

Exploring the role of ethnicity and culture in shaping greenspace practices: A qualitative study from Bristol, UK

Andrew K. Palmer^{a,*}, Mark Riley^a, Laurence Jones^b, Sarah Clement^{a,c}, Karl L. Evans^d, Beth F.T. Brockett^e

^a Department of Geography and Planning, The University of Liverpool, Roxy Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L69 7ZX, UK

^b UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Environment Centre Wales, Deiniol Road, Bangor LL57 2UW, UK

^c Fenner School of Environment & Society, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

^d Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN, UK

^e Society and Environment Research Group, Forest Research, c/o Forestry England, Delamere Forest, Cheshire CW8 2JD, UK

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cultural background and childhood experiences shape engagement with greenspaces.
- Transnational perspectives influence how people perceive and adapt to UK greenspaces.
- Cultural considerations, perceived exclusion and gender mediate experience and engagement.
- Peer-led walking groups can increase greenspace confidence and knowledge.
- Physical environment upgrades like zoning and wash facilities offer culturally specific benefits.

ABSTRACT

Greenspaces provide multiple wellbeing and social benefits, yet ethnic minorities often have restricted engagement with these spaces which reinforces health inequalities. Addressing these requires a detailed understanding of the diversity of ethnic minorities' perceptions, preferences, and practices relating to greenspaces. Through thematic analysis of interview and diary transcripts from 53 people from multiple ethnic minority groups in Bristol, UK, we identify various ways in which ethnicity and culture influence engagement with greenspaces. We find that cultural background and childhood experiences are particularly important in shaping attitudes towards greenspaces; transnational perspectives originating from cultural heritage and familial history influence how people perceive and adapt to UK greenspace conditions; and cultural considerations, perceived exclusion, and gender combine with intersectional identities to mediate experiences and engagement patterns. We draw from a novel integration of theoretical work on affordances with practices to theorise and synthesise these findings, contributing to understanding how cultural and social factors shape greenspace use. Our findings suggest that structured access initiatives, such as peer-led walking groups, and physical environment modifications, including zoning and washing facilities, can enhance the cultural inclusivity of greenspaces while addressing systemic barriers to engagement. These insights offer practical guidance for urban planners and greenspace managers seeking to create more equitable and inclusive spaces that reflect and serve increasingly diverse communities.

1. Introduction

Research has consistently shown that people from UK ethnic minority groups visit greenspaces less frequently and engage with nature at lower rates than the national average (Boyd et al., 2018; IFF Research, 2023). Greenspaces, defined as publicly accessible areas featuring open green spaces in and around towns, cities, and the countryside, provide crucial benefits for physical health, psychological restoration, and

community wellbeing (Frumkin et al., 2017; Natural England, 2017). This disparity in usage has significant implications, as those who do not engage may miss out on important health and wellbeing benefits. Understanding the constraints on greenspace access requires consideration of research beyond the UK context. Studies from the United States, Canada, and Australia demonstrate that marginalised communities face similar inequities, shaped by intersecting factors of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Rigolon, 2016). In the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: andrew.palmer@liverpool.ac.uk (A.K. Palmer), mark.riley@liverpool.ac.uk (M. Riley), lj@ceh.ac.uk (L. Jones), sarah.clement@anu.edu.au (S. Clement), karl.evans@sheffield.ac.uk (K.L. Evans), beth.brockett@forestresearch.gov.uk (B.F.T. Brockett).

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United States, three main explanations for under-representation have been identified: marginality, ethnicity and cultural differences, and discrimination. While all three are important (Krymkowski et al., 2014), this paper focuses on the second explanation – ethnicity and cultural differences – exploring how these shape greenspace practices and experiences among minority groups.

Ethnicity and cultural differences are reflected in the ways cultural norms, values, and traditions shape preferences, behaviours, and perceptions of greenspaces. It has been shown that leisure preferences are influenced by cultural heritage and socialisation processes (Floyd, 1998; Stodolska et al., 2013). For instance, greenspace use among Hispanic recreationists often involves large, multigenerational, groups which may reflect cultural values of collectivism and social bonding (Fernandez et al., 2021; Floyd, 1998). Similarly, foundational studies have shown that outdoor spaces hold social and cultural meanings for Mexican Americans, in contrast to Anglo preferences for solitude and individual recreation (Carr & Williams, 1993; Gramann et al., 1993). Furthermore, cultural differences may intersect with experiences of discrimination, shaping patterns of participation in outdoor recreation. For example, Floyd and Gramann (1995) found that perceptions of discrimination vary within ethnic minority groups, influenced by factors like how well people still use Spanish (their ability to understand, speak, and read it), education, and social integration. Building on this, Sharaievska et al. (2010) demonstrated how discrimination in leisure settings, including verbal harassment and unequal treatment, acts as a significant constraint for Latino communities in urban areas.¹

While exclusionary conditions in the US and UK arise from different historical and social contexts, there are clear parallels. In the US, the legacy of legally enforced segregation in public spaces has left a lasting impact on access to greenspaces. Policies like racial segregation, red-lining (where minority neighbourhoods were denied investment), and the move of wealthier white populations to the suburbs have all contributed to long-standing inequalities (Osei Owusu & Rigolon, 2024). In the UK, marginality emerges through structural inequalities in greenspace provision and the over-representation of ethnic minorities in urban areas, which often lack high-quality amenities (Cronin-de-Chavez et al., 2019). Discrimination has also been observed, with rural spaces often perceived as unwelcoming or codified by whiteness (Agyeman, 1990; Agyeman & Spooner, 1997). As Gentin (2011) noted in a European context, such inequalities are compounded by cultural differences in greenspace use and access, shaped by acculturation and the specific urban environments in which ethnic minorities reside. These experiences also extend into urban spaces but can vary significantly between individuals and sociodemographic contexts (Palmer et al., 2025).

Ethnicity and culture have been explored in UK greenspace research, with cultural backgrounds shown to influence how ethnic minorities use parks and gardens. Rishbeth (2001) observed that certain groups often value greenspaces as settings for socialising and family gatherings, with activities such as picnicking and collective outings reflecting cultural preferences. More recently, Cook et al. (2024) highlighted how cultural practices shape greenspace use among ethnically diverse communities, with activities and motivations varying significantly across socio-demographic groups. Scholarship has also addressed these differences in terms of placemaking, echoing earlier work by Rishbeth (2004), who examined how planning and design practices can unintentionally reinforce boundaries, stereotypes, and exclusions, resulting in environments that are not culturally desirable or accessible to all (Snaith & Odedun, 2023). Yet, despite policy interventions, such as the UK Equality Act (2010), ethnic minorities remain under-represented and under-heard in

greenspace planning and management discussions (Mathers et al., 2015).

This study examines greenspace engagement through the dual lens of ethnicity and culture, recognising their interplay in shaping experiences. The term “ethnicity and culture” encapsulates both the relatively stable aspects of group identity (ethnicity) and the dynamic, context-dependent practices and values (culture) that influence greenspace use. This distinction is critical: ethnicity often determines structural factors, such as access to resources and exposure to discrimination, while culture informs preferences, perceptions, and behaviours (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). Together, these dimensions provide a framework for understanding the diversity of experiences among and within minority groups, avoiding reductive categorisations while embracing the complexity of greenspace engagement.

