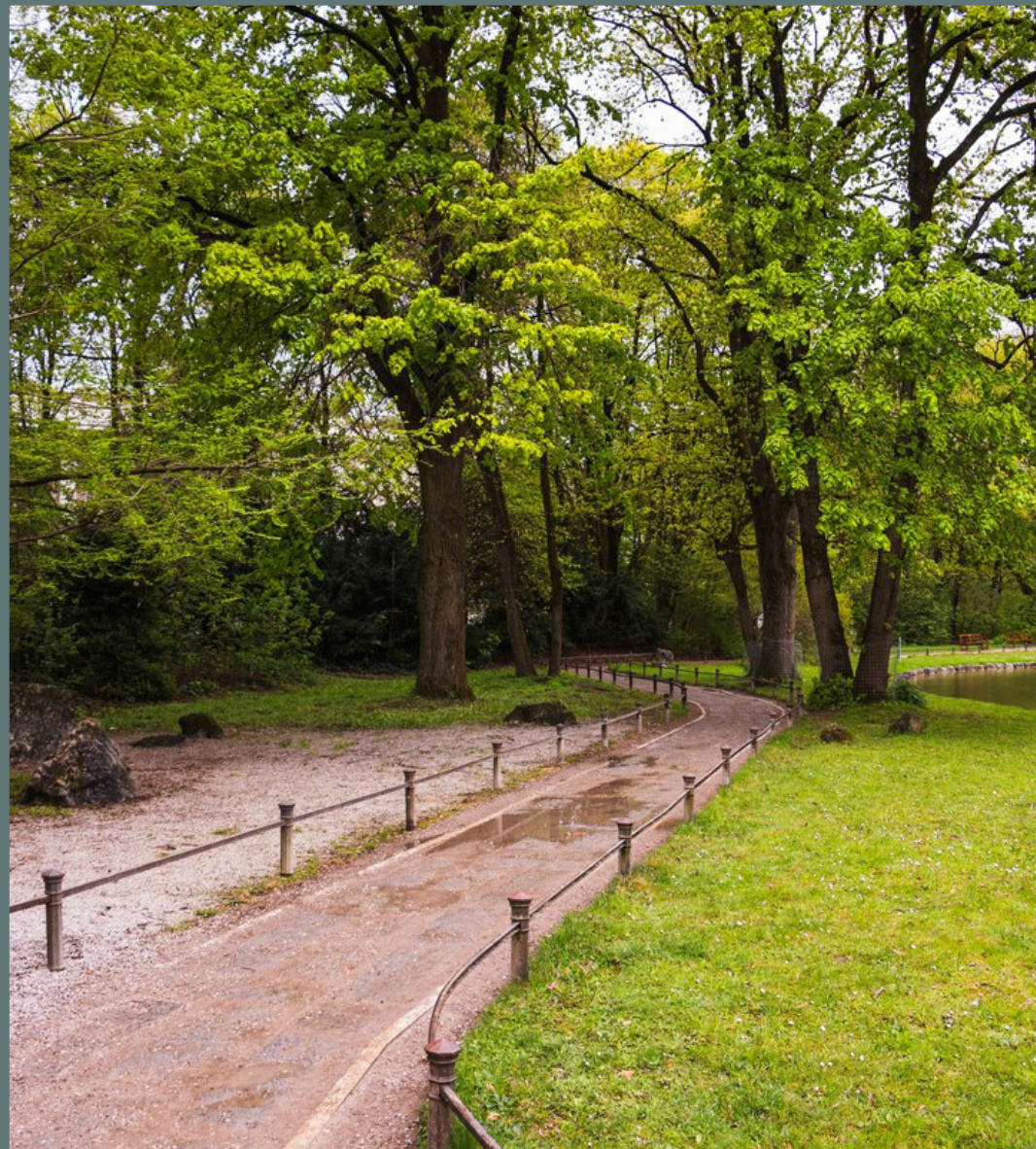

Nature-based integration:

The Role of Nature in integration for
The London Borough of Haringey





Summary

This document summarises findings and presents recommendations related to nature-based integration and the role of publicly accessible spaces in nature both in the UK and, specifically, in the London Borough of Haringey. These findings stem from our ‘Nature-Based Integration: connecting communities with/in nature’ project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation and the British Academy. Our findings highlight key interventions that enable various stakeholders to harness the transformative, yet often untapped, power of nature to aid integration. This project explored how nature contributes to the integration of migrants and established local communities, utilizing a variety of participatory and reflective methods. These included analyzing participatory mapping surveys, conducting community aesthetic workshops and making reflexive observations of natural spaces. We provide further illustrations of these methods in this document.

Our project recognises the untapped potential for policy related to nature engagement to influence factors such as wellbeing, belonging and social cohesion in a migrant integration context (although our findings also further emphasise related evidence for the positive potential of nature engagement for many diverse intersections of society).

After summarising our research methodology, we present an overview of the natural environments that residents of Haringey that took part in our study said they feel connected to. We then summarise the findings our findings specifically for Haringey before we list our recommendations based on these. Finally, we present our UK-wide project findings and conclusions.

The recommendations in this document can be considered alongside those in our final report *Nature-Based Integration: Connecting Communities with/in Nature*, our *Nature-Based Integration Toolkit* and other resources listed at the end of this report, which apply to diverse geographical contexts.

Methodology

■ Participatory mapping survey

We employed participatory mapping¹ to gather insights into the Haringey residents' engagement with the natural environment. We engaged 119 residents in Haringey. Participants were asked to mark on a local map the places they felt most connected to and discuss their reasons, including details about their activities, transportation means, etc. Another mapping query focused on places they prefer to avoid, seeking explanations and listing any additional unvisited locations. The survey also gathered demographic information—such as country of birth, ethnic background, age, gender, and postcode—to discern patterns of usage linked to intersectional identities.

■ Community aesthetic workshops

In Haringey, we conducted four community workshops with diverse groups of residents, conducting visual and sensory artistic activities to leverage collective

experiences and explore the nuanced effects of nature on the lives of residents.² Informal interviews and discussions complemented these sessions, with the materials generated during the workshops later co-analysed by the research team and Community Researchers through a sensory ethnographic lens, aligned with our Conceptual Framework. Workshop discussion transcripts were also coded and evaluated in line with Braun and Clarke's iterative steps to thematic analysis.³

■ Reflexive observations⁴

As part of our data collection in Haringey, we also carried out 10 reflexive observations, which took place in Alexandra Park, Bruce Castle Park, Chestnut Park, Down Lane Park, Finsbury Park, Priory Park, Lordship Recreation Ground, Railway Fields and Tottenham Marshes. Both lead and community researchers participated, adopting distinct yet complementary perspectives. The findings of these reflexive observations are also factored into our analysis here.

What public nature spaces are mentioned in our survey of places that people feel connected to in Haringey

Our participatory mapping survey asked respondents to select what area in nature they connect most to in the region. Among parks that were popularly selected as important by respondents were those such as Alexandra park, Finsbury park and Lordship Recreation Ground. Other public nature spaces include wetlands and marshes, and rivers and canals. Tottenham Marshes was a popular location in the sample, as the map above shows.

94 of 119 participants chose walking as a regular mode of transit to their selected area, suggesting the importance of these connections as somewhere close-by in which

they can easily relax alone or with family, friends and pets.

Through our participatory mapping survey, we were also able to collect data on potential demographic nuances in site selection and other survey themes. There was no significant difference in the pattern of locations chosen by people when adjusting self-identified migrant, gender and age status. Figure 1 below is one of the participatory maps created as part of the project, which shows the natural places that respondents from Haringey feel connected to.

1 Brown, G. & Kyttä, M. (2018). Key issues and priorities in participatory mapping: Toward integration or increased specialization? *Applied Geography*, 95, 1–8.

