	Clare Dobbs, Trailblazer
Other	
Community regeneration	Tom Flood, BTCV
Outreach	Myriam Levine, English Heritage
Capacity building	Maria Adebawale, Capacity

* Considerable effort was made to contact organisations or experts with dual experience on mental health and outdoor recreation but the people contacted felt they had insufficient experience to act as experts for the research.

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for experts

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

This research:

- is part of an overall strategy to promote diversity of access to the countryside
- builds on existing research which has highlighted a number of key *barriers* to countryside use, such as: cost, lack of time, lack of awareness of opportunities, poor transport, fear of discrimination, concerns over safety, etc.
- focuses on the *perspectives and needs of under-represented users*
- seeks to understand the *symbolic readings* (attitudes, perceptions, representations, images, etc) of the countryside that impact on participation, rather than exclusively the barriers that exclude people from the countryside

1.2. Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research are to determine:

- how different groups of under-represented users *conceive* of the countryside
- how this *impacts on their use* of the countryside
- what *needs to be done* to increase their use of the countryside

The 'under-users' included in this research are:

- BME people: Black-Caribbeans, Indians and Pakistanis
- disabled people: with either mental health problems, visual impairment or mobility impairment
- young people: 14 to 16, and 17 to 20 years old

1.3. ETHNOS Research & Consultancy

1.4. Research process

- 1 hour interview
- confidential
- use of the findings
- finding out about the results / obtaining feedback / contacting ETHNOS

2.0. USE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

2.1. Views on overall participation in countryside by under-user group

How would you describe current participation in countryside activities amongst (BME, disabled and young) people?

2.2. Profile of users/non-users in each under-represented group

Are there important distinctions in relation to countryside use, in terms of:

- ethnicity
- impairment
- age group
- gender

- social class
- area of residence
- other?

2.3. Differences in type and frequency of activities pursued by each group

Are you aware of any differences in the patterns of countryside use amongst (BME, disabled and young people) compared to the general population?

- recreational activities: sports, meditation, arts, etc.
- touristic activities: long stays, day visits, destinations, etc.
- educational activities: nature conservation, history, arts and crafts, etc.

Are there any noticeable differences in the type of places that (BME, disabled and young people) actually visit?

2.4. Feedback on experiences of the countryside

In your experience, when (BME, disabled, young) people do experience the countryside, what are their reactions? Are the reactions positive or negative? In what ways?

What are the benefits of outdoor pursuits which people mention?

Are the benefits any different because of the ethnicity, disability or age group of the person?

3.0. EXPLANATIONS FOR UNDER-UTILISATION

Why do you think the countryside attracts mainly people from such restricted backgrounds – mainly White, middle aged, middle-class, able-bodied, mostly men?

Put differently, why do you think so few people from BME backgrounds/ disabled/young people make full use of the countryside?

3.1. Definitions of the countryside

Do you think there are differences between the way (BME, disabled, young people) define the countryside and the 'general population'?

Can you say more about what (BME, disabled, young people) regard as 'the countryside'?

Explore whether definitions would include:

- open countryside (e.g. forests, fields, lakes, mountains)
- seaside and waterways (e.g. canals, rivers)
- rural villages
- urban green spaces (e.g. allotments, parks, private gardens)

Explore potential gender and social class differences

3.2. Perceptions of the countryside

Do you think there are differences between the way (BME, disabled, young people) perceive the countryside and the 'general population'?

Is there anything distinctive in the way (people with specific impairments, people from specific ethnic minority groups, teenagers and young people) experience the countryside?

Explore, for each group, such perceptions as:

- associations of countryside with work VS leisure
- association with relaxation VS activity
- association of nature with threat VS possibilities for personal renewal
- association of countryside with 'backwardness' VS modernity/progress
- association of countryside with 'remote places' VS close to home, accessible places
- association of countryside with 'others' (e.g. old people, White people, able-bodied people, poor/rich people) and feeling of marginalisation
- relative importance of sights, sounds, smells, textures, gradients, etc.
- feelings of frustration, exclusion, etc.

Why do you think these perceptions exist?

