

# ‘I need some time at the Sea’: The Coast as Therapeutic Landscape



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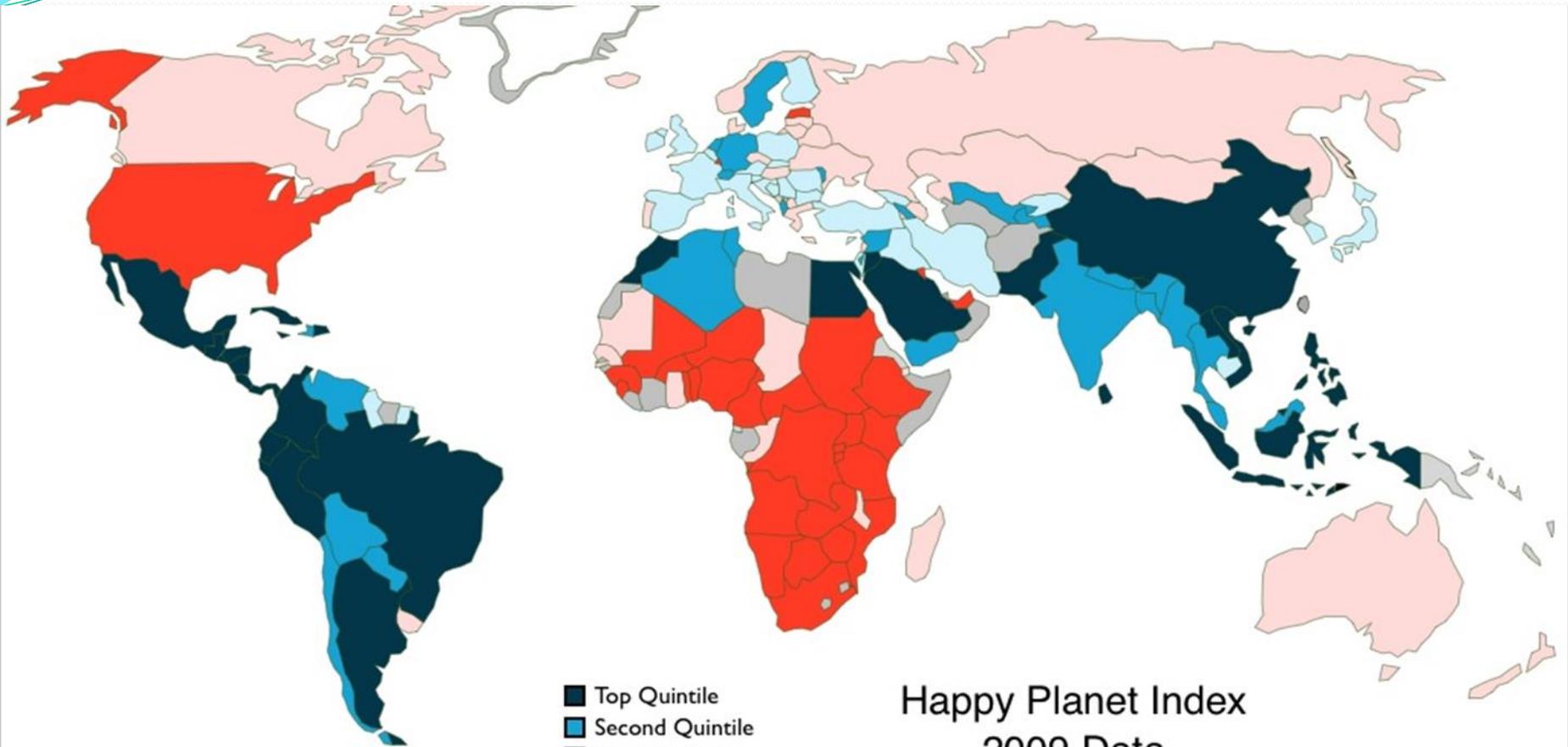
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# Outline

- The Sea as Wellbeing Context
- Narratives of Healing
- Therapeutic Landscapes & Bluespace
- Case Study – Brighton: Policies, Practices and Experiences

# Wellbeing

- Huge drive in the 'wellbeing agenda' in recent years at local national and international scales, (Global Happiness Index)
- But also - a long and ancient context to wellbeing and the sea – e.g.coastal spa towns
- Definitions wide and varying: WHO emphasise the importance of proactivity in maintaining good physical and psychological health, not just merely 'the absence of disease'
- Salutogenic factors important ('contributing to wellbeing')
- More recent research on the role of nature in wellbeing and mental health (NEF, 2012 'Natural Solutions': the Economic Value of Nature, Natural England, 2016: A Review of Nature-Based Interventions for Mental Health Care) 'What Works Wellbeing' AHRC think-tank etc
- The coast is a key part of the natural environment in such discussions but often overlooked or specifically spoken of...



