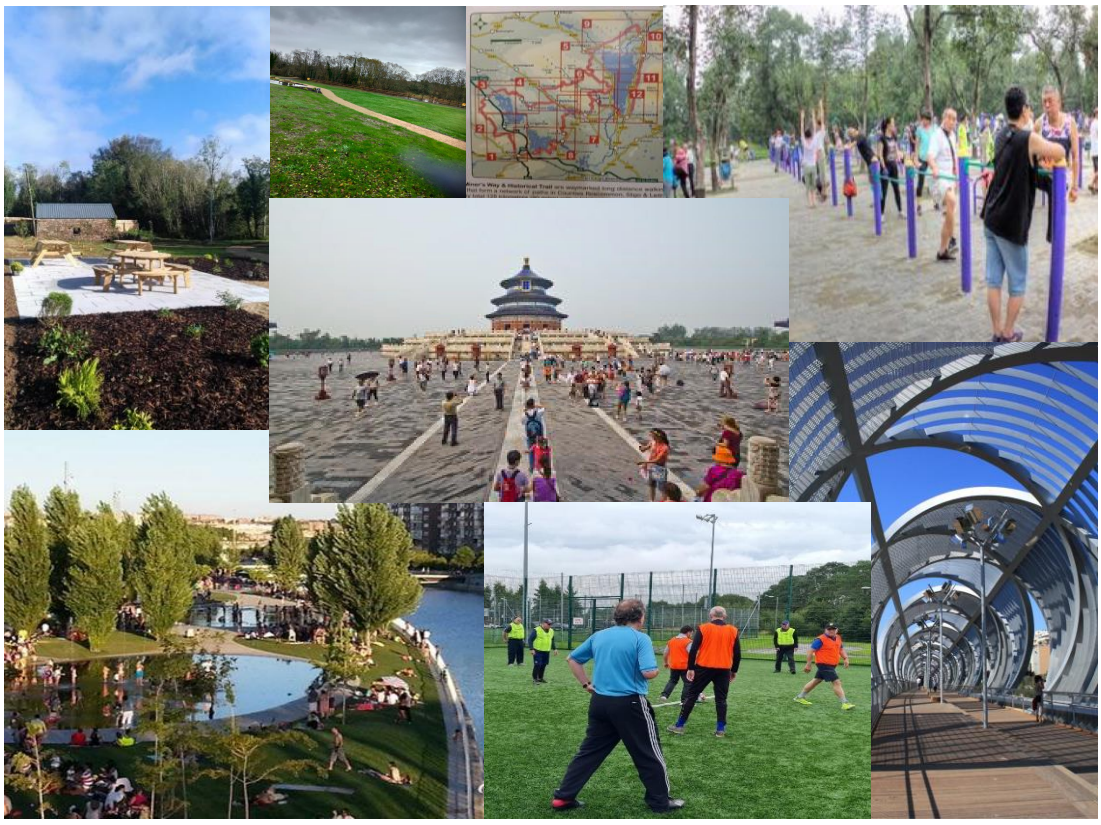
Straightforward
Research and Development

Age & Opportunity

PEER RESEARCH ON PUBLIC SPACES



Age & Opportunity
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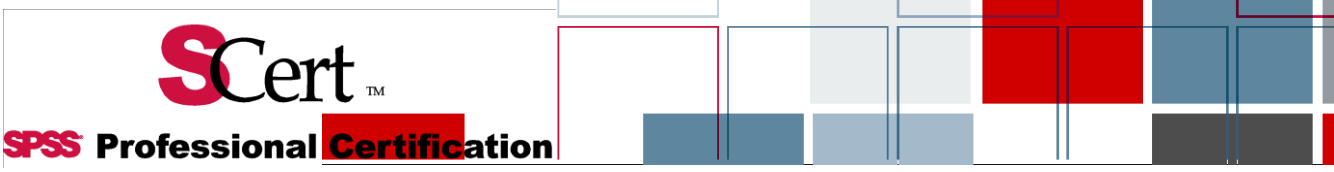

This research was funded by the Sport Ireland Research Grants Scheme, a scheme which aims to support research endeavours for the Irish sports sector. The scheme provides an opportunity for sporting bodies to undertake research on issues that are relevant to their own unique contexts and provides a platform for NGBs/LSPs/Funded Bodies to build meaningful relationships with the third level sector whilst building their understanding and capability on how to do research.

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Section 1 Executive Summary

This research was commissioned by Age & Opportunity to carry out a qualitative and quantitative study on the barriers and motivators of using public space for physical activity in Ireland using public patient involvement (PPI).

General information:

1. Peer researchers across Ireland interviewed a total of 232 older people aged over 50 years of age. Following cleaning of the data, 223 responses were analysed for the primary research data of this research[1].

2. The response achieved was closely representative of the population sample. The majority of respondents were aged between 70-79, with a slightly lower percentage of respondents aged over 50. Feedback from the peer researchers outlined that it was difficult to encourage people aged between 50 and 59 to respond to the research as they did not consider themselves to be 'older people'.

Findings:

1. There is a high level of proximity to open space which can be used by respondents for outdoor recreation. Almost 60% live within a five-minute walk to such open space, 65% within a ten-minute walk. There was a significant difference in proximity across urban and rural areas with 87% of those located in urban areas living within a ten-minute walk compared to 54% in rural areas.

2. 80% of respondents indicated that they are happy to use the open space which is nearest to them for the purposes of outdoor recreation, 16% said they just don't use that space and 5% said they don't use it due to a number of reasons.

3. In terms of type of open space, the largest percentage of respondents 25% live beside a green area, followed by 22% living beside a walk or footpath and 21% indicating a park was their closest open space available for outdoor recreation.

4. The majority of respondents indicated that while there are other spaces available they are happy to use the one which is closest to them. For those that did not prefer to use the space closest to them, more than a quarter (28%) indicated that it would be more than 30 minutes to get to that facility.

[1] 37 questionnaires were extracted prior to analysis, as a number of entries were duplicated and a number not fully completed.

5. Almost all respondents (96%) indicated that they are able to travel to and from public spaces on their own or independently, for example, walk there on their own or drive themselves. However, analysis shows that the ability to travel independently decreases as age profile increases.

6. More than 70% of respondents indicated that they could walk to the open space they prefer on their own and 30% said they would have to drive or use public transport to get there. As above however, this decreased with age group from 70% of those aged in their 60's and 70s' to 60% of those aged 80+.

7. In general, the open space available to respondents was accessible and most people felt safe there. The open space was of a high standard and was within easy walking distance. A lower percentage of respondents however, felt that the space nearest to them, or the one they preferred to use actually meets their needs.

8. There was a significant variance in the accessibility domain across urban and rural areas. The percentage of people who indicated the space is an accessible distance from home living in urban areas is 83% and for respondents living in rural areas, 42%.

9. The main reasons older people accessed public space were health motivated. This was a very strong theme running through case studies as well. Secondary reasons included the influence of enjoying scenery and wildlife, spending time in nature, getting out of the house and feeling revitalised etc. While these aren't 'tagged' as health reasons, there are obvious linkages and extensive research to outline the benefits of such activity to overall health and social wellbeing improvement.

10. The largest proportion of respondents (over 25%) indicated that the lack of toilet provision was the main barrier preventing them from accessing open space for outdoor recreation. This is consistent with discussion with the peer researchers in advance of the consultation phase. It also is an issue which featured prominently in the case studies which were completed by the researchers.

11. In general, respondent's health rating was either good (45%) or very good (31%). Fewer of those who do not use available public spaces for outdoor recreation experience 'very good' levels of health and well-being (15% compared to 35%).

12. A case study profiles that the designs of gardens, streets, neighbourhoods and open spaces affects older people's ability to age well and live independently by supporting, or preventing access for all. People who don't find it easy or enjoyable to get outdoors can spiral into poor physical health, less social contact with others and a reduced quality of life overall.

13. A higher proportion of respondents who do access open space met the physical activity guidelines. For example, 51% of those who use outdoor space met the guidelines compared to 34% of those who do not use outdoor space met the guidelines.

14. For the majority of respondents (over 40%), the pandemic had an impact on the extent to which they were able to get out and access the public open space that they normally use. It had no impact on almost a third of the respondents (bearing in mind the proportion living within a 5-10 minute walk from their preferred open space) and conversely for over a quarter, the pandemic meant they were able to get out more.

15. 76% of respondents indicated that the cost of getting to or entry to public open spaces does not make any difference to how often they access them.

16. Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) indicated that there are other public spaces in their community that could be used for outdoor activities.

17. Case Study research found that in 2018 there were about 130 adult outdoor gyms installed across the country, with 41 in public parks and walkways. The average cost, at that time, was between €8,000 and €15,000. There are at least 7 in public parks around Dublin and more than 32 outdoor gyms around Ireland – at least one in every county.

Recommendations:

1. A number of key determinants to access and use of public open space were identified as having significant importance in this research and should be given due consideration in development of projects, funding and policy decisions in the future:
    - Physical infrastructure on site – toilets, handrails, fresh water taps, etc.
    - Group-based activities and social connection
    - Safety considerations
    - Transport connectivity
    - Programme Support

2. The access and use of public space by residents in rural areas would appear to need specific focus given the lower percentage highlighting access in this research. Location in a rural area on the face of it would seem to suggest people have open access to public space, however given the key determinants identified above this is not the case. This is consistent with Age & Opportunity's previous research[2] which found opportunities and supports are needed to encourage older people's groups to return to physical activity

[2] Impact-of-Covid-19-Report-Age-Opportunity.pdf (ageandopportunity.ie)

including the provision of enabling environments, both indoors and outdoors and the resources and transport infrastructure to avail of them.

3. Profiling of the impact of access and use on health and wellbeing and also ability to meet NPAP Guidelines. Add specific results of this research to the significant international evidence base.

4. There may be merit in developing targeted communications and support towards older people aged over 80 to encourage them to increase use of public open space to which they live in close proximity. PR could highlight health benefits, connectedness and also focus on support available through community, voluntary or statutory partners, using examples from case studies in this research. Eg: Case Study 1 on Social Prescribing in Wales found that GP's reported the impact of social prescribing for outdoor activity resulted in patients making fewer appointments and they felt more in control of their own health. Also, evaluation of the walking and befriending project outlined in Case Study 4, showed that the programme has provided a kick start to more healthy independent clients. The WHO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors programme (Case Study 7) showed that there is growing evidence that well-designed outdoor spaces can enhance the long-term health and wellbeing of those who use them regularly.

5. Case studies completed by peer researchers suggested that outdoor gyms were important features of outdoor space in communities, however this was not reflected in results of the consultation process. Further research on the use of and importance of outdoor gyms to older people in Ireland may be useful.

6. Stakeholders e.g. Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs)s should consider PR focussing on communicating that a higher proportion of older people who access open space met the physical activity guidelines and are more likely to report their health and wellbeing as very good.

7. It may be an opportune time to encourage those who have increased their access to open space as a result of the pandemic.

8. Stakeholders need to focus on the provision of group-based activities to encourage increased access to and ongoing use of public open spaces. This is underpinned by results of the primary research and also case study examples chosen as models of good practice by peer researchers. Many of them focussed on projects which provided comprehensive support to older people in addition to actual access and physical improvements. Support for Community organisations by LSPs, County Councils and other Agencies is crucial in achieving a much higher percentage of population using our wonderful open space amenities.

9. Safe access car parks and toilet facilities, safe platforms and handrails, suitable safe, dry, non-slip surfaces, instructional signage were all considered important to increase access and usage in case studies.

10. Importance of social interaction in group activities should be emphasised in PR, funding applications and policy decisions. Lots of the case studies focussed on activities which were group based or in the company of others.

11. It would appear that the main barriers preventing access and use of open space could largely be addressed with additional focus on/investment in infrastructure.

12. The profiling of people aged over 50 years as 'older people' was an issue in achieving proportional engagement of that age category in this research. In the future there may need to be some thought given to how to approach this. Categorisation by government and agencies of people over 50 years of age as 'older people', may not match individuals' perceptions of themselves.

Section 2 Background and Introduction:

In Autumn 2020 Age & Opportunity and Amarach Research conducted research with 700 groups about the impact of the Covid-19 on physical activity (Age & Opportunity, 2021). Findings indicate that greater use of public space for physical activities has been a positive consequence of the pandemic. Recommendations in this report pointed to opportunities and supports needed to encourage older people's groups to return to physical activity which include the provision of enabling environments, both indoors and outdoors and the resources and transport infrastructure to avail of them. The report also recommended that Age & Opportunity should further explore the potential to promote walking and other outdoor activities mentioned by respondents in the findings and undertake further research looking to countries where outdoor physical activity for older people is more developed and disseminate the findings in order to generate new ideas for older people's groups to be physically active safely in public spaces.

In response to these recommendations Age & Opportunity commissioned this research to carry out a qualitative and quantitative pilot study on the barriers and motivators of using public space for physical activity in Ireland. Public patient involvement (PPI) was employed as a core principle and Age & Opportunity's network of Physical Activity (peer) Leaders (PALs) would act as citizen researchers. This research approach builds on a PPI model developed by Age & Opportunity in association with Straightforward Research and Age Friendly Ireland in order to investigate digital exclusion.

The project recruited older people as research partners from Age & Opportunity's Research Advisory Group and network of PALs and retired Active trainers who are 'experts by experience' both in leading physical activity and lived experience of what it is like to use public spaces generally as older people. Age & Opportunity and Straightforward Research provided the necessary up-skilling to these older people who worked as citizen researchers for this initiative.

Following training, the researchers interviewed their peers with the purpose of discovering barriers and motivators to using public spaces for physical activity. The local data will facilitate service providers in addressing some of the issues raised and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of barriers to using public spaces at local and regional levels.

Each researcher also conducted a short piece of desk research and produced a best practice case study from across Ireland or another part of the world. Both interviews and case studies form the basis for this report into current and potential value of public spaces for participation by older people in physical activity.

We are extremely grateful for the input of peer researchers to the design, implementation and analysis of this research. We trust that their involvement and expertise will strengthen the findings, build skills in the age-friendly sector and sustain the legacy of this research across Ireland, particularly in the areas where the

detailed research was completed. The following peer researchers were invaluable to the completion of this project[3]:

Brendan Farrelly
Bridie Clarke
Bridie O' Reilly
Jack Butler
Janet Gaynor
John Flynn
Linda Broaders
Lynda Mc Avinue
Madge O' Callaghan
Mairead Monaghan
Norman Farragher
Patricia Dawson
Pauline Healy
Valerie Mc Coy

This research aimed to:

- Carry out an older person led research study on current use of outdoor space for physical activity
- Identify the main barriers to using public space for physical activity
- Identify the main factors in an enabling outdoor physical environment
- Identify best practice in other countries and explore how this could be replicated in Ireland
- Inform development of opportunities for older people to engage in outdoor physical activity
- Inform the delivery of the proposed National Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- To inform development of outdoor PALs workshops as part of Active Programme

PPI

The inclusion of Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in the research methodology was a key component of Age & Opportunity's proposal to Sport Ireland.