What impact do you think these perceptions have on the use (BME, disabled, young people) make of the countryside?

3.3. Preferences for countryside

Do you have any information or views on the kind of countryside places (BME, disabled, young people) prefer?

Explore potential differences in relation to:

- historical significance VS no obvious historical connection
- open countryside VS forest VS seaside VS mountain
- close to home VS further afield
- small scale VS large-scale environments
- manicured VS wild
- with man-made facilities VS natural
- with other people VS socially isolated

4.0. NEEDS OF BME / DISABLED / YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION

4.1. Unmet needs

What are the needs of (BME/disabled/young people) in order for them to make fuller use of the countryside?

Probe on:

- Changes in perceptions of the countryside
- Changes/improvements in design of physical places
- Changes/improvements in social communication: marketing, promotion of specific places
- Removing barriers
- Involving under-users in planning, decision-making and management
- Increasing the range of activities targeted at specific groups

What would be your priorities to make the countryside more attractive to BME/disabled/young people?

How should the aims you mention be achieved?

5.0. ENGAGING UNDER-REPRESENTED USERS

5.1. Reaching out to under-represented users

What can be done to *broaden* participation in the countryside from people that are currently under-represented amongst countryside users?

How to you *engage* hard-to-reach, excluded, disadvantaged individuals and communities?

How do you make the countryside *relevant* to all people?

How do you develop a sense that the countryside really is 'for all'?

What do you think countryside service providers need to do to attract more BME, disabled and young people to the countryside?

Probe on:

- Philosophy
- Strategy
- Infrastructure
- Service provisions
- Communications
- Other? (Education of the wider rural community?)

5.2. Examples of good practice

Do you know of any effective approaches, interventions or projects to increase countryside use in (BME, disabled, young people)?

What, specifically, is good about these approaches?

6.0. SUMMARY AND OTHER VIEWS

Is there anything else you which to add, or anything else you want to discuss?

Many thanks.

Appendix 3: Sample of lay research participants

Table 1: Characteristics of ‘non-users’ in focus groups (N=24)

Group	Gender	Location	Age (years)
Indian	Men	Birmingham	21-39
Indian	Women	London	21-39
Indian	Mixed	Bradford	40-55
Pakistani	Men	London	40-55
Pakistani	Women	Bradford	21-39
Pakistani	Mixed	Birmingham	21-39
Black-Caribbean	Men	Bradford	40-55
Black-Caribbean	Women	Birmingham	21-39
Black-Caribbean	Mixed	London	40-55
Vision-impaired	Men	Birmingham	21-39
Vision-impaired	Women	London	40-55
Vision-impaired	Mixed	Bradford	21-39
Wheelchair user	Men	London	21-39
Wheelchair user	Women	Bradford	21-39
Wheelchair user	Mixed	Birmingham	40-55
Mental illness	Men	Bradford	40-55
Mental illness	Women	Birmingham	21-39
Mental illness	Mixed	London	21-39
Young people	Young men	Birmingham	17-20
Young people	Young women	London	17-20
Young people	Mixed	Bradford	17-20
Young people	Boys	London	14-16
Young people	Girls	Bradford	14-16
Young people	Mixed	Birmingham	14-16

Table 2: Characteristics of ‘users’ in focus groups (N=8)

Group	Gender	Location	Age Group
Indian	Mixed	Birmingham	21-55
Pakistani	Mixed	Bradford	21-55
Black-Caribbean	Mixed	London	21-55
Vision-impaired	Mixed	Birmingham	21-55
Restricted-mobility	Mixed	Bradford	21-55
Mental-illness	Mixed	London	21-55
Young people	Mixed	Birmingham	14-16
Young people	Mixed	London	17-20