2 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Sage; Bal, M. & Hernández-Navarro, M. A. (2011) *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture: Conflict, Resistance, and Agency*. Brill; and Petersen, A. R. (2018), *Migration into Art: Transcultural identities and art-making in a globalised world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1091/1478088706qp0630a>.

4 Reflexive observations involved sessions where the research team visited local natural places in our case studies reflecting on key questions around nature and integration.

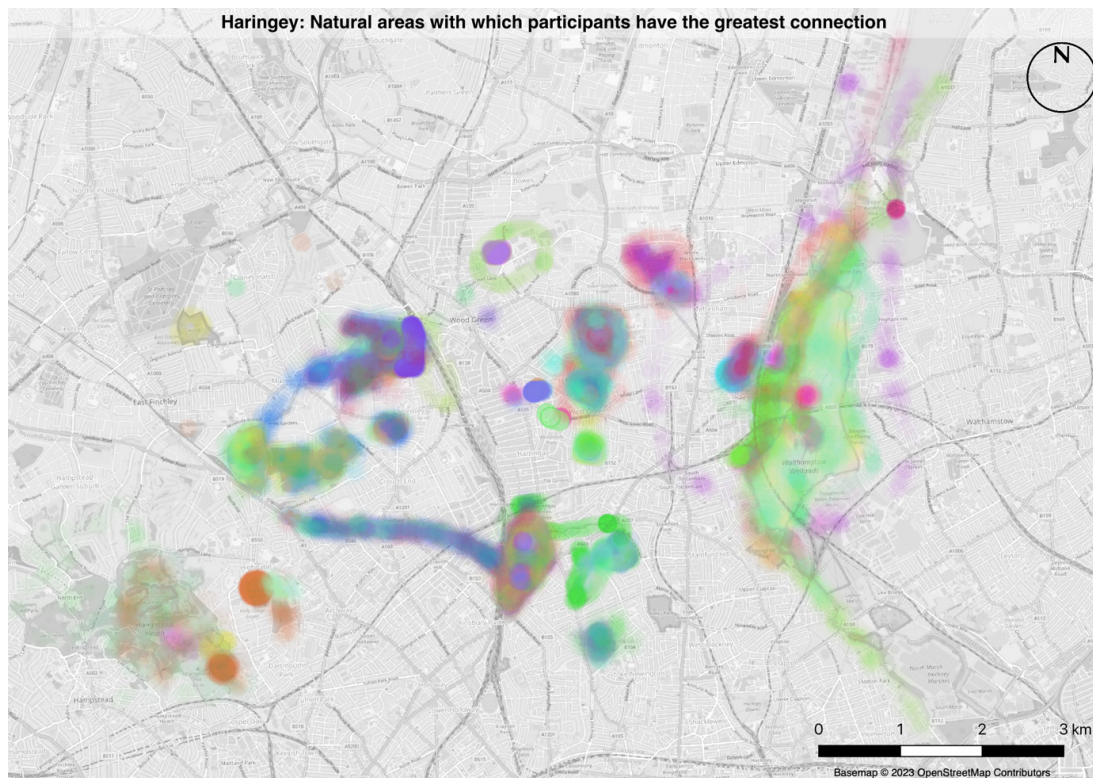


Figure 1: Different respondent 'sprays' represented by different colours. Every colour is a respondent.

What are the findings from our project on nature and integration in Haringey?

Below are summaries of our findings organised by the specific key themes that emerged through our wider research of nature-based integration, along with commentary on the relevance of each when considering publicly accessible nature spaces in Haringey.

1. Nature and wellbeing

Health is a recognised means and marker in the Home Office's Indicators of Integration⁵, with good health and wellbeing being foundational for one to engage in socialising, work, education and other activities. Our findings chart various physical and psychological impacts of engaging with nature in Haringey, including through walking, mindfulness, sport, horticulture and foraging – and how this illustrates the important role that nature engagement plays in the realisation of integration outcomes as outlined in frameworks

such as the Indicators of Integration. Parks and other publicly accessible green spaces, especially, are central to anecdotes shared about these wellbeing experiences by research participants in Haringey.