PPI is an umbrella term used to describe effective involvement of people in service delivery or improvement processes. A key component of effective PPI is empowerment of service users to sustain and consolidate their involvement and influence. It means actively engaging with those who use services, their carers and the general public to discuss ideas, plans, their experiences, why services need to change; what people want from services; how to make the best use of resources; and how to listen to these views and therefore improve the quality and safety of services.

[3] One peer researcher completed all of the training and contributed to questionnaire design and development of the data collection process, however unfortunately had to withdraw from the project prior to completion.

Section 3 Methodology:

Given the scope of this research project, a number of interrelated methodologies were employed in the completion of this research assignment with PPI engagement significantly influencing the methodology at each stage of the assignment.

A research steering group was established to oversee the research assignment through whom the various stages of the research methodology were agreed. The steering group met three times throughout the course of the assignment. The group consisted largely of key staff in Age & Opportunity along with peer researchers and other agencies.

Séamus Mullen from Straightforward Research and Development took on the role of Research Coordinator for the programme. The role of the Research Coordinator was as follows:

- Development of research tool, including study sample, recruitment and up skilling of older people to contribute to research design and carry out field research with a total of 200 older people
- Coordinate study, analyse and report on results
- Provide pro-forma, coordinate the completion of case studies including collate the results
- Contribute to the project's reporting requirements and produce a final report
- Identify elements of best practice and quality indicators in the project delivery
- Measure the overall outputs achieved against the project work-plan
- Measure the short and medium term impacts achieved against the project objectives

Recruitment and training of peer researchers

Recruitment of peer researchers was completed by Age & Opportunity.

Once recruited, a training programme was designed by Straightforward Research and Development building on the previous Digital Research project, and delivered across four sessions covering the following components:

1. Outline of the research
2. Exploring the barriers to accessing public open space and motivators to encourage people to increase access and use
3. Skills and expertise we bring to the research
4. Patient and Public Involvement – what is it and why is it important?
5. Introduction to each other and to the research and PPI
6. What do we want to find out – key areas of questionnaire
7. Speaking to people – asking the right questions
8. Subject areas for consultation

9. Ethics and conflicts of interest
10. Understanding stratified population sampling
11. Pilot survey
12. Review session

Peer research

A primary research questionnaire was designed in conjunction with the peer researchers in Sessions 3 and 4 of the training programme. The questionnaire was piloted with the researchers following session 4 and adjustments were made based on peer researchers suggestions. The questionnaire was also assessed by the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) to ensure maximum use of plain English, to minimise misunderstanding and consider varying levels of literacy across the community.

Once trained, a stratified population sample was agreed with Age & Opportunity and provided to researchers to help peer researchers access the correct population sample.

Data to determine population sample was extracted from the 2016 Census SapMaps[4] at county level from the Central Statistics Office.

Assumptions:

Following a discussion with Age & Opportunity, we agreed to focus the population sample on people aged 50 and over. This was based on the premise for which the funding was allocated.

The table below outlines the approximate population sample targeted from each researcher:

Stratified Sample	***N***	***%***	***Per researcher X 10***	***Per researcher X 15***
Age				
50 – 59	78	39	4	6
60 – 69	62	31	3	4
70-79	38	19	2	3
80+	22	11	1	2
Male	96	48	*5*	*7*
Female	104	52	*5*	*8*
Rural	76	38	*4*	*5*
Urban	124	62	6	8
Total per researcher	**200**			

[4] SapMaps are developed by the All Ireland Research Observatory

Table 1 Stratified Sample for survey

Data analysis

Data was cleaned and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) to provide frequency and cross-tabulation at single and multiple-response variable levels.

Data was extracted from SPSS to Microsoft Excel to provide more useable graphs and tables for the final report.

Section 4 Findings of Literature Review

Links between outdoor recreation and health and wellbeing:

Physical exercise is known to release brain chemicals such as endorphins, which help to relieve discomfort and boost our mood. However, research shows that simply being in a green space and reconnecting with nature can do wonders for our health. A 2018 study by King's College London found that exposure to trees, the sky and birdsong is beneficial to our psychological health.

In 2020, research at Cornell University[5] found that as little as 10 minutes in a natural setting can help us feel happier and lessen the effects of both physical and mental stress.

Research reveals that environments can increase or reduce our stress, which in turn impacts our bodies[6]. What we are seeing, hearing, experiencing at any moment is changing not only our mood, but how our nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are working.

Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings. Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, it contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones. It may even reduce mortality, according to scientists such as public health researchers Stamatakis and Mitchell.

Research completed in hospitals, offices, and schools has found that even a simple plant in a room can have a significant impact on stress and anxiety.

In Autumn 2020 Age & Opportunity and Amarach Research conducted research with 700 groups about the impact of the Covid-19 on physical activity (Age & Opportunity, 2021)[7]. Findings indicate that greater use of public space for physical activities has been a positive consequence of the pandemic. Recommendations in this report pointed to opportunities and supports needed to encourage older people's groups to return to physical activity which include the provision of enabling environments, both indoors and outdoors and the resources and transport infrastructure to avail of them.

A systematic review of five online databases and reference lists by Caoimhe Twohig-Bennett and Andy Jones in 2018 focussed on the health benefits of greenspace was completed to synthesise and quantify the impact of greenspace on a wide range of

[5] Spending time in nature reduces stress -- ScienceDaily
[6] What Is Stress? | Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing (umn.edu)
[7] Impact-of-Covid-19-Report-Age-Opportunity.pdf (ageandopportunity.ie)

health outcomes[8]. The research included 103 observational and 40 interventional studies investigating ~100 health outcomes. Meta-analysis results showed increased greenspace exposure was associated with decreased salivary cortisol −0.05 (95% CI −0.07, −0.04), heart rate −2.57 (95% CI −4.30, −0.83), diastolic blood pressure −1.97 (95% CI −3.45, −0.19), HDL cholesterol −0.03 (95% CI −0.05, <-0.01), low frequency heart rate variability (HRV) −0.06 (95% CI −0.08, −0.03) and increased high frequency HRV 91.87 (95% CI 50.92, 132.82), as well as decreased risk of preterm birth 0.87 (95% CI 0.80, 0.94), type II diabetes 0.72 (95% CI 0.61, 0.85), all-cause mortality 0.69 (95% CI 0.55, 0.87), small size for gestational age 0.81 (95% CI 0.76, 0.86), cardiovascular mortality 0.84 (95% CI 0.76, 0.93), and an increased incidence of good self-reported health 1.12 (95% CI 1.05, 1.19). Incidence of stroke, hypertension, dyslipidaemia, asthma, and coronary heart disease were reduced. For several non-pooled health outcomes, between 66.7% and 100% of studies showed health-denoting associations with increased greenspace exposure including neurological and cancer-related outcomes, and respiratory mortality.

It concluded that Greenspace exposure is associated with numerous health benefits in intervention and observational studies. These results are indicative of a beneficial influence of greenspace on a wide range of health outcomes. However, several meta-analyses results are limited by poor study quality and high levels of heterogeneity. Green prescriptions involving greenspace use may have substantial benefits. Our findings should encourage practitioners and policymakers to give due regard to how they can create, maintain, and improve existing accessible greenspaces in deprived areas. Furthermore, the development of strategies and interventions for the utilisation of such greenspaces by those who stand to benefit the most.

Social Connectedness:

A systematic review was carried out with seven partners from different European countries, including Bulgaria, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. From a total of 17,560 studies identified, 133 studies were selected with relevant data extracted to standardized forms[9]. This gives an overview of the social impacts associated with outdoor sports which have been clustered to six broad categories: physical health, mental health and wellbeing, education and lifelong learning, active citizenship, crime reduction, and anti-social behaviour, as well as additional benefits.
It found that:

- In the context of healthy ageing, it was shown that outdoor sports can help older people to maintain their physical performance. Furthermore, the exposure to sun helps to maintain the level of vitamin D (25 OHD level)

[8] The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes - PMC (nih.gov)
[9] Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society. A Systematic Literature Review and Reflections on Evidence - PMC (nih.gov)

especially in older people. Outdoor activities are also discussed as helping to prevent multiple sclerosis and the onset and progression of myopia.

- As per physical activity in general, outdoor sports are associated with a range of positive health benefits. This includes general health related factors such as increased fitness and better cardiovascular function, as well as reduced blood pressure, obesity, resting heart rate, and a positive influence on other health markers.
- Beyond the health enhancing effects of physical activity and nature, outdoor sports are also associated with social benefits including the intra- and interpersonal development for young people, crime reduction, and active citizenship as they provide unique opportunities within the natural and social environment.

Findings published in Age UK's report "All the lonely people: Loneliness amongst Older People"[10] show that the proportion of older people who are lonely has remained relatively constant but that the numbers of older people are rising fast. Over the last decade around one in every twelve older people say they 'often' feel lonely. The Charity warns that if this continues, huge numbers of people are on course to experience loneliness in later life, because our population is ageing. This should be a major public health concern because if loneliness is not addressed it can become chronic, seriously affecting people's health and well-being.

Age UK found that being 'often' lonely affects people of all ages to a similar degree, but that different circumstances tend to prompt it, depending on age. Leaving full-time education, for example, is often a vulnerable time for younger people, whereas the death of a loved one or the onset of illness and disability are more common trigger points among older people. Following its analysis, the Charity is calling for loneliness to be measured in ways that ensure its prevalence across all age groups is captured equally well.

[10] All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life (ageuk.org.uk)

Section 5 Research Analysis:

This section of the report provides analysis of the data from 228 valid questionnaire returns. Unless stated otherwise, charts and tables in this section are based on 228 responses.

5.1 Demographics:

5.1.1 Age Profile:

The chart below highlights the age profile of respondents to the survey. At the outset, we set out to achieve a stratified sample of 39% aged 50-59, 31% 60-69, 19% aged 70-79 and 11% aged 80+.

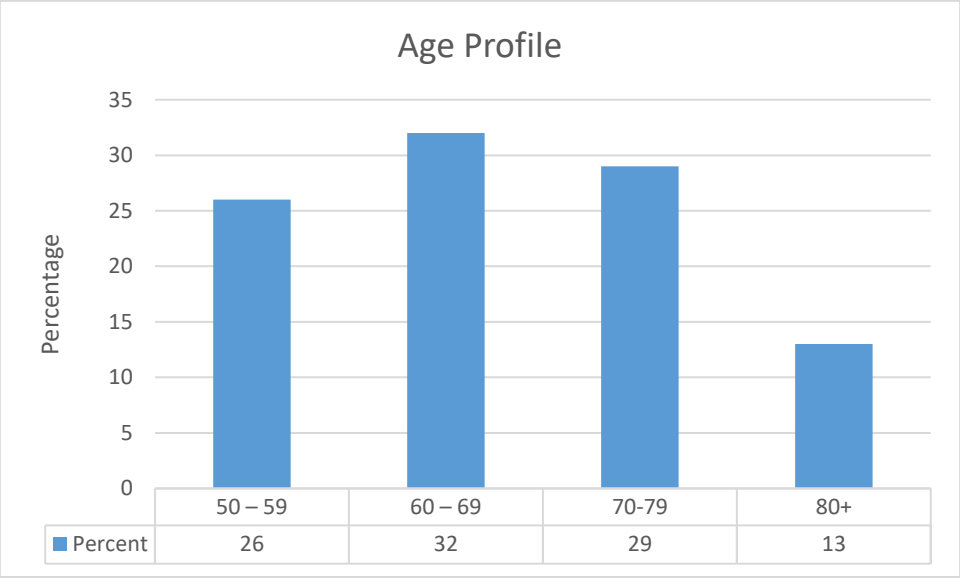


Figure 1 Respondent Age Profile

As the chart shows, the actual response was broadly reflective of the population sample. The majority of respondents were aged between 70-79, with a slightly lower percentage of respondents aged over 50. Feedback from the peer researchers outlined that it was difficult to encourage people aged between 50 and 59 to respond to the research as they did not consider themselves to be 'older people'. This may be something that Age & Opportunity will have to look at in the future as the categorisation by government and agencies of people over 50 years of age as 'older

people', may not match individuals' perception of themselves as belonging to that population bracket.

5.1.2 Gender:

The chart below shows the gender profile for responses to the survey, with 40% male response and almost 60% female:

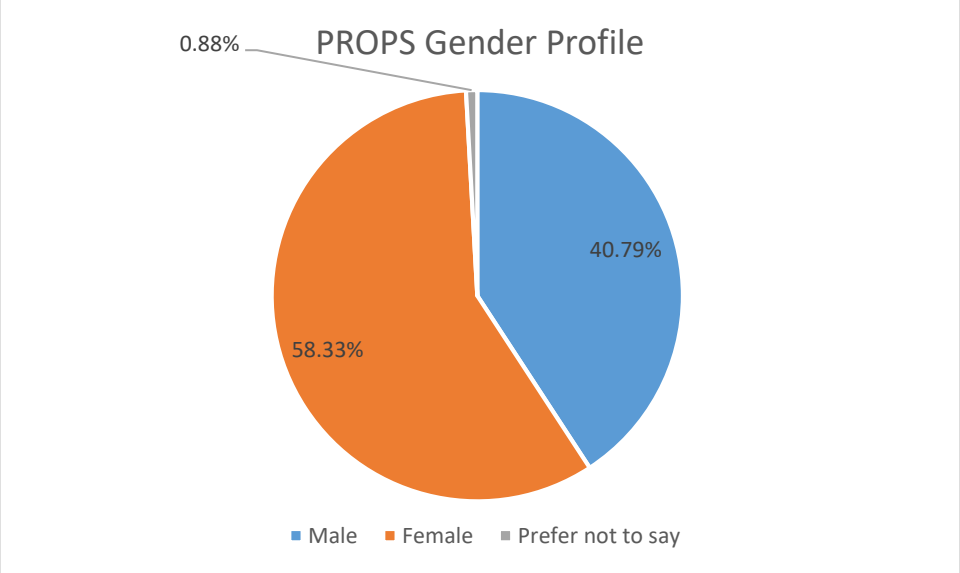
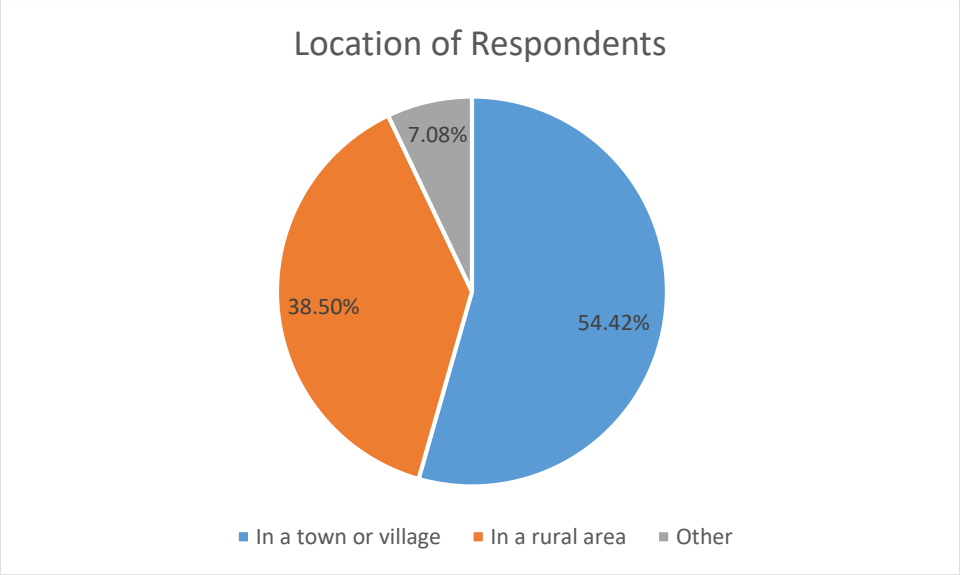


Figure 2 Respondents' Gender profile

5.1.3 Location of Respondents:

During PPI sessions with peer researchers, access to and use of open space by researchers living in rural and urban areas differed with differing barriers identified from each area. As a result, we felt it was important to ensure we could distinguish between respondents coming from rural and urban areas.