Table 3: Characteristics of 'non-users' in individual interviews

Group	Gender	Location	Age (years)
Indian	Man	London	21-39
Indian	Woman	Birmingham	21-39
Indian	Man	Bradford	40-55
Indian	Woman	London	40-55
Pakistani	Man	Birmingham	21-39
Pakistani	Woman	Bradford	21-39
Pakistani	Man	London	40-55
Pakistani	Woman	Birmingham	40-55
Black-Caribbean	Man	Bradford	21-39
Black-Caribbean	Woman	London	21-39
Black-Caribbean	Man	Birmingham	40-55
Black-Caribbean	Woman	Bradford	40-55
Vision-impaired	Man	London	21-39
Vision-impaired	Woman	Birmingham	21-39
Vision-impaired	Man	Bradford	40-55
Vision-impaired	Woman	London	40-55
Wheelchair user	Man	Birmingham	21-39
Wheelchair user	Woman	Bradford	21-39
Wheelchair user	Man	London	40-55
Wheelchair user	Woman	Birmingham	40-55
Mental illness	Man	Bradford	21-39
Mental illness	Woman	London	21-39
Mental illness	Man	Birmingham	40-55
Mental illness	Woman	Bradford	40-55
Young people	Young man	London	17-20
Young people	Young woman	Birmingham	17-20
Young people	Young man	Bradford	17-20
Young people	Young woman	London	17-20
Young people	Boy	Birmingham	14-16
Young people	Girl	Bradford	14-16
Young people	Boy	London	14-16
Young people	Girl	Birmingham	14-16

Table 4: Families taken on escorted visits (N=14)

Family Group	Country park
Indian	Aldenham Country Park
Indian	Sutton Park
Pakistani	Ogden Water Park
Pakistani	Aldenham Country Park
Black-Caribbean	Sutton Park
Black-Caribbean	Anglers & Newmillerdam Country Park
Vision-impaired (with carer)	Aldenham Country Park
Vision-impaired	Sutton Park
Wheelchair user	Anglers & Newmillerdam Country Park
Wheelchair user (with carer)	Aldenham Country Park
Mental health problems	Sutton Park
Mental health problems	Ogden Water Park
Young people	Aldenham Country Park
Young people	Sutton Park

Appendix 4: Individual interview / focus group guide

Note: The guides for the individual interviews and for the focus groups were almost identical. There were of course slight changes related to the research participants' status as either 'users' or 'non-users' of the countryside. There were also changes linked to the specific groups of under-represented users – ethnic minority, disabled or young people - being targeted in each interview or focus group. The guide included here (for disabled people who are non-users) serves as an exemplar.

1.0. Introduction

- **The Countryside Agency**
- **Ethnos: Independent research company**
- **Focus: Perceptions of countryside and needs to access countryside**
- **Recording**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Incentives (£25)**
- **Housekeeping: Speak clearly, one at a time, silent mobile phones, etc**
- **Round table introductions (name, age, countryside use)**

2.0. General perceptions and awareness of the countryside

2.1. Without thinking too deeply, if I say 'the countryside' to you, what are the first words, images or feelings that come to mind? (Record on flipchart)

Is 'the countryside' a word that you would use yourself? What other words would you be more likely to use?

What do you understand by the word 'the countryside'?

Explore the types of:

- landscape/environment evoked (forests, meadows, farmland, mountains, seaside, city parks, nature reserves, allotments, etc)
- people associated (e.g. social class/landed gentry/able-bodied, etc)
- communities/identities encountered (parochial, xenophobic, friendly)
- feelings encountered (peaceful, tranquil and calm, excluded and angry, safe or threatened)

2.2. What do you think people do in the countryside?

Explore:

- leisure (running, walking/rambling, cycling, camping, picnicking, gardening, bird-watching, fishing, horse riding, sailing, wind-surfing, kite-flying, rock-climbing, artistic pursuits, relaxing, socialising, etc)
- education (city farms, learning about plants, trees, insects and the environment, geomorphology/geography, history trails, etc)
- tourism (visiting AONB, rare plant species, English Heritage attractions, animal-related (bird-watching, safari parks and zoos, etc)
- farming (agribusiness, husbandry, etc)

2.3. Are any of these activities relevant to you as disabled people? Do you currently do any of these activities? Would you like to? Why/why not?

- 2.4. Overall, would you say that the countryside is a place for disabled people? Do you think that you “fit” in the image you are depicting of the countryside?

3.0. Lifestyle and (unmet) needs

In this part of the discussion, we would like to discuss with you your lifestyle in order to find out whether you have any needs which could be met by increased use of the countryside.