Whilst this area of research is well-established, this study provides a timely contribution by adopting a qualitative, context-specific approach that reflects the UK’s distinctive social, cultural, and historical conditions. By foregrounding lived experiences, it ensures that the findings remain relevant to contemporary debates on inclusivity and accessibility in greenspace planning and management, thereby addressing the persistent inequalities in access and representation outlined above. Our study examines the experiences of the UK’s ‘non-white’ population (Opara et al., 2023) in Bristol, acknowledging the limitations of the term ‘ethnic minority.’ While we use this term, we recognise that it risks oversimplifying the rich diversity of experiences both within and between communities. As Gentin (2011) has highlighted, sensitivity to the heterogeneity within ethnic groups is crucial for understanding how cultural, generational, and social differences shape greenspace engagement. These groups collectively form the global majority, with their experiences shaped by visible identity markers, intergenerational differences, and less-visible forms of marginalisation. Specifically, we highlight the experiences of people with Caribbean heritage and more recent Somali migrants, whose presence is reflected in the growth of Bristol’s Islamic community.

We posed the following research questions:

1. How do people from UK ethnic minority groups feel that their ethnicity or culture shapes their engagement with nature?
2. What preferences and perceptions of greenspaces are expressed by UK ethnic minorities?

This paper proceeds as follows. We begin by outlining our theoretical framework, which synthesises Bourdieu’s (1986) work on practices with Gibson’s (1979) ecological approach on affordances. We then detail our methodological approach, including participant recruitment and interviews. The findings section presents nine key empirical insights derived from our analysis, before concluding with implications for theory and practice.

2. Affordances and practices

Our theoretical framework synthesises Gibson’s (1979) concept of affordances with Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of practice to examine inclusivity in greenspace use. This integration allows us to connect individual perceptions and practices to broader processes of inclusion and exclusion. Affordances are what the environment offers, provides, or furnishes to an organism – as Gibson (1979, p. 127) states, they are “action possibilities” that exist independently of the organism’s ability to recognise them but are defined by their relationship to the organism. For example, a flat surface at knee height affords sitting for humans. While affordances are relational, they are also grounded in the material characteristics of the environment, which exist outside of human perception. These material properties – such as the strength of a tree branch or the flatness of a surface – set limits on the range of possible interactions, providing a repertoire of opportunities for interpretation and interaction.

¹ These issues are explored in greater depth in *Race, Ethnicity, and Leisure: Perspectives on Research, Theory, and Practice* (Stodolska et al., 2013) which primarily examines the intersection of race, ethnicity, and leisure within the United States, addressing systemic inequalities and cultural differences in leisure behaviours and greenspace access.

Affordances, therefore, direct attention not only to the functionality and relational aspects of environments but also to their materiality. This dual nature of affordances – relational and material – encompasses physical, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. For example, [Hadavi et al. \(2015\)](#) demonstrated how users’ preferences for greenspaces are shaped by both the material functions of the environment and the social practices they enable. This highlights the importance of understanding how material features of greenspaces interact with cultural motivations and social practices to shape perceptions and behaviours. Similarly, [Lennon et al. \(2017\)](#) has emphasised how greenspace affordances are interlaced through physical attributes, social opportunities, and cultural contexts, arguing that these dimensions interact with user characteristics and environmental contexts, including urban/rural settings and seasonal variations. Their framework highlights how perceptions of greenspace quality emerge from both physical features and the social interactions they facilitate, with user characteristics like age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status playing crucial roles in shaping these interactions. Incorporating thinking on practices to these perspectives offers deeper analytical insights to understand these cultural processes. [Heft \(2018\)](#), for example, demonstrated how places become meaningful not just through their affordances, but through their embedding in social practices. He argues that we step into pre-structured social practices that we typically reproduce rather than change, highlighting how affordances and their perception are shaped by history, broader sociocultural patterns, and power (see [Birk & Manning, 2024](#)).

These structural patterns can be further understood through Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field, and capital, which illuminate the mechanisms linking structural conditions and individual actions. Habitus, understood as ingrained dispositions shaped by life experiences, influences how individuals perceive and use greenspaces. These interactions occur within ‘fields’ characterised by unspoken rules, where actors compete for various forms of capital including economic, social, cultural, or symbolic assets that can be exchanged for new positions within fields ([Grenfell, 2012](#)). This work has been instrumental in inclusivity research through demonstrating how inequalities are reproduced. One salient example being how structural Whiteness in UK placemaking fails to recognise the cultural dimensions of “nature” and upholds an ecocentric and romanticised Western ideal framing and excluding those preferring, for example, social or horticultural activities as “disconnected” ([Snaith & Odedun, 2023](#)).

The dynamics of habitus and field have been further explored in the context of immigrant experiences. [Horolets et al. \(2019\)](#) highlight how rural-to-urban immigrants navigate their engagement with natural environments, revealing that their interactions are shaped by both social and cultural capital, which in turn influence perceptions and practices within specific fields defined by the power relations and social structures that govern access to resources and opportunities. These field processes interact with the habitus of different groups, as demonstrated by [Hamza et al. \(2024\)](#), who revealed how proximity to greenspace shapes both habitus and the maintenance of social capital by facilitating regular social interactions, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions. Their work showed that spatial relationships influenced users’ comfort and confidence levels, with participants more likely to use local spaces independently compared to distant rural sites. While structural inequalities in greenspace access persist, research by both [Hamza et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Edwards et al. \(2022\)](#) challenges oversimplified narratives of ethnic difference, demonstrating that, overall, UK minority groups seek fundamentally similar benefits from greenspaces as White users, despite facing additional structural and social constraints.

Adding to these discourses, [Palmer et al. \(2023\)](#) advocate for the analytical value of synthesising affordances with Bourdieu’s concepts to enable more sophisticated intersectional analyses of greenspace inclusivity. They propose that integrating affordances and practices can reveal the complex interplay between environmental features, individual experiences, and broader societal dynamics. They suggest moving beyond the concepts of habitus and capital to understand the (in)

accessibility of greenspaces and nature experiences, advocating instead for a more nuanced approach that explores how dispositions influence perceptions (and preferences) of natural environments through affordances ([Palmer et al., 2023](#)). This theoretical synthesis proves particularly valuable for understanding and operationalising the intersectional ([Crenshaw, 1991](#)) aspects of greenspace experiences. For example, Bourdieu’s habitus captures how ingrained dispositions vary across different identity positions; capital reveals how resource access is shaped by intersecting social categories; and field analysis illuminates how specific social contexts mediate experiences differently for various groups ([Kilvington-Dowd & Robertson, 2020](#)).

In the following sections we use this conceptual framework to simultaneously explore place-based experiences and practices and broader socio-cultural influences to examine the multifarious ways that different groups and individuals engage with greenspaces. This then enables us to draw out practical and policy-relevant recommendations for the future of greenspace management.