2. Sensemaking and aesthetics

This theme links closely with wellbeing and relates to how the multisensory ways we interact with diverse natural environments enable us to establish meaningful connections with nature and place more broadly. Our Haringey data draws on evidence of individuals and families interacting with infrastructure and natural environments in publicly accessible nature spaces to establish a feeling of 'escape' and find equilibrium in nature – which emerges as critically important to help people cope with a myriad of stresses in daily life. Aesthetic elements were highlighted as crucial, as this process of escape was associated strongly

5 Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A, Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019) Indicators of integration framework 2019: third edition. Accessible at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf.

with inspiring and diverse settings that allowed people to feel closer to nature.

“

‘So my favorite place in London is Alexandra Park. Uh, in the winter though, it’s a place where you can see, overlook all over London with its own glamorous, shining during the day and wonderfully lit during the evening or night time. Uh, that’s why it’s my favorite place. Also. You can picnic there, you can go there, picnic, sit down in the park, stroll walk. Um, hearing the nature’s musical sound like birds chirping even better.’

London Haringey, Aesthetic workshop participant

3. The relationship between social connections and nature engagement

Contemporary integration literature stresses the importance of social connections in processes associated with progress, belonging and social cohesion.⁶ The findings show that nature acts as a significant common area where family, friends and strangers can strengthen relationships. 65 of the 119 participatory mapping respondents mentioned friends or other acquaintances (such as housemates or fellow volunteers) as a regular accompaniment on visits to their chosen locations. 63 people mentioned family as accompaniment. Given the general prevalence of parks in the mapping sample, and considering statements from aesthetic workshop participants in Haringey, we can conclude that parks and similar publicly accessible nature spaces are important

arenas for building and strengthening social connections between families, friends and others in the community.

4. Memory and heritage

Our findings support that nature engagement is intrinsically linked to memory generation and recollection, and connecting to one’s heritage fulfils a central role in connecting them with an area. As we explore further below in the context of Belonging, Identity, and Authentic Connections with Nature, people’s relationship with nature is key to establishing ties with place, and thus to the process of integration.⁷

Publicly accessible and close-by nature spaces are crucial in helping people from diverse intersections of the community to connect to their personal histories and establish meaningful relationships with place.

“

‘I have visited this park several times as a child with my family and have lovely memories of my childhood. I now live only a few minutes away and like to come here on my own for walks and with my son, friends, and family. I feel most connected when I walk through this park on my own, it helps centre my thoughts and helps me emotionally/psychologically. I like to visit and walk through the park on the path when I am feeling particularly agitated, stressed, and upset. I feel like it really helps calm me.’

Reflexive observation of Alexandra Park, 14th October 2023

5. Belonging, identity and authentic connections with nature

While we state the importance of social connections in nature engagement, the findings emphasise the ways in which authentic connections with nature can uniquely influence personal identity and a sense of belonging in

6 Alison B. Strang, Neil Quinn, Integration or Isolation? Refugees’ Social Connections and Wellbeing, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 34, Issue 1, March 2021, Pages 328–353, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fezo40>; and Käkelä E, Baillot H, Kerlaff L, Vera-Espinoza M. From Acts of Care to Practice-Based Resistance: Refugee-Sector Service Provision and Its Impact(s) on Integration. *Social Sciences*. 2023; 12(1):39.

7 Zisakou, A., Figgou, L., & Andreouli, E. (2024). Integration and urban citizenship: A social-psychological approach to refugee integration through active constructions of place attachment to the city. *Political Psychology*, 45, 215–233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12919>.

an area. We can associate this sense of belonging with literature demonstrating the importance of processes of place-attachment.⁸ Thus, in these ways, our findings illustrate that authentic connections with nature are important to integration.