- 3.1. Explore whether respondents feel that they:

- have a healthy lifestyle
- get enough exercise
- have enough opportunity to relax, ‘get away from it all’, or reflect about their life
- have enough opportunities to socialise
- are able to develop their creative or artistic sides
- have enough exciting challenges in their life
- feel disconnected from nature

- 3.2. Do you think the countryside could be used to improve your quality of life? What benefits would be gained from more or better countryside use? What needs could be met?

Perhaps it is useful to think about what you like about the leisure activities you currently have? What needs do these activities fulfil in your life? What do you most enjoy out of these activities?

Explore:

- meeting with friends
- being by yourself
- physical exercise
- getting out of residential area
- intrinsic pleasure
- winning (if competitive)
- just doing something different
- meeting different people
- being in different environments
- calm, reflection, de-stress

4.0. Reasons for under-utilisation of countryside

In this part of the discussion, we would like to find out from you why disabled people usually make little use of the countryside.

- 4.1. Do you ever get any feedback from people with a similar disability about time they have spent in the countryside? Is this positive or negative?

Who would you turn to in order to find information about activities to do or places to visit in the countryside?

- 4.2. How would you get physical access to the countryside?

- 4.3. Once in the countryside, how do you think people would relate to you?

- 4.4. What kind of activities do you expect to find in the countryside? Do these appeal to you?

- 4.5. Are there difficulties specific to disabled people you imagine you might face?
- 4.6. Generally, what stops you, as a disabled person, from making fuller use of the countryside?

5.0. Improvements in provisions

It is said that disabled people tend not to use the countryside as much as able-bodied people.

- 5.1. Does this seem broadly correct to you? Can you think of any reasons why this might be the case?
- 5.2. What could be done to make the countryside more attractive to you? What changes would need to be made for you to feel that the countryside is a place you want to go to?

Are there *activities or facilities* you would like in particular?

Probe:

- more/different activities for disabled people
- more/different local provisions
- better information about existing activities and facilities
- better signposting in the countryside
- safer environments
- countryside staff with disabilities
- equality training for parks managers and other green spaces staff
- special events, initiatives and projects aimed at people with different disabilities
- advertising and awareness raising campaigns
- liaison with support groups for disabled people
- partnership and capacity-building with different groups
- different attitudes towards disability amongst countryside residents

What needs to be done to make these changes happen?

- 5.3. Are you aware of any initiatives or projects aimed at encouraging disabled people to make greater use of the countryside? Are these good/bad, not achieving/making an impact, who is involved, what groups are reached out to, etc.
- 5.4. Should disabled people be more involved in making decisions about the countryside?

What kinds of involvement would be most appropriate (stakeholder consultation, sitting on a board or having local community groups partnering with countryside organisations)? Would you have any interest in being involved in any of these levels yourself?

6.0. Close and thanks

Is there anything else you would like to add which is related to why you, or other disabled people, do not make much use of the countryside or to what could be done to increase your use of it?

Many thanks.

Appendix 5: Exit questionnaire for escorted visits

QUESTIONNAIRE AFTER ESCORTED VISITS TO COUNTRY PARKS (to be completed by each family member individually)

PART I: ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Q1. How much did you enjoy your visit?

A great deal

A fair deal

Not very much

Not at all

Q2. Which three aspects did you enjoy *most*?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Q3. Which three aspects did you enjoy *least*?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Q4. How similar is the country park compared to what you expected?

Very similar

Quite similar

Not very similar

Not at all similar

Q5. Was the country park better or worse than your expectations?

Much better

Better

The same

Worse

Much worse

Q6. In what way was the country park better or worse than what you expected?

Q7. Is there anything that was missing from the park or that would have added to your enjoyment?

Q8. Has the visit made you feel any different about the countryside and green spaces?

Yes No

Q9. What would normally stop you from visiting a country park like the one you've just been to?

Q10. Has visiting the country park made you feel differently about these barriers?

Yes No

Q11. Do you think you would benefit from making greater use of the countryside?