The chart below highlights the proportion of respondents who live either in an urban or rural area:



We did not set targets for this in the stratified sample, however this is broadly reflective of the urban/rural population breakdown by area type in Ireland according to the most recent statistics published by Central Statistics Office in 2019[11], which suggests 62.5% live in an urban area and 37.5% in a rural area. Many of those selecting the 'other' category highlighted that they live in a city.

5.2 Access to Public Open Space:

This section of the research focussed on access to public open space for outdoor recreation. During the PPI sessions, peer researchers suggested it was important to distinguish between access to public space and also access to space for the purposes of outdoor recreation.

5.2.1 Proximity to public open space

We asked respondents how far away from their home is the nearest public open space which is usable for outdoor recreation. It was important to distinguish between an open space which *could* be used for outdoor recreation, and one which respondents were happy and content to use for outdoor recreation. We therefore distinguished the two.

[11] Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, 2019 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

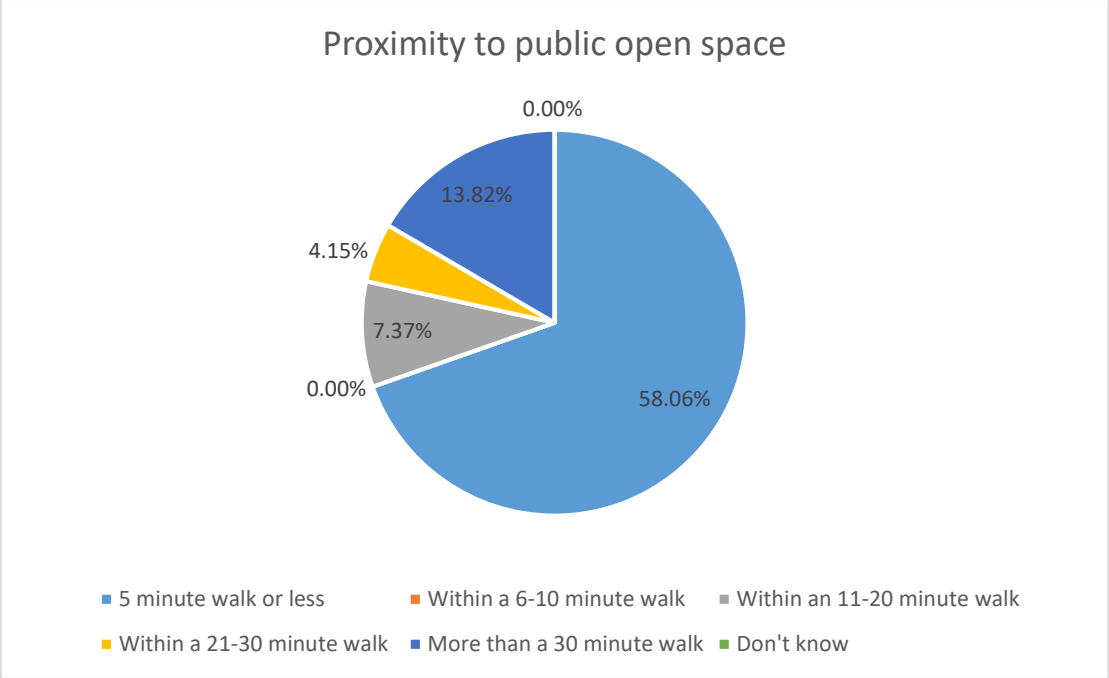


Figure 3 Proximity to public open space

The chart shows a high level of proximity to open space which could be used by respondents for outdoor recreation. Almost 60% live within a 5 minute walk to such open space, 65% within a 10 minute walk.

There was a significant difference in proximity across urban and rural areas. The percentage of people living within a 10 minute walk across both are:

- Respondents living in Urban areas > 87%
- Respondents living in Rural areas > 54%

When exploring further, almost 80% of respondents indicated that they are happy to use the open space which is nearest to them for the purposes of outdoor recreation, 16% said they just don't use that space and 5% said they don't use it due to a number of reasons. Reasons given for not using the nearest available public space included:

- Being too far away to get to on their own (mostly for people living more than 10 minutes from the space)
- Safety concerns (including road safety and fear of crime)
- Need for additional infrastructure at the actual spaces – handrails, fresh water taps, etc).

There was a significant usage across urban and rural areas. The percentage of people who are happy to use that space is:

- Respondents living in Urban areas > 83%
- Respondents living in Rural areas > 73%

The chart below indicates the type of open space beside which respondents lived:

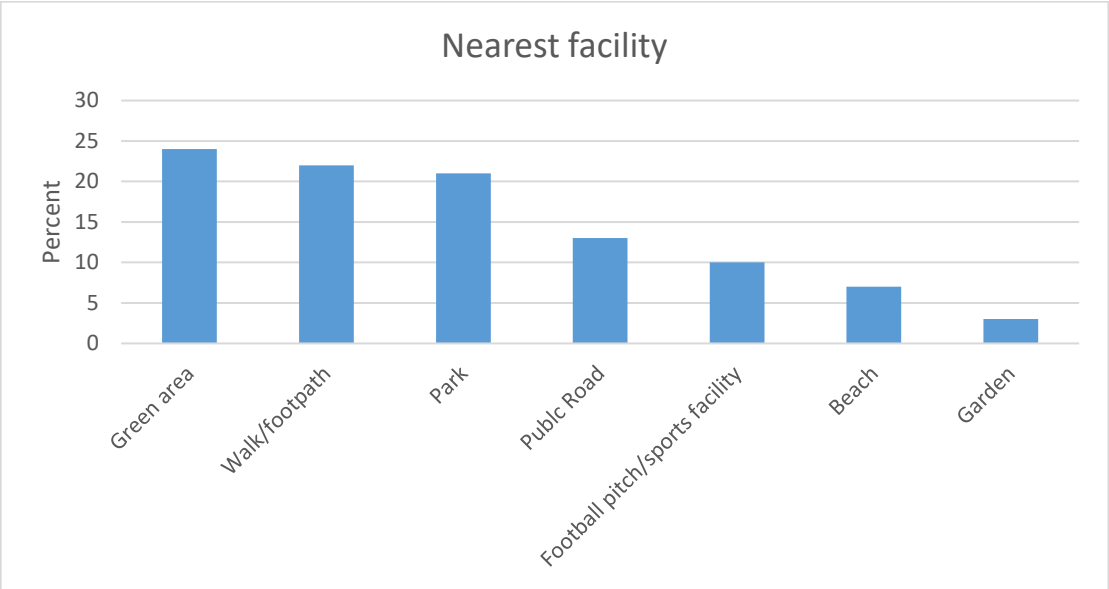


Figure 4 Type of open space in close proximity

The chart shows that the largest percentage of respondents (25%) live beside a green area, followed by 22% living beside a walk or footpath and 21% indicating a park was their closest open space available for outdoor recreation.

The chart below shows the proximity of the space which respondents indicated that they would prefer to use for outdoor recreation:

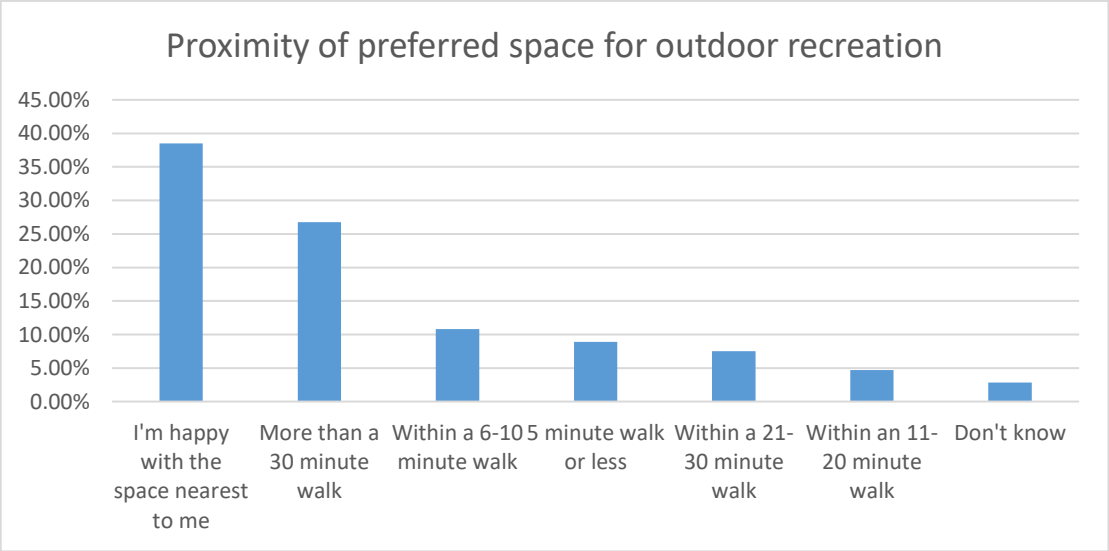


Figure 5 Proximity of preferred space for outdoor recreation

The chart shows that the majority of respondents indicated that while there are other spaces available they are happy to use the one which is closest to them. For those that did not prefer to use the space closest to them, more than a quarter (28%) indicated that it would be more than 30 minutes to get to that facility.

5.2.2 Ability to access public space:

Almost all respondents (96%) indicated that they are able to travel to and from public spaces on their own or independently, for example, walk there on their own or drive themselves.

Further analysis shows that ability to travel independently decreases as age profile increases:

- Respondents aged in their 50's > 100%
- Respondents aged in their 60's > 97%
- Respondents aged in their 70's > 87%
- Respondents aged 80+ > 85%

For those that cannot, 85% said they have family or friends who support them to go if they wish. As above however, this decreased with age group.

More than 70% of respondents indicated that they could walk to the open space they prefer on their own and 30% said they would have to drive or use public transport to get there. As above however, this decreased with age group from 70% of those aged in their 60's and 70s' to 60% of those aged 80+.

The chart below shows the proportion of people who could/couldn't access the open space independently:

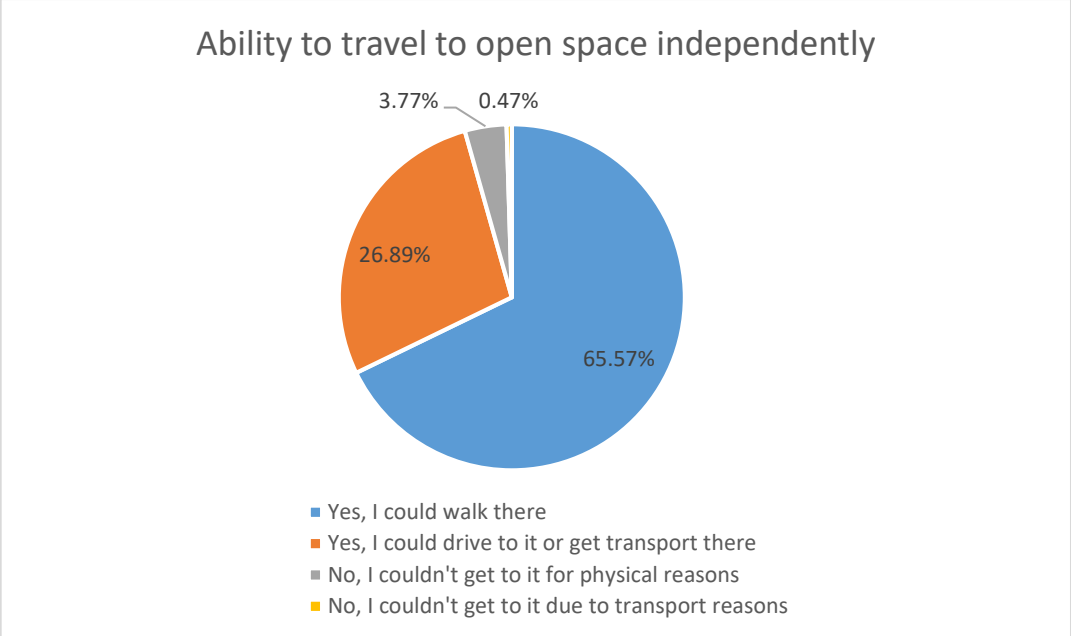


Figure 6 Ability to travel to open space independently

5.3 Use of public open space

5.3.1 Usage of open space

We asked respondents if they use the public space which is closest to them. The chart below shows the responses:

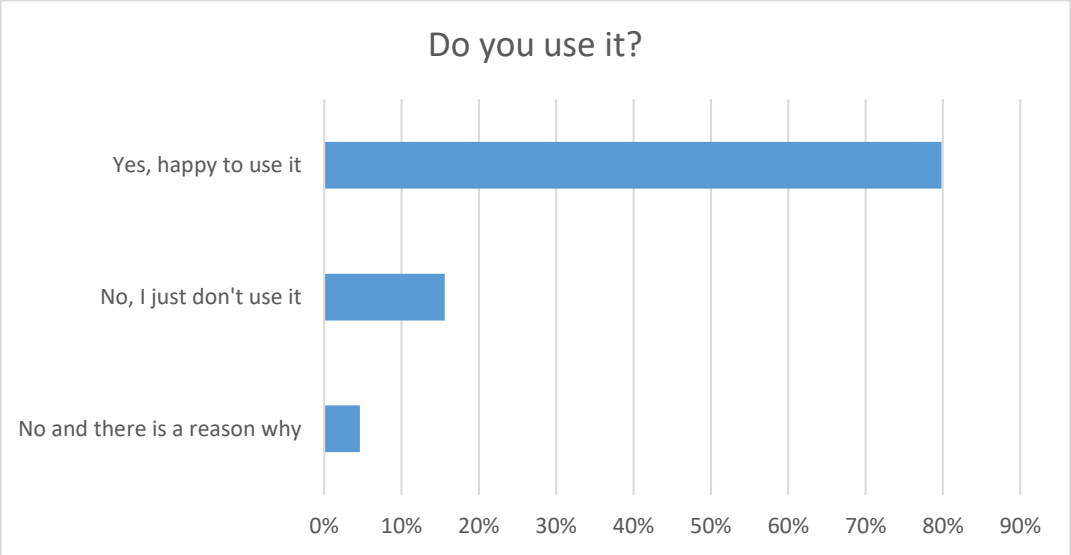


Figure 7 Usage of open space

Further analysis shows that usage slightly decreases as age profile increases:

- Respondents aged in their 50's > 89%
- Respondents aged in their 60's > 92%
- Respondents aged in their 70's > 83%
- Respondents aged 80+ > 86%

We asked respondents to indicate across a number of domains (determined in consultation with the peer researchers) whether or not the open space they use meets their requirements. The chart below illustrates the findings:

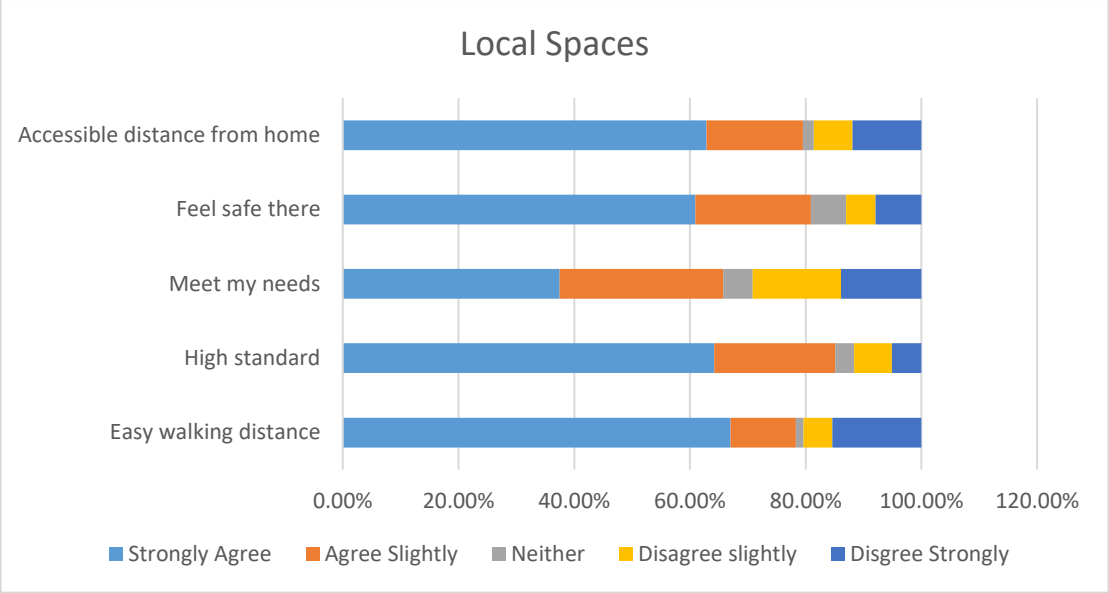


Figure 8 Does open space meet your requirements

The chart shows that in general, the open space available to respondents was accessible, most people felt safe there, was of a high standard and was within easy walking distance. A lower percentage of respondents however, felt that the space nearest to them, or the one they preferred to use actually meets their needs. This suggests that more work could be done to either provide additional facilities or focus adjust to meet the needs of older people who are actually using the sites. Exploring responses in more detail we could see issues with:

- Open space in communities not suitable for cycling
- Issues around safety including lighting, lack of and broken footpaths, proximity to traffic

This is connected with some of the lessons learned in the case studies by peer researchers. In the successful examples profiled, researchers chose examples which had address infrastructure e.g. Case Study 2 profiles a Seniors Exercise Park in Ivanhoe Australia, which sits across from a children's playground, beside a safe access car park and near toilets creating a designated enclosed recreational space that can be actively enjoyed by people of all ages.

There was a significant variance in the accessibility domain across urban and rural areas. The percentage of people who indicated the space is an accessible distance from home is:

- Respondents living in Urban areas > 83%
- Respondents living in Rural areas > 42%

Analysing by age group of respondents showed relatively little difference across most of the domains apart from accessible distance from home. A smaller

percentage of respondents aged over 80 felt that the space was an accessible distance from their home (60% compared to 70% of those aged in their 60's and 70's, respectively).

Main reason for using public open space:

We asked respondents what were the main and secondary reasons for using public open space. In consultation with peer researchers, we felt it was important to distinguish between the two as there are multiple reasons why older people choose to get up and go out and avail of public open space. The chart below illustrates the main reasons why respondents use public open space for outdoor recreation:

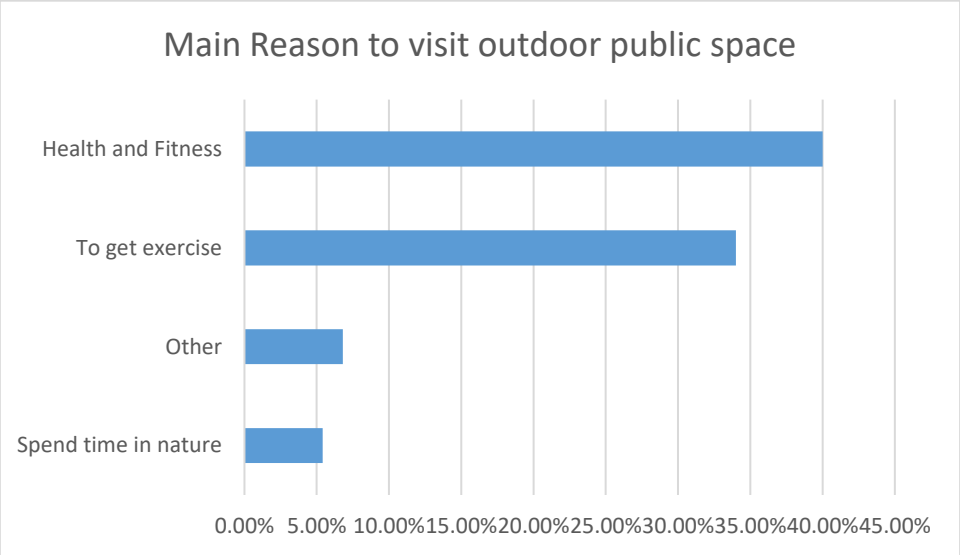


Figure 9 Main Reason to visit outdoor public space

We can see that the main reasons as highlighted in the chart above were health motivated. This was a very strong theme running through the case studies as well. For example, Case Study 1 on Social Prescribing in Wales found that GP's reported the impact of social prescribing for outdoor activity resulted in patients making fewer appointments and they felt more in control of their own health. Also, evaluation of the walking and befriending project outlined in Case Study 4 showed that the programme has provided a kick start to more healthy independent clients. The WHO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors programme (Case Study 7) showed that there is growing evidence that well-designed outdoor spaces can enhance the long-term health and wellbeing of those who use them regularly.

Secondary reason for using public open space:

The chart below illustrates the secondary reasons why respondents use public open space for outdoor recreation:

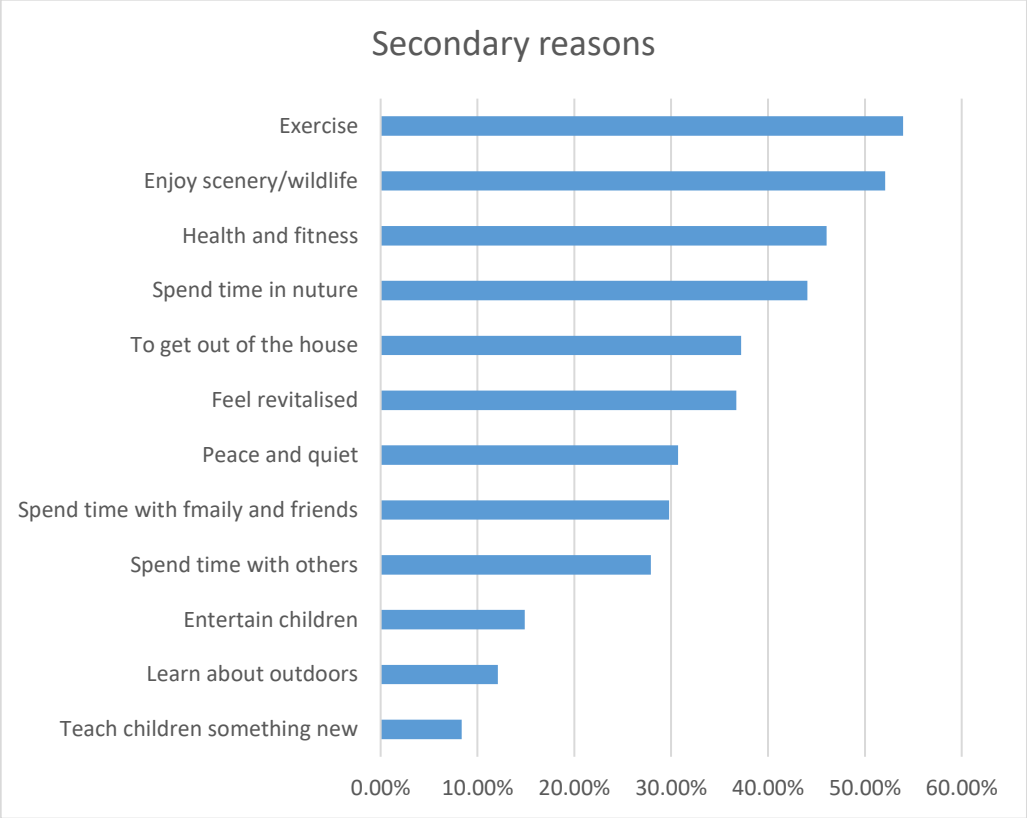


Figure 10 Secondary Reasons for visiting outdoor public space

The previous chart (Figure 9) shows that there is still a significant focus on health and wellbeing in the reasons people use public outdoor space. In the chart above (Figure 10), the secondary reasons for visiting outdoor public space included t enjoying scenery and wildlife, spending time in nature, getting out of the house, feeling revitalised etc. While these aren't 'tagged' as health reasons, there are obvious linkages and extensive research to outline the benefits of such activity to overall health and social wellbeing improvement.

Research outlined in the Literature Review suggests that environments can increase or reduce our stress[12], which in turn impacts our bodies. What people see, hear, experience at any moment is changing not only our mood, but how our nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are working. In one study in Mind, 95% of those interviewed said their mood improved after spending time outside, changing from depressed, stressed, and anxious to calmer and more balanced.

[12] What Is Stress? | Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing (umn.edu)

5.3.2 Barriers preventing use of open space

We asked respondents what were the main and secondary barriers preventing them from using public open space. Again, in consultation with peer researchers, we felt it was important to distinguish between the two as there may be multiple barriers preventing older people from using public open space. The chart below illustrates the main barrier preventing respondents from using public open space for outdoor recreation:

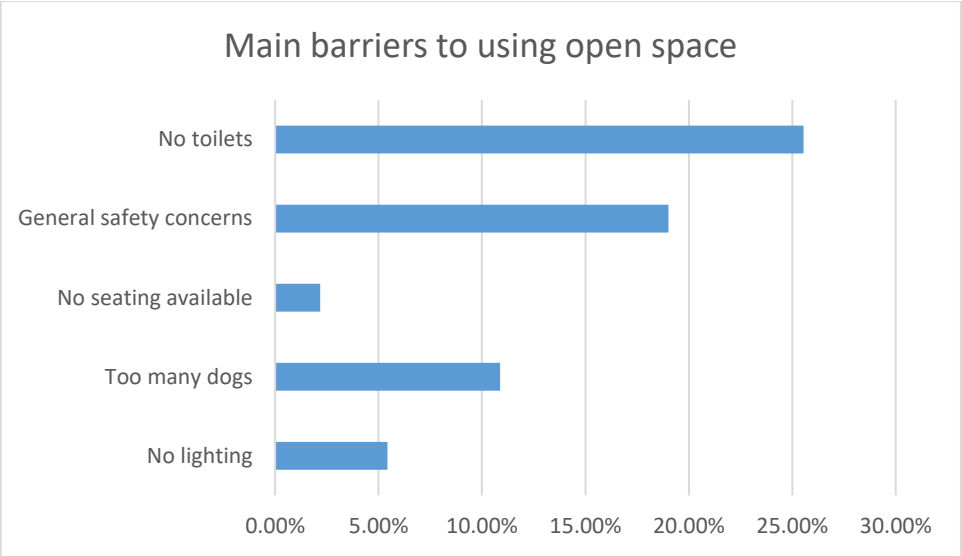


Figure 11 Main barriers to using open space

The chart above highlights that the largest proportion of respondents indicated that the lack of toilet provision was the main barrier preventing them from accessing open space for outdoor recreation. This is consistent with discussion with the peer researchers in advance of the consultation phase. It also is an issue which featured prominently in the case studies which were completed by the researchers. For example,

Also in Case Study 7, the WHO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors programme consulted 770 older people across Britain about their wellbeing and quality of life, how often and why they went outdoors and what features of their neighbourhood helped or hindered their activity. It looked at barriers and benefits to getting around as a pedestrian and found that participants going out more frequently was more achievable when conditions were good, e.g. seating, safe footpaths, toilets, and bus shelters. They were also twice as likely to achieve the recommended levels of healthy walking (2.5 hours per week).