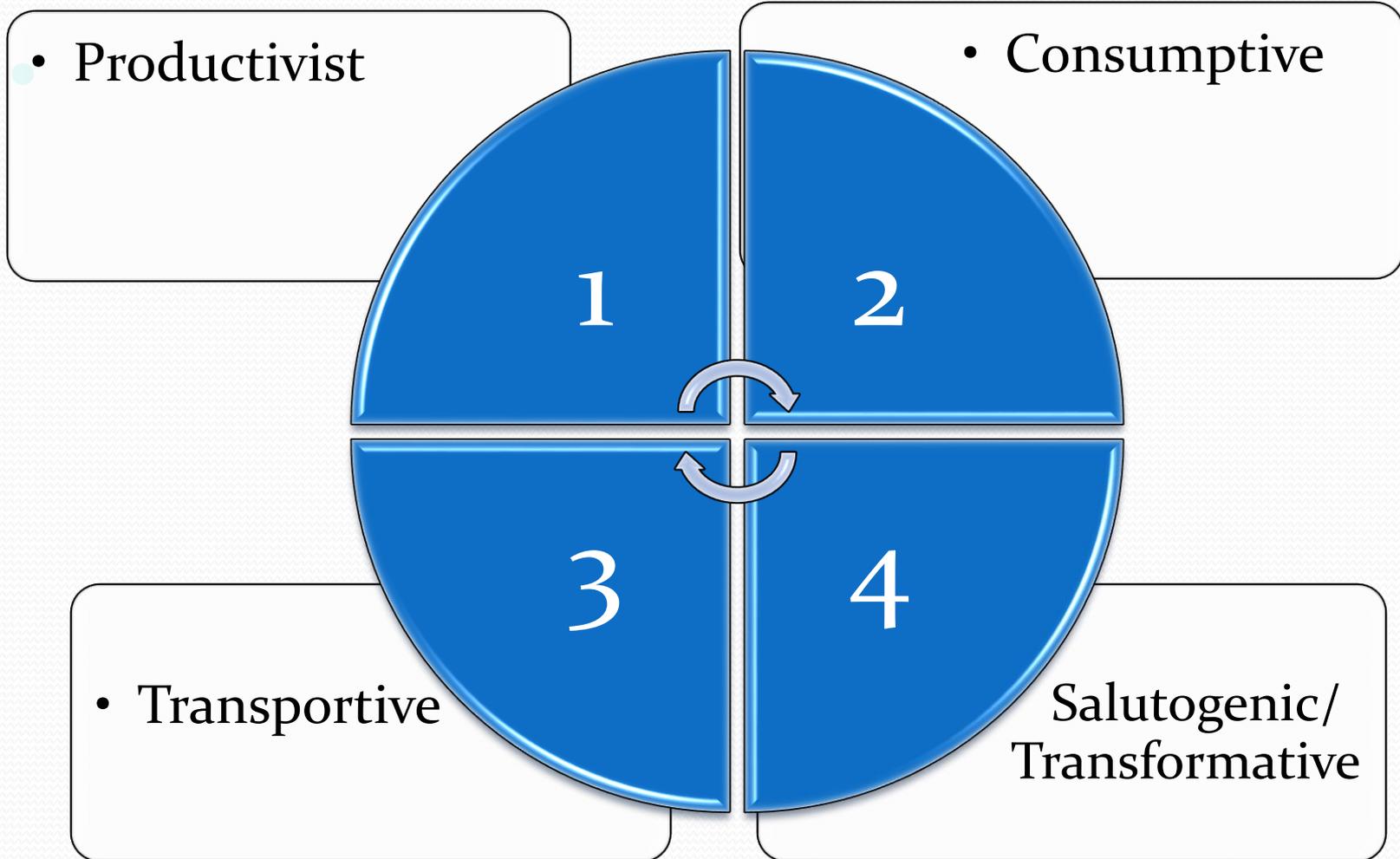
- Top Quintile
- Second Quintile
- Third Quintile
- Fourth Quintile
- Bottom Quintile
- No Data

