Impact & Insights Note
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BRANCHING OUT
New routes to valuing urban treescapes

FUTURE OF UK Treescapes

More understanding, connection and action: How discussing the value of trees in citizen panels influenced participants

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Using a Research Impact Evaluation Framework, we explored how members of the public were affected by participating in the Branching Out project citizen panels which captured stories about how trees are valued.



Headlines

Citizens **changed their thinking about trees, gained new knowledge, made new social connections**, as well as **taking action** based on their participation.

Many participated in more than one panel, creating additional benefit by gaining a greater understanding of the project and contributing on several occasions.

Background

To explore the ways in which participants were affected by Branching Out, four impact categories were selected from the Research Impact Evaluation Framework (Edwards and Meagher, 2020). These four categories are: 1) instrumental change, 2) conceptual change, 3) capacity building, 4) enduring connectivity.

Using this framework, we developed short questionnaires which were distributed to participants at citizen panels in York, Cardiff and Milton Keynes on three occasions in 2023/24 as well as a 'panel of panels' which included participants from all locations in 2025. The panels gathered stories on the values of treescapes in each city and provided citizens with information about the project. In total, 273 responses were received, many from repeat citizens.

Findings

Instrumental change: The biggest **instrumental impacts** of the panel of panels on respondents were that they had shared what they learnt with family and friends (83%) and they had made changes in their daily life to help the environment (65%). Twenty-six percent of the citizens had planted trees because of the project.

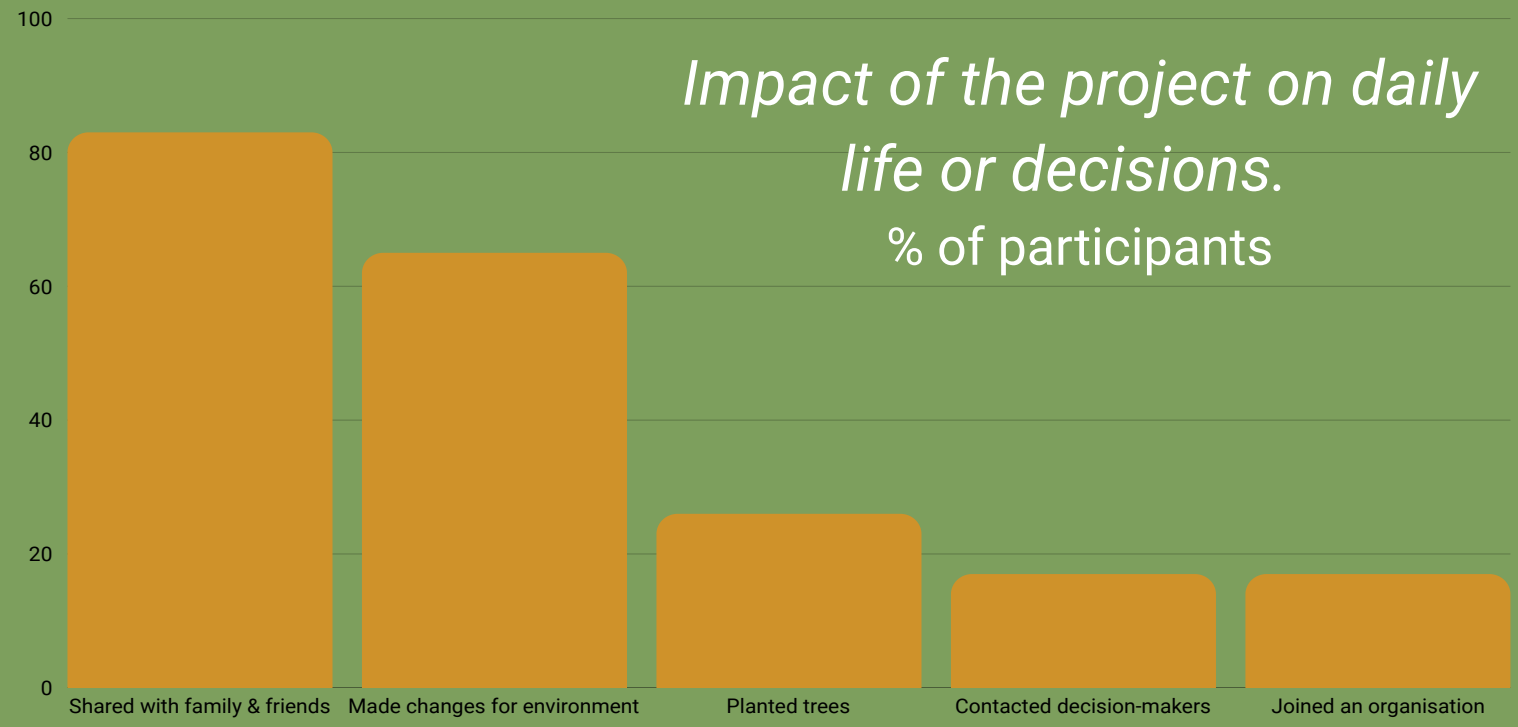
Conceptual change: There was broad recognition of the **importance of exposure to other people's views** and how trees mean various things to different people. Citizens on the panel of panels agreed that the project helped change the way they think. It also helped them understand the role of trees in society and communities better, and they discovered something new about trees (96%).

Capacity building: Citizens on the panel of panels agreed that they had gained a **better understanding of tree management practices** and how these are put into action (82%), and how decisions are made about trees (74%). Citizens agreed that discussion with others in the panels had increased their knowledge and understanding (98% in 2024, up from 93% in September 2023).

Enduring connectivity: 42% of respondents discovered **new groups, organisations and networks because of the project**. Also, just under a quarter made plans with someone from the project and followed through with them or stayed in touch with people they had met.

> *While I've always liked nature I hadn't considered the broader aspect of how treescapes affect us and the nature around us. It's made me think more about it and appreciate treescapes more* (Citizen's reflections).

Findings



Implications & Recommendations

- Citizen panels are a **powerful method for engaging meaningfully** with members of the public on an individual and group level.
- Inviting citizens to multiple panels led to many participating more than once. This **repeated engagement** further aided learning and engagement with the project.
- Citizens participating in panels often **learn something new** through social interactions with both peers and researchers.
- The panels can **reinforce people's existing beliefs** or help them **consider the topic in a new way**, gaining a broader perspective.
- Citizen panels are a great way for local policymakers and practitioners to **explore the views of their communities**, especially as all parties can examine their views in the context of new information and deliberation.



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This note is based on: Jordan et al., (in press). The transformative impact of Participatory Interdisciplinarity explored through the 'Branching Out – Treescapes Project'; Edwards, D. and Meagher, L. 2020. A framework to evaluate the impacts of research on policy and practice: A forestry pilot study, Forestry Policy and Economics.

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