3. Methods

3.1. Setting and recruitment

To address our research questions, we adopted a qualitative approach for its strength in allowing depth and contextuality and culturally sensitive research ([Rishbeth et al., 2022](#); [Tillman, 2002](#)). Based in Bristol, an ethnically diverse city in England, participants were recruited through a stepwise approach ([Newing et al., 2011](#); [Perez et al., 2013](#)) employing multiple methods to diversify our sample. We began by sharing recruitment flyers through community centres’ social media, then progressed to place-based recruitment at community groups and finally conducted a process of door knocking. The door knocking methodology, informed by [Davies \(2011\)](#), targeted two areas in Bristol characterised by high ethnic minority populations and sub-optimal access to quality greenspace (assessed using Natural England’s Green Infrastructure (GI) Mapping tool, [Natural England, 2021](#)).

Recruitment was supplemented by respondent-driven sampling ([Raifman et al., 2022](#)), where participants referred others who met the criteria of being an adult UK ethnic minority living in Bristol. This criterion encompasses individuals from “non-White” ethnic groups in the UK, including those with migrant status. We recognise the limitations of this criterion, particularly given the significant diversity within non-White populations in the UK ([Aspinall, 2021](#); [Opara et al., 2023](#)). The participants include people from diverse age and ethnic groups in Bristol, including African, Caribbean, South Asian and Mixed groups.² In

Table 1
Participant characteristics.

Characteristic	Details
Age	18–24 (6), 25–29 (4), 30–34 (6), 35–39 (6), 40–44 (7), 45–49 (6), 50–54 (7), 55–59 (5), 60–64 (4), 70–74 (2).
Gender	Female (29), Male (24)
Self-ascribed ethnicity	Arab (1), Asian (1), Asian Pakistani (2), Black British (4), Black British Caribbean (2), Black Caribbean (1), Black Man (1), British Bangladeshi (1), British Pakistani (2), Brown British (1), Caribbean (6), Chadian (1), Indian (2), Jamaican (1), Mixed Caribbean (1), Pakistani (1), South Afrikan (1), South Asian (2), Somali (9), Sudanese (1), Sri Lankan (1), Syrian (3), White and Asian (1), White and Black Caribbean (2), Not Provided (3).

Note. Several participants chose to omit certain demographic characteristics.

² 33 respondents were born outside the UK, although several of these moved to the UK as children.

Table 1, we present only self-ascribed ethnicities to avoid the con-scripted nature of census categorisation (Aspinall, 2021). Participants' identities are concealed through a pseudonymisation process that drew from self-ascribed ethnicity, age and background, thereby retaining the meaningfulness of their sociocultural identity (Deakin-Smith et al., 2024). While Table 1 provides an overview of participant characteristics, interview extracts are provided with our chosen pseudonym. Some participants opted to withhold demographic information, which is reflected in the absence of this information in some participant-references. Informed consent was acquired, and each participant was reimbursed £20 on completion of the interview. Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Liverpool's, Faculty of Science and Engineering Committee, research ethics approval number: 11121.

3.2. Interviews and diary method

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken remotely or in-person with fifty-three respondents, primarily conducted individually, but occasionally in small groups. Participants were questioned about their nature practices, perceptions and preferences, and their thoughts regarding ethnicity and cultural differences, and under-representation in greenspaces, including the factors that restricted or influenced their engagement. Participants were also asked to describe their experiences of visiting (if they visited), including greenspaces outside of the city. This aspect involved providing participants with Natural England's definition of greenspace (*publicly accessible areas featuring open green spaces in and around towns, cities, and countryside*) as meanings of greenspace can be subjective (Hamza et al., 2024; Taylor & Hochuli, 2017). Each interview concluded with an open discussion where participants could add additional thoughts and suggest changes or upgrades, they would like to see implemented in greenspaces.

The lead author conducted all interviews in English, with one conducted in Arabic with the support of a translator, and some of the paired and group interviewees supporting others in interview with specific English phrasing and terminology. Interviews were designed to be flexible, allowing participants to express themselves in ways they felt most comfortable. The inclusion of small group interviews in some cases helped to keep participants at ease, though the majority were held individually to allow for in-depth personal reflections. Participants who were pre-arranged for interviews were also offered the opportunity to complete a diary documenting their experiences through various media – including voice recordings, written notes, pictures, and videos. Four participants chose this diary method, which was designed to give participants creative control, with instructions to document aspects of greenspaces they found positive, negative, or personally meaningful over the course of a period of up to two weeks. Their textual accounts were transcribed and the photographs used to aid participants' recall during discussions and to provide additional context to their perspectives.

3.3. Thematic analysis

Using NVivo 12, the interview transcripts and diary materials were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis framework through six iterative stages: i) familiarisation; ii) open coding; iii) generating initial themes; iv) developing and reviewing themes; v) refining, defining and naming themes; and vi) writing up the analysis. This analytical approach was inductive, prioritising participants' words and lived experiences across the entire dataset. By doing so, the analysis ensured that the voices of participants were preserved and centred, rather than being constrained by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. This approach was particularly appropriate given the research's aim to amplify marginalised voices, especially considering the first author's positionality as a White male researcher working with participants whose lived experiences differ from his own (Britton, 2020).

Grounded in constructionist epistemology, this approach

acknowledged the reciprocal relationship between language and experience (Byrne, 2022). The analysis combined experiential and critical orientations. The experiential component focused on the participants' lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings, while the critical orientation sought to elevate these findings through theoretical enquiry, drawing on the concepts of affordances and Bourdieu's habitus. The theoretical insights were introduced in the final stages of analysis to contextualise and refine the findings. This abductive phase allowed the analysis to move beyond description and explore how participants' lived experiences of greenspaces were shaped by the interplay between environmental features, social practices, and cultural contexts. For instance, affordances were used to interpret participants' perceptions of what greenspaces enabled or constrained, while Bourdieu's habitus provided a lens for understanding how these affordances were mediated by the dispositions.³ To enhance trustworthiness and demonstrate transparency online and in-person feedback sessions were offered to all participants who agreed to be contacted later. Three hour-long feedback sessions were conducted with six participants, allowing them to review the project's findings and add further comments.

4. Results and discussion

Our analysis revealed multiple interconnected themes that shape how ethnic minorities engage with and experience greenspaces in Bristol. These findings, illustrated in Fig. 1, cluster around nine empirical insights, which each respond to both our research questions. Throughout the results and discussion, we draw on theories of affordances and practices to understand how participants' experiences are shaped by cultural, social and material factors.

4.1. Cultural influences and early experiences

Our interviews revealed how deeply cultural background can shape people's relationship with nature, with participants describing influences that both encourage and constrain their engagement with green spaces. When discussing early life experiences, participants often reflected on how cultural practices and family traditions informed their current relationship with nature, aligning with recent scholarship on cultural background and environmental engagement (Neal et al., 2015; Stodolska et al., 2025). Several interviewees for example, situated their current practices within broader biographical contexts:

...for physical reasons we do go out, of course, for walks for physical fitness, but not to enjoy; that's not something which is a, which is like, that's not how we grew up (Bharat, 35–39, Indian man)
...because we were not exposed to them [greenspaces] when we're younger, we don't find peace in them (Alicia, 45–49, Black British Caribbean woman)

Bharat, in referencing his experiences growing up in India, offered a utilitarian view of the outdoors, recognising its value for physical exercise rather than enjoyment, demonstrating how cultural background shapes habitus formation (Sharlamanov et al., 2024). Similarly, Alicia's childhood experiences created a more detached view of greenspaces as spaces of leisure. These accounts align with Heft's (2018) theorisation of how children's perception of environmental affordances develops through both direct engagement and cultural learning, where the meaning and utility of spaces are shaped by social contexts and cultural practices. In these cases, engaging with greenspaces during formative years in culturally-specific ways have shaped how respondents understand and utilise these spaces in the present. However, among respondents who were more engaged with greenspaces, culture and early experiences contributed to nature-related habitus along a continuum of

³ Coding decisions and emergent themes were discussed and agreed upon amongst the paper's authors.