## Happy Planet Index 2009 Data

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy\\_Planet\\_Index](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Planet_Index)

*Geocurrents Map*

# Framing coastal functions:



# Terminology

- Multiple and varied **definitions** of wellbeing and wellness from variety of disciplinary contexts...
- Long standing awareness of benefits of 'being outside' and the role of the **natural environment** in 'being well'
- **Therapeutic landscapes** literature offers combination of health and cultural geographies to frame spaces of meaning for healing and wellbeing [often in the everyday context]
- Social sciences and psychology literature examining evidence based approaches to **ecotherapy** (often within mental health/public health agendas)
- Concepts of '**green space**' and '**blue space**' valid for both everyday and tourism and leisure constructs of spatial consumption and production
- Landscape **designations** often incorporate wellbeing and sustainability as important factors – but scope to explore this further..as symbiotic relationship...

# Narratives of Healing and Nature

- Growing evidence base around the healing effects of nature, even 'views of nature' (Ulrich, 1999) that affect stress reduction...
- Green Space, common term for all natural areas
- Blue Space 'all visible surface waters' (Volker and Kistemann, 2011) and 'Waterscapes' (Lianyong and Eagles, 2009)
- Presence of water important human need; blue space also examines the sound of water, its colour, clarity, motion and context /usage
- Emotional and restorative benefits as well as recreational: 1) kinetic recreational experiences (motion) 2) situation-based, 3) harvest experiences, 4) Contemplative or aesthetic experiences
- Scope for increasing links between health and landscape research with wellbeing & the sea



## Mindfulness by the Sea



# Contd.

- **Engagement with Nature/Nature and Self –**
- New research situated within psychotherapy and ecotherapy where nature therapy aims to help people understand and shift the traits of their relationships, both to the planet and with each other (Jordan, 2009)
- MIND (Mental Health Charity) – ecotherapy..and emerging work on the role of the sea in mental health...
- New juxtapositions of organisations and disciplines emerging

## EXAMPLE:



Sample of Partnerships working together – Sea-Swimming for Mental Health

# Therapeutic Landscapes

- Gesler (1993): ‘those changing places, settings, situations, locales and mileus that encompass both the physical and psychological environments associated with healing ...’
- – (1)The Physical Environment, (2) The Social Environment and (3) The Spiritual Environment (Gesler, 98)
- Original emphasis on ‘healing places/landscapes’ (eg Lourdes) now extended to include home environments, summer camps for children, and everyday landscapes of health...
- Builds also on my own research into Retreats/Wellness Tourism – temporary therapeutic landscapes (Kelly, 2010, 2012, 2016)

# Therapeutic Landscapes

- Much has been written about landscape as salutogenic context (Ward Thompson, 2011; Cooper Marcus and Barnes, 1999) and the ideas of Therapeutic Landscapes are important in constructing ideas of spaces that encapsulate different aspects of it: the physical environment, the social environment and the spiritual environment.
- Interesting idea of places with ‘an enduring reputation for achieving physical, mental and spiritual healing’, using cultural geography notions of **sense of place and sites of meaning** in understanding symbolic spaces – the sea as an abstract idea often adheres to this...
- Research is often focused on **physical places** that can be mapped (spas, baths, pilgrimage sites)- calls for exploring also everyday spaces (gardens, parks, the home) (Wilson, 2003) and also Spiritualities of Life (Heelas, 2008)
- Scope to investigate **the sea** as part of this myriad of layered meanings, spaces and activities therefore...

# Bluespace

- Original context main as part of 'green space' and nature narratives of wellbeing... Now emerging as a field of study in its own right.
- Key research questions include: How can bluespace promote human wellbeing? How are blue-spaces perceived and valued/evaluated? What role does bluespace play for restoration and recreation? (Volker and Kistemann, 2010)
- Bluespace needs to be central to questions of wellbeing rather than adjunctory/secondary context...

