

# Environmental support for flourishing in older age: An exploration using a personal projects approach

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## Introduction

- Supportive outdoor environments can enable older people to remain active, improving quality of life.
- While environments may support everyday activity adequately, they may not support people to carry out the 'personal projects' that make life enjoyable.
- Personal projects are self-generated and purpose-oriented activities ranging from everyday routines to ambitious, long-term endeavours.
- This study explored the environments that make a difference to older people's quality of life in relation to the personal projects important to them.

## Methods

- Adults aged 50+ living in urban and semi-rural areas of Scotland, UK were interviewed across three time points (Feb-Mar 22, May-Sept 22 and May 23- Present).
- Participants were asked to describe current projects and rate them across eight different dimensions, including enjoyment, importance and supportiveness of the local outdoor environment. Quality of life and self-rated health were also measured.
- Walking interviews were completed with a subsample of participants.
- Participants also completed daily activity diaries for one week in both summer and winter.

## Results

- 35 older adults have participated in the study (28 Female, 7 Male, age range 54 to 88 years). To date, over 70 interviews have been conducted across three time points.
- Projects that involved other people and local communities were highly valued. The most common personal projects involve 'Recreation and exercise' and 'Engagement with people'.
- Community centres are the most common place where participants carry out their projects.
- Participants who report the outdoor environment poses little difficulty in achieving their personal projects are more likely to report higher quality of life.
- Easy access to places that enable people to make social connections in their local environment are significant contributors to older adults' sense of well-being.

## Conclusion

- Projects that involve social connection and where the environment does not pose difficulty to their completion can contribute to higher quality of life.
- Environments that support older adults to get outdoors as well as environments that enable people to connect with others should be key when planning 'age-friendly' environments, particularly following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older populations.



Ease of access to outdoor environments enables older adults to engage with nature