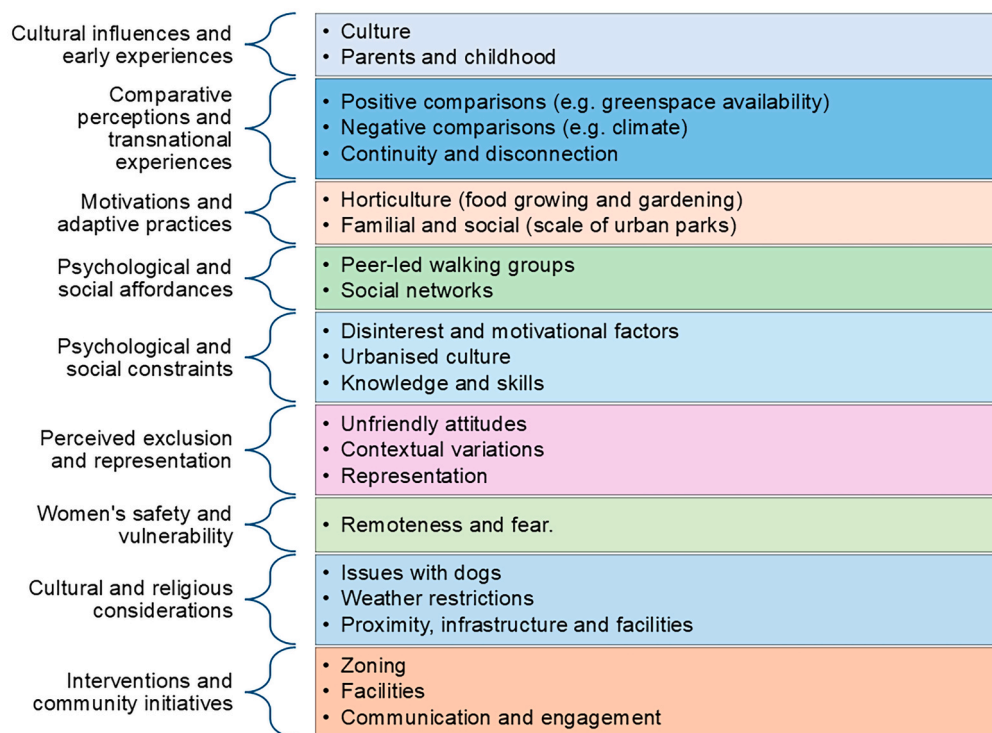


Fig. 1. Illustration of the structure of themes (left) and sub-themes (right).

attitudes, highlighting that early life experiences can be both positive and negative, and demonstrating the diverse experiences of different ethnic minorities:

Hindu people, they always believe that the nature is God and then we worship and there are lots of you know, you know, there is lots of reasons why we believe the God because it gives us you know, the food, it gives us food and clothing and shelter, which is very necessary for us, and then also it gives us mentally and physically healthy (Priya, 40–44, South Asian woman).

I think that's a load, because [...] I'm Jamaican background, my parents and our family come from the rural, some of our African brothers and sisters [...] our Asian brothers and sisters, a lot of them come from rural backgrounds. Their parents come from rural backgrounds. So, when they go back home, they go to rural places (Trevor, 55–59, Black British Caribbean man).

It's kind of a different way [to relax], they [people in Somali] have this chewing stuff, they call "khat", they have that and they just go (Ibrahim, 40–44, Somali man).

Relating to our research questions, Priya connects her religious faith with nature, and the benefits derived from this relationship. This aligns with Hamza et al.'s (2024) findings where Muslim participants specifically viewed natural greenspaces as sites for spiritual contemplation and religious connection, with some reporting enhanced emotional and spiritual contentment through these visits. Trevor challenges dominant narratives about minority groups' disconnection from nature by highlighting the rural heritage and ongoing engagement with natural spaces. When discussing leisure practices, Ibrahim highlighted how his Somali cultural background offered different relaxation practices, notably the use of Khat (a native plant stimulant) – rather than the conventional Western concepts of outdoor recreation. The case of Khat illustrates a broader tension: while it functions as a communal activity in Somali culture, its illegal status in the UK (Swain, 2021) symbolises how certain cultural practices are excluded from legitimate forms of sociality through complex intersections between migration, cultural practices, and greenspace use.

This nature-related habitus, shaped by previous experiences, can be understood through Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis which occurs when habitus and practices face negative consequences because they no longer align with their new environment (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 161). In the present context, this misalignment manifests when migrants' established relationships with nature encounter markedly different environmental and social conditions in their new setting – what Birk and Manning (2024) describe as the "vortex" of contemporary social life where social relations, cultural practices, and power dynamics create uneven access to and experiences of place (see Hall & Savage, 2016).

4.2. Comparative perceptions and transnational experiences

The previous section highlighted how material cultures can influence perceptions of the natural environment, including the cultural context in which they operate. These cultural differences create "transnational perspectives", where migrants' memories and experiences of landscapes in their countries of origin shape their engagement with UK greenspaces through both 'continuity and dislocation' (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013; Stodolska et al., 2017). This dynamic process requires adaptations in both practices and perceptions, as individuals creatively negotiate between past experiences and present environments. An illustrative example is how blue spaces, which several participants regarded as important, are experienced differently based on individuals' prior cultural contexts:

So, the big difference from coming from Jamaica to here and being in you know, in blue spaces is that the beaches here are completely different from beaches in Jamaica, to the point where when... I remember when I was a student in London and I went down to Brighton, because I wanted to go to Brighton beach, and realised it wasn't a beach like what I call the beach so I suppose now we go to the beach here for different reasons than we go in Jamaica, so I've had to adjust my concept of what a beach is, looks like and what it is for (Karen, 60–64, White and Black Caribbean woman).

Karen's observation about UK beaches being perceived through cultural and physical differences complements Horolets et al. (2019),

who highlighted how migrants adapt their practices when transitioning to new environments. Just as migrants navigate challenges in transferring nature-related cultural capital, UK beaches may require a redefinition of leisure practices, reflecting broader processes of cultural adaptation and habitus formation. However, we extend this in noting that there appeared to be distinct differences between participants depending on their migratory origins. We found that participants who had moved to the UK from African countries such as Somalia tended to have positive views towards local greenspaces, highlighting their satisfaction with its 'greenness' in comparison to more arid conditions and cultural practice in Somalia:

Back home we don't have any greenspace. So, it's this is kind of a bonus to have any green places. However, it is just a bonus! Really, no one thinks about really making any green stuff. Nowhere, there is no, and the weather is quite hot. It's difficult to have a green area (Ibrahim, 40–44, Somali man).