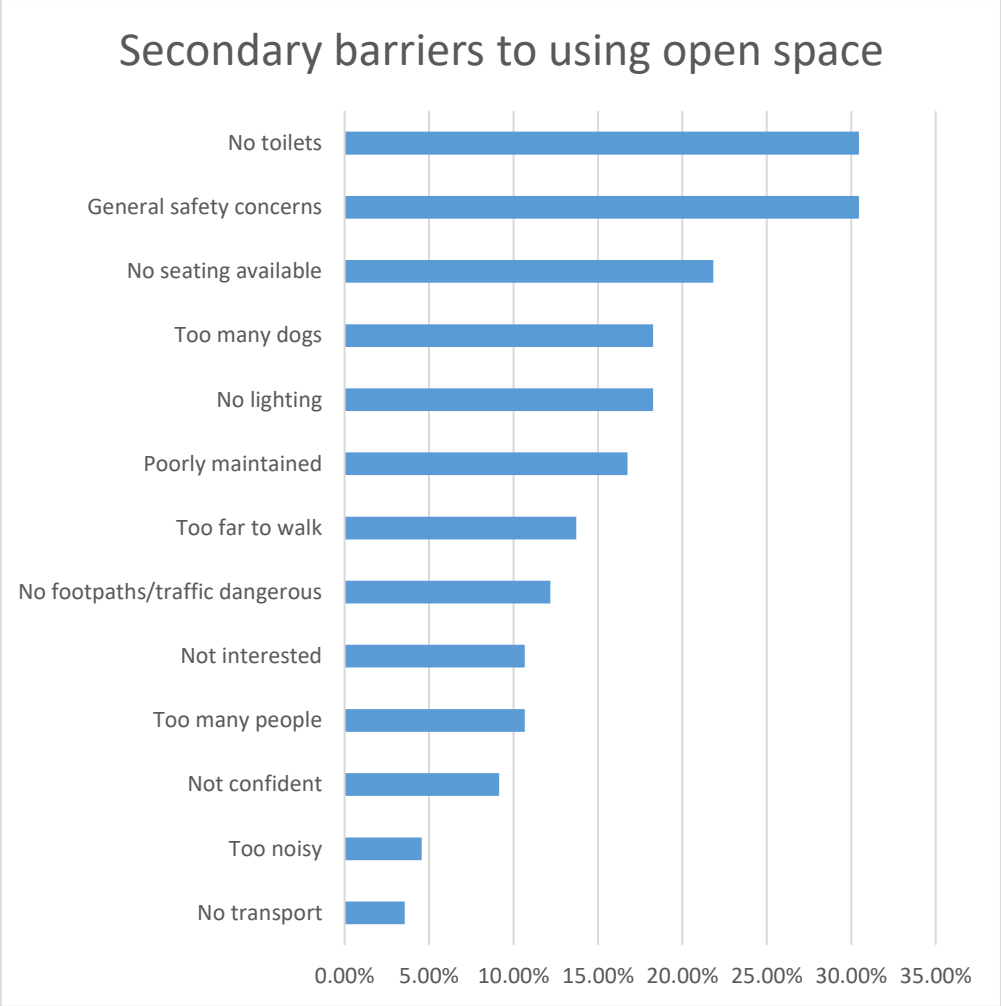


Figure 12 Secondary barriers to using open space

As outlined in Figure 10, toilets and safety concerns remain the main barriers affecting the ability to access and use open space for outdoor recreation. Focussing on the other reasons, it would appear that the main barriers preventing access and use of open space could largely be addressed with additional focus on/investment in infrastructure.

5.4 Health and wellbeing

5.4.1 General health and wellbeing

The following section provides an overview of respondents health and wellbeing and profiles the health and wellbeing status of those who do access open space for outdoor recreation as well as those who don't.

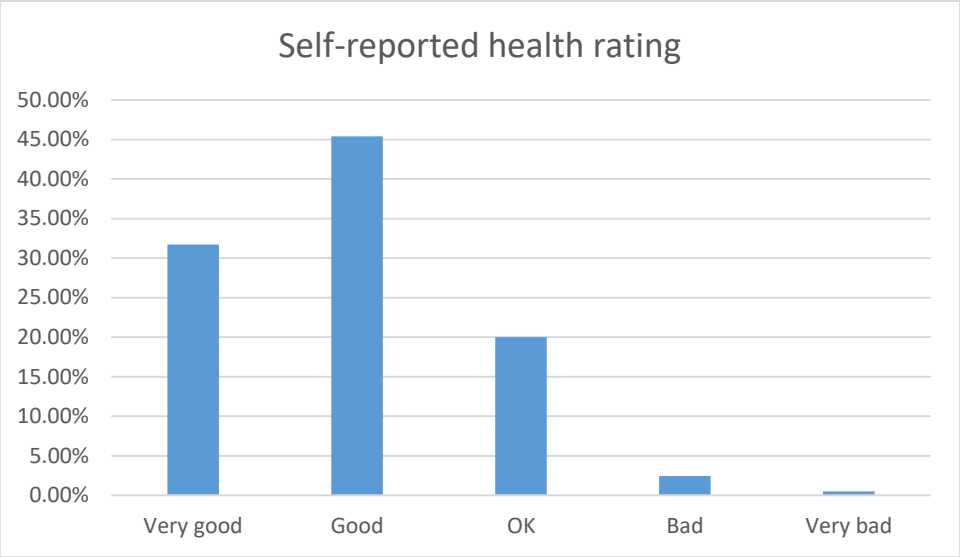


Figure 13 Respondents Health Rating

The chart above shows that in general, respondent's health rating was either good (45%) or very good (31%).

Further analysis shows that the percentage of those indicating their health is good or very good decreases as age profile increases:

- Respondents aged in their 50's > 75%
- Respondents aged in their 60's > 82%
- Respondents aged in their 70's > 79%
- Respondents aged 80+ > 65%

Further exploration shows that fewer of those who do not use available public spaces for outdoor recreation experience 'very good' levels of health and well-being (15% compared to 35%).

5.4.2 Physical Activity

The National Physical Activity Action Plan (NPAP) includes Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland[4]. These guidelines are based on international expert evidence and describe appropriate levels of health enhancing physical activity for the Irish population.

The guidelines indicate that older people aged 65+ should be active for at least 30 minutes a day, partaking in moderate intensity activity 5 days a week, or 150 minutes a week with a focus on aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening and balance. The chart below highlights on how many days in the week prior to completing the research that respondents had completed a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity, which was enough to raise their breathing rate:

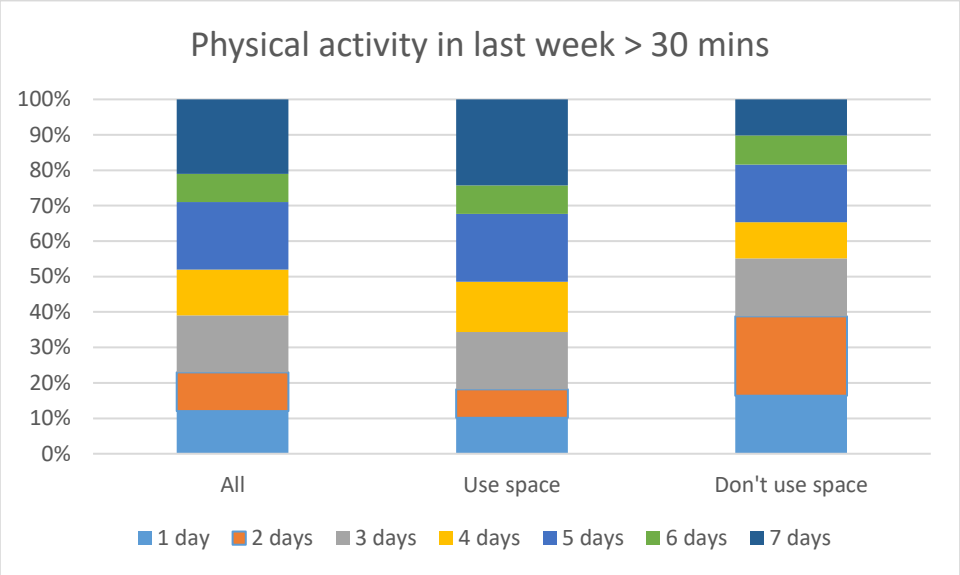


Figure 14 Physical Activity in the last week

The chart above illustrates that a higher proportion of respondents who do access open space met the physical activity guidelines. Ie:

- 51% of those who use outdoor space met the guidelines
- 34% of those who do not use outdoor space met the guidelines

5.4.3 Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on use of public space

We asked respondents whether or not the pandemic had any impact on the amount they used public open space. For context, respondents were interviewed in June 2022 which was a time at which the main restrictions had recently been lifted throughout Ireland and many people were beginning to return to normal activities.

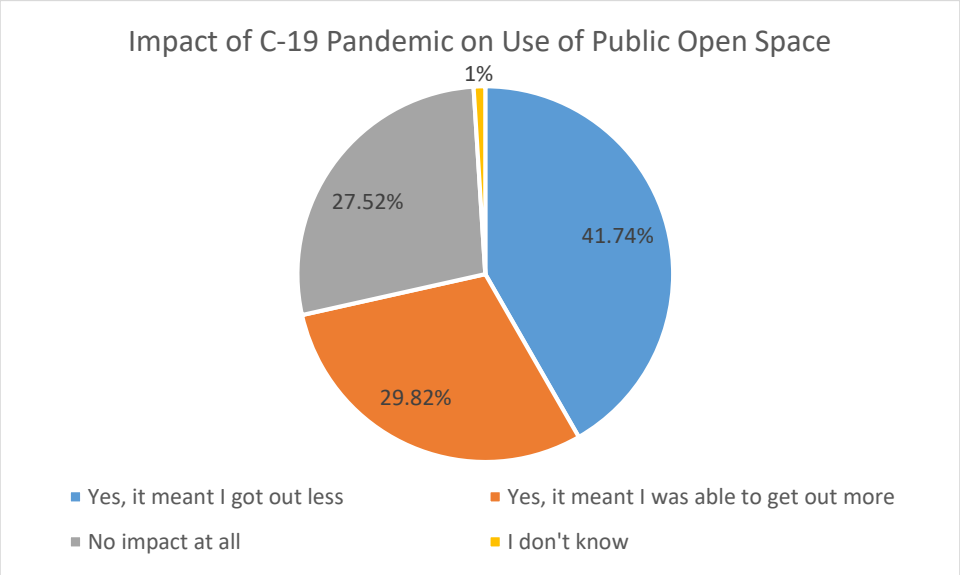


Figure 15 Impact of C-19 Pandemic on Use of Public Open Space

The chart shows that for the majority of respondents (0ver 40%), the pandemic did have an impact on the extent to which they were able to get out and access the public open space that they normally use. It had no impact on almost a third of the respondents (bearing in mind the proportion living within a 5-10 minute walk from their preferred open space and the 2 km and then 5 km restrictions) and conversely for over a quarter, the pandemic meant they were able to get out more. Many respondents commented that they had taken up walking during the pandemic as:

- they had less to do
- an alternative as they were unable to go to other forms of sport/dance/education classes to which they normally travel
- they couldn't meet friends as normal or attend church/meetings which were beyond the 5km restriction

5.4.4 Impact of cost on use of public space

We asked respondents if the cost of getting to or entry to public open spaces make any difference to how often they access them (e.g. the cost of getting into a park, cost of transport to and from open space, etc.)?

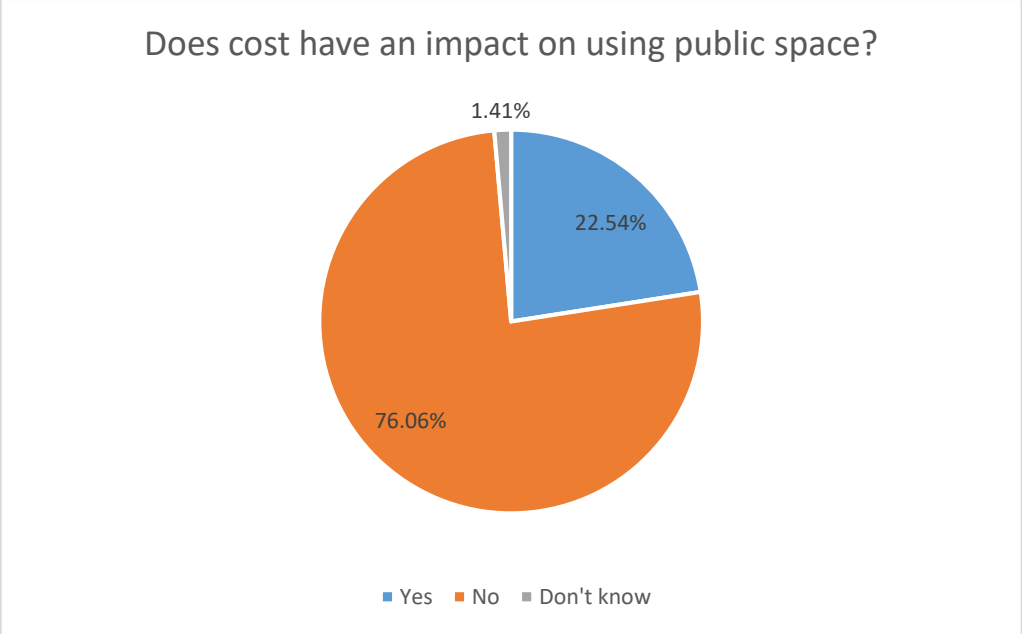


Figure 16 Impact of cost on use of public space

The chart above shows that 76% of respondents indicated that the cost of getting to or entry to public open spaces does not make any difference to how often they access them. This may well be due to the high percentage of respondents who are accessing facilities that are free of charge. For those who did indicate that it has an impact (23%), the majority specified that the cost of fuel was the biggest impact whether they drive to the open space themselves, or someone else drives them. It should be noted that at the time of completion, the costs of fuel were significantly high in Ireland due to the energy price crisis as a result of wider global supply issues.

5.4.5 Other opportunities for using public space

We asked respondents if they believed there are other spaces or locations in their community that could be used more by the public for exercise (e.g.school grounds, waste grounds, etc.)?

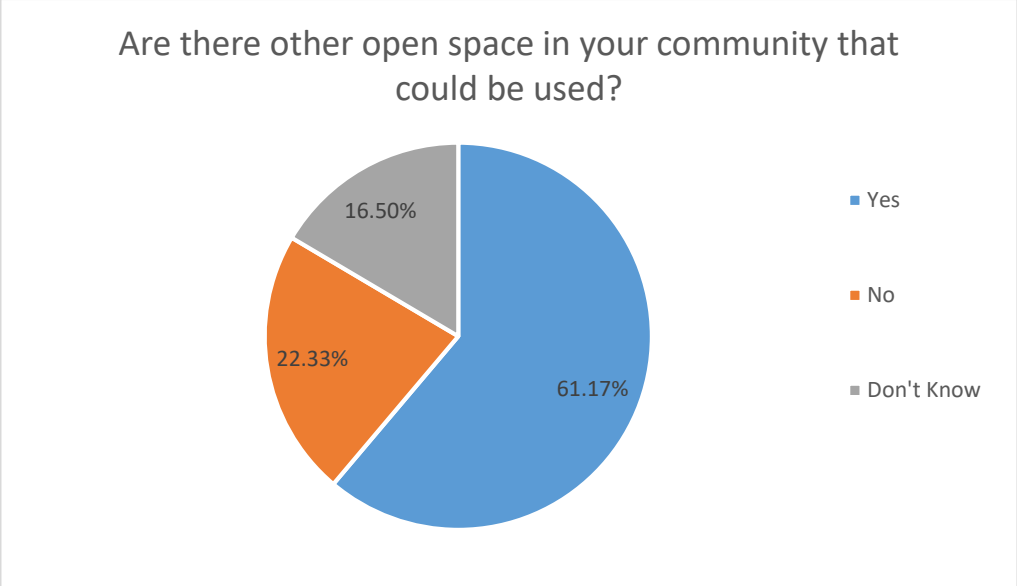


Figure 17 Are there other open spaces in your community that could be used?

