

## Outdoors and Health Network

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## VC Roundtable Discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009

*Speakers – Professor Andrew Church, Professor David Uzzell, Dr Birgitta Gatersleben, Dr Peter Varley, John Watkins and Dr Jin Park.*

*Participants – Dr Sarah-Anne Muñoz, Professor Richard Mitchell, Dr Liz O'Brien*

Nine OHN members took part in the third video conference roundtable discussion, with presentations from Professor Andrew Church, Professor David Uzzell and Dr Birgitta Gatersleben, Dr Pete Varley, John Watkins and Dr Jin Park. Each of them discussed their work and research interests and how they relate to the OHN.

The first presentation, “People, environment and leisure”, was made by Andrew Church who discussed his and Neil Ravenscroft’s research at Brighton University. Andrew talked through some of his latest projects focused on water recreation, domestic gardens, air quality and encouraging people with different health background to spend time and to exercise in outdoor environments. He also talked about the risks associated with outdoor exercise, which is a reoccurring theme within the OHN. The relationship between humans and nature was discussed in terms of emotional reactions, frustrations and disappointments, the meaning of homes and having access to a garden, power relations and memories in the garden. Andrew also discussed work they had done regarding the potential for communication technologies to provide predictive air quality information to people with respiratory problems and how this can allow them to avoid high pollution areas. A variety of methods had been used in the various projects including interviews, stakeholder workshops, GIS, blogs, posters and narrative analysis of the Mass Observation Archive.

David and Birgitta then talked about their work at the University of Surrey, in the field of environmental psychology. Their five main areas of research are risk, transport, restoration, access to the countryside and heritage and environment education. They talked through examples of projects they have worked on relating to these areas, which used a variety of methodologies and theoretical frameworks. Methodologies included focus groups, surveys and questionnaires, observation and behaviour mapping studies, field and lab experimental studies, oral histories and discourse analysis. One particular point which was made in their presentation was the role of emotion and how that can enhance an individuals’ experience of a situation. This was a point followed up by Pete Varley.

Dr Pete Varley from Manchester Metropolitan University described his work as a sociologist, with particular interests in ecosophy, tourism, marketing and leisure. He discussed projects he has worked on in the past, particularly the ones to do with tourism and adventure, which mainly use qualitative methods and in particular ethnography. He thought that out of all the disciplines his work covers, adventure education possibly has the strongest body of work on the benefits of outdoor experience, along the lines of personal and social development, and environmental

understanding. Pete also picked up on David and Birgitta's point about the outdoors being 'multi-sensual' and agreed that it is something which could be explored. Pete also highlighted the fact that too much time is spent observing people that are not willing to spend time outdoors while the willing and able are being ignored. He ended by saying that his particular interest is children's use of the outdoors and pointed out that television personalities, Ray Mears and Bear Grylls have encouraged children to embrace the outdoors, this may be something to think about. His interests predominantly are to do with memory, magic and enchantment of outdoor places especially for children and how this can generate long-term 'customer loyalty' to the outdoors.

Next, John Watkins from Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) discussed his role in policy issues and his role in their research agenda. Health and wellbeing are high on the agenda for CCW as health is a priority in Wales, with obesity and cancer on the increase. He talked about how the green infrastructure idea is becoming important in Wales' future development. Most of CCW's research is based around terrestrial, marine and freshwater research. John is looking to the OHN to experience different disciplines and how he can work with them in order to further CCW's knowledge and policies.

Jin Park from the Centre for Mountain Studies finished off the session by talking about her research and giving some examples of how we understand health and wellbeing. She is particularly interested in factors influencing individuals' behaviour when making choices to use the outdoors or not and what are the barriers and motivators. She also raised some points about the outdoors:

- Are we clear what the 'outdoors' indicates and who the potential users are from this research?
- Why do some people use the outdoors and others not?
- Is it difficult for people to feel comfortable in outdoor spaces?

Jin finished by saying that once it is certain that outdoor use is beneficial, the next step should be to determine how to promote and sustain outdoor use.

David Uzzell added that there were some very interesting points raised from the presentations and all in different contexts. They have opened up several areas for collaboration in the future that can be further discussed at the Surrey workshop on the 25<sup>th</sup> June.

Particular issues that Andrew Church felt were pertinent to the outputs of the Outdoors and Health Network were:

- Outdoor health – sources of evidence, research processes and funding
- Outdoor health – domestic spaces
- Outdoor exercise – frustrations and disappointments
- Outdoor exercise, risk and vulnerable groups

Sarah-Anne thanked all the participants and concluded by reminding everyone that the next meeting will be the Surrey workshop on 25<sup>th</sup> June.

*Summary prepared by Lindsay Grant and Jayne Tinsley, SDRC, June 2009.*