Contrastingly, some participants expressed negative perceptions about the UK climate: *"Primarily with that it's weather"* (Meera, 18–24, South Asian woman); *"When it's not raining it is very good"* (Djenab, 30–34, Chadian man). These responses reflect not just comparative perceptions with drier climates, but demonstrate how environmental affordances are perceived and acted upon differently based on prior experiences and cultural dispositions. These constraints, particularly wet conditions, are a year-round consideration that reshape both the perceived possibilities for action and the cultural meanings attached to greenspaces (Cronin-de-Chavez et al., 2019).

While apparent differences in greenspace engagement emerged between communities, these variations need to be situated within the complex intersections of historical settlement patterns and structural conditions, rather than purely cultural factors. For instance, Caribbean communities have a longer history of settlement in Bristol than many other minority communities, with migration predominantly occurring in the post-WWII period. In contrast, many in the Somali community arrived later, particularly during a substantial wave of migration in the 1990s during the Civil War which is a pattern compounded with higher indices of deprivation and experiences of forced migration (Abdullahi & Wei, 2021; Anderson, 2023).

4.3. Motivations and adaptive practices

Building on these comparative perceptions, discussions about greenspace use, specific motivations and adaptive practices were identified in our data. These included motivations that were linked with cultural heritage, for example, food growing emerged as a significant theme, particularly, among participants with Caribbean ancestry:

"...allotments and people being involved in that [...] coming to the house with fresh produce was quite normal, which would like be callaloo, which is like a type of spinach (Angella, 40–44, Black British woman). ...there's a few West Indian men [...] they've got their little allotment in Bristol [...] and that's their way of probably recreating what they know from when they were in their 20s before they came to England but they're restricted as what they can grow because some of the things that they would grow would not grow here (Doreen, 70–74, Jamaican woman). There's always gonna be barriers for people who live high-rise. Remember there's no land space, only, your allotment. You can come [to our gardening group] if don't have access to that one [...] or wait for their own allotment. That's the only two way you can survive. If the government gave everybody an allotment [...] greenspaces, then you can cure your problem (Malcolm, 50–55, Caribbean man).

Participants described difficulties accessing suitable spaces and growing familiar plants in UK climatic conditions. Malcolm, speaking from his local community centre, emphasised the need for growing spaces within dense urban environments, revealing intersectional constraints where economic and structural conditions amplify cultural

disconnections. In response, participants developed creative solutions and reconfigurations through small-scale interventions. These ranged from home-grown herbs and vegetables to community-led initiatives, as Derrick demonstrated: *"look in this garden here which we occupied right, this garden here produce like 15–16 Pumpkin last year"* (Derrick, 55–59, Caribbean Man). Such adaptations align with emerging research on the role of under-realised greenspaces for communities facing structural limitations (Rishbeth et al., 2022).

More broadly, when discussing participants' motivations and assessments of spaces, responses often centred on the social context rather than physical features. Participants frequently referenced communal activities, children's play and social interaction, with several emphasising the significance of large urban parks:

"My area is very, very green. I got two park, one big one. Sunday and Saturday, people come in" (Anwar, 60–64, Somali man)

"The big park, so many others coming, different people [...] but the people always when they come in the park, they relax" (Ayaan, 50–54, Somali man).

"I like the big parks in the area. There are three big ones. I like the open spaces" (Yara, 40–44, Somali woman).

Such responses highlight the importance of scale – an issue specifically emphasized by Somali participants, whose comments suggest that larger spaces offer different affordances supporting their preferred forms of social interaction and communal gathering. While some participants noted problems with anti-social behaviour or crowding in certain areas, causing them to travel to other parks, our data revealed numerous instances of participants actively seeking out larger spaces rich in cultural affordances.

A primary location discussed was Eastville Park: *"I go to Eastville Park! I go to Eastville Park, every week, twice!"* (Amin, 45–49, Somali man), *"Three times for me!"* (Khalid, 35–39, Somali man). This park exemplifies how large spaces can provide a broader range of affordances – from open areas that facilitate group gatherings to infrastructure that supports activities like barbecuing and physical exercise – demonstrating how scale and affordance possibilities are intrinsically linked to culturally-specific community needs (Lennon et al., 2017).

4.4. Psychological and social affordances

Our data also revealed processes that are helping participants gain better access to greenspaces. A key example was the success of peer-led walking groups that were set up by and for UK ethnic minorities. These groups provided structured opportunities to connect with nature and each other for those who joined them. Notably, the theme of 'safety' emerged, with several participants explaining: *"Safety in numbers, definitely. Yeah, definitely"* (Zara, 30–34, woman); and *"doing things in a group setting, probably, you know, people have, you know, the confidence because you're there as a group"* (Doreen, 70–74, Jamaican woman). Interestingly, these descriptions juxtaposed against accounts from participants such as Kimberly (quoted below), who had attended non-minority walking groups or activities, where they reported being subjected to questions about their background. Instead, conversations in peer-led walking groups were reported as being natural and unburdened from the looming dynamics that are hallmarks of unequal power structures in fields:

...it just feels different. No one really... you know, maybe it's a "how are you?" and those questions are still a little bit safer for me, you know, what I'm doing and who..." (Kimberly, 35–39, Black Caribbean woman).

In these accounts, peer-led walking groups emerge as crucial mechanisms for accessing greenspaces, serving as sites for accumulating social capital through networks built on shared experiences and cultural understanding. Groups such as Muslim Hikers, Black Girls Hike UK, and Boots and Beards exemplify this growing movement across the UK, with their successful expansion demonstrating the demand for culturally

responsive outdoor space (Slater, 2022). Rather than these sites providing just physical safety – they constitute a modified field where diverse forms of capital are recognised and valued, allowing participants to exercise agency without navigating the subtle markers of difference and power hierarchies typically present in mainstream outdoor spaces. While these processes might superficially suggest assimilation or acculturation, the underlying dynamics reveal a more complex interplay of social processes and power relations within the field. This complexity is evident in how participants developed nature-related cultural capital through these groups and gained knowledge and confidence that enabled independent exploration of the countryside:

...people feel more confident when they go to the group. And then maybe like three people say, oh, you know, we like each other, let's go off and do another walk around on their own and that kind of stuff. But you can't really do that. I feel you have more. As a person, I would have more confidence going somewhere that I've been before with other people (Kimberly, 35–39, Black Caribbean woman)

I wasn't always interested in the outdoors, which is actually quite well, maybe I was, but I didn't always have the opportunity to spend as much time outside when I was younger, until I moved to Bristol. And then I get became surrounded by all these friends that like, love the outdoors, and I actually had people to go with. So I guess like my early twenties onwards was the phase where that really started to be a bigger part of my life. So now I'm outside all the time, can't keep me inside (Aisha, 25–29, British Pakistani woman).

The importance of having access to these sites of social and cultural capital contributes to the broader finding of the value of others in these greenspace relationships. In these responses, as illustrated below, becoming more engaged with nature was framed in a positive manner with participants illustrating how they had learned from others or pointing to a gradual change through exposure to different cultures.

It's really inspiring, influencing actually [...] because it's so good for your health and usually from my ethnicity, people don't do that (Bisma, 25–29, Asian Pakistani).