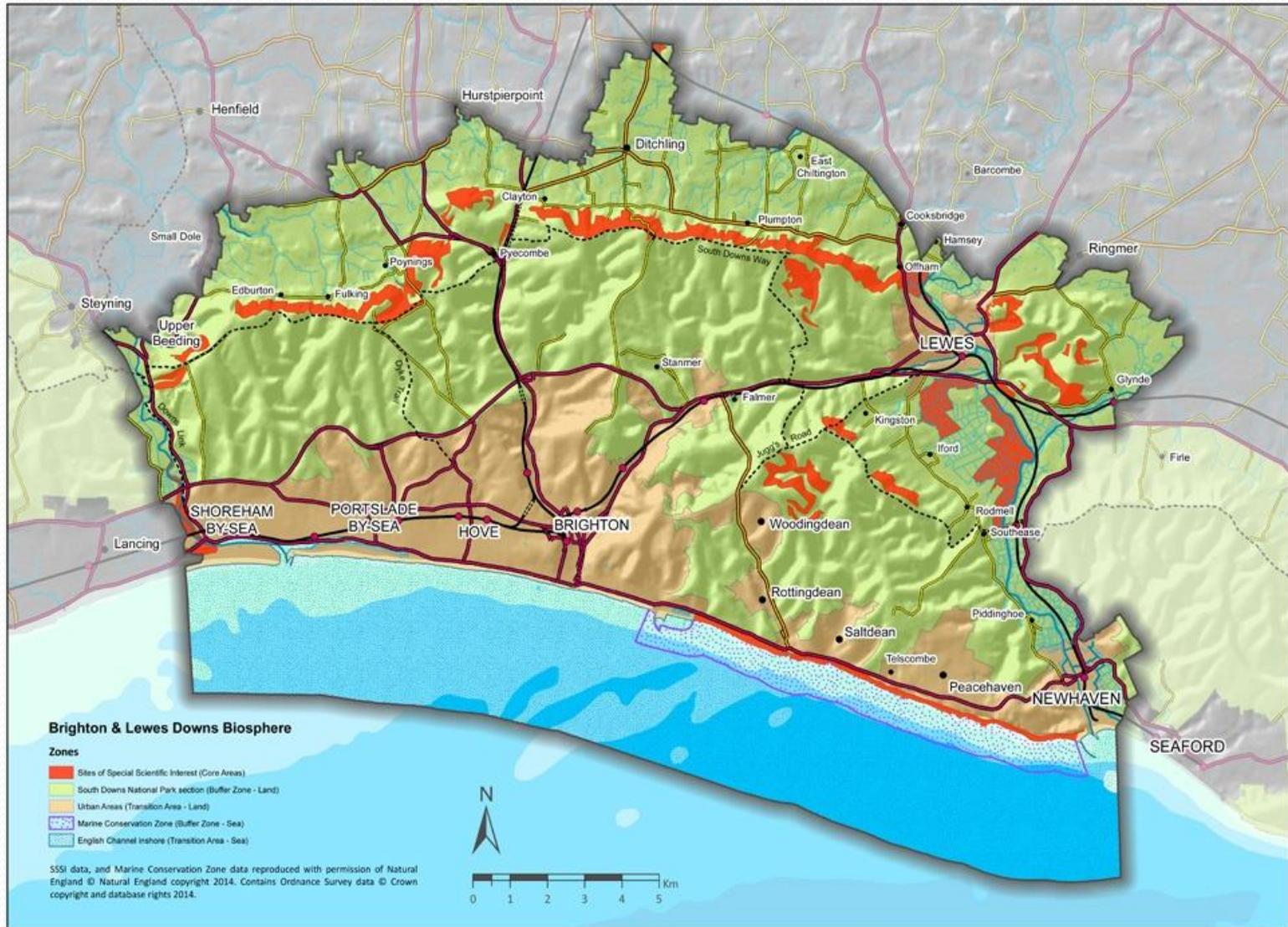
# CASE STUDY

## Brighton- Policies, Practices, Experiences

- Brighton an old fishing village and coastal spa town
- Russell's work on healing seawater 1700s
- Top coastal resort destination in UK (2013)
- More recent history of alternative therapies and liberalism – large day trip and weekend visitor market
- Large ex-London population, many family migrants moving to 'make a better life for their children by the sea'
- Residents V Visitors – sustainable spaces, engaging with the outdoors for health (mental and physical)
- UNESCO Biosphere – countryside, city and coast – how to create a meaningful designation for a lived and visited landscape – wellbeing for humans and the built/natural environment?