Yes No
Maybe

Please specify in what ways: _____

Q13. Would you like to visit this country park again?

Yes Maybe No

Q14. Would you consider visiting other country parks?

Yes Maybe No

Q15. What would be needed for you to consider visiting this or other country parks in the future?

PART II: ABOUT YOU

Q16. How old are you?

14-16 17-20 21-39 40-55

Q17. What is your sex?

Male Female

Q18. Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?

White British Black-Caribbean/
Black British Indian/
British Asian Pakistani/
British Asian

Q19. Do you have a disability?

Yes
No (if no, go to Q21)

Q20. Is your disability related to:

Vision Mobility Mental health

Q21. Which of these cities do you live in or near to?

London Birmingham Bradford

Q22. ***Which category best describes your current employment status?***

Student

Unemployed

Part-time work

Full-time work

Other

Q23. ***Other comments***

Please use this box for any other comments you may wish to make.

Thank you very much for taking time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 6: Filter questionnaire for recruitment

This is an example of the questionnaires that were used to ensure that all research participants met the criteria to take part in the research. This particular example was used to recruit ethnic minority people who had not used the countryside. Very similar questionnaires – with slight alterations for under-represented groups or for user status – were used to recruit the other groups.

PROJECT: Perceptions and needs in relation to the countryside	Countryside Agency
----------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------

INTRODUCTION

Good morning/afternoon. I work for an independent research company. We are conducting some research about people's perceptions and needs in relation to the countryside and green outdoor spaces.

We are getting together a small group of people like you for a discussion. You will be given £25 for taking part in a discussion for about 90 minutes. This discussion will be held:

On (date)

At (time)

Are you free to join us? YES/NO **(IF NO, CLOSE)**

If Yes, continue.

QA Do you work in any of these industries or professions?

QB Do any of your close friends or relatives work in any of these industries or professions?

MARKET RESEARCH	Y	TV OR THE MEDIA	Y
OUTDOOR/GREEN SPACE-RELATED PROFESSIONS	Y	JOURNALISM	Y

None of these (TICK)

IF ANY 'Y' CIRCLED, CLOSE

Q1 Do you live either in Birmingham, London or Bradford?

Yes	1	Recruit to quota
No	2	CLOSE

Q2	Gender?			
		Male	1	Recruit to quota
		Female	2	Recruit to quota
Q3	Could you please tell me your age? Please write in _____.			
		14-20	1	CLOSE
		21-39	2	Recruit to quota
		40-55	3	Recruit to quota
Q4	What is your ethnicity?			
		Black Caribbean / Black British (<i>not</i> of African origin)	1	Recruit to quota
		Indian or British Asian	2	Recruit to quota
		Pakistani or British Asian	3	Recruit to quota
		White British	4	CLOSE
		Other	5	CLOSE
Q5	Would you describe yourself as disabled?			
		Yes	1	CLOSE
		No	2	Recruit to quota
Q6	Have you been to the countryside or to green outdoor spaces in the past 12 months?			
		Yes	1	CLOSE
		No	2	Recruit to quota
Q7	What is your current job status?			
		Full-time working	1	No quota restrictions but
		Part-time working	2	get a good mix
		Unemployed	3	
		Student	4	
Q8	Have you ever taken part in a market research discussion before?			
YES	How long ago was that ?	Less than 6 months	1	CLOSE
YES		More than 6 months ago	2	Recruit
NO		Never	3	Recruit

What was the subject of the discussion group(s) you attended?

Write in:.....(If green space-related
CLOSE)

Confirm that they would like to take part in the focus group.
Remind them of the date and time.
Make sure you get ALL their details including a phone number – **VERY IMPORTANT**

Give out REMINDER card

RESPONDENT NAME:

TEL NO:.....

ADDRESS:

.....
.....
.....
.....

RECRUITER DECLARATION:

This respondent was recruited face-to-face according to the accompanying instructions and to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and is unknown to me and to the best of my knowledge unknown to the other respondents attending the group.

Name:.....

Signature:.....

Date:

Duration of interview:.....

REMINDER CALL:
TO ATTEND 2 - REPLACE

Attending

1

UNABLE

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