

Presentation by

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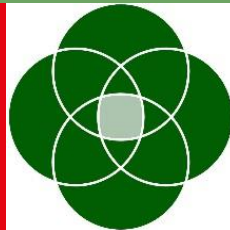
**CTS Symposium
2025**

3rd July 2025

“I definitely choose
routes actively, that will
take me through nature”
The role of nature in
cycling decision-making

**UWE
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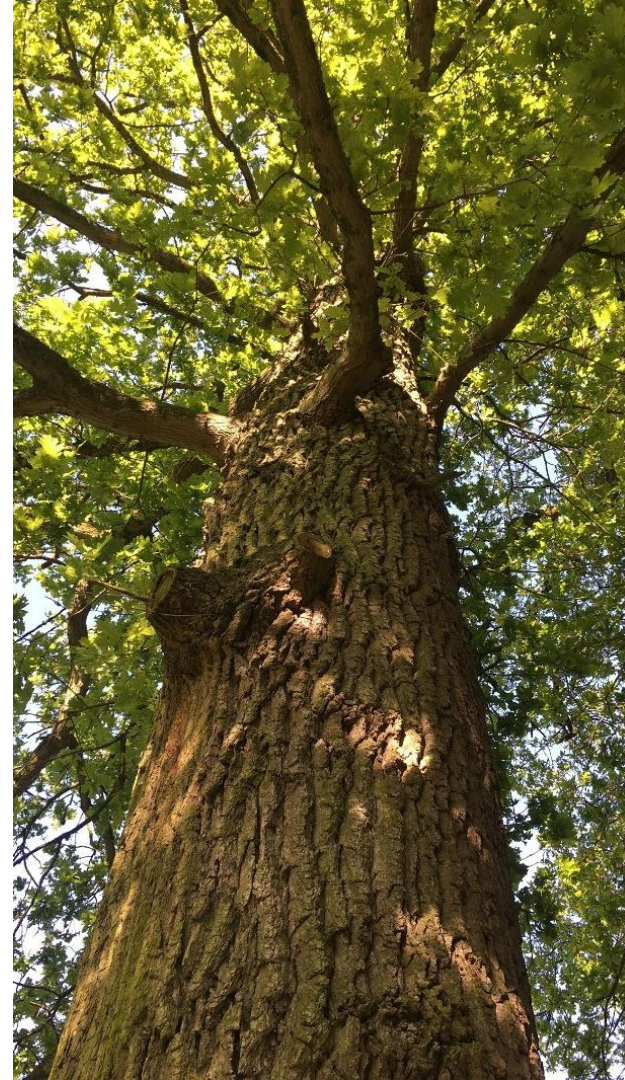


Background

Cycling and nature (connection) both offer many benefits (e.g., Logan *et al.*, 2023; Martin *et al.*, 2020)

Research has assessed the role of environmental factors in cycling (e.g., Winters *et al.*, 2010a and 2010b; Panter *et al.*, 2019)

