

Where nature and culture coalesce: The social, cultural and political impact of outdoor recreation in Sheffield

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Where Nature and Culture Coalesce: The Social, Cultural and Political Impact of Outdoor Recreation in Sheffield.

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Sheffield – the Outdoor City

In 2014 the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned to undertake a research project on behalf of Sheffield City Council to gain an understanding of the importance of Outdoor Recreation in Sheffield, primarily in terms of its economic / fiscal value. The research objectives were to quantify the size, scale and scope of the outdoor sector and to assess its economic footprint. The over-arching aim of the study was to inform Sheffield City Council's future plans to reposition the city's image to reflect the unique topography and outdoor recreation offer, with a central focus on enhancing economic benefits from the outdoor sector. As a result of this analysis we were able to quantify participation levels in Sheffield and make comparisons to other major cities (see Gregory et al., 2014). However, due to the resource confines of the study (both in terms of the timescale and finance) this did not include an evaluation of the social, health or wellbeing benefits associated with outdoor spaces; all of which are frequently neglected by research and policy on landscapes ([Scott et al., 2009](#)).

In overlooking such factors, we risk neglecting other important dimensions that contribute to the popularity of outdoor spaces. Sheffield is the greenest city in England, with

an estimated two million trees. It is the only major city to include part of a national park, the Peak District, within its borders. The unique topography of the city, which sits on seven hills, provides a range of opportunities for outdoor recreation and accommodates a wide spectrum of activities from walking to downhill mountain biking. The extensive supply of parks, amenity green spaces and public footpaths generate a range of outdoor resources that for the majority of residents are in very close proximity to home. Such green spaces are supported by a strong outdoor infrastructure which includes world class climbing environments, the country's only city centre mountain biking facility and an annual outdoor festival: the 'Outdoor City Weekender'. These are likely to be some of the many reasons why participation in outdoor recreation in Sheffield is significantly above the national average (Gregory et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding these attractions, the idea of Sheffield as an outdoor city is somewhat of a paradox given its long industrial history. Indeed, until recently the city had a reputation for the oppressing living conditions that were commonplace during the industrial revolution, and was synonymous with the perpetual smell of smelting lead and suffocating clouds of smog. As Dafoe (cited in Gaynor, 1997: 12) laments during his 18th century tour of Britain: 'This town of Sheffield is very populous and large, the streets narrow, and the houses dark and black, occasioned by the continued smoke of the forges, which are always at work'. Today, such vast industrialisation and urban expansion has led to the juxtaposition of urban and rural landscapes in a manner unlike anywhere else in Britain. On the surrounding Moors, which are a major hub of outdoor recreation, the vista oscillates between natural, picturesque valleys and the views of the inner-city and the landscape is scattered with visual reminders of Sheffield's by-gone lead and steel industry. Equally, outdoor space, and links to it via bus, train and footpath, are fully integrated with the fabric of the city. Sheffield therefore provides a unique opportunity to analyse and understand the impact of outdoor recreation on its residents

In this chapter we explore the social and cultural significance of outdoor activities in Sheffield's emerging municipal spaces, whilst addressing the political consequences that such analyses may have on the promotion of physical activity. Following a review of the literature,

we advocate a move beyond economic narratives towards a more holistic analysis of outdoor recreation that considers the complex interplay between sports, landscapes, people and places (Palmer, 2010). Utilising data from an online survey with over 2000 respondents, we then elucidate three key findings: (1) that participation in outdoor activities carry spiritual/life affirming qualities (2) that such feelings are accentuated by the participant's relationship with nature (3) that both feelings of spirituality and a positive relationship with nature can contribute to physical and mental wellbeing that extends beyond the activity itself. This evidence contributes to a more rounded assessment of the 'value' of outdoor recreation which takes into account a broader range of social indicators beyond those which are more easily monetised (Marques et al., 2015). To conclude, we consider the policy implications that emerge from this discussion in relation to health promotion in Sheffield. More specifically, we evaluate the potential contributions that outdoor recreation could make to the 'Move More Plan' (2013), a city wide initiative which aims to improve the health of its residents through regular physical activity, as well as the practical challenges that may arise in implementing these.