I didn't go for walks when me when I came in. So just stick around inside. Yeah, I mean, it took a couple of years [...] of course you make friends [with] work colleagues, and then you get introduced to their families and then it starts a cultural thing, right? You get acclimatised outside, your acclimatised. And then when we meet, we start meeting friends and families and colleagues, families. And then so we just go on walks with them. And then when you try to understand what this is, like part of a culture and join the nature spaces. So, it's probably influenced, we were influenced by the friends and colleagues, families, I would say, and then we started going out. (Bharat, 35–39, Indian man).

Here, we can be more certain in talking about 'assimilation', which did not appear value-laden or framed as some aspect of their culture being lost, as described elsewhere (Jay & Schraml, 2009; Robinson et al., 2022). We acknowledge that assimilation can carry negative connotations of cultural erosion, but we see more neutral processes at play in our research. In relation to our research questions, our findings align more with research highlighting how access to, and use of, greenspaces by ethnic minorities involves complex interactions between cultural values and spatial practices, where participation does not require the abandonment of cultural identity or values (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). Within these shared greenspaces, social and psychological affordances emerge as crucial sites for building both social and cultural capital. Social trust, for example has been shown to facilitate nature connections (Yoshida et al., 2022), while access to outdoor-oriented networks provides both opportunities and motivation for connecting with nature (Sando & Sandseter, 2020).

4.5. Psychological and social constraints

While some participants highlighted psychological and social

benefits of greenspaces, others described mental constraints to access, reflecting mindsets and habitus that did not align with greenspace use. These perspectives also highlight the differences in cultural capital between respondents – that is knowledge, skills and confidence. However, while we demonstrate these psychological constraints and the potential for overcoming them, we apply caution in framing the participants in our study as 'in deficit' or in need of a 'cure' for lower visitation rates. For instance, several participants indicated their general disinterest: "some places are quite nice but I'm not a big fan of [visiting greenspace]" (Yusuf, 18–24, Somali man). This sentiment aligns with evidence that a significant proportion of both non-White and White populations in the UK do not visit greenspaces because they are "not interested" (Burnett et al., 2022). Such patterns also resonate with findings from studies informed by Bourdieu on African-American visitation to national parks, where historical and cultural factors are seen to shape perceptions and participation (Erickson et al., 2009) and note how practices are influenced not only by individual preferences but also by broader social structures.

The intersection of psychological constraints and socio-cultural context emerged as a significant theme. Yara (40–44, Somali woman) captured this complexity, explaining that she does not "even think about going to the countryside," adding that "People from Somalia would not feel safe going further afield on their own" and "it is more in their culture to stay at home". However, this account must also be contextualised within broader dynamics, such as unfamiliarity and the potential for greenspaces to be perceived as unwelcoming, whether through direct encounters or second-hand stories of discrimination and incivility. As participants described, these experiences and perceptions are often reinforced within their communities, shaping attitudes and behaviours over time:

...the cycle just continues. They're [ethnic minorities] always just staying within and because you don't know any different, you just stay within, without, you know, opening up to what's out there (Doreen, 70–74, Jamaica woman).

You know, you just don't see many people of colour walking out into certain places, you know, even up to this day now. And I think it is learned behaviour (Marsha, 55–59, Black British woman).

[not many ethnic minorities] utilise some green spaces or tap into that natural environment. You know, we're very stuck into like, the inner city. I'd say habit – it's not something immediately that comes to mind... and knowledge (Daniel, 30–34, African man).

These accounts reveal distinct phenomena – cycles, habits, learned behaviours, sociohistorical roots (Johnson, 1998) and urbanised culture – each contributing to our understanding of practice. Some participants may have developed a habitus that limits their exploration of new spaces, and that socialisation and experiences may have shaped their choices. This is captured by the idea that habitus reflects the interplay between the free will and structures over time, by "dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices [...] and our very perceptions of these" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). This interplay manifests within the field, which is structured by existing power relations and inequalities, leading to patterns of under-representation. When individuals encounter these structured inequalities (see also Johnson et al., 1998) their experiences of feeling unwelcome become incorporated into their perception of affordances, constraining what they see as possible or appropriate actions within these spaces (Ramstead et al., 2016). The habitus thus mediates how environmental affordances are recognised and acted upon, where limited engagement further narrows the range of perceived possibilities.

These psychological constraints and nature-related habitus reflect differences in cultural capital that shape perceptions and capabilities in engaging with greenspaces. Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) describes cultural capital as existing "in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body." For some participants, these constraints included a lack of knowledge about urban greenspaces, while

others who had little contact with such environments during childhood explained that accessing the countryside – or even knowing where to go – was particularly challenging:

I would love to go to like the Isle of Skye [...] but I feel like I don't have the knowledge or the confidence to do that yet, because I don't know how to read a map. [...] I think places like that [...] intimidate me a bit more because I don't have like navigation knowledge. [...] I'd want to go with someone that's been there before and can like, show me around (Aisha, 25–29, British Pakistani woman).

These findings are further supported by participants' perceptions of the countryside as a codified space, imbued with symbolic significance related to leisure, ethnicity, and privilege. Alicia articulated a stereotype often associated with her community's relationship to natural spaces, stating, *"Black people don't hike, [...] It's a white middle-class thing, let's be honest about it. [...] You don't see your mum and dad taking a walk and stuff like that. [...] it's not part of our thing."* (Alicia, 45–49, Black British Caribbean woman). Yet, while Alicia's remark reflects a prevalent stereotype, it also highlights the broader societal narratives and field processes that shape perceptions of outdoor leisure activities and habitus. This stereotype, rooted in historical and cultural contexts, can perpetuate a sense of exclusion for individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds, suggesting that engagement with nature is not part of their ethnic identity (Askins, 2009). However, it is crucial to recognise that such statements do not capture the diversity of experiences within these communities. Our data revealed contrasting accounts, from Doreen's (70–74, Jamaican woman) expressed desire to connect with nature – albeit hindered by factors such as access and cultural representation – to Yara's enthusiastic embrace: *"I'm happy, people, green, talking, green innit?"* (Yara, 40–44, Somali woman). These varied accounts reflect how participants have developed distinct relationships with greenspaces through different influences and experiences (see also Palmer et al., 2025).

4.6. Perceived exclusion and representation

The interplay between in-situ factors in greenspaces and intersectional aspects of identity, including gender and religious affiliation, emerged as significant considerations in our analysis. These factors highlight practical cultural considerations that could be made explicit within greenspace design and management to benefit UK ethnic minority groups, although some issues lie partially or wholly outside the agency of those directly responsible for these spaces. A key finding was the experience of exclusion, stemming from feelings of otherness or being out-of-place. These perceptions were particularly prevalent in non-urban greenspaces, where participants reported feeling unwelcome or self-conscious due to unfriendly looks:

I've had a few incidents sometimes where someone has made me feel uncomfortable when I'm outside. Like, I've been approached by people and they're like, "what are you doing here? Where have you come from", and like asking me while questions and I'm like, "none of your bloody business" (Aisha, 25–29, British Pakistani woman).

...for many people of colour there is often still [...] a feeling of insecurity, self-consciousness, worry, about going further into rural areas where we do feel very visible. I suppose for me, I mean I've often felt very visible, but I've done it regardless and I guess that's partly because having spent sort of all my secondary school life, you know, White Cotswold village, you so you didn't have a choice to kind of be, you know, kind of live. Be out there, be visible and be in green spaces (Kavitha, 45–49, Sri Lankan woman).