But nature seems underexplored compared to the built environment



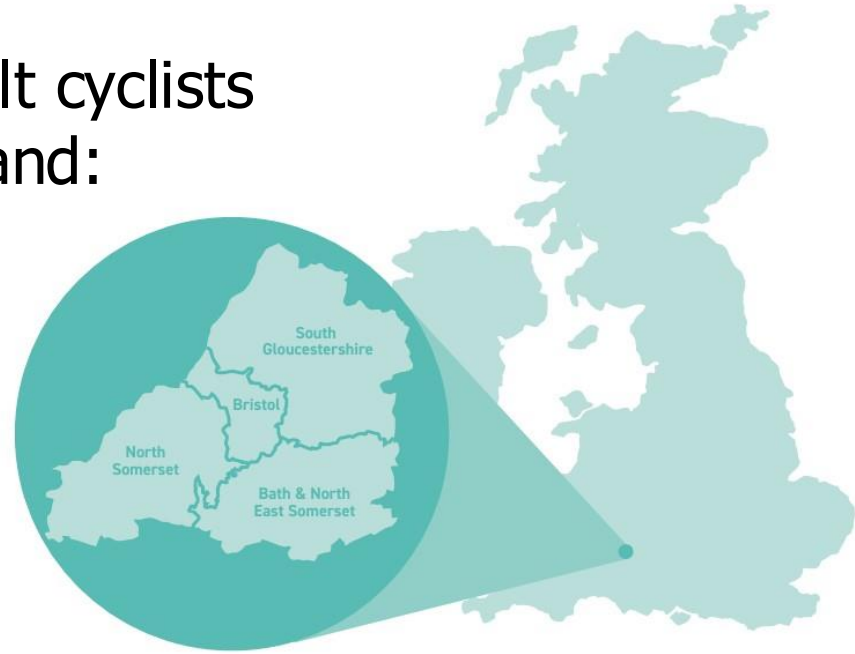
Methods and area

1. Online survey targeting adult cyclists ($n = 260$) in the West of England:

- Urban-rural routes
- Strong cycling cultures

2. Some participants ($n = 16$) also took part in:

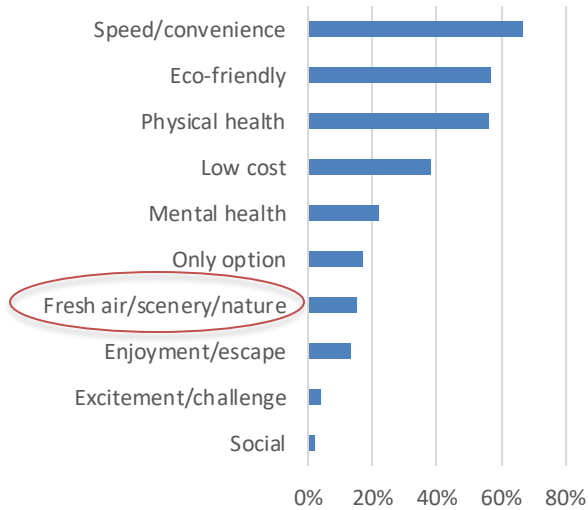
- audiovisual recording task
- semi-structured interviews



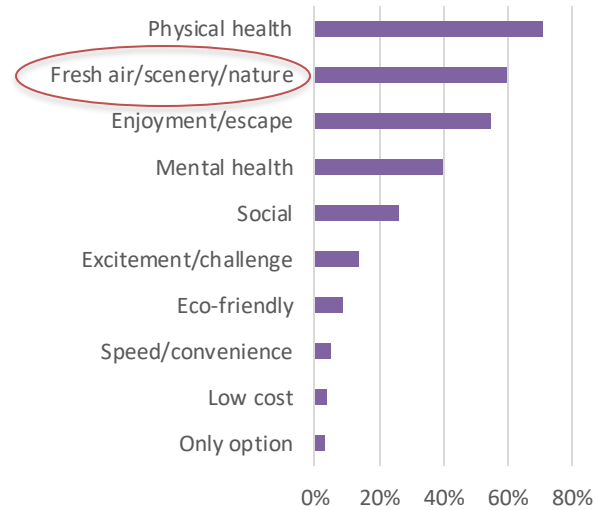
Nature as reason to cycle

Survey participants selected their top 3 reasons for:

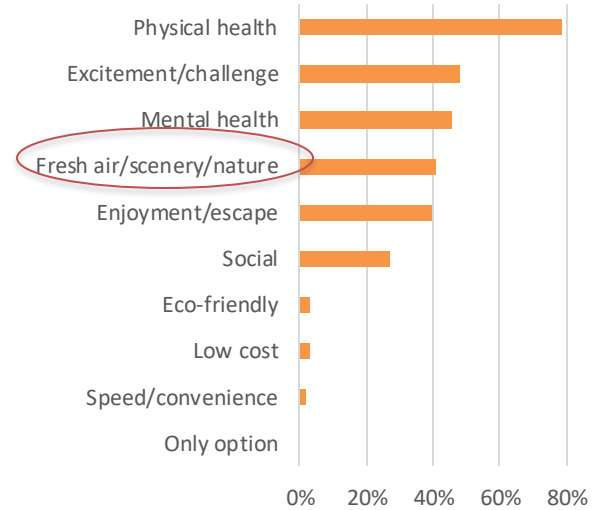
Utility cycling ($n = 213$)



Leisure cycling ($n = 174$)



Sport cycling ($n = 73$)



Nature can be a primary motivator for leisure and sport rides:

“I would not go for a mountain bike ride if I was not enjoying nature.”

