

Understanding engagement with the natural environment 9 key things we've learnt so far, and what that means for where next

Alison Darlow Senior Specialist – Social Science & Evaluation Outdoor Recreation Network Seminar, 18 April 2018

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)





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



levels



Visit takers



Destinations



Activities



Motivations & barriers



Appreciation & enjoyment



Other engagement & protective actions

How was MENE different to previous surveys?

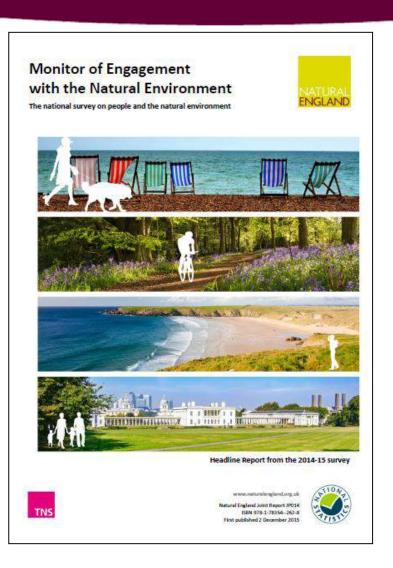


- Focus on all visits to the natural environment
- Continuous interviewing
- Origin and destination of visits
- Why people don't visit
- Attitudes towards the natural environment
- Pro-environmental behaviours
- Other ways of engaging with the natural environment

Other developments...



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



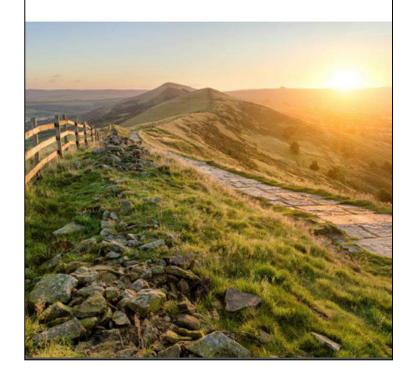
National policy and strategy



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



A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment





Science is a <u>progression</u> of answering good questions

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

Importance of local greenspace – visits close to where people live

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



2. Type of place visited important for individual benefits.

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



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

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

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

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

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



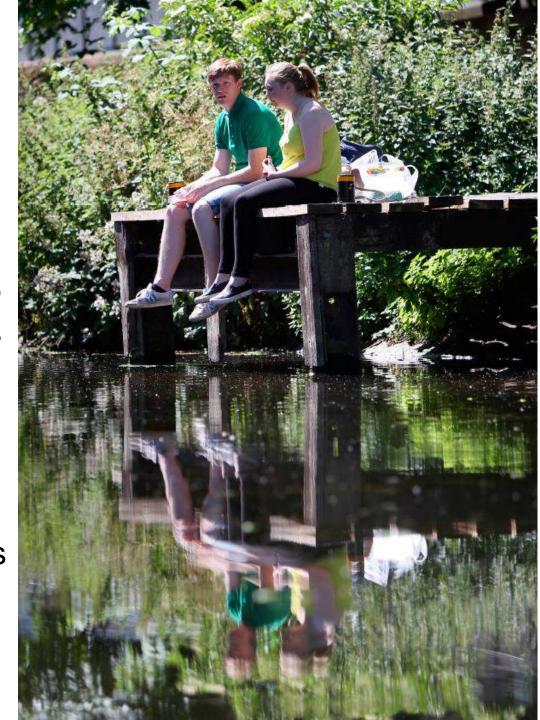
5. MENE has shown an (albeit weak) association between attitudes, nature connection, visits and other behaviours.

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



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

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



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

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



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

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





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

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

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment



The national survey on people and the natural environment









Headline Report from the 2015-16 survey



www.naturalengland.org. Natural England Joint Report JP022 ISBN 978-1-78354-420-2 First published 16th May 2017



Conclusions



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







Thank you!



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MENE reports, data viewer and data available from:

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