# Policies:

# The Only UK Rural-Urban-Coastal Biosphere



# Practices: Nature-Based Wellbeing Audit

- Many wellbeing-led practices/providers centred around nature, greenspace and the coast in Brighton
- My current ongoing collaborative research project stems from Brighton and Hove council public health department commissioning of a 5 year Happiness and Wellbeing strategy
- Green and Growing consultation group established
- From this, a research project to audit, collate, communicate and evaluate provision in the area
- **Overall Aim** – to assess current levels of green/nature based wellbeing offerings in BAH and to offer a dual analysis of Green Wellbeing, i.e. both provision, and engagement/participation (for both academic research output, as well as a sectoral report)
- My own interest is specifically in the sea/coast...

# WildBeachSchool

- A bottom-up approach, action-research...
- Own work – taking children as part of primary school curriculum to the sea – Year 2 children – meeting multiple KS1 learning objectives; also after-school club and holiday camp days...
- Content a mixture of learning activities, team games, collaborative work, creativity/craft and listening...
- Purposeful outcomes plus adjunct outcomes observed
- Participant assessment: **pilot research** to examine which aspects of the sea contribute most to wellbeing (active/contextual) and the perceived associated benefits amongst one user group (children age 5-10)







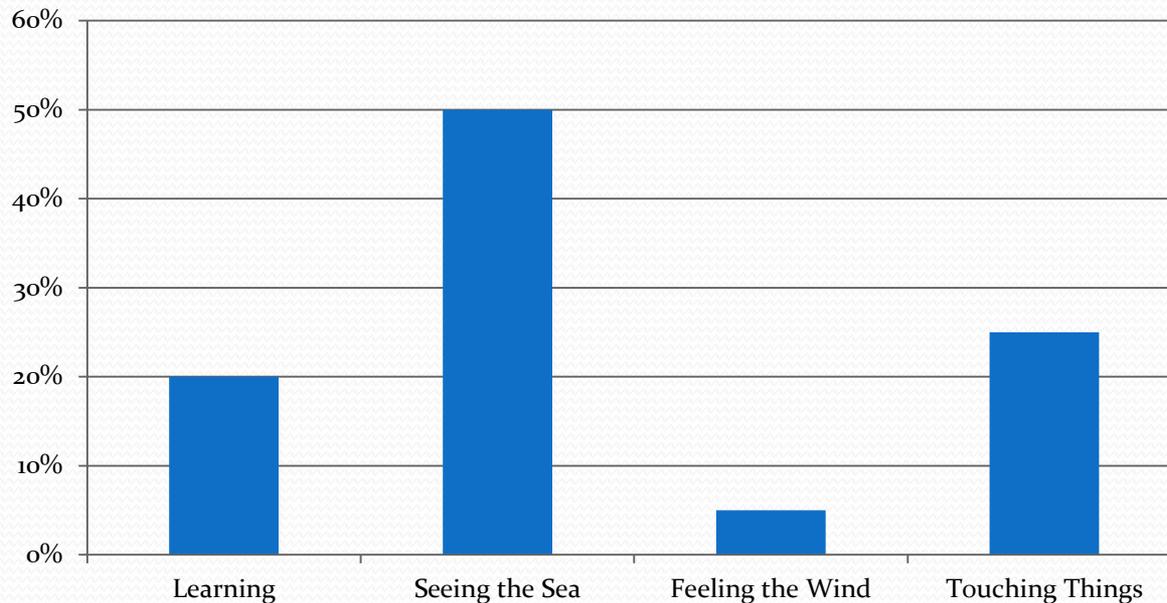


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# Assessment/Pilot Research

## Enjoyment of Activities



Daugstad (2008) 'Sensescapes' - Smell, sound, touch, taste and body are key facets of eliciting emotional responses to landscape (here seascapes) in children's and others encounters and experiences...

‘What words come into your head when you think of the Sea’?