Conceptualising the Outdoors – Rethinking the Notion of 'Value'

In recent years there has been a growing body of literature which focuses on the economic impact of outdoor environments (Gratton, 2013; Ormerod, 2014). Central to these commentaries has been an analysis of the financial rewards that can be accrued through participation in outdoor activities, and the long term benefits that such participation may have on tourism, trade, employment and local/regional promotion. Through this outcome approach (Pigram, 2004) to sport and leisure provision, natural environments are subject to technical/managerial analysis, and the use-value of outdoor spaces is quantified for the benefit of relevant stakeholders. Policy makers, administrators and managers are charged with identifying positive outcomes and delivering opportunities that can help to accommodate these experiences in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible (Pigram and Jenkins, 2006).

Adopting one such approach, [Marques et al \(2015\)](#) identify three explanatory factors for participation in nature-based leisure: environmental attitudes, visit motives (which includes, but is not limited to available attractions), and the perceived value of engagement. This conceptual framework, which they label the 'activity preference model' (2015: p.3) is said to incorporate both the socio-psychological determinants ('push' factors), as well as the contextual/environmental elements ('pull' factors) that influence peoples' propensity towards particular outdoor activities. Drawing on quantitative data collected within Portuguese National parks, and using structural equation modelling to test a multitude of hypotheses, trends were identified with respect to the positive relationship between pro-environmental attitudes and enjoyment of nature, pro-environmental attitudes and study attractions, and cultural attractions and recreation. The use-value of this approach, claim the authors, is that participant behaviour can be rationalised and subsequently predicted so that managers of outdoor environments can make objective decisions about resource allocation, as well as considering the financial impact of alternative policies and programmes ([Pigram and Jenkins, 2006](#)).

The difficulties with adopting such models are numerous and well-documented. [Sniehotta \(2009\)](#) contends that human behaviour and human actions are not the result of a linear decision-making process, but are states of being that are constantly in-flux. In the same vein, [Scott et al \(2009\)](#) point out that quantitative land-use models have a tendency to oversimplify the complex embodied and multi-sensory relationships between people, places and spaces and that in limiting motives to a finite list of factors, such models end up hiding more than they reveal. Indeed, there is a tendency to conflate *experience* with *perception*, the difference being that the former refers to a mode of participation that is immediately lived, as opposed to one that is cognitively, and retrospectively processed (Merleau – Ponty, 1962). This, one might argue, is a significant problem for policy makers as it is only by understanding these pleasurable, sensory experiences that we can foster, understand, and therefore promote sustained participation in outdoor activities ([Allen-Collinson and Leledaki, 2014](#)). Furthermore, in generalising about users of these spaces we risk ignoring the social, cultural and political conditions which underpin, and at times restrict the access of particular user-

groups, which is especially problematic given the predominately white, middle class, male composition of many lifestyle sports ([Wheaton, 2010](#)).

The meaning of space is not static. People 'see' and 'feel' as they move, and 'our knowledge of the environment undergoes continuous formation in very course of our moving in it' (Ingold, 2000: 230). Brown et al's (2008) analysis of cross-country mountain biking is exemplary in this respect, as they explain how embodied, emotional, sensory and kinaesthetic experiences condition the experiences of the riders. Drawing on footage from head-mounted video cameras, they explore how the smoothness of the riding surface, the pungency of flowers and the crunch of the ground under-tyre become 'entangled' (2008: 7) in the practitioners experience of outdoor environments. Similarly, Atkinson (2015) has shown how the often harsh, lonely environments encountered by fell-runners can lead to positive emotional responses that are, paradoxically, facilitated by the 'pleasures of suffering' (2015: 53). These commentaries, and others like them present an important challenge to evolutionary perspectives which intimate that human beings have innate, intuitive drives to explore the outdoors, and refocuses attention on the diverse, situated and relational nature of subjective, sensuous and embodied interpretations of sporting spaces (Franklin, 2002). This is particularly important in relation to those activities that take on the outskirts of Sheffield, as the convergence of nature and culture compels us to seek more dynamic approaches that link the material, social and affective dimensions of place.