Given certain circumstances, including those related to aesthetic diversity and accessibility, parks and other publicly accessible green and blue spaces provide ample opportunity to connect with nature. The significance of this concept of developing an authentic connection with nature is supported by numbers of participatory mapping respondents mentioning that they visit their favoured nature location sometimes or routinely alone (62 of 119 people).

6. Accessibility

Factors associated with accessibility, such as proximity, transport and security, were strongly associated with the process of forging meaningful and beneficial connections with nature. 94 of 119 participatory mapping respondents chose walking as a regular mode of transit to their most favoured areas in nature; 22 regularly or sometimes cycled to their chosen locations; 17 said that they took public transport to their chosen area; and 7 respondents chose car as a regular or irregular form of transportation.

Recommendations

The research conducted in Haringey underscores the multifaceted relationship between community members and their engagement with natural environments. This exploration has revealed a complex matrix of enablers that support and barriers that hinder this engagement. The insights from Haringey not only map out the terrain of nature engagement but also chart a course for future initiatives aimed at breaking down barriers and amplifying the enablers. By doing so, the potential of natural spaces as catalysts for community cohesion, personal wellbeing, and ecological stewardship can be fully realized. The recommended interventions below can be considered alongside our UK-wide recommendations available in our full report and our Nature-Based Integration Toolkit (see section Additional Resources).

8 Zisakou et al. Ibid.

Considering data such as this, we can surmise that proximity and accessibility, generally, is a key factor in allowing people to forge important connections with nature.

Our findings highlighted barriers facing people making these connections, including those in relation to transport, aesthetic beauty and security. Concerns about safety were voiced by participatory mapping respondents when asked why they might not visit places they desire to – all of these respondents (9) were female. Meanwhile, our aesthetic workshops highlighted the issue of racism and stigma experienced in parks, meaning that groups such as ethnically diverse women were less likely to be able to reap the benefits of nature engagement in these places.

Finally, there was a significant emphasis throughout all our data on the importance of accessibility of parks and similarly accessible public nature spaces for families and children. Thus, it is important to ensure that infrastructure is available in parks, such as well-maintained children's playgrounds, to support parents and children to spend ample time there required to establish meaningful connections in and with nature.

■ Strengthening Community Ties Through Nature

Findings from Haringey vividly demonstrate the importance of social connections, child welfare, and physical activity in motivating individuals to engage with nature. This underscores the value of maintaining and investing in parks and other public natural environments as vital spaces for families, friends, and children to play, exercise, and socialize in a comfortable setting. The need to design nature spaces and nature-based initiatives that are financially inclusive is particularly pressing, given the backdrop of austerity policies that have eroded access to free public community infrastructure.

■ **Enhancing Safety and Inclusivity**

The research further highlights the necessity of creating opportunities for all community members to access diverse and aesthetically appealing natural areas where they feel safe from antisocial behaviour. Specifically, the data points to a pressing need to support individuals identifying as female, who often express heightened concerns for their safety in natural settings. Initiatives that offer group activities, coupled with policies aimed at addressing the root causes of antisocial behaviour, are crucial steps toward improving nature access for these groups. Other measures such as introduction of improved lighting as well as neighbourhood watches or safety patrols may be considered.

■ **Promoting Quietness and Reflection**

The value of finding peace and tranquillity in natural settings emerged as a critical theme in the study, especially in Haringey. This finding suggests the importance of authorities and civil society working collaboratively to increase the accessibility of natural sites that provide spaces for quietness and reflection, catering to those seeking solace and a mental break from the urban hustle.

■ **Leveraging Volunteer Networks and Organizational Support**

Volunteer conservation networks and community organizations play a pivotal role in encouraging deeper engagement with local natural sites. These groups are especially important in supporting ethnically diverse individuals to overcome barriers, including stigma and discrimination, and in facilitating a genuine connection with nature. Employing social and artistic methods can further enable individuals to draw upon their personal heritage to foster a meaningful relationship with various natural environments.

