

RECREATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY OF RURAL AREAS:  
ITS ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT ON VISITATION AND ATTACHMENT

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**Abstract**

The Dutch government aims to improve the (internal) accessibility of the countryside for recreational walking and cycling. Policy goals behind this aim are (a) reducing recreational shortages, (b) promoting physical activity and (c) increasing social support for conserving the (identity of the) countryside. This study investigates whether increasing accessibility is an effective tool, given these goals. A related first question is how to measure the accessibility of an area. Eight rural areas were selected that varied widely in estimated accessibility, scenic beauty and recreational pressure. Accessibility audits took place and residents living within 5 km of an area were surveyed (N = 702). A simple accessibility indicator based on the density of paths and roads deemed suitable for recreational cycling, as derived from GIS-data, correlated moderately with residents' average accessibility ratings. When the GIS-data were augmented based on the audit, including unpaved paths and roads, the density measure correlated higher. Taking the structure of the network into account might increase this relationship even further. As for visitation, the results indicated that farmland areas are more visited because of their nearness than of their high quality: distance was important, whereas scenic beauty was not. Recreational use was related to the area's internal accessibility too. However, additional results showed that increasing an area's accessibility is more likely to lead to location substitution than to higher overall activity levels. On the other hand the increased capacity might help to reduce visitor densities, and thereby improve experiences of peace and quiet. Using an area is related to one's attachment to it, so improving accessibility may help in this respect too. All in all increasing accessibility seems most useful in (even unattractive) areas that are currently poorly accessible and that are located very near large population centers offering few nature-based recreation opportunities.

**Key Words**

accessibility, visitation, attachment

**Key References**

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