Thus, whilst the visual perception of outdoor environments is important, other senses play an integral role in our kinaesthetic exchanges with place and space. Climbing a rock face or swimming in a lake are activities that are defined as much defined by how that activity feels (haptic), how it smells and tastes and what it sounds like (olfactory) as it is about how it may 'look'. In Humberstone's (2011) account of windsurfing she talks of the significance of this 'embodied affective', using her own narrative to underpin her analysis. She reflects on the subtle movement of 'the water rushing past her feet and legs', the 'smell of the salt and mud' and the 'power of the wind and the ability of my body to work with the wind and the waves' (2011: 502), and in so doing reveals the hidden complexities of her embodied engagement

with the natural environment. As a result, the assumption that bodily sensation is a less valid lens for qualifying the 'use value' of various landscapes is called into question (Brown, 2013).

Given the analysis that we have hitherto conducted, we are drawn to the idea of the wilderness as a theoretical tool as it is a concept which represents the complex and often contradictory nature of the landscapes, and human relationships, that we are investigating. In its purest form the wilderness is tantamount to a remote, untouched place – disordered and dangerous, with little or no sign of human cultivation. Wild places, writes Nash (2001: xii) evoke images of natural landscapes that exist 'out there', beyond the safety of civilisation' – a journey into the unknown. For Berg (2014) these romantic visions of the wild are paramount in most outdoor sports, in 'which remoteness, self-sufficiency and contact with nature are key to ones sense of departure' (2014: p.9). Overcoming the elements and conquering natural terrain is, to paraphrase Robinson (2015) a way for individuals to seek redemption and a new significance for themselves, by overcoming the physical pain and mental suffering that such activities may entail. They are rule-free, have no extrinsic value, and provide opportunities to push one body's to the limit in order to experience a form of spirituality that is unparalleled in modern sports and activities (Rinehart, 2007).

These 'wild' spaces are gathering mass appeal in 21st century societies, as old forms of recognition (i.e. class, work, geographical community) make way for individualised forms of identity that are defined less by one's occupation than the choices we make as consumers (Bauman, 2007). Under these conditions, there is less appetite for the highly regulated, intensely surveyed and rigidly organised spaces of modern sports, as people increasingly seek more expressive, creative environments. As a result, we have seen the emergence of a new 'lifestyle sport' movement (Wheaton, 2004), in which participation has moved from institutionalised forms of engagement to informal attachments that are organised around a particular 'way of life'. These sports, to paraphrase Robinson (2015) have a participatory ideology that promotes fun, hedonism and self-actualisation, and often take place in spaces, such as those outlined herein, which lack regulation and control. In a world which is increasingly defined by urban living (proximity with others, indoor habitats and man-made

structures), and the cultural condition of late-capitalism (work, rationalised sport, consumerism) – that are predictable and safe, but emotionally boring, participation in these sports can facilitate a quest for excitement ([Elias and Dunning, 1986](#)) that allows people to infuse their chosen sport and/or landscape with the meaning and purpose that they may have otherwise lost. Indeed, the symbolic meaning of these sports, and the ‘wild’ spaces that they inhabit, is often so fervent that participants will resort to environmental and political action in order to preserve and protect them (see Wheaton, 2007).

