

HOW ARE TRENDS IN SOCIETY IMPACTING ON RECREATION AND TOURISM

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Abstract

We need knowledge about what is likely to influence future outdoor leisure behaviour, and understanding the trends can help to identify the opportunities we can work with, and the threats we can work to mitigate against. Whether in the commercial sector or the public sector, this can help us to select the right interventions to allow us to be effective. For example:

- The right images and messages to use to engage with our audiences;
- The right communication media, such as leaflets, on-site interpretation, newspapers, internet or television;
- The right products and places which appeal to our existing customers – but importantly to new audiences too.

First of all we need to know what we want to achieve – and why.

For Natural England our statutory purpose provides the context to our work. We are charged to “ensure the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development”. This purpose includes providing opportunities for people to enjoy the natural environment and we have stated that one of the outcomes we want to achieve is ‘more people enjoying, understanding and acting to improve the natural environment, more often’. Through enjoyment of the outdoors we believe we can:

- increase understanding of the importance of the natural environment to the future of our planet;
- encourage people to act to improve the natural environment, whether in their own patch or on a larger scale;
- support the economy dependent on visitors, especially in more remote places;
- improve the quality of life for more people through better health and well being as time spent in the natural environment can improve physical and mental health.

In this presentation I will highlight some of the trends which we believe are impacting on our ability to achieve our outcome.

The opportunities for us include: an interest in reducing obesity and diseases related to lack of activity along with personal concerns about health; an ageing population with more wealth and ambition to do more; an interest in life experiences (the 100 things to do before I die mentality!); and an interest in nature. They also include public sector interventions through the planning process, agricultural incentives, lottery grants, Olympics in London in 2012, and education and health policies.

The threats range from: public sector interventions leading to poor infrastructure to deter outdoor activity; perceptions of risk; lack of knowledge of the natural environment; for some lack of time and motivation and for others the cost and lack of transport.

Finally in the presentation I will look at some of the solutions Natural England is working on at the moment and some ideas for the future.

Key Words

Outdoor Leisure, Recreation, Trends, Interventions, Natural Environment, Quality of Life, Enjoyment of the Outdoors, Sustainable Future, Act to Improve, Economic Benefits, Quality of Life, Health and Well-being

Key References

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Biography

Wendy Thompson works for Natural England as the Principal Specialist on Recreation and Access in the Research and Evidence Team. Previously she worked for the Countryside Agency, one of Natural England's founding bodies, where over the past eight years she has led on Recreation Routes, Country Parks and Greenspace, Leisure Surveys, Outdoor Promotion and an inter-agency review of Outdoor Recreation which involved commissioning the research on recreation trends from Henley Centre Foresight Vision that will be referred to in the presentation.