

Delapré Walk Project: Are signposted walking routes an effective intervention to increase engagement in urban parks? -Natural experimental study

Declan Ryan, Jack Hardwicke, Kimberley Hill




Context

"A lack of knowledge at an individual level on where people are allowed to walk recreationally is consistently cited as a key barrier to recreational walking."


Physical Activity and Health Research Centre, University of Edinburgh (2019)

Aim: Investigate the effect on visitors' greenspace engagement by retrofitting wayfinding, to create a looped walking route, within an urban park.

Online-survey (23rd March – 3rd May 2021)



Wellbeing, Space and Society
Volume 3, 2022, 100111



Public perceptions on the role of wayfinding in the promotion of recreational walking routes in greenspace—Cross-sectional survey

Declan. J. Ryan^a, Kimberley. M. Hill^b

Demographics

Location: Northampton, England

Amount: 266 respondents

Gender: 200 Women, 63 Men, 3 Other

Ethnicity: 95% White

Age 18 – 30: 10.5%

31 - 45: 29.7%

46 – 60: 43.6%

61+: 15.4%

Response Rate: 23%

What to include on signs

1. Arrows
2. Consistent colours and fonts
3. Total distance of the route
4. Local information of interest
5. Emergency contact information
6. A map of the route

How will signs impact how people engage with the space?

“I like to explore paths that are signposted and then that gives me the **confidence** to explore further knowing I can find the pathway back.”

“I think having clearly defined parameters would actually **encourage** people to explore a little further.”

Concerns and uncertainties

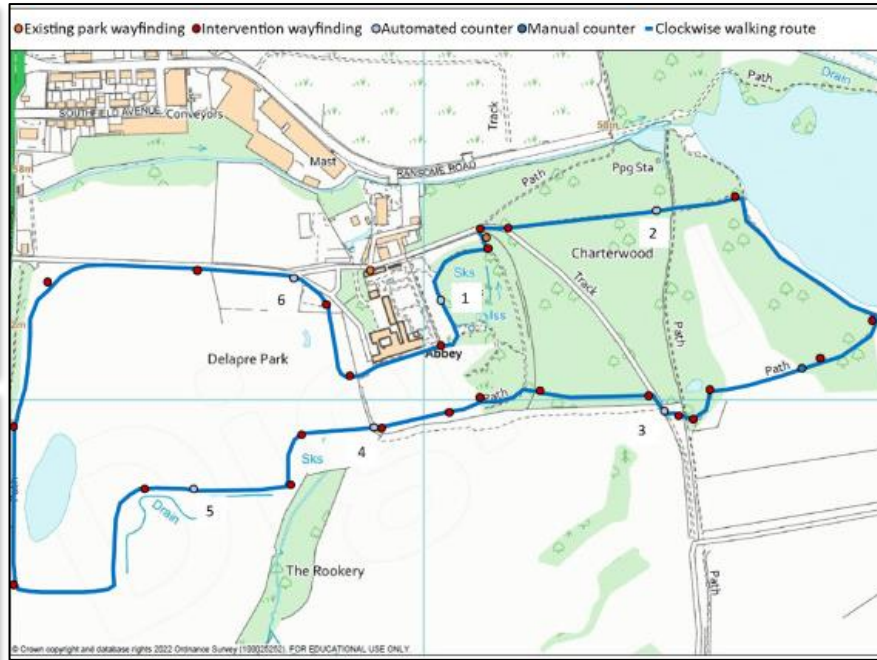
“I think directional signposting totally takes the fun and adventure out of a walk. It **loses the sense** of enjoyment from **exploration** and **discovery**.”

“Signposts should not disturb the landscape they are installed in. E.g., **not blight the beauty** of the area.”

Intervention (March 2021 – August 2022)


 Health & Place
 Volume 83, September 2023, 103049


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Outcomes

- No change in manual counts at baseline or 12-month follow-up between Delapr  Park and two matched control Parks.
- No change in automated counts between Baseline, Autumn/Winter, and Spring/Summer Follow-up.
- 23% of people walking the route were following the signs at 12-month follow-up.



Intercept Survey

“This has enabled me to **safely walk** around an area I'm unfamiliar with.”

“Easier to navigate for **first timers** like me.”

“The **walking distance** being signposted really helps to decide whether to take the walk or not.”

Intercept Go-Along Interviews (September 2022)

"It's my little sanctuary": Exploring urban park users' engagement with greenspace and a wayfinding intervention.

Hardwicke, J. Hill, K.M, Ryan, D.J.
(Currently under review in Cities and Health)

Demographics

Location: Northampton, England

Amount: 28 participants

Gender: 20 Women, 8 Men

Ethnicity: 100% White

Age: Child: 1

Adult: 16

Senior: 11

Interview: 10 – 45 minutes

Response Rate: 65%

Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Greenspace attraction

"It's a lovely environment, lots of trees, grass, wildlife. We love **watching and hearing the birds** and the squirrels."

"When you come for a walk like this you want to get into the fresh air, trees, grass. You **don't want to see that urban environment** particularly. pylons...city and developed life - it's nice to be away from that."

Embodiment, connectedness and well-being

"So **mental health-wise it's massive for me**. This is my little sanctuary."

Provide places to sit

"This is one of the longer walks we're doing today and there is that seat there, **there's not another chance now until we get all the way back** to the walled garden.

Wayfinding

If you knew you weren't going off course and **you knew the length** of what you'd got to go so you **don't overstretch yourself**...that would be brilliant, to have that, it would **encourage me to go further**.

Key Learnings

Need to **distinguish** between **infrequent and frequent** park visitors.

Wayfinding gives visitors **confidence** to explore unfamiliar areas.

Wayfinding materials need to **be in-keeping** with the **natural environment**.

Including the **total distance** of the route, location of **seating**, and **terrain** of wayfinding will aid **visitor decision making**.

Including **qualitative data** provides a richer understanding of **visitor habits** and **engagement** with greenspace interventions.

Intercept go-along interviews are a promising method to gain insight into the **value of greenspace**.

Find out more

Read the publications, access data, and read news articles at our research repository.

www.pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/persons/declan-ryan

