Rooted in the Community?
Ethnic Participation in Forest Recreation in Great Britain

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Overview

• Background: why the research was commissioned
• Research agenda
• Activities and methods
• Results: focus groups and woodland visits
• Discussion and conclusions: factors influencing access
• Recommendations: research and practice
Background

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- Promote equal opportunities
- Promote good relations between people from different racial groups

Race Equality Duty
- Monitor the impact of all existing policies on black and minority ethnic (BME) groups
- Assess and consult upon the potential impact of future proposed policies
- Identify and implement actions to address differential impact on BME groups

Some responses from countryside service providers
- “We already have an open access policy. It’s their fault if they don’t use it!”
- “I agree these goals are very important, but how exactly do we go about achieving them?”
- “Where are the 20 extra staff I need to implement it?”

Some responses from the media
- “Political correctness gone mad”
- Lake District National Park outreach programme
- Appointment of FC Diversity Manager
Evidence of under-representation of BME groups

- Strong evidence of low levels of access to a wide range of services and opportunities
- Strong evidence for under-representation among woodland recreational users (e.g. Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys)

Table 1: Proportion of population who had visited woodlands in the previous few years, by ethnicity and residential location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of respondent</th>
<th>Positive response (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME groups</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Forestry Commission (Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2007)
Table 2: Frequency of visits to woodlands (April to September 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of visits</th>
<th>Positive responses (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times per week</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times per month</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Forestry Commission (Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2007)

Is this because BME groups tend to live in deprived inner-city communities where overall participation in outdoor recreation is lower?

There is a large body of qualitative evidence for under-representation, which suggests that BME groups are faced with additional barriers to accessing the countryside.
Research agenda:
An investigation into the application of the Forestry Commission’s Race Equality Scheme

• Aim: to provide information that will assist Forestry Commission in fulfilling its duties under the RRAA

• Key questions:
  • Why are BME groups under-represented?
  • How do the attitudes and perceptions of BME groups influence their use of woodlands?
  • How can we improve public engagement and outreach work at the local level?
  • How do we assess, consult upon, and monitor the impacts of FC policies and functions on BME groups?
Activities and methods

Scoping study
• Literature review
• Interviews with key stakeholders

Phase 1: Case study
• 4 BME community groups in Northampton and Wellingborough, UK
• Focus groups – discussions; photographs
• Accompanied site visits to Salcey Forest
• Participatory Action Research: involved community leaders and rangers
• Feedback workshop

Phase 2: GB-wide investigation
• 15 interviews with forest managers and front-line staff, etc
• 10 interviews with non-Forestry Commission experts
Summary of results

Salcey forest, Northamptonshire
1. South Asian Elders (Pravasi Mandal)

- 6 Asian elderly women from E. Africa & S. Asia; Gujarati & some English
- Very enthusiastic and engaged throughout
- On arrival: went straight for the play area
- Prompted memories of country walks while growing up
- Singing and clapping to traditional songs
- Picked flowers and leaves, discussed herbal & medicinal qualities
- Requested several repeat visits
2. Somali teenage boys (Somali Youth Forum)

• 7 muslim boys, aged 17-19, sons of recent immigrants, mainly born in UK, English speakers
• Behaved like other teenagers from similar urban environments
• Enjoyed the visit but more reserved, less well prepared, less comfortable with physical environment
• Some quite scared about wild animals, and concerned about cleanliness
• Comments and actions more obviously shaped by their position & performance within their peer group
3. Afro-Caribbean Children (WACA)

- 9 Afro-Caribbean boys and girls, 8-13 years; most with strong links to parents’ former home; one with special needs
- Focus group: comparisons with countries of parents’ origin
- Thoroughly enjoyed the unstructured play during the site visit: hide-and-seek over increasingly large areas of woodland
- Interest was lost during the unstructured activities; increasingly unruly
- Very similar to other groups of children from urban backgrounds
4. Young South Asian Mothers (Dostiyo)

- 9 Asian women and 4 children from central Northampton; mixed English language abilities
- Very reserved and passive, taking cues on how to respond from the researchers and rangers
- Appeared to value the unusual experience of participating in a research project and visiting a woodland
Discussion and conclusions

The BME population is extremely diverse:
  • The variation within a group is probably greater than between groups
  • Ethnicity is just one part of a person’s identity – gender, age, residential location, and social class are arguably more important determinants
  • Some generalisations can be made: e.g. preference for large social groups

Four factors that can influence BME access to woodlands:
  1. Non-ethnicity-related:
     • a) economic factors (leading, e.g. to restricted access to transport)
     • b) lack of awareness, knowledge, familiarity, confidence or interest
  2. Ethnicity-related:
     • c) cultural attitudes and preferences
     • d) feeling unwelcome or out of place

Two perspectives on ‘feeling out of place’:
  • The association in the public imagination of the English countryside with the ‘true’ English national identity, a refuge from the negative influences of urban multicultural life
  • A perceived risk, or direct experience, of racism, while visiting the countryside
Key recommendations

Research
• Improve the evidence base for BME under-representation
• Catchment area studies: qualitative and quantitative methods

Strategic actions
• Equality impact assessment and consultation for new policies
• Ethnic monitoring for all existing functions and policies
• Improve communications; design of interpretation material; staff training; targeted recruitment of staff and volunteers; partnership working; outreach work with BME communities
• Additional resources and high level support

Local actions
• Enhance the resources and capacity of front-line staff
• Extend the role of outreach work to integrate other functions of FC that relate to BME groups (e.g. monitoring, consultation, training, etc)
Thank you for your attention

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