

Diversity review – options for implementation

While countryside activities have the potential to be inclusive, many people currently experience real or perceived barriers to access.

In definitions of exclusion, participation, and under-representation, the critical distinction lies between people's observed behaviour and how people feel.

Summary

The Rural White Paper (2000) promised a Diversity Review of how to 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. On behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Countryside Agency undertook a study on the options for implementing the review.

The Agency appointed consultants to undertake the study. The study included a literature review and a review of past and current projects to address under-representation and social exclusion. The research shows that there is a significant lack of good baseline information regarding the level and nature of participation in countryside activities. Equally, there is a lack of adequate post-hoc evaluation to assess the benefits of countryside enjoyment and the effectiveness of projects to increase participation by under-represented groups. Efficient use of data sources is needed to determine baseline information and inform long-term monitoring within a consistent evaluation framework.

Main findings

The approach: The purpose of the study was to formulate recommendations for a full review of the diversity of people accessing and enjoying the countryside. Recommendations were needed to cover a programme of research to include, action based exploratory initiatives and supporting activities, such as the need for advisory groups, for the full review. To arrive at these, the consultants were asked to investigate:

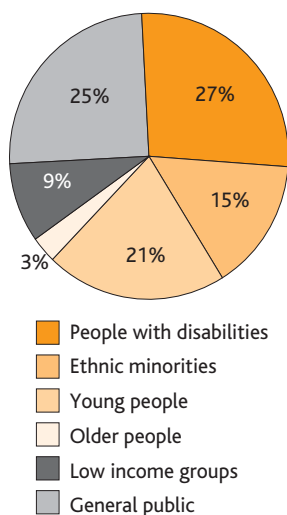
- under-representation in accessing local countryside and greenspace for enjoyment;
- the relationship between under-representation, cultural background and social exclusion; and
- the potential role of countryside and greenspace to address social exclusion.

A literature review was undertaken, accompanied by a review of past and ongoing projects which have attempted to increase access to the countryside for under-represented or excluded groups. Once recommendations for the diversity review had been drafted, a seminar was held to share the findings and explore opportunities for collaboration with representatives from a range of departments, agencies and NGOs involved in countryside recreation and access, or working with under-represented groups.

The Countryside Agency research notes

Comparatively little work has been undertaken to encourage the participation of older people and low-income groups in countryside recreation.

Figure 1: Types of under-represented groups targeted by projects



Note 1: The projects that are addressed to more than one user groups are listed under the 'general public' category.

Note 2: There are no projects solely targeted at women.

There has been a lack of independent project evaluation to determine effectiveness against baseline data and over an appropriate timeframe.

There is evidence that many groups in Britain – young adults, low-income groups, black and other ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities, older people, and women – do not participate in the countryside and related activities proportionate to their numbers in society. However, exclusion cannot automatically be inferred from under-representation; a group that is under-represented may not feel excluded if it has full access but still declines to participate in countryside activities.

Barriers to access: Social, physical and psychological barriers significantly influence the way that people perceive the countryside and how they make choices over whether or not to use it. Many barriers to access and participation were identified in the literature:

- financial costs incurred;
- lack of time and other commitments;
- lack of appropriate activities to attract excluded groups;
- lack of awareness of local initiatives and lack of perceived relevance;
- physical difficulty of access to sites;
- lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment;
- lack of (appropriate) interpretative information at sites and lack of publicity;
- a neglected or poorly maintained environment;
- previous negative experiences of the countryside;
- lack of (accessible) transport.

Projects to increase participation in countryside enjoyment: The project review revealed a wide variety of initiatives, past and current, to increase participation by under-represented groups in countryside recreation and enjoyment (see Figure 1 and Table 1). However, there is no central database of projects, nor initiatives for comprehensive dissemination of information about them. Opportunities are being missed, therefore, for sharing experiences and developing best practice.

The review of projects shows that the simple provision of new facilities or transport is not sufficient; a more comprehensive and integrated approach is required to address lack of participation, including increasing people's understanding of, and sense of belonging in, the countryside.

Projects to promote participation often rely on the enthusiasm and awareness of several key (and often over-stretched) staff and/or volunteers. This often affects the potential for project expansion, the extent to which consistent monitoring is undertaken, and the retention of expertise when a project finishes. The short-term nature of most project funding initiatives also creates problems. A more long-term approach to management and funding is required to enable greater sustainability of initiatives.

Methods for outreach to under-represented groups: A range of outreach methods have been used to increase participation in enjoyment of the countryside. They fall into several broad categories (see Figure 2):

- information provision, both on and off-site;
- community consultation and engagement, including special events;
- improvements to access through transport, site design and provision of facilities;
- sports, including outdoor pursuits and water-based activities;
- participation in environmental projects in the countryside.