■ **Addressing Socio-economic and Planning Challenges**

Addressing the financial and urban planning challenges that disproportionately affect those at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, including many from ethnically diverse backgrounds, requires substantial resources and strategic commitment. Solutions to these issues are essential for ensuring equitable access to nature, promoting inclusivity, and enriching the community's quality of life through enhanced engagement with the natural world.

UK-wide project findings

Nature-based integration fosters relationships between humans, nature, and culture in different time periods and locations. Our project found that nature has a beneficial effect on the integration of various communities, including migrants, non-migrants, people with migrant backgrounds, refugees, and asylum seekers. The project focused on nature's impact on health, well-being, identity, social connections, and accessibility, leading to the following key findings:

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Nature engagement was universally recognized for its physical and psychological benefits, with exercise and horticulture mentioned as key activities enhancing physical health and offering psychological solace. Participants shared experiences of nature as a source of joy, motivation, and a means of escape from daily stresses.

- **Identity and Culture:** The natural environment played a crucial role in shaping participants' sense of identity and cultural integration, with nature acting as a common ground for diverse communities. Engaging with nature facilitated connections, creative expression, and a rediscovery of cultural and personal heritage through memories and sensory experiences.
- **Social Connections:** Nature served as a vital arena for building social bonds, with its universal appeal bridging gaps between different community segments. The analysis underscored nature's role in fostering community cohesion and providing a space for meaningful interactions among residents with varied settlement histories.

Accessibility: Despite the recognized benefits, challenges in accessing nature were identified, particularly for certain demographics and geographies. Barriers included lifestyle constraints, socio-economic factors, and infrastructural limitations. The importance of inclusive, supportive infrastructures and programs to enhance nature accessibility was highlighted.

- **Nature and Sense of Belonging:** The discussions suggested that connecting with nature can aid in the adaptive phase of settling into a new area, fostering a sense of belonging. This connection needs to be nurtured, akin to building social connections, highlighting nature's role in both personal and communal integration processes.

Aesthetic Workshops: The effectiveness of aesthetic workshops as a research and integration tool was affirmed, with their multisensory, creative approach enriching the data collection and providing a platform for intercultural exchange and learning about nature.

The findings indicate that connecting with nature can aid in the process of adapting to a new area and foster a sense of belonging. Nature connects us with ecosystems, ecologies, sociologies, geologies, and cosmologies beyond our immediate understanding. These connection needs to be nurtured, similar to building social connections, highlighting nature's role in both personal and communal integration processes. Therefore, by intertwining nature engagement with the Home Office Indicators of Integration, there is potential to foster more inclusive and cohesive communities.

Conclusion

Our research project findings showed that nature engagement impacts integration through its influence on wellbeing, sensemaking, social connections, memory and heritage, belonging and identity, and authentic connections with nature and place. Parks and similar publicly accessible nature spaces are central arenas in which these processes happen, especially in urbanised regions such as Haringey.

However, nature spaces facilitate these integration processes variably depending on general accessibility (proximity is key to helping people forge a connection with a nature area) as well as the ability or motivation of people to interact with the relevant natural environment. This ability or motivation can be influenced by a

range of factors including aesthetic diversity, feeling of safety and availability of infrastructure such as children's playgrounds – the latter, for example, will influence whether an ethnically diverse woman will feel comfortable spending time in and connecting to nature in a park with her family.

Our findings also highlight the benefits of initiatives which prioritise intercultural exchange and help people from diverse intersections of the population relate nature engagement to their own personal histories and circumstances, allowing them to reap the benefits of spending time in and connecting meaningfully to nature areas such as parks and other publicly accessible nature spaces.

Additional Resources

 [Link to our project website](#)

 [Link to report](#)

 [Link to toolkit](#)

Contact details

Azadeh Fatehrad

 a.fatehrad@kingston.ac.uk

Davide Natalini

 davide.natalini@aru.ac.uk