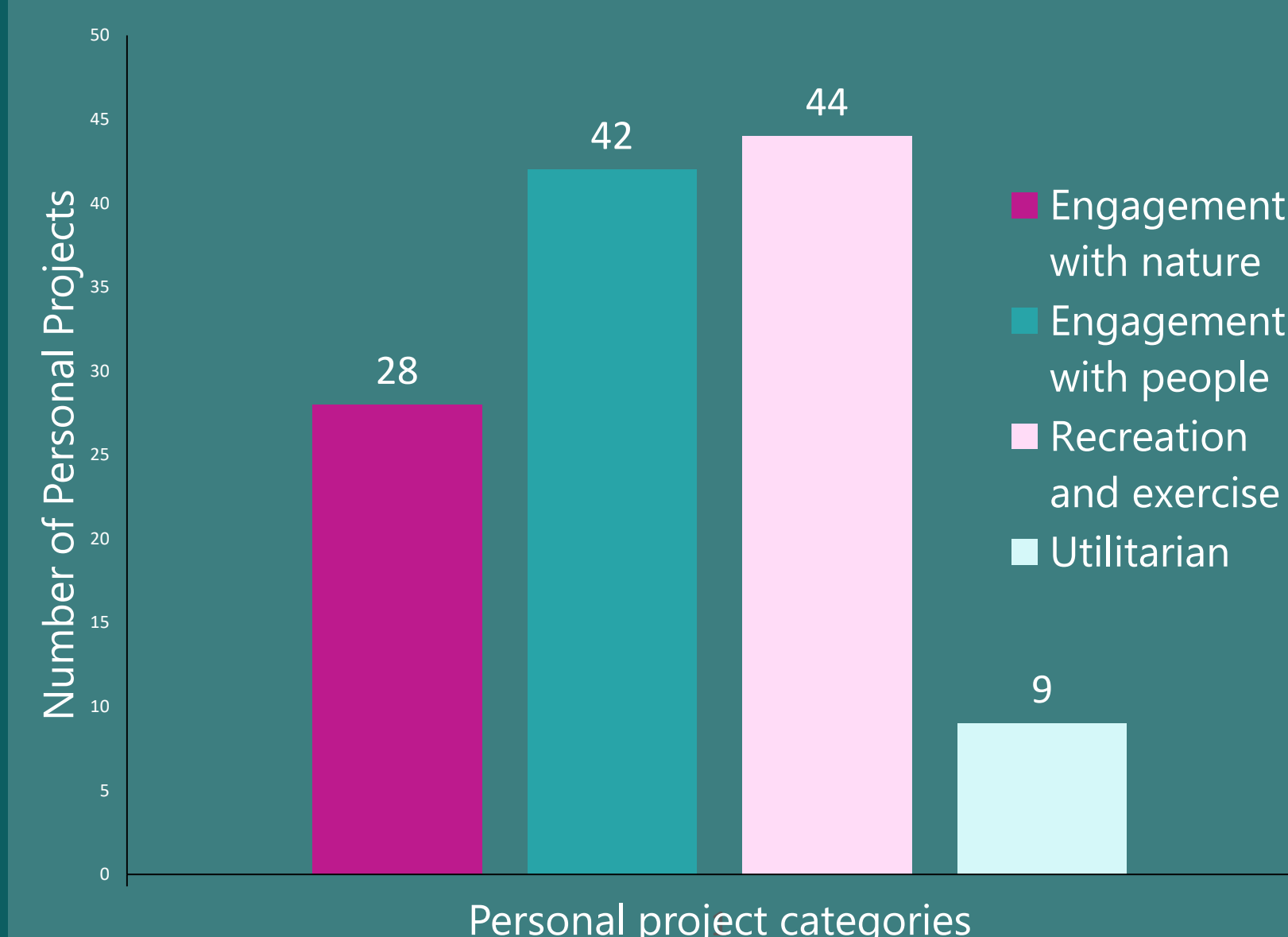
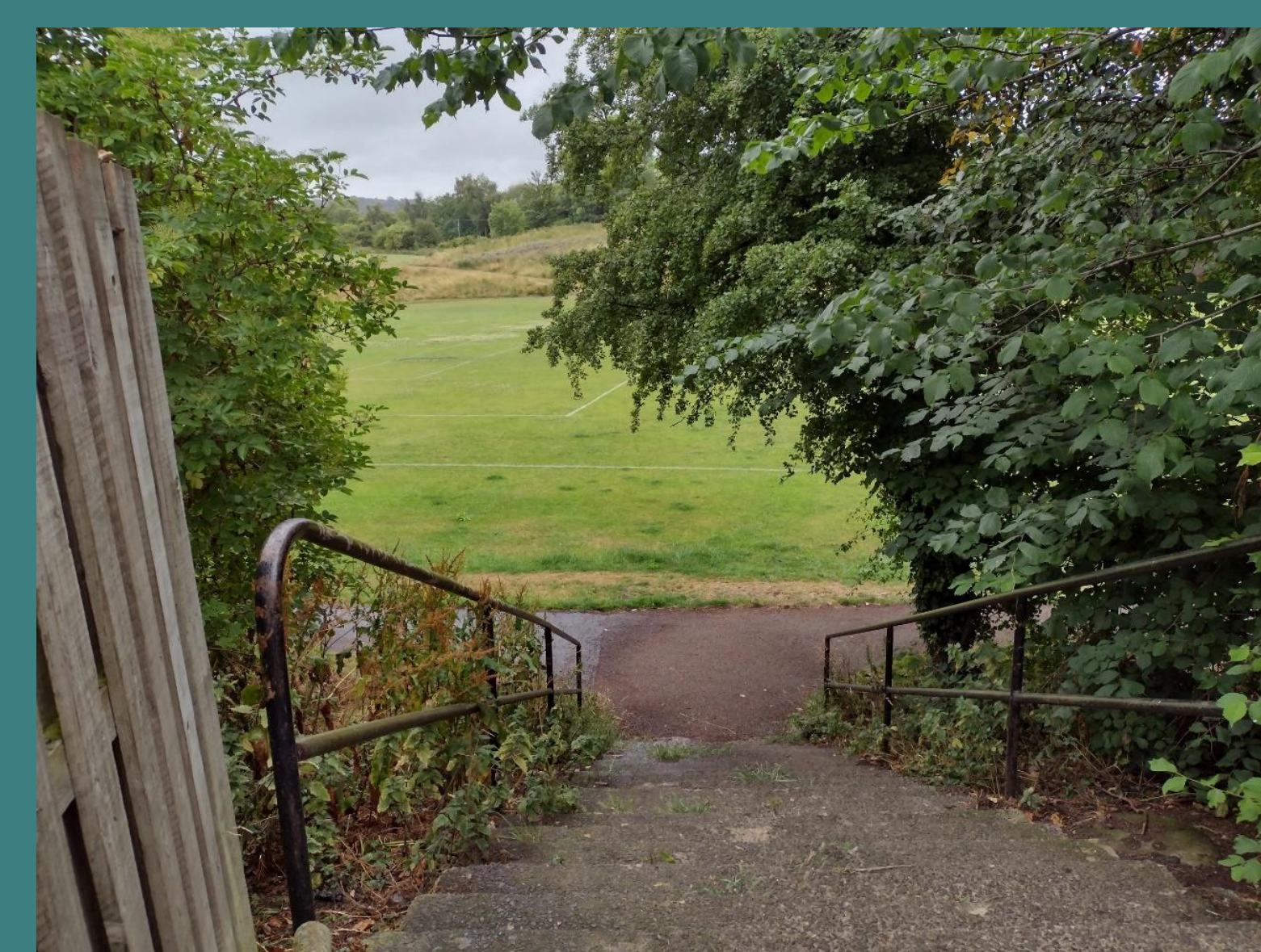


Figure 1. Personal projects (n=123) categorised by type



Outdoor environments provide opportunities for social connection as well as physical activity

## References

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