Reports such as these were highlighted by around half of the participants, while an equal number shared mainly positive experiences, particularly in multicultural urban areas, which were seen as more socially supportive, closer in proximity, and less codified by ethnicity and whiteness (see Johnson et al., 1998; Palmer et al., 2025). However, it is

important to acknowledge the sentiment expressed by Kavitha, who, while alluding to these processes, emphasises that they do not deter her from visiting greenspaces – partly due to her previous experiences of socialisation and desensitisation. This highlights the layered, intersectional, and relational nature of these experiences, which go beyond simple identity characteristics. The role of discrimination in shaping minority groups' experiences is underscored here (Hassen, 2025; Schinasi & Lawrence, 2024) drawing attention to variations across geographic and social contexts, while recognising the oppressive yet simultaneously aspirational aspects that differ between individuals.

4.7. Women's safety and vulnerability

It is important to recognise how the intersecting aspects of identity shape interactions with nature. Gender, for instance, has been shown to influence greenspace access and physical activity. Colley et al. (2022) for example, highlight that women often feel more vulnerable than men in greenspaces, which can affect the types of activities they undertake and the times or locations they choose to visit. This was true in our study, where women spoke about fears or concerns about going out on their own, when it was dark or to places that were more remote where they felt vulnerable. Karen, for example, wrote in her diary entry explaining how she avoids certain pathways due to their steepness, lack of people around, and safety [see Fig. 2 (1)]. Adding to this, Kimberly, illustrated the interaction between perceptions of other users' attitudes, fear, and vulnerability when walking alone in greenspaces as woman:

...there's this fear, particularly when I walk on my own, of just how to, I didn't know it just sometimes people... aren't very kind when I've been out on my own, and that's made me feel like it wouldn't stop me. But I felt, you know, there's always that fear, as well as being a woman on my own, as well as that, that fear that's there. But I think there's a lot of things to happen to feel safe for people to walk. You know? (Kimberly, 35–39, Black Caribbean woman).

In relation to our second research question, these safety concerns can be further influenced by cultural practices or preferences, as highlighted by Yara (40–44, Somali woman), who noted that some members of her community tend to "stay closer to home" when in the UK. For other participants, factors such as skin colour or religious clothing added additional layers of discomfort in greenspaces. This intersectionality was evident in the case of Bisma, a Muslim woman who, like Karen, exercised caution in entering certain environments, especially in more remote areas. She illustrated, here, uneasiness and fear through her description of passing through a canopied pathway [Fig. 2 (2)] on her journey to an urban greenspace:

...you feel a sense of like 'What if something happens? What if something comes?' You know that fear, especially with your child. You just want to cross this area where there's a drop silence and no one in sight. Even though it was a sunny day, you can see the picture was bright, but still, I had that sense of being a bit scared, not scared, but uneasy. I don't know if there's someone behind the bushes. I wouldn't enjoy going from there again; it wouldn't be an option for me (Bisma, 25–29, Asian Pakistani woman).

As we see, the negative sentiment ascribed to a scene, that might be innocuous to males, demonstrates a range of influences not always fully understood when thinking about access and inclusivity to greenspace. We can draw from the work on affordances by Lennon et al (2017) who highlighted how the design and configuration of greenspaces can either promote or inhibit positive experiences, depending on the relational dynamics between the user and the environment. In Bisma's case the lack of perceived safety and the sense of isolation diminish the affordance opportunities of the greenspace she was visiting, making it less inclusive. This is also important in considering the practices of different groups, with proximity, family-orientated activities, and welcoming and inclusive placemaking shown to be important in this and other studies



Fig. 2. Diary photos responding to request to take photos of positive, negative or meaningful aspects of their experience: 1, Remote, uneven pathway (Karen, 60–64, White and Black Caribbean woman); 2, Canopied pathway (Bisma, 25–29, Asian Pakistani); 3, Steamed kale & 4 Grapevines (Kavitha, 45–49, Sri Lankan woman).

(Peters et al., 2016; Rishbeth et al., 2018; Stodolska et al., 2017).

4.8. Cultural and religious considerations

Building on the intersections, our findings reveal specific cultural and religious considerations relayed by the participants. A significant concern raised by numerous participants was the presence of unleashed dogs in greenspaces, which can hold cultural and religious significance. Participants from Islamic communities and those with Caribbean heritage cited various concerns about dogs, though for different reasons. For Caribbean participants, this often stemmed from fear due to limited exposure to dogs in childhood or previous negative experiences. For Muslim participants, the concerns were often rooted in religious considerations regarding ritual purity (tahara). In Islamic tradition, while interpretations vary among scholars and individuals, many Muslims consider that direct contact with a dog's saliva or nose can break their state of ritual purity required for prayer (wudu). Some interpret this to mean they should avoid physical contact with dogs entirely, while others focus specifically on avoiding contact with the dog's saliva or nose. The two quotes below illustrate the cultural and religious perspectives on why dogs become a significant consideration when visiting greenspaces:

...for me, culturally, the relationship between humans and dogs in this country is much closer than it is in Jamaica, where I grew up [...] If I'm walking in a place where there are a lot of dogs off the leash, which they often are in this park, they might jump on me or get too close, and I'm not comfortable with that (Karen, 60–64, White and Black Caribbean woman).

... [we're not] scared of dogs, or we hate or dislike dogs, it has nothing to do with that, it's that basically if they do touch our clothes, and that makes our clothes dirty [...] we have to do like a wash again before our prayer. But you'll find a lot of people who are dog owners don't actually... not aware of that. Don't understand that. To be fair, a lot of them don't even respect that (Amina, 35–39, Arab woman).

Previous experiences, cultural mismatches, and specific challenges faced by Islamic communities converge to shape their interactions with greenspaces. Negative affordances, such as the presence of dogs and the UK's dog-friendly culture – previously identified in research (Hamza et al., 2024; Morris et al., 2011) – further complicate these experiences. This is a clear reminder of how, for some, the field regulations might

work to exclude those from outside the dominant culture, as “social space tends to function as a symbolic space, a space of lifestyles and status groups characterized by different lifestyles” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 20).

4.9. Interventions and community initiatives

The participants made recommendations for solving some of the issues highlighted in this paper or building on successes and enablers. For example, responding to issues surrounding dogs, and cultural considerations, straightforward alterations were proposed that could foster change and enhance inclusivity. For instance, they suggested implementing dog-free zones, or expanding the boundaries of children's play areas:

I think separate areas, where you have certain areas, dogs are not allowed, for example, or non-dog friendly area or something? I think that would be nice (Amina, 35–39, Arab woman).

Partitions like dog areas and baby areas (Alicia, 45–49, British Black Caribbean woman).

These interventions also included improving infrastructure and facilities. For example, when considering the need to wash regarding prior to prayer rituals, more facilities were called for by several participants, particularly if they are visiting spaces further from home:

...am I still gonna be there when I need to pray? And if so, are there washing facilities? So, then I can do my prayers [...] I'd be aware of it culturally [...] if I'm close to home, I can get home in time, that's fine (Sadia, 45–49, British Pakistani woman).