In this respect, it is not difficult to envisage lifestyle sports providing a valuable resource with respect to physical activity and health promotion, especially given their unique relationship with nature. In Allen-Collinson et al’s (2011) evaluation of an outdoor physical activity programme in Wales, engagement with the outdoors was shown to stimulate a range of senses, and this sensual stimulation was hugely influential in encouraging positive attitudes towards exercise. This was particularly important for participants with sensory impairments, as these individuals were able to engage with a wider range of stimuli than those normally available in more artificial sporting environments. Benefits can also be derived from the liminal qualities of such activities, which is especially important when trying to motivate those, including young people and women for instance, who may have been marginalised by more populist pursuits. This was particularly evident in research by Frederick and Anderson (1999), in which they show how isolation, tranquillity and affective engagement in physical activity can free women from domestic and parental responsibilities and make a significant contribution to their mental and physical wellbeing.

It is important to remember, however that the wilderness, and by virtue of this, the value of activities that reside in such spaces, are difficult to define in absolute terms (Dougherty, 2007). Natural environments can never be wholly so, since few outdoor spaces in the 21st century remain free of human influence. Anyone seeking solitude in any of the UK’s National Parks will no doubt recognise this problem, as it becomes increasingly difficult to discover untouched environments that do not converge with roads, machinery and agriculture (Brown, 2013). As a consequence of this, our encounters with the wilderness are often as

much about psycho-corporeal detachment from civilisation as they are about geographical distance (Oelschlaeger, 1991). Indeed, Krein (2014) posits that while physical and psychological challenges, isolation and minimalist living may be important factors in experiencing wilderness, these qualities can just as easily be found within the confines of civilisation. As such, it could be argued that such a rigid nature-culture binary is both theoretically and pragmatically untenable

Given these limitations, perhaps a better way of viewing the relationship between 'natural' and 'urban' activities is through Derrida's (1974) logic of the trace. Derrida contends that Western philosophy has always been limited by its reliance on binaries such as nature/culture, life/death, black/white and masculine/feminine. In each of these binaries there is always a power imbalance in which one binary achieves superiority over another. In pre-modern civilisations, for example, the wilderness, and by virtue of this, aspects of nature, were seen as the unknown, the disordered and the dangerous, and as a result of this 'the largest portion of the energy of early civilisation was directed at conquering wildness in nature and eliminating it' (Nash, 2001: 24). To some extent, such binary thinking is still prevalent in studies around lifestyle sports, in which nature-based activities are seen as a means to explore positive body-self relationships, whereas urban activities are seen to be increasingly sterilized, standardised, and bereft of all meaning. However, the literature that we have addressed herein demonstrates that natural environments are only meaningful where they are exposed to their binary other (urban), and that a multitude of meanings can exist within the same natural environment. It is important, therefore to remain open-minded about the value or purpose of the outdoors with regard to sport and physical activity, since the wilderness and its associated affective experiences are idiosyncratic, and can be found in the most unexpected places (Farley and Roberts, 2012).

Experiencing Nature through Outdoor Recreation

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common interpretation of the great outdoors in Sheffield was that it provided the outdoor enthusiasts with a unique gateway to nature ([Humberstone, 2011](#)). This engagement with the natural world, which is integral to many lifestyle sports, arouses positive emotions in individuals that were linked to specific sensory experiences:

Clean air to breath. Smells that are earth and plants not engines. Textures that are rock and mud, not concrete and tarmac (participant 2000).

It is just nice to be able to see trees, fields, and hear birds singing. This time of year especially lifts my spirits as spring progresses (participant 1655)

I love to get out in the country and breathe some fresh air. I love the wind in my face and the quietness of it all on a sunny day when you're up on the hills (participant 58)

Such responses demonstrate how somatic experience, in the form of visual, haptic and olfactory feedback, is central to physical activity in wild, natural environments ([Allen-Collinson and Leledaki, 2014](#)). For these participants, their appreciation of the outdoors is not instinctive or passive, but *affective*, as the meaning of different spaces is entirely dependent on the way that that space was 'enunciated' (de Certeau, 1984: 98). The natural environment is perceived through the senses, and each of these creates a number of sensations and moods that are subtly linked to their motivations for participation. Of particular interest here is the way in which these affective experiences are conditioned by social encounters with others. Many detailed with great enthusiasm their encounters with other nature lovers, whereas some talked at length about the joys of spending time with their children/grandchildren. Furthermore, respondents described the collective memories and sense of nostalgia that were evoked by certain locations, particularly when such locations were an integral part of their childhood. For

Casey (1996), this demonstrates the gathering power of place, of which the body is central, as individuals, often from different backgrounds, can be drawn together to a space or landscape through a collective set of everyday experiences.