The chart shows that almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) indicated that there are other public spaces in their community that could be used for outdoor activities. Thirty respondents went on to specify what they thought in terms of other spaces being open. Many felt that insurance and safety would be an issue which would prevent access to spaces that aren't currently available. Others gave examples of different spaces available in their communities which would be opened up for example in order of mention:

1. sports facilities which are currently closed to members
2. parks which are just not used enough
3. river banks/walks which could be developed
4. local beaches have restricted access to cars, but this has an impact on older people's ability to access the beach
5. community premises and their associated car park/grounds.

5.4.5 Other opportunities to encourage use of public space

We asked respondents whether or not there is anything they think would encourage more people to access public open spaces more of the time. This was left as an open field in the survey to encourage people to explore issues without prompting. Due to the open text we have recoded the answers to provide a level of analysis. The table below highlights the range of responses in rank order form the 196 people who answered this question:

Ideas	Number of respondents
Organised events (group activities)	60
Better facilities - toilets etc	40
Safety including lighting, security	32

Transport	22
More greenways/walks	21
Better facilities - exercise equipment toilets, seating etc	20
Better maintenance	20
More information on what's available locally	16
No	12
Use of school grounds	11
Advertising/communication	10
Information	10
Coffee facilities	5
Fewer dogs/special areas for dogs	5
Special park run for older people	4

Table 2 Other opportunities to encourage use of public space

Section 6 Case Studies:

This section of the report provides an overview of case studies completed by peer researchers. As part of the overall research, peer researchers were asked to conduct a short piece of desk research and produce a best practice case study from another part of the world. Combined with the results of the previous section, the case studies form the basis of recommendations into current and potential value of public spaces for participation by older people in physical activity.

It is important to note that while we provided a template for the collection of information on case studies, different researchers have different styles of report writing and presentation. As this is peer research we have not significantly edited the case studies to preserve fidelity to the peer-led data collection process.

Summary of case studies:

Case study	Focus
Walking and Befriending project	AGE UK Milton Keynes - helping inactive older people to become more active. Before the intervention, 46% had fallen, 32% had been hospitalised, 73% lived alone and 50% reported full health. Impact was assessed on both the clients and the volunteers through questionnaires and journals. The results of the report were hugely positive.
Madrid Rio, Spain	Madrid Rio is an urban park in the Spanish Capital. This is an expansive leisure and cultural spot parallel to the River.
City Playgrounds for Older People	While in China doing research, Jay Maddock from Texas A&M University noticed that more than 50% of the people doing exercise in public parks were older people. In the US the figure was never more than 15%. Also in China people exercised together in large groups.
Exercise Park, Ivanhoe Australia	Seniors Exercise Park sits across from the children's playground beside a safe access car park and near toilets
Stepping Out	Stepping Out Together. The objectives of this programme were to reach and engage older adults whose confidence and core fitness had decreased due to Covid-19. Learning from programmes in Cambridge Canada to promote mental health awareness and First Steps in Ontario. When Covid-19 restrictions were lifted it was found that the participants had gained more confidence socially and had continued with their programme stepping together at least three days a week.
Breffni Beara Way	Development of Local Walkways in Co Roscommon included the creation of a resting space on the Miners Way providing seating and the provision of drinking water. This development is part of a

	network more directed to older people and encourages them to explore the outdoors to the sound of the birds and the river in a peaceful setting and easy walking surfaces.
Social Prescribing in Wales	VALLEYS STEPS is a free and innovative program to help people manage stress and develop skills and awareness around personal mindfulness. GROW WELL PROJECT is a gardening program within a GP practice promoting physical exercise, healthy eating and mental health with a professional gardener on hand to help.
Naas Community Men's Shed	NCMS has 60 members of which 58 are between the ages of 50 and 90, located at a leased large dwelling with a half-acre of open ground in the town of Naas. The Shed is open 6 days a week from 10 am to 2 pm. Activities include gardening; bee Keeping; carpentry, music sessions; drama; dancing and art.
National Cheng Kung University Hospital	Explore older persons' perceptions of outdoor fitness equipment and their experiences using these facilities. Most of the older persons did not visit the park specifically to use the outdoor fitness equipment; instead, they visited the park to participate in group exercises or to walk. They considered using outdoor fitness equipment represented only a supplementary activity, a "playground" rather than a resource for "exercise" equipment.
Toronto Mall Walking Club	Walk Our Way Walking Club, meets twice a week from October through June at malls throughout the Toronto area before the shops open. In 2012, scientists from Statistics Canada found that socialisation may be one of the most significant factors in quality of life for older adults. "The results of this analysis highlight the importance of frequent social participation to maintaining quality of life," study leader Heather Gilmour wrote.
Community Gardening in Shannon	8 week programmes (Art to Crafts to Gardening) with a minimum of eight learners started in Clare over ten years ago to encourage people to get involved in their local community.
H2Open Days	EPALE is a multi-lingual platform providing training and networking for adult learning community. Their Lifelong Swimming initiative is called Training for a Long Future and included H2Open days organised during EU Weeks of Sport/Move Week to promote benefits of swimming as a low impact activity.
Outdoor public spaces Beijing	The outdoor public spaces (parks, squares) were full of people doing various forms of exercise. In particular Tai chi and in the very early hours of the morning, but not limited to this. There was dance, large board games and plenty of interaction amongst local residents

Case Study 1: Social prescribing in Wales

Organisation: Primary Care Division, Cardiff (Hub May 2018)

Project Title: Social prescribing in Wales

Project Summary: Social prescribing is a systemic mechanism for linking people with wellbeing services. Social prescribing enables primary care professionals to refer patients with social, emotional or practical needs to a range of local, non-medical services.

Social prescribing schemes can involve a variety of activities which are provided by voluntary and community sectors. Most involve link workers who work with a person to access a source of support.

GP's report the impact of social prescribing resulted in patients making fewer appointments and they felt more in control of their own health.

VALLEYS STEPS is a free and innovative programme to help people manage stress and develop skills and awareness around personal mindfulness. As well as seeking medical help, people can take part and engage with more people to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation. GP's refer patients to VALLEYS STEPS by telephone or community centres to discuss their needs.

GROW WELL PROJECT
Is a local charity, first of its kind in Wales, a gardening program within one of their GP practices to promote physical exercise, healthy eating and mental health.
A professional gardener is on hand to help.

Target area: Wales citizens

Target Group: All ages

References: WWW.PRIMARYCAREONE,WALESNHSUK

Case Study 2: Seniors Exercise Park, Banyule, Australia

Organisation: Banyule City Council

Project Title: Seniors Exercise Park, Ivanhoe Park, Banyule

Project Summary: The Seniors Exercise Park sits across from the children's playground, beside a safe access car park and near toilets creating a designated enclosed recreational space that can be actively enjoyed by people of all ages.

The Seniors Exercise Park features specialised outdoor exercise equipment with safe platforms and handrails, suitable safe, dry, non- slip surfaces, instructional signage with simple information and illustrations, resting benches, and a state-of-the-art-friendly mobile app to suit older people. These aspects were considered carefully to maximise usage and encourage the older demographic to engage in new positive movements.

The Seniors Exercise Park includes a signboard with instructions for correct usage of equipment for guidance. The Park is also aided by innovative QR codes which can be scanned with a smartphone and an app with instructional "how to" videos which also include the ways the movement can be progressed or regressed dependent on physical ability.

Between January 2021 and Mid-March 2021 over 186 people used the QR codes on the site, accessing safe exercise instructions.

Research and Evaluation.

Prior to the installation of the Park NARI conducted a 7-day periodic observation of the space in Ivanhoe Park. This took place in September 2020, during Covid-19 restrictions and with the children's playground open.

11 systematic scans were performed between 7am and 6.30pm each day to evaluate the number of visitors to Ivanhoe Park. The data showed an average of at least 329 visitors each day, equating to conservative estimation of 2304 visitors over 7 days.

Who Leads the Project?

As a member of the World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Network, Banyule City Council looks to create opportunities for older adults to remain actively engaged in their community in a range of different ways. Local Government is a key agency in building age-friendly communities, where both physical and social environments can be addressed.
By continuously looking at ways to increase age-friendliness throughout the council, a greater number of older people are enabled to live their best lives for as long as possible.

How long has it been running?

In June 2020 Banyule City Council engaged in a partnership with the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) to work collaboratively as part of a research project (ENJOY MAP for HEALTH) to create this age-friendly site with specialised equipment (Seniors Exercise Park) for older people. Both partners will work together to increase knowledge, skills and awareness about the health benefits of outdoor physical activity. The Park opened in January 2021.

Target area: Exercise Park, Ivanhoe Park, Banyule, Australia

Target Group: Older people

Case Study 3: Cities designing playgrounds for older people

Organisation: BBC 100 Year Life

Project Title: Cities designing playgrounds for older people

Project Summary: While in China doing research Jay Maddock from Texas A&M University noticed that more than 50% of the people doing exercise in public parks were older people. In comparison the figure in the US was never more than 15%. Also in China people exercised together in large groups. Professor Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris of the University of California believes that while culture does play a role it is location, design and amenities that determine whether older people will use the parks or not.

Cities around the world are now designing senior playgrounds based on the Chinese model.

Berlin

Studies have shown that Germany has an ageing population with Older persons being the fastest growing demographic group and children are becoming a rarer sight.
It has opened its first playground for Older persons in Preussen Park, Berlin. Its purpose is to encourage older people to get out and exercise more, getting fit and socialising. This photo shows a Chinese style fitness park in Berlin.

Renate Zeumer from Playfit, the company that designed the playground, adapted the machines to suit European heights. The total cost of building the playground was €20,000, about 25% of the cost to build a children's playground.

London

Hyde Park Senior's Playground opened in 2009. It has six exercise machines designed for older people. Its location was chosen for its easy access to roads and public transport.

Spain

In the province of Málaga there are 400 senior playgrounds. The first opened in 2007. Pro. Rafael Merino-Marbán from the University of Málaga estimates that 50,000 people use the senior playgrounds in Málaga province every week.

Target area: Various Cities, Berlin, London, Malaga

Target Group: Older people

Case Study 4: Walking and Befriending Service

Organisation: AGE UK Milton-Keynes

Project Title: Walking and Befriending Service

Project Summary: AGE UK Milton Keynes has piloted a relatively new initiative funded by Sports England. It finds clients, recruits volunteers and matches both to participate in 1-on-1 weekly walks. These are in a locality based near the client's home – come for a walk at your own pace! The aim of the initiative is helping inactive older people to become more active. Clients are identified as benefitting from the programme through illness, bereavement, or loneliness; anyone who could benefit from a restart, getting out and moving forward.

Volunteers are trained and vetted, and they commit to a number of hours weekly. The project is managed by the locality coordinator who works closely with a range of local organisations to identify clients. These include GP surgeries, day centres and faith groups. Walking has been identified through research as the safest activity for older people. Volunteers are recruited through local groups such as walking groups, sports clubs and through social media.

This is a relatively new initiative. The Walking and Befriending Report – February 2020 – profiled the initiative and its impact: 72 clients; 21 males; 51 females; Aged 58-96. Before the intervention, 46% had fallen, 32% had been hospitalised, 73% lived alone and 50% reported full health. Impact was assessed on both the clients and the volunteers through questionnaires and journals. The results of the report were hugely positive. Clients stayed on the programme, they walked for longer and they enjoyed the socialisation and connection. Many said it gave them a new lease of life.

A few comments from clients:
"This walking service has shown me that I can do more than I think I can."
"It's the highlight of my week."
"It's wonderful to have the support."

'Come for a walk at your own pace' – this initiative has reduced some of the barriers to becoming more active, it allows the client to have their voice heard, the client stays in charge, the clients become more active but also create good relationships with their befriender and their local community.

The goal is that after the initial pilot phase some of the clients move on to more independent walking. This includes group walks and community walks which require minimal or no additional support. The pilot programme has provided a kick start to more healthy independent clients.

Target area: Milton Keynes

Target Group: Older people (over 55); individuals who are vulnerable and inactive who would like to become more active.
References: Walking Befriending Project Report (February 2020, Milton Keynes) Age UK – All The Lonely People (2018) https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2018/october/all-the-lonely-people-report/ Walking and Befriending Toolkit (Milton Keynes) https://www.ageuk.org.uk/bp-assets/globalassets/milton-keynes/original-blocks/our-services/walkingbefriending/walking-befriending-toolkit.pdf Measuring National Well-being, Insights into Loneliness, Older People and Well-being, ONS 2015 www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuringnational-well-being/older-people-s-well-being/ art-older-people-s-well-being--2015.html Victor, C. (2011) 'Loneliness in Older Age – the UK perspective', in Safeguarding the Convoy – A Call to Action from the Campaign to End Loneliness, Age UK Oxfordshire, 2011

Case Study 5: Naas Community Men's Shed

Organisation: Naas Community Men's Shed

Project Title: Experience with Public Space and Physical Activity

Project Summary: NCMS has 60 members of which 58 are between the ages of 50 and 90, located at a leased large dwelling with a half-acre of open ground in the town of Naas. The Shed is open 6 days a week from 10 am to 2 pm.

The Shedders take part in a wide range of physical activities on open space at the shed:
-Gardening, fruit and vegetable growing, wildflower beds care.
-Bee Keeping.
-Outdoor Carpentry and woodwork activity.
-Outdoor tea/coffee and music sessions.
-Outdoor drama and Flamenco Dancing on an unused tennis court at the shed.
-Art Classes held in an outdoor open veranda at the shed.

The Shedders partake in a wide range of outdoor physical activities at other Open Space facilities in the local area:
-Walking Football at Naas Sports Centre.
-Pole Walking at Public parks, Canal banks, Footpaths and outdoor sports club facilities.
-Shed Band performances, at Nursing Home Garden Settings, Town Festivals and local parades.
-Walks along the canal and at outings to nature Trails in other parts of the county.

The Benefits derived from our activities in Open Spaces include:
-A positive Physical and mental health and wellbeing outcome for our Shedders.
-Social interaction and participation in these activities with many other local community organisations and individuals with support from KSP, Age and Opportunity, Irish Men's Shed and through social media.
-A continuing growth in our shed membership due to our reputation and high activity visibility recognised by local medical agencies.

Conclusion
-Open Space Activities have huge benefits for the Health and Wellbeing of the over 50 Community.
-Support for Community organisations by LSPs, Age and Opportunity, County Councils and other Agencies is crucial in achieving a much higher percentage of population using our wonderful open space amenities.
-A research project or survey on Community organisation members who socially interact through activities in open spaces, would I have no doubt show how important it is to their happiness and wellbeing.

Target area: Naas, Co. Kildare, Ireland

Target Group: The men are from the local area, mainly retired and from a wide range of backgrounds with varying health and wellbeing challenges, mainly between the ages of 50 and 90.