Fun

*Sparkly*

Water

Free

Happy

*Blue*

Swim

*Fish*

Waves

Sandcastles

*wind*

Pebbles

sand

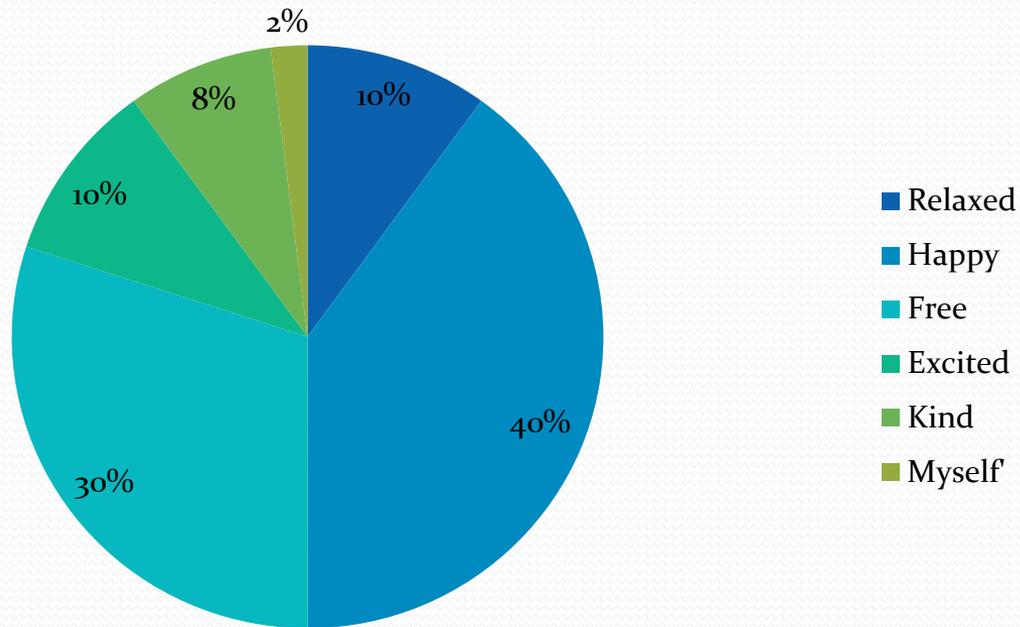
Dolphins

Crabs

# PAB: Perceived Associated Benefits?

(WildBeachSchool)

## How being at the beach makes you feel



Respondents: n= 25 x8 weeks, + plus 180 one-off participants/schools fieldtrips (205)

# Biophilia Hypothesis/Children

- Biophilia hypothesis: humans have a propensity and need to affiliate with nature (Wilson, 84, Kellert, 96)
- Given the option, humans choose landscapes near water (Kaplan and Kaplan, 89)
- Children have an abiding affiliation with nature (Kahn 97) and developmental psychologists examine how homocentric reasoning and biocentric reasoning are linked – children mostly found to support the intrinsic value of biological life, teleos of nature and the rights of nature
- The coast is a natural site of learning and happiness for children, as this pilot research shows...
- Scope to extend this to specific bluespace/sea-wellbeing research ...

# Scope for place promotion and coastal wellbeing?

- Consider a move away from just the traditional visual engagement, to the non-visual; encourage tourists to consider 'the feel of a place', the wind, the air, the elements, as a mode of emotional connection with coastal landscapes.
- In addition, coastal tourists can gain deeper personal experiences of sea-places through tasting local produce, traditional heritage dishes or recipes, hearing stories of the seascape by local residents, fisherfolk and others..
- Sound or the lack of (urban) sound can be promoted as a sensory experience of peace, of quiet and stillness, thereby adding more to the coastal experience than the visual alone.
- Reframing coastal places is an underestimated possibility that looks beyond the object, beyond the attraction or the 'service' in traditional touristic or place analyses. New ways of 'thinking seascape' for locals, visitors and children are useful for broader ways forward..

# Future Research/Directions?

- With the direct financial costs of mental illness in the UK estimated at £41.8 billion per annum (and a growing crisis specifically amongst young people) a case must be made for the growing evidence of nature-based interventions.
- The coast holds a special place in the hearts and (healthy) minds of many – using it in a more pro-active way for residents, visitors and children, and researching the benefits, values and impacts on user-groups, as well as on the environment itself are future areas for wellbeing research by the sea...