That said, there was much variance in the participant's definition and interpretation of the natural. In particular, evidence from this study challenges orthodox readings of nature that set it apart from humanity ([Brymer and Gray, 2009](#)). This was most evident when participants talked about the relationship between nature and the city:

Sheffield is amazing! Where else can you go for a nice Italian coffee in the morning, climb/run all day, then go to a brilliant pub in the evening? (participant 31)

It's a stunning natural resource. A playground on our doorstep. You can be in the centre of town and look towards the hills and they call you to play and explore (participant 1010)

These excerpts suggest that the relationship between natural and artificial, indoor and outdoor, industrial and non-industrial environments is more fluid than some academic readings have suggested. It also shows how the social, cultural and historical contexts of sport and society continually shape our experience of the natural world. Individuals talked simultaneously about vehicles and flowers, consumption and climbing, work and play, and in many cases it was the presence, not the absence of artificial structures, materials and environments that accentuates their experience of nature ([Butryn and Masucci, 2009](#)). For instance, in articulating their love of the Peak District many participants described the importance of Sheffield's rich industrial heritage; identifying education (of themselves, their children and their grandchildren), civic pride and the benefits of tourism as reasons for such interest. This paradox sits uncomfortably with the traditional belief that nature and the wilderness are separate to humanity, and intimates a more complex understanding of nature appreciation that is heavily influenced by

interpersonal experiences, social identities and geographical location ([Brymer and Gray, 2009](#)).

Outdoor Recreation as a Spiritual Journey

Their engagement with nature-based sport lead many of the participants to talk of the spiritual/life affirming qualities of outdoor activities (Humberstone, 2011). Again, this was often manifest in the sensuous qualities of the outdoors:

It's more than a way of life or lifestyle choice, it is at the very heart of who I am. It gives definition and purpose to me as an individual...it is the single guiding light sustaining me through the days and weeks (participant 7)

The great outdoors puts you back in touch with yourself and your feelings. It makes you feel part of something bigger and more important than everyday preoccupations (participant 26)

For Taylor (2007) such religious sentiments are typical of nature-based recreation, in which sensual experiences and personal exploration allow individuals to seek new 'spiritual paths' (2007: 924) and become 'more compassionate towards both people and nature' (2007: 924). This sense of belonging with nature and 'oneness' with the outdoors represents an important affective dimension of outdoor recreation, as individuals seek a range of sensuous experiences that may be unavailable in urban environments. Against the homogenous space of consumer culture and the fragmentation of identity, the sacred spaces of Sheffield offer themselves up as a type of holy land; a series of symbolic, absolute and communitarian spaces, which accommodate the disruption and reformation of embodied identities. In some instances, these newly formed identities promoted a sense of 'ecophilia' (Hung, 2008: 16) that

resulted in a deep appreciation for the transformative, healing properties of nature and the need to protect it from urban expansion.

Such environmentalist attitudes are facilitated by two specific features of outdoor recreation. The first relates to the challenging natural terrain and the unpredictability of the weather:

I like the adrenaline rush and sense of satisfaction I get when navigating difficult terrain. It feels good to take risks and know that the landscape can punish you (Participant 13)

Participants such as this described a preference for 'natural' 'unspoilt' and 'unsanitised' environments, and the 'rush' associated with overcoming a natural feature or a 'rough' section of terrain, by foot, hand or bike, under adverse natural conditions. For Atkinson (2011: 1), this demonstrates how corporeal punishment and sensory overload can lead to a state of 'voluptuous panic', which is actively sought by outdoor enthusiasts. In these moments of panic, time stands still and the individual may begin to experience a bio-psychological state in which the reward is solely in movement and flight instead of extrinsic or will orientated goals. Similar sentiments also surfaced when participants described their respect for the natural environment:

It's nice to be in touch with something more permanent and ancient and beautiful than, well, almost everything we see every day (participant 19)

Dubay (1999: 56) describes awe as the primary draw of the outdoors, as individuals repeatedly return to nature during periods of rationalisation and urbanisation to satisfy an 'aching need for the infinite'. In this sense, perhaps the most significant role played by the outdoors is that it helps people to 'switch-off' – to abandon one's mind, and to not 'think' of anything at all. It reminds users that there is more to life than work, and facilitates a deeper, more positive

understanding of the self and one's place in the social world that are unlike those available in institutionalised sporting contexts.

Alternative Narratives of Health and Wellbeing

The final theme that emerges from this data is the positive effect that outdoor recreation has on the participants' health and wellbeing. Escaping from civilisation, sensory engagement with nature, feelings of risk/challenge and a sense of spiritual enlightenment – which participants felt were facilitated by outdoor recreation - were all said to greatly improve their physical, mental and emotional health:

It gives me the freedom to unwind from a stressful job. It lets me practice a skill a value very highly. It keeps me healthy, and prolongs my life. It encourages me to... look after my body...It gives me a wealth of friends of all ages. It helps develop social diversity – I've met people I couldn't possibly have met otherwise. It helps build confidence.

(Participant 9)

This statement is indicative of many of the responses received in this study and reveals a number of things about the participants' interpretations of 'health', as well as the role that sport can play in facilitating this. In the first instance, it reinforces the 'cathartic' qualities of escape ([Elias and Dunning, 1986](#)) and the health benefits that may come from the sense of detachment described in earlier sections. For numerous participants, this was a particularly effective way of alleviating the increasingly common symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression:

I, like many others suffer from stress and anxiety problems. When I'm in the great outdoors I have found it is the best therapy on earth (Participant 6)

With mental health problems, wide open space, greenery, being able to get out in fresh air and calm helps lift my mood and keep anxiety at bay (Participant 40)

Access to nature has long been associated with increased longevity, decreased mental illness and more frequent physical activity participation, and in this study such benefits were mainly accrued via the sense of enlightenment that comes from feeling intimately 'connected' to nature ([Humberstone, 2011](#)). However in Sheffield, the proximity of the Peak District and the convergence of nature and culture may bring other health benefits that are unavailable in other contexts. Individuals pointed to the advantages of being near to nature, such as when nature was incidental to some other everyday activity such as commuting (via foot, bike or car), and/or when they were able to imagine nature in the broadest sense when they were thinking about it in the workplace. The latter of these findings is particularly interesting, as it supports claims that individuals need not necessarily be 'present' in nature to enjoy it ([Pretty et al., 2005](#)), and that the health benefits of green exercise extends beyond direct participation.

As such, this research indicates that outdoor activities in Sheffield involve a significant emotional investment that is manifest in the participants' irrepressible desire to seek new embodied pleasures. Against the backdrop of an increasingly neo-liberal society, the individuals in this study are drawn to the potentially infinite number of interpretations that the outdoors may offer, and gain pleasure in the knowledge that that no two experiences are the same. Such diversity is interpreted as deeply enriching, and therefore good for their health, as it allows individuals to suspend the weight of the world and remove themselves from the restrained drudgery of daily life. Furthermore, in making this commitment one may establish sensuous solidarities ([Shilling and Mellor, 1997](#)) with people from a variety of socio-cultural groups who share their passion for the outdoors, which could potentially lead to increased levels of confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. For us, this finding carries profound implications for understanding outdoor activity, as it helps to interpret the significance of bodily transcendence in physical activity and more importantly, it's use value in the promotion of non-Western values and holistic notions of health.