The perspectives relayed in the data above demonstrate the internalised understanding of how their religious requirements shape their perceptions of greenspaces, influencing their approach to leisure practices. Public spaces become sites of negotiation between different forms of cultural capital. The calls for specific facilities and segregated areas represent attempts by different groups to have their cultural practices legitimised and scaffolded through specific cultural affordances, i.e. socially and culturally mediated opportunities for engagement (Ramstead et al., 2016). The request for washing facilities, for instance, may represent an attempt to align physical affordances with religious habitus, making the space more inclusive for Muslim people. Significantly, we observe the importance of proximity, which goes further to

explain the co-constituting nature of these practices and the combination of factors that might affect planning greenspace visits locally or further afield.

Along with the success of walking groups, participants suggested various approaches to improve greenspace access. These included raising awareness about both the health benefits – as one participant noted, *“improving the awareness of the positive effects that natural spaces have on your physical and mental health”* (Zion, 18–24, Caribbean man) – and the location of local greenspaces, which some felt were insufficiently promoted: *“more education about them, more awareness, more telling us that they exist!”* (Alicia, 45–49, British Black Caribbean woman). Participants who were actively involved in community projects (i.e. civic gardening, outreach, and peer-led walking groups) brought additional perspectives, emphasising how nature-related organisations need to ‘communicate in different ways’. Their suggestions encompassed community engagement through various means, including organised events, excursions and immersive engagement practices:

...some people can't read the English signage, people can't, you know, so you have to find different ways, you have to invest the time, invite someone from a community of people of communities you want to engage, get some advocates in the community and have them translate certain things in different languages, you know, create like, like ways like little black vox pops, little interviews, of people of different colours in different cultures, to talk about the experience of being on the farm experience of working on, and they put that out in your social media. Put that out in, you know, if people find a way to engage with it, make radio ads, let people know they can come, [...] let the people know you want to encourage a little bit more diversity! (Kabelo, 40–44, Indigenous South African man).

In this context, we observe a strong alignment with [Rishbeth et al. \(2022\)](#), who report on ‘what works’ including practices such as co-participatory and peer-led activities, as well as the use of social media and digital initiatives to share information and build confidence in visiting and using greenspace. These findings underscore the coherence and potential for implementing interventions that align with theories of practice ([Jackson et al., 2024](#); [Spaaij, 2012](#)).

5. Limitations

While this research benefited from the highly diverse backgrounds of its participants, this breadth also limited its ability to deliver targeted policy recommendations, as the focus on diversity diluted the depth of analysis for specific ethnic or cultural categories. This trade-off, reflecting the project’s prioritisation of experiential accounts over a narrower focus, meant that while valuable insights into the complexity of greenspace use were gained, more concentrated studies on particular under-represented communities are needed in the future. Additionally, discussions often blurred distinctions between urban and rural greenspaces, which, while useful in enabling open dialogue, it sometimes limited the specificity seen in studies focused on a single typology. Finally, the researcher’s outsider positionality would have influenced both recruitment and interpretation, as being an outsider as a White male may have obscured certain constraints or priorities which could have limited the depth and meaningfulness of the findings for the communities involved.

6. Conclusions

This paper has examined how ethnicity and culture shape greenspace practices among minority groups in Bristol, drawing on thematic analysis to distil nine interconnected findings into four key messages. Cultural and social influences, particularly those rooted in childhood and family, play a foundational role in shaping greenspace engagement. Intersecting identities, including cultural, religious, and gendered dimensions, mediate access and experiences, with specific concerns

around safety, modesty, and cultural practices being especially significant. Psychological constraints and affordances interact with these cultural influences, manifesting in perceptions of disconnection or continuity with other regions, and highlighting the importance of both psychosocial and material factors. Enhancing access and experiences requires attention to spatial configurations, effective communication, and the fostering of inclusive, community-driven initiatives such as peer-led walking groups. While these findings align with broader research on greenspace engagement, this study provides additional depth by situating these dynamics within Bristol’s specific sociodemographic context and by foregrounding the nuanced experiences of Somali, Caribbean, and Islamic communities.

Drawing on theories of affordances and practices, our analysis how cultural and social capital, alongside nature-related habitus, are crucial to understanding the complex ways different communities negotiate greenspace engagement. The temporal dimension is particularly significant, as earlier-life experiences and cultural socialisation continue to influence present-day interactions with greenspaces. Processes such as hysteresis and the adaptive reworking of space reflect ongoing negotiation of cultural capital. Our findings suggest some distinct community needs among our participants: for example, some Somali participants expressed satisfaction with greenery, which may reflect immediate structural concerns; several individuals of Caribbean heritage described a desire for growing spaces; and some Islamic participants highlighted the importance of infrastructure such as washing facilities and dog-free zones. It is important to note that these insights reflect the perspectives of those who took part in this study and should not be assumed to represent the views or experiences of all members of these communities.

These observations underscore the need for culturally sensitive greenspace design, multilingual communication, and community-led initiatives. Sharing positive greenspace experiences from similar social and cultural backgrounds may help overcome psychosocial constraints and foster engagement, while the creation of peer-led activities, such as walking groups, can facilitate the development of social capital and provide valued assets to communities. Upgrades to the physical environment should consider scale, proximity, and facilities for prayer or washing, as well as the cultural specificity of engagement with dogs and the potential for growing spaces to support integration, skills sharing, and the development of social and cultural capital.

While our findings complement existing literature, this study contributes to the growing body of work by providing a detailed, contextually grounded analysis of greenspace engagement among minority groups in Bristol. By integrating theories of affordances and Bourdieusian concepts, we illustrate how greenspaces serve as dynamic sites of cultural negotiation, adaptation, and social connection. These insights highlight the importance of place-based, culturally sensitive interventions that address both physical and psychological constraints to greenspace access, offering practical guidance for policymakers, urban planners, and community organisations. For example, policy could prioritise the co-design of greenspaces with local minority communities to ensure facilities such as prayer and washing areas, dog-free zones, and dedicated growing spaces reflect specific cultural and religious needs. Funding should be allocated to support peer-led walking groups and community gardening projects, recognising their role in nurturing social capital and wellbeing. Communication strategies should include multilingual signage and targeted outreach, drawing on trusted community networks to promote awareness and inclusion.

It is also important to recognise that lower rates of greenspace visitation should not automatically be viewed as a deficit or a problem to be solved. Alongside structural and psychological constraints, some participants simply expressed a lack of interest in visiting greenspaces. This diversity of motivations highlights the need for future research and policy to respect individual preferences and avoid pathologising lower visitation or engagement and instead focus on creating opportunities that are responsive to a range of cultural values and personal choices.

In light of these findings and limitations, future research would

benefit from longitudinal and participatory approaches to capture changes over time and engage more closely with under-represented communities. We also advocate for more in-depth analysis of particular community experiences to inform policy development and policy approaches drawing on emerging research that integrates community perspectives into decision-making around urban and rural greenspaces, ensuring that interventions are responsive, equitable, and sustainable.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Andrew K. Palmer: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Mark Riley:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology. **Laurence Jones:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Sarah Clement:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Karl L. Evans:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Beth F.T. Brockett:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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