Table 1: Funded project groups

		Funding bodies														
		County or Borough Council	Countryside Agency	Community Lottery/ Heritage Lottery Fund/ Community Fund	European Union (including ERDF)	Sport England	Youth Hostel Association	New Opportunities Fund	Millennium Commission	BT Millennium Miles/ BT Countryside for All	National Trust	Community Forest	British Heart Foundation	English Nature	Forestry Commission	Other*
Under-represented groups	People with disabilities	6	2	1					1	3	2				1	13
	Minority ethnic and black groups	2	2	4	1				1			2				6
	Young people	3	4	1			3	1			1	2				8
	Disadvantaged and people on low incomes	1	3	3	1	2	2									10
	Older people	1				1										1
	Women															
	General public/ multiple target groups	5	8	2	1	2		2	1			5	2	1		13

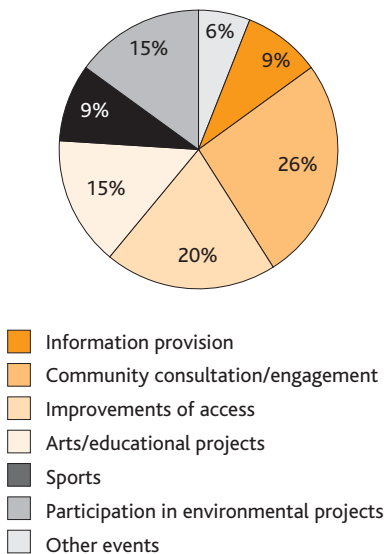
Key: Number of projects
 10 and above
 5 - 9
 1 - 4
 Less than 1

Note: Projects are often funded by more than one sponsor.
 *Including non-specific sources/channels of income and organisations such as the National Parks Authorities, Forest Enterprise, Fieldfare Trust, BTCV, BEN, Scottish Natural Heritage, private companies and charitable trusts.

The potential role of countryside to address social exclusion: The literature and project review suggest that participation in countryside activities offers a range of benefits:

- enhanced physical health and general well-being;
- the development of social and personal skills;
- the development of practical skills and an enhanced sense of achievement;
- improved quality of life;
- enhanced community development and cohesion;
- wider opportunities for education and economic development;
- a greater appreciation and understanding of the natural environment.

Figure 2: Broad categories of outreach methods



Recommendations

Recommendations for an evaluation framework: The project review highlighted the urgent need for an evaluation framework to be developed. Such a framework should include:

- baseline data against which evaluation data can be measured;
- evaluation of both processes and outcomes;
- tracking methods for monitoring progress of projects against objectives;
- qualitative and quantitative methods.

Ongoing monitoring and independent post-project evaluation will be necessary to enable policy-makers to assess the benefits of wider countryside enjoyment and its role in addressing social exclusion. Such impact assessment requires a long-term approach to monitoring and evaluation.

The Countryside Agency research notes

Participation in countryside recreation offers a wide range of potential social, economic and health benefits for the wider community.

The research programme should include case studies which compare users' perceptions and experience with countryside service providers' data.

Further reading

Agyeman, J. (1990). 'Black people in a white landscape: social and environmental justice', *Built environment* 16 (3): 232 - 236.

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Rowe, N. and Champion, R. (2000). *Young people and sport: national survey 1999*. Sport England, <http://www.english.sports.gov.uk>.

Slee, B., Curry, N. and Joseph, D. (2002). *Social exclusion in countryside leisure in the United Kingdom: the role of the countryside in addressing social inclusion*. A report for the Countryside Recreation Network. Countryside Recreation Network.

Recommendations for a programme of research: A research programme to address the objectives of the full review will need to:

- (a) research people who are under-represented and/or socially excluded, including an exploration of their perceptions, needs and preferences;
- (b) research providers of services for these groups in England; and,
- (c) analyse the extent to which 'visiting' the countryside can address social exclusion.

Exploring the 'fit' between (a) and (b) will identify where there are mismatches and gaps in current provision. Exploring (c) requires analysing to what extent visits to the countryside yield 'inclusion benefits' and how the benefits vary according to people's age, gender, ethnicity, social class and disability, as well as how the benefits compare to the costs, monetary and opportunity, of 'visits'.

Recommendations for action-based initiatives: A strong element of user involvement and ownership should be incorporated in all processes from the beginning and projects should be located within a wider strategy that considers long-term sustainability through partnership working and joint funding.

A mix of projects is recommended, some aimed at the general public, and some to allow the specific needs of selected target groups, such as people from low-income and disadvantaged communities to be raised. Less commonly employed outreach methods, for example, websites, should be explored. The effectiveness of different out-reach methods in relation to selected under-represented groups should be evaluated as this may form the basis of future good practice guides.

Recommendations for supporting activities for the diversity review:

Supporting activities should ensure effective engagement with clients and target groups; in particular, participation and decision-making strategies that adopt an inclusive approach to design, implementation and dissemination will be important.

A support programme is recommended which will include:

- a website;
- a launch event;
- a series of leaflets and publications;
- development of a learning network to include partner organisations and groups;
- a major conference to disseminate research findings;
- workshops and training courses, including 'roadshows', school events, etc.

This research was carried out on behalf of the Countryside Agency by OPENspace, the research centre for inclusive access to outdoor environments, Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University, in collaboration with the Scottish Ethnic Minorities Research Unit, and the Centre for Research into Socially Inclusive Services, in the School of the Built Environment at Heriot-Watt University.

Countryside Agency Research Notes can also be viewed on our website:
www.countryside.gov.uk