Policy Contributions – The Move More Plan for Sheffield

Following the 2012 Olympics in London, the City of Sheffield was successful in receiving major legacy funding to establish hub sites for a new Department of Health initiative to deliver education, research and clinical services. The funding created the prestigious National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine (NCSEM) which operates through projects in the three areas which act as drivers for lasting change through promoting health and wellbeing at a population level. Parallel to this, a city-wide public health strategy entitled 'Move More' was launched, with the remit of making physical activity more appealing and accessible to Sheffield's residents. In consultation with over 100 local stakeholders, including the Voluntary Sector, the NHS, both of the city's Universities, the Local Authority, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, and Sheffield International Venues, the Move More Programme has developed a long term strategy – the Move More Plan (2013), in which they outline six key outcomes: (1) to empower communities to take responsibility for and ownership over their own health and wellbeing (2) to develop an 'active environment' that encourages people to be more active in everyday life (3) to ensure that physical activity is at the heart of every family (4) to promote physical activity as a viable treatment for certain types of ill-health and to encourage active schools (5) and workplaces (6).

What is surprising about this strategy, given the analysis that we have hitherto conducted, is that it includes little explicit reference to the value of the outdoors in the promotion of physical activity. This, it would seem, follows a wider trend in which those responsible for sport, physical activity and health overlook the benefits of alternative physical activities in favour of more traditional modes of participation that offer 'safe' activities in 'predictable' and 'risk-free' environments. Furthermore, there is often a reluctance to promote certain outdoor activities on account of their spontaneity, informality and (perceived) antagonisms with 'outsiders' (Tomlinson et al., 2005).

Sheffield's proximity / convergence with the Peak District National Park and voluminous green space provision, as well as the willingness of many its residents to participate in outdoor

activity, makes it a valuable asset in the promotion of cheap, accessible and inclusive physical activity. This can undoubtedly play a valuable role in the attainment of many of the outcomes outlined in the Move More strategic plan. One such contribution is in the development of active schools (outcome 5). Research suggests that physical activity rates witness the biggest decline between the ages of 13-15 years (BHF, 2015), and that in many cases this drop off can lead to life-long sedentary habits. Explanations for this in Physical Education include an overemphasis on rules and competition ([Tinning, 1991](#)), anxieties around self/body image (Mason, 1995), bullying/harassment (Holman et al., 2013) and the rigid/ethnocentric nature of the English curriculum. Participation in outdoor activity carries very few of these stigmas. Most activities, especially those that align with the notion of lifestyle sport, take place in environments that lack regulation and control, and are therefore not subject to the kind of rigid performance discourse ([Tinning, 1991](#)) that prevails in Physical Education. Individuals pit themselves against the landscape and the elements, not each other, in so doing eliminate many of the insidious structures that maintain and uphold such competitive antagonisms. Perhaps more importantly, however, is that outdoor activities may be an effective way to address sedentary activity amongst school-leavers between the ages of 16-24, as individuals are able to enjoy free, unrestricted access to natural environments.

Evidence from numerous studies suggests that one of the biggest barriers to participation in outdoor activities involves the accessibility of such activities, including the financial and temporal implications of travelling to and from outdoor locations (Countryside Agency, 2005). Findings from this research suggest that such issues may be less pertinent in Sheffield, where the unique convergence of the urban and the rural/natural and artificial mean that accessing outdoor environments is less difficult than in other major cities. The spiritual connection that many of the participants had with nature may also be important in this respect, as it not only encourages more frequent engagement in physical activity, but may lead to an increase in environmental awareness ([Wheaton, 2007](#)) that compels people to protect the environments that accommodate and sustain such activity. Whilst we recognise the idealistic claims made on behalf of the latter, and understand that the countryside is often subject to

middle-class ideologies and restricted access laws that can at times prevent inclusive participation, we would envisage this becoming a key responsibility for the Move More ambassadors outlined in the Move More Plan (section 5.1) in cooperation with park rangers and education services within the Peak District National Park, whose job it would be to educate residents about the value of physical activity in outdoor locations and the responsibility that comes with using them.