Case Study 6: Stepping Out

Organisation: Cambridge retirement home in Canada

Project Title: Stepping Out

Project Summary:

"Walking is a man's best medicine." Hippocrates

There are benefits to walking no matter where you do it: at the mall, on a treadmill, outside on the pavement, or on a park path. But research also suggests that walking more briskly is important if you are not able to walk frequently. The same holds true if you have to shorten the length of your walks.
(Stamatakis, E.et al. 2018)

Older people at a Cambridge retirement home in Canada are stepping up and stepping forward to promote mental health awareness. This is a fundraising event and the goal is to complete a million steps and raise $500 by the end of June '22. Fifty participants walking with staff at Granite Landing retirement home have so far walked 640,000 steps and raised $400.

Nancy Lowell, the executive director at Granite Landing, explained that residents can wear a pedometer (Tudor-Locke C.2006) on any type of walk, including a stroll around the building or even on a shopping trip. Doreen Toland, an 87 year old resident at Granite Landing, is one of fifty older people counting their steps since the start of June and many of the participants are over 85 years of age.

In the late 1990's and into 2000 an initiative was conducted through the Centre for Active Ageing London, Ontario and the University of Western Ontario, called

First Step. This programme was developed initially for individuals with Type 2 Diabetes, with a view to incrementally increasing habitual activity levels. A preliminary summative evaluation revealed that the first step programme appeared to be both effective and efficacious.

As a result of this promising and novel initiative the Canadian Diabetes Association gave additional funding for further research. (Tudor-Locke C.,1998) The project has since inspired other areas throughout Canada to replicate a stepping out programme as seen by the fundraising event in the Granite Landing retirement home.

Linking these initiatives of walking/stepping to Ireland there was a recent project conducted in Co. Dublin called Stepping Out Together. The objectives of this programme were to reach and engage older adults whose confidence and core fitness had decreased due to Covid-19. This programme was targeted at adults over 65 years of age who were not engaging in sufficient physical activity due to Covid-19 restrictions. This was part of the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Sports Partnership's strategy that supports initiatives contributing to the wellbeing and quality of life of older adults.

When Covid-19 restrictions were lifted it was found that the participants had gained more confidence socially and had continued with their programme stepping together at least three days a week.

Target area: Canada / Ireland

Target Group: 50 plus years in both independent living & residential care

References:

www.dlrsportspartnership. info@activeagingcanada.ca
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Case Study 7: Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors

Organisation: World Health Organisation, I'DGO

Project Title: Inclusive Design For Getting Outdoors

Project Summary: There is growing evidence that well designed outdoor spaces can enhance the long-term health and wellbeing of those who use them regularly. Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors (I'DGO) examines what this means for older people. When we think about lifelong access to and enjoyment of neighbourhood environments, we place older people at the centre of our research, as does the latest looking at sustainability and regeneration agendas. But is this reflected in current policy? And does the latest 'best practice' in the planning and design of outdoor spaces really meet the needs of all users?

I'DGO was established to explore if, and in what way, the ability to get out and about impacts on older people's quality of life and what barriers there are to achieving this day to day. Spanning nine years, this project has involved over 4,350 participants aged 65 years or over. The findings of I'DGO are fine-tuned to the individual preferences of their diverse sample, innovative research and multi-method approach, It is encouraging to note that The World Health Organization have recognised this research in Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide (WHO, 2007).

The first phase of I'DGO research ran from 2003 to 2006 and involved 770 older people across Britain, they were asked about their wellbeing and quality of life, how often and why they went outdoors and what features of their neighbourhood helped or hindered their activity, looked at barriers and benefits to getting around as a pedestrian. Research found: participants went outdoors frequently, usually on foot (regardless of weather). The main reasons they gave were to socialise, exercise, get a bit of fresh air, sunshine, and to enjoy nature. This was more achievable when conditions were good, eg: seating, safe footpaths, toilets, and bus shelters. They were also twice as likely to achieve the recommended levels of healthy walking (2.5 hours per week).

Research reveals that a typical street contains a number of barriers to getting around as a pedestrian, the problems people faced included the lack of car free paths, seating, attractive trees and waterscapes, also the poor design and maintenance of amenities that did exist. Crucially, these environmental shortfalls often compounded personal limitations, as well as concerns about crime, danger from traffic, and the scale, mix and layout of some higher-density neighbourhoods.

The second phase of I'DGO research looked at new build housing, was it providing older people with residential outdoor space and if this mattered; if interventions to make residential streets more pedestrian friendly were creative 'shared spaces'

for everyone. If tactile paving was designed and laid correctly and if it posed a falls risk to older people.

A study on recently built housing found that in 21st century developments Residential Outdoor Space (ROS) tends to be less green than it was pre-2000, and the rising numbers of homes built specifically for older people is below average. The greatest impact on older people came from those having their own patio or simply a green view. While size wasn't important, quality and choice was. The more types of ROS participants had - whether owned or shared - contributed to their greater satisfaction and wellbeing.

If an older person cannot get out and about locally, they are at risk of becoming prisoners in their own homes. Research by I'DGO has found that the designs of Britain's gardens, streets, neighbourhoods and open spaces affects older people's ability to age well and live independently by supporting, or preventing access for all. People who don't find it easy or enjoyable to get outdoors can spiral into poor physical health, less social contact with others and a reduced quality of life overall. With the cost of sedentary behaviour at an estimated cost at £8.3bn per year, this places a further burden on the NHS and Local Authorities through increased admissions to hospitals and residential care homes.

Target area: WHO Network

Target Group: Older people in general

Case Study 8: Madrid Rio

Organisation: Madrid City Council, designed by the architect Ricardo Bofill

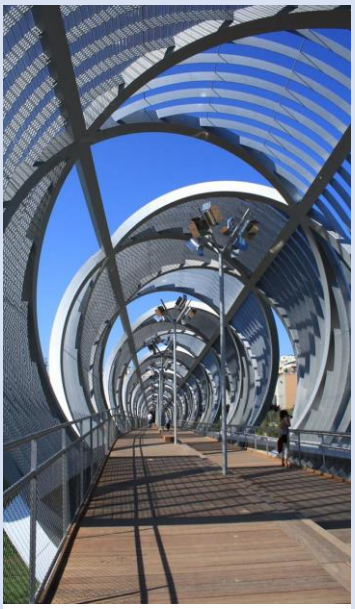
Project Title: Madrid Rio

Project Summary: If Covid-19 has taught us anything it is that, as humans, we need to be connected to each other. Creating an opportunity for people to meet in the public space is very important for our health and wellbeing and for the sociability of the public space. Having social events such as music, concerts, exhibitions, markets, displays, etc. creates a valuable connection between the people and the public space. The following case study is a prime example of a City Council creating a beautiful place that is accessible for people to relax in and enjoy.

The area now known as the Madrid Rio was a section of the Manzanares river and surrounding area boxed in by the M30 by-pass. When the M30 was connected to the A-5 motorway it divided the city and was impassable. Built in 2003 the project came about as a result of an international ideas competition organized by Madrid City Council and the winner was Gines Garrido.

The Madrid Rio is an urban park in the Spanish Capital. It follows the course of the Manzanares River as it passes between Usera and Vallecas. This is an expansive leisure and cultural spot parallel to the River. A walk alongside the river leads to the Manzanares Linear Park, an area for leisure activities and walking designed by the architect Ricardo Bofill. The esplanade, a level open space by the sea, separates the tranquil area of Madrid Rio from the hustle and bustle of the nearby town. What people love about this section of Madrid Rio is that the beach offers jets of water, ideal to cool down on a hot summer's day.

There are seventeen play areas for children of different ages based on their level of skill, strength and balance. The swings and hammocks. are made of sustainable material such as wood or rope and a high-performance Tennis Centre designed by Domonique Perrault, offers plenty of activity and entertainment. With acres of green areas, an amphitheatre, a restaurant, a stage for café/theatre performances, spaces for the performing arts, two viewing points and a sculpture of 'The Lady of Manzanares'. Madrid Rio has something for everyone, tourists and citizens alike. Even the shopaholics are catered for with the impressive Plaza Rio 2, Shopping Centre.



This urban park in the Spanish Capital has seven dams with beautifully designed bridges. From the beautifully designed bridges, such as the Arganzuela Bridge or the Perrault Bridge to the many cultural activities (exhibitions, music festivals, theatre plays, the Madrid Rio is an exceptional public space.

Target area: Madrid

Target Group: General population

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Case Study 9: Training for a long future

Organisation: European Union EPALE (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe)

Project Title: Lifelong Swimming

Project Summary: EPALE is a multilingual, open membership platform that provides the content, resources, training and networking to help you learn new skills, stay informed and get involved in the Adult Learning community. EPALE is funded under the Erasmus+ programme via the European Education and Culture Executive Agency. The objective of Lifelong Swimming (LLS) is to spread awareness of the benefits of swimming and aquatic sports through an awareness campaign and increase the participation of adult and senior citizens in swimming with the support of an innovative senior centred program. One of the main objectives of the project was to promote the value of sports and the benefits of water activities in healthy and active ageing.

Lifelong Swimming Project Partners are:
FIN – Italian Swimming Federation
LEN – Ligue Européenne de Natation
RFEN – Royal Spanish Swimming Federation
TYF – Turkish Swimming Federation
University of Coimbra

The partnership shared knowledge and experiences, compared programmes and best practices and developed actions to increase and retain new potential adult and senior swimmers. The project aim was to produce the following outputs:

- A LLS Awareness campaign on the lifelong benefits of swimming was run on web sites, social networks and in swimming pools. It was targeted to adults and older persons highlighting the enjoyable aspects of swimming and the wellbeing results of leading a healthy lifestyle.
- A "Training for a long future" (TFLF) Program focused on older swimmers containing training sessions, specific workouts, nutrition advice and guidelines for the development of senior friendly pools.
- TFLF Seminars circulated the program with the technical staff of Federations and their affiliated swimming clubs.
- H2OpenDays were organised in the partners' countries during the European Week of Sport and/or Move Week to promote the benefits of swimming and aquatic sports and the project achievements.
-

As the body ages, high impact activities are much more stressful on the joints. This does not mean that someone in their sixties or eighties could not complete a marathon or a triathlon, but the fact remains many older people need a low impact way to stay active. Swimming is the perfect solution. Just as you are never

too young to fall in love with swimming, you are never too old either. Swimming is not an activity that you will have to stop participating in just because of age.

Appendix:
LIFELONG SWIMMING 60 plus, Trieste (ITA), report
FINAL LIFELONG SWIMMING CONFERENCE AND LIFELONG SWIMMING
60 plus SPORTS EVENT to promote the value of swimming in Healthy and Active Ageing EUROPEAN WEEK OF SPORT TRIESTE 17th SEPTEMBER 2016

On September 17th, during the European Week of Sport – LEN and FIN organized the Final LIFELONG SWIMMING Meeting in Trieste to celebrate the results of the ERASMUS Plus Project.

The main objective of the project was to promote the value of sports and the benefits of water activities in healthy and active ageing. It was organized in FIN Federal Centre in Trieste, a city with a long-lasting tradition in sports and the largest ageing population in Europe.

The LIFELONG SWIMMING 60&about Meeting was held at the Bruno Bianchi Swimming Pool and presented an original formula which joint the sports event, seminar sessions on Healthy and Active Ageing themes and the final LLS Conference and Award Ceremony. It started with the traditional annual H2OpenDay in which the swimming pool opened free to the local 6o plus community to offer "tasting sessions" of water sports activities like slow swimming, aqua fitness and aqua yoga.

Then came the "450 Relays" where swimmers of 60&about met with team members from other countries with the common objective of celebrating Healthy and Active Ageing. The "Relay 450mix" formula is based on an innovative and friendly formula: relay teams formed by 8 team members: 4 women and 4 men and the sum of their age must be equal or over 450 so as to have a free combination of members of different ages swimming together.

Over 250 people took part in the Meeting and 150 senior swimmers registered in the non-competitive 450 Relays. Teams come from nine different European countries (Spain, Turkey, Malta, Switzerland, Portugal, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria) and from many Italian regions. All participants took part in the Final LIFELONG SWIMMING Conference to celebrate the results of the day and the Lifelong Swimming Project.

Target area: Swimming Pools, Swimming clubs and Swimming Federations across Europe

Target Group: Older people both experienced swimmers and non-swimmers

References: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/contribute http://www.len.eu

Case Study 10: Temple of Heaven

Organisation: European Union EPALE (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe)

Project Title: How Beijing is redefining outdoor public space with the Temple of Heaven

Project Summary: The Temple of Heaven in the heart of Beijing is a vast network of palaces, stages, altars and walking paths scattered over 600 acres of parkland. Recognised as a World Heritage site for its exceptional architecture and landscape design, the Temple of Heaven served for centuries as a private place of worship for the Chinese emperors. And it was not until the 20th century, not unlike many of Europe's royal palaces, that it opened to the public.

It is understandably a magnet for tourists but the Temple of Heaven has also helped to redefine the concept of outdoor public space in Beijing. It is now a hybrid experience that not only combines culture and history but a thriving modern public park and an outdoor workout area facility so compelling, that hundreds of locals convene there daily for exercise and to meet and socialise.

There are grassy areas used by groups practising tai chi and dance. A large asphalt area used for badminton, meditation or meeting up and the calisthenics area has hundreds of pieces of equipment including exercise bars. It is essentially a playground for local residents of all ages. On weekdays, it is predominantly used by middle aged to older locals. Many are retired or semi-retired and workout as part of their daily routine. At weekends, a broader cross-section of society are also drawn to the idyllic setting. It’s not unusual for multiple generations to workout alongside one another.

Outdoor gyms have been a common fixture in China for decades. However, in recent years, more thought and effort has gone into the functionality of hybrid public spaces like the Temple of Heaven. One may think the use of public space for exercise and well-being may conflict with historic preservation but the mixed offering provides added incentive to visit. It combines enthusiasm for history and cultural heritage with the traditional Chinese focus on fitness and mental wellbeing.

All of this aligns with the forward thinking idea of creating hybrid experiential places in cities where people can go to do a variety of activities in a social setting. This isn't exclusive to China. Another example of hybrid urbanism is Parc River de Seine in Paris. A former road running along the River Seine, it has been transformed into a playground, workout area, cafe, and place to stroll and bike.

The best use of public space ultimately comes down to what resonates the most with locals. In the case of Beijing, the compelling hybrid mash up of history, architecture, parkland and workout area has succeeded.

Target area: Beijing, China

Target Group: Local residents but ultimately wider population

Case Study 11: What older adults think about outdoor fitness equipment

Organisation: National Cheng Kung University Hospital

Project Title: What older adults think about outdoor fitness equipment in public Parks

Project Summary: Public Park designs increasingly include outdoor exercise spaces for older adults. This project sought to identify whether the provision of outdoor fitness equipment was considered beneficial by older people.

The purpose of this project, conducted by Hsueh-wen Chow,[13] with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of National Cheng Kung University Hospital, in Taiwan, was to explore older persons' perceptions of outdoor fitness equipment and their experiences using these facilities.

When considering usage of public parks by older adults the focus in the past has been to provide passive or low intensity recreation, such as the provision of adequate benches to rest on, and smooth walking paths for safe walking. Only in the past decade have public parks worldwide increasingly created specific spaces/zones with low-impact outdoor exercise equipment for senior citizens.

The study results suggest that most older people perceive the benefit of using outdoor fitness equipment in terms of both physical and psychological health, as well as social connection.

Most of the older people did not visit the park specifically to use the outdoor fitness equipment; instead, they visited the park to participate in group exercises or to walk. They considered using outdoor fitness equipment represented only a supplementary activity. They considered various pieces of outdoor fitness equipment as the park's additional features that were fun to use. They thought of outdoor fitness equipment as a "playground" rather than a resource for "exercise" equipment.

All respondents reported they would use the outdoor gym again and would recommend it to a friend. Most cited ways to promote further outdoor gym use were the provision of instruction sessions and shade or shelter.

The findings are consistent with another study from Australia. In that instance, it was also reported that there was a higher proportion of female outdoor gym users than general park users. In addition, there appears to be greater use and activity levels by women and older adults in parks that provide structured environments offering exercise classes.

[13] Graduate Institute of Physical Education, Health & Leisure Studies, National Cheng Kung University, No1, University Road, East District, Tainan City, 70101, Taiwan

The co-location of the outdoor gym with a playground, amenities and walkways was important in raising awareness of the gym, attracting new users to exercise sessions and ensuring natural surveillance of the gym. [14]
Target area: The study involved semi-structured interviews with 55 senior outdoor fitness equipment users at two parks in Tainan City, Taiwan.
Target Group: A total of 55 older people (27 males and 28 females) provided interviews for this project. Seventeen of them were between age 50 and 60, 13 ranged between 61 and 70, 20 between 71 and 80, and two participants were above age 81 with an oldest, 97 years old. Most of the respondents came to the parks alone. Of the 55 older people interviewed, 78% indicated that they exercise in the park daily, 13% approximately three times per week, and 9% twice per week. Most of the respondents visit the park in the early morning, for one to two hours.
What's happening in Ireland? In 2018 there were about 130 adult outdoor gyms installed across the country, with 41 in public parks and walkways. The average cost, at that time, was between €8,000 and €15,000. Several councils have paid for them to be installed through the Sports Capital Grant Scheme.[15] There are at least 7 in public parks around Dublin.[16] Earlier this year (2022), Sligo County Council's Parks Department launched a new suite of inclusive outdoor gym equipment at Doorly Park in conjunction with Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership (SSRP)[17] There are 32 great outdoor gyms around Ireland – one in every county[18]

[14] Scott, A., Stride, V., Neville, L., & Hua, M. (2015). Design and promotion of an outdoor gym for older adults: A collaborative project. Health Promotion Journal of Australia, 25(3), 212-214. doi:https://doi.org/10.1071/HE14037

[15] https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/fitness/outdoor-gyms-you-have-seen-them-but-have-you-ever-used-them-1.3633313

[16] https://citylanguageschool.com/seven-outdoor-gyms-in-dublin/

[17] https://www.independent.ie/regionals/sligochampion/sport/other-sports/inclusive-outdoor-gym-opens-in-doorly-park-41523713.html

[18] https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/fitness/32-great-outdoor-gyms-around-ireland-one-in-every-county-1.4563107

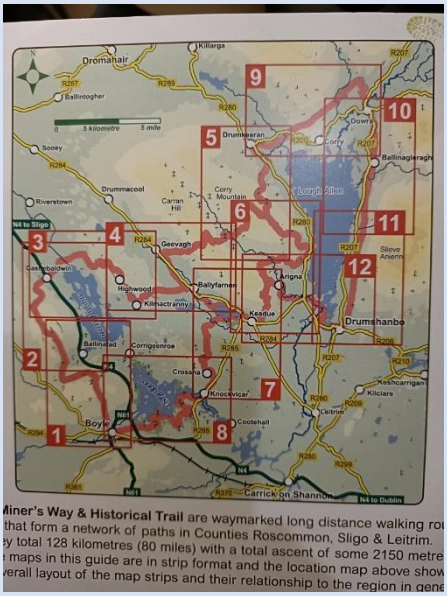
Case Study 12: Breffni Beara Way

Organisation: National Cheng Kung University Hospital

Project Title: Breffni Beara Way, Development of Local Walkways in Co Roscommon

Project Summary: This project is situated off the R 284 in Co Roscommon and at the end of a sideroad L51085 in the townland of Lurga. When Leader was established with European money in 1992 their first assignment was to develop local walkways.

One such was the Miners Way. This development led to the Local Development Drumboylan Committee under the guidance of Aiden Malone to pursue the purchase of a garden bordering the non-navigable part of the River Shannon for a fee of 1250 euro in around 1999. At this point there is a narrow footbridge bridging the Counties of Leitrim and Roscommon. It is also said that O' Sullivan Beara crossed into Leitrim at the end of his historic walk from Cork at this juncture.



Miner's Way & Historical Trail are waymarked long distance walking rou
that form a network of paths in Counties Roscommon, Sligo & Leitrim.
y total 128 kilometres (80 miles) with a total ascent of some 2150 metre
maps in this guide are in strip format and the location map above show
verall layout of the map strips and their relationship to the region in gene

In recent years this local Committee (voluntary) sought funding from agencies (Roscommon Leader NDP 2040) under the Dept of Rural and Community Development for the creation of a resting space providing seating and the provision of drinking water. Trees and shrubs as well as Solar Lighting have been provided creating an unique atmosphere for the pilgrim.

To emphasise it as a place of safety and quiet there were no car spaces provided encouraging people to walk or cycle from a park at the Local Hall that has restrooms, shower facilities and broadband.

Covid-19 delayed its completion but it is fully open in 2022. As it is now part of a wider network of roads dedicated to walking and cycling, the Miners Way and Historical Trail are waymarked Long Distance walking routes that form a network of paths in Counties Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim. They total 128 Kilometres with a total ascent of 2150 metres.

This development is more directed to older people and encourages visitors to explore the outdoors to the sound of the birds and the river in a peaceful setting and easy walking surfaces.

Target area: Counties Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim

Target Group: Development is more directed to older people

Case Study 13: Community Gardening in Shannon

Organisation Limerick Clare Education Training Board (LCETB)

Project Title: Community Gardening

Project Summary:

The Community Education project started in Clare over ten years ago to encourage people to get involved in their local community. The courses are often a stepping stone to further education. The project is organised by Breda O'Driscoll. There are a variety of courses available ranging from Art to Crafts to Gardening.

Each course was promoted by local advertising and website information. Word of mouth and self-referral are other ways to get a place on the course. The learners come from all walks of life and experience.

Each course runs for 8 weeks and with a minimum of eight learners.

It is a community-based education programme, everyone is welcomed and encouraged to participate. Other reasons for attending the course vary from wanting to learn a new skill to getting out of the house for a while to meeting new people. Some learners availed of the opportunity to progress their education and continued further to do QQI level courses.

Benefits outlined by learners

- Opportunity to make new friends
- More physical activity
- Stepping stone to new learning
- Revitalise social skills following the isolation of Covid restrictions
- Learned new skill
- Build self confidence
- Seeing the fruits of work (literally).
- Sharing skills with other friends and family

Learners stories:

A woman in her early nineties joined an art class recently, she had always wanted to do art but had spent a busy life rearing her family.

Another person was surprised that she had learned so much about planting and was putting her skills to use in her own garden. She is now growing her own fruit and vegetables as well as a selection of flowers.

One of the men made raised beds for his neighbours making their growing space more accessible. When presented with a Certificate of Attendance at the end of the course one woman (in her sixties) said that it was the first certificate she had received since leaving school.
Target area: There are groups running in towns and villages throughout Co Clare, a minimum of eight participants is required to set up a group.
Target Group: The courses are aimed at those who live in isolated areas and those who are distant from education. The target group is not age or gender specific, the local group consisted mainly of women over 50, though there were a few men in attendance.

Section 9 Recommendations:

The following recommendations are made based on research completed throughout the various phases of this assignment:

Findings:

1. There is a high level of proximity to open space which can be used by respondents for outdoor recreation. Almost 60% live within a five-minute walk to such open space, 65% within a ten-minute walk. There was a significant difference in proximity across urban and rural areas with 87% of those located in urban areas living within a ten-minute walk compared to 54% in rural areas.

2. 80% of respondents indicated that they are happy to use the open space which is nearest to them for the purposes of outdoor recreation, 16% said they just don't use that space and 5% said they don't use it due to a number of reasons.

3. In terms of type of open space, the largest percentage of respondents (25%) live beside a green area, followed by 22% living beside a walk or footpath and 21% indicating a park was their closest open space available for outdoor recreation.

4. The majority of respondents indicated that while there are other spaces available, they are happy to use the one which is closest to them. For those that did not prefer to use the space closest to them, more than a quarter (28%) indicated that it would be more than 30 minutes to get to that facility.

5. Almost all respondents (96%) indicated that they are able to travel to and from public spaces on their own or independently, for example, walk there on their own or drive themselves. However, analysis shows that the ability to travel independently decreases as age profile increases.

6. More than 70% of respondents indicated that they could walk to the open space they prefer on their own and 30% said they would have to drive or use public transport to get there. As above however, this decreased with age from 70% of those aged in their 60's and 70s' to 60% of those aged 80+.

7. In general, the open space available to respondents was accessible, most people felt safe there, was of a high standard and was within easy walking distance. A lower percentage of respondents however, felt that the space nearest to them or the one they preferred to use actually meets their needs.

8. There was a significant variance in the accessibility domain across urban and rural areas. The percentage of people who indicated the space is an accessible distance from home living in urban areas is 83% and for respondents living in rural areas, 42%.

9. The main reasons older people accessed public space were health motivated. This was a very strong theme running through case studies as well. Secondary reasons see the influence of enjoying scenery and wildlife, spending time in nature, getting out of the house, feeling revitalised etc. While these aren't 'tagged' as health reasons, there are obvious correlation and extensive research to outline the benefits of such activity to overall health and social wellbeing improvement.

10. The largest proportion of respondents (over 25%) indicated that the lack of toilet provision was the main barrier preventing them from accessing open space for outdoor recreation. This is consistent with discussion with the peer researchers in advance of the consultation phase. It also is an issue which featured prominently in the case studies which were completed by the researchers.

11. In general, respondent's health rating was either good (45%) or very good (31%). Fewer of those who do not use available public spaces for outdoor recreation experience 'very good' levels of health and well-being (15% compared to 35%).

12. A case study profiles that the designs of gardens, streets, neighbourhoods and open spaces affects older people's ability to age well and live independently by supporting, or preventing access for all. People who don't find it easy or enjoyable to get outdoors can spiral into poor physical health, less social contact with others and a reduced quality of life overall.

13. A higher proportion of respondents who do access open space met the physical activity guidelines. For example, 51% of those who use outdoor space met the guidelines compared to 34% of those who do not use outdoor space.

14. For the majority of respondents (over 40%), the pandemic had an impact on the extent to which they were able to get out and access the public open space that they normally use. It had no impact on almost a third of the respondents (bearing in mind the proportion living within a 5-10 minute walk from their preferred open space) and conversely for over a quarter, the pandemic meant they were able to get out more.

15. 76% of respondents indicated that the cost of getting to or entry to public open spaces does not make any difference to how often they access them.

16. Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) indicated that there are other public spaces in their community that could be used for outdoor activities.

17. Case Study research found that in 2018 there were about 130 adult outdoor gyms installed across the country, with 41 in public parks and walkways. The average cost at that time was between €8,000 and €15,000. There are at least 7 in public parks around Dublin and more than 32 'Great Outdoor Gyms' around Ireland – at least one in every county.

Recommendations

1. A number of key determinants to access and use of public open space were identified as having significant importance in this research and should be given due consideration in development of projects, funding and policy decisions in the future:
    - Physical infrastructure on site – toilets, handrails, fresh water taps, etc.
    - Group-based activities and social connection
    - Safety considerations
    - Transport connectivity
    - Programme Support

2. The access and use of public space by residents in rural areas would appear to need specific focus given the lower percentage highlighting access in this research. Location in a rural area on the face of it would seem to suggest people have open access to public space, however given the key determinants identified above, this is not the case and needs a specific focus to increase access and usage in the future. This is consistent with Age & Opportunity's previous research which found opportunities and supports are needed to encourage older people's groups to return to physical activity which include the provision of enabling environments, both indoors and outdoors and the resources and transport infrastructure to avail of them.

3. Profiling of the impact of access and use on health and wellbeing and also ability to meet NPAP Guidelines. Add specific results of this research to the significant international evidence base.

4. There may be merit in developing targeted communications and support towards older people aged over 80 years to encourage them to increase use of public open space to which they live in close proximity. PR could highlight health benefits, connectedness and also focus on support available through community, voluntary or statutory partners, using examples from case studies in this research. For example: Case Study 1 on Social Prescribing in Wales found that GP's reported the impact of social prescribing for outdoor activity resulted in patients making fewer appointments and they felt more in control of their own health. Also, evaluation of the walking and befriending project outlined in Case Study 4 showed that the programme has provided a kick start

to more healthy independent clients. The WHO Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors programme (Case Study 7) showed that there is growing evidence that well-designed outdoor spaces can enhance the long-term health and wellbeing of those who use them regularly.

5. Case studies completed by peer researchers suggested that outdoor gyms were important features of outdoor space in communities, however this was not reflected in results of the consultation process. Further research on the use of and importance of outdoor gyms to older people in Ireland may be useful.

6. Stakeholders such as LSP's should consider PR focussing on communicating that a higher proportion of older people who access open space meet the physical activity guidelines and are more likely to report their health and wellbeing as very good.

7. It may be an opportune time to encourage those who have increased their access to open space as a result of the pandemic.

8. Stakeholders need to focus on the provision of group-based activities to encourage increased access to and ongoing use of public open spaces. This is underpinned by results of the primary research and also case study examples chosen as models of good practice by peer researchers. Many of them focussed on projects which provided comprehensive support to older people in addition to actual access and physical improvements. Support from Community organisations by LSPs, County Councils and other Agencies is crucial in achieving a much higher percentage of population using our wonderful open space amenities.

9. Safe access to car parks and toilets facilities, safe platforms and handrails, suitable safe, dry, non- slip surfaces, instructional signage were all aspects that were considered as important to increase access and usage in case studies.

10. Importance of social interaction in group activities should be emphasised in PR, funding applications and policy decisions. Lots of the case studies focussed on activities which were group based or on the company of others.

11. It would appear that the main barriers preventing access and use of open space could largely be addressed with additional focus on/investment in infrastructure.

12. The profiling of people aged over 50 years as 'older people' was an issue in achieving proportional engagement of that age category in this research. In the future, there may need to be some thought given to how to approach the categorisation by government and agencies of people over 50 years as 'older people'. This may not match individuals' perceptions of themselves as belonging to that population bracket.