# Data on environmental attitudes and behaviours – with Pierre Walthéry

### Transcript - Datasets on environmental attitudes and behaviour from the UK Data Service

Full resource (and video): <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/all/?id=20834>

Pierre Walthéry: Well, hello, and welcome to this presentation on environmental attitudes and behaviour by the UK Data Service. My name is Pierre Walthéry and I am a research fellow with UKDS.

So, what are we going to talk about in this session? Three things mainly. So, first of all, I'll say a few words about who we are for those of you who don't know UK Data Service very well. Then I will provide a broad brush overview of the kind of data that you can find at UKDS in relation to environmental issues. And then I'll come back to talk a bit more in-depth about specific examples of data sets that you can use.

Right, who are we? The UK Data Service is the main repository of social science data in the UK. Not only that, but it is also a provider of support, training and guidance for our users. It is a single point of access, freely accessible and funded by the ESRC, the Economic and Social Research Council. So, the data and the service we provide is historically aimed at academic researchers and students who still are a large share of our users, but also government analysts, charities in the voluntary sector, business consultant, independent and private sector research centre and think tanks.

The data we curate comes from various sources. The main bulk of them, I would say, are UK social surveys. So, bet it large scale cross-sectional government surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey series, for example. Or major longitudinal surveys such as Understanding Society in which individual people are followed over time. We also provide access to multinational survey data and aggregate data banks. We have a portal that allows the user to access census data with modern recent records or historical records. We provide access to business and administrative microdata as well as a range of qualitative resources.

In terms of user support and training, we have a help desk in which we answer queries and help users with any issues they may have when using our data. We produce webinars and online workshops that are targeted at introducing users to specific data sets, methods or software. We also have some online learning materials, and a growing collection of it actually, which are similarly targeted at introducing the user to specific data methods.

Our core business, so to speak, is about survey related data, but we increasingly have resources about new forms of data and computational social science. And we also strive to support data literacy among undergraduate students.

Right, now let's start our tour of social science data on environmental issues. I thought it useful before actually diving into the data to think about the kind of research or the kind of approach that can be had when thinking about environmental issues.

So, first of all, there's the substantive aspect of the environmental crisis that people can be interested in researching carbon emissions and energy use. They can be interested in looking at loss of biodiversity, pollution and resources depletion or individual or collective resilience and adaptation with regard to these challenges. Then there’s the issue of the level of analysis. Depending on what your research interest is, you may want to look at individuals or households or even geographical aggregates such as regions of a country, countries themselves or even continents. And finally, there's the question of the kind of data you want to look at, whether it is attitude and social representations, whether it is qualitative narratives or even behavioural data. Oh, who knows also, organisational behaviour.

So, now let's go back to each one of these type of data. I'll start with social representations and attitudinal data because they are probably the most common one can find in our data sets. So, at a very broad degree of generality, you can see that attitude can be seen as people's views and representations about aspects of the climate crisis and the levels of support for policies or changes that are put forward. These type of data are common