Throughout this study, we have indicated that the role of the family is pivotal in the participant's enjoyment of the outdoors. However, the influence of the family in lifestyle sports and nature-based sport is complex and multi-faceted, which makes it difficult to define its role in the promotion of physical activity (outcome 3). Like many traditional sports, it is clear that the family are hugely important in determining people's enthusiasm for outdoor physical activity, and when family members are encouraging their children to engage in such activity their participation levels tend to be significantly higher ([Wheeler, 2012](#)). Literature also points to the inclusive nature of lifestyle sports, as well as their role in challenging traditional stereotypes such as those associated with female domesticity ([Spowart et al., 2010](#)). That said, participants in these activities still hail from predominately white, middle class backgrounds who, according to statistics, have the best physical activity levels of any socio-economic groups (HSCIC, 2015). In this vein, we would support Move More Plan's aim to 'connect people and families with physical activity' (2015:27) whilst ensuring that a focus on family is central in signposting and promotion of certain activities. Furthermore, given the educational value identified in the discussion above, it would be wise to extend outdoor opportunities in schools, since family members can play a key role in ensuring positive, responsible attitudes towards outdoor physical activity.

Through offering inclusive opportunities with a key focus on Sheffield's recently promoted status as the 'outdoor city', we believe that the Move More strategy will be in a better position to achieve the ambitious goal of 'empowering' the residents of Sheffield to take responsibility for, and ownership of their own physical activity (outcome 1). In our view empowerment can be achieved through the solitude, risk taking, free-thinking and joy that are

offered by these wilderness environments. Outdoor physical activity, in this respect is more than just a means to an end, but a spiritual journey, in which mind and soul are enlightened and one's attachment with work and routine is temporarily broken. Though a process of challenge and self-discovery, participants are able to re-invent themselves, perform alternative identities, negotiate social relationships, and achieve a greater sense of ownership over their bodily movement than they would get in more 'urban' settings. Such outcomes are difficult to quantify, and are unlikely to provide the kinds of tangible results that local authorities are keen to promote, but are essential if residents are going to achieve the level of wellbeing that the Move More strategy aims to deliver.

Concluding Comments

Sport England and the Outdoor Industries Association recently published 'Getting Active Outdoors' (2015), a detailed insight study into both the supply and demand for outdoor activities in England. This report highlighted that 'being outdoors' itself is important, rather than the sport or activity; it's the environment which is enticing. The government's new sport and physical activity strategy 'Sporting Future' (HMGOV, 2015) also acknowledged the value of the new insight and made a pledge towards greater support for the outdoor recreation sector: *"we... want to see the outdoor activities sector thrive and grow as an important alternative way that people can engage in sport and physical activity"* (2015: 24) The strategy highlighted that the UK is fortunate to have some of the best countryside and outdoor space in the world and vowed to *"support the outdoor activities sector and to give government and Sport England a clearer policy role in encouraging outdoor activities"* (2015: 25).

At a local level, Sheffield has launched itself as 'The Outdoor City' with a new strategic plan to grow economic impact and further develop recreational zones within the city. There are set to be strong links between the new Outdoor City Strategy (currently at draft stage) and the More Move strategy to work collectively towards increasing participation. The Outdoor City Strategy will be connected to the city-wide physical activity strategy Move More and will adopt

the philosophy and the approach outlined in that programme to reduce inequality in participation and therefore return the greatest health, social and economic benefit for the city. The Strategy outlines 10 priorities for the 2016. These include: Priority 8: *Collaboration with Move More to Roll out a Participation Plan across the City for Sheffield's Outdoors*. This integration is a positive step towards a collective and joined up effort to promote outdoor activity at a population level, which receives further backing from the new national strategy for sport and physical activity. There is however further scope to assess the wider 'value' of Sheffield's natural geographic assets in terms of their social importance and the contribution that they make to an enhanced quality of life for individuals, which may in turn generate wider societal benefits.

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