(Robin)

And a secondary consideration for utility rides as well:

“[utility cycling] makes me feel great, like I've already achieved something for the day. Improves cardiovascular and therefore physical and psychological health. Allows me to traverse through nature which additionally benefits my health. It is thrilling and keeps me challenging myself, especially with Bristol's hills!” (survey participant)

And it can play little to no part at all:

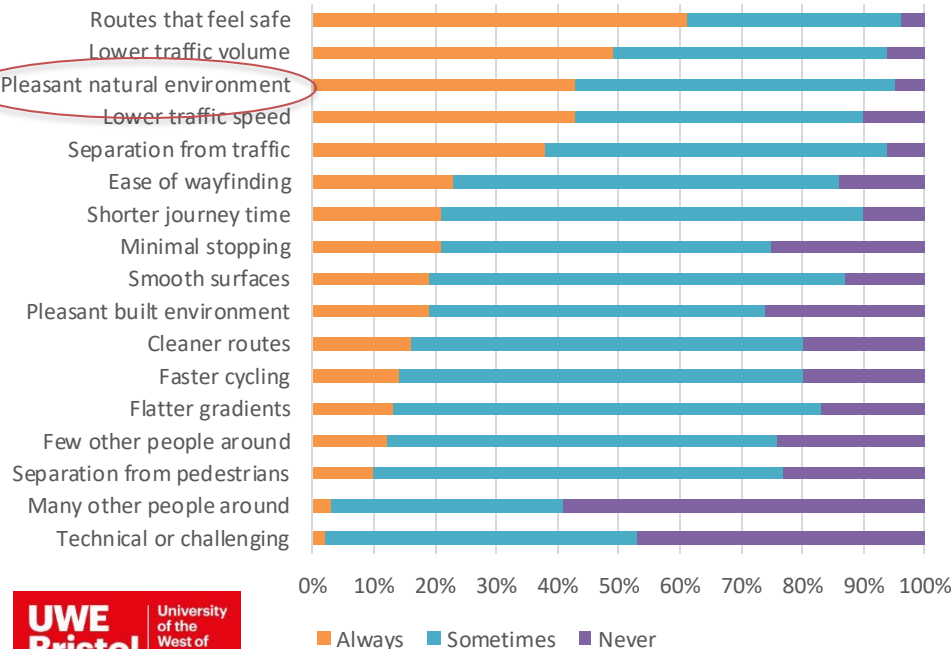
“I'm a physicist/engineer. I think my love of cycling comes from the amazing efficiency and independence it achieves. Nature, in the ecological sense, isn't so interesting to me.” (survey participant)

Motivating aspects of nature

- Sunny weather
“I will always cycle [to work] on a nice day”
(Helen)
- Being in the countryside (scenery and sensation)
“I love being outdoors and I love being in the countryside and having a bike makes that much more accessible for me.” (Annabelle)
- Escaping the urban or everyday
“Well that’s the point. It’s to get out of the city”
(survey participant)
- **Enjoyment, health and wellbeing**
“it’s also just the mental health benefits of being out in the countryside... I never would have done that... riding through Filton or somewhere.”
(Neil)

Nature and route choice

Frequency of considering these factors when choosing routes



Utility rides:

"I try and go the greenest route..., well, the quietest route, so with the most trees." (Robin)

"...it's not the quickest route. But I know that after school it's always quite chaotic. They'll be fighting and that sort of thing. And there's something about the distraction of going through a lovely park. We often look out for squirrels and things like that." (Helen)

Nature as barrier

Weather

- Icy conditions (all)
- Rain and wind (leisure)
- Cold temperatures

“I don't know if it's peer pressure or what but yeah, it would have to be pretty, pretty horrendous [weather] to say, you know, no, we're not going out” (Martin)

Darkness

- Affects route choice (utility)
- Avoiding riding (leisure/sport)

“what's the point, you can't see anything.” (Stephen)

“I wouldn't dream of cycling at night.” (Mary)

Conclusions

- Nature contributes to cycling decision-making for many cyclists
- Many aspects of nature can motivate cycling and some can also deter it
- The role of nature differs by personal interest and cycling purpose
- Enjoyment and wellbeing are key



Thank you

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West of England Combined Authority (2020) *Joint Local Transport Plan 4* [online]. Bristol: West of England Combined Authority. Available from: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/JLTP4-Adopted-Joint-Local-Transport-Plan-4.pdf> [Accessed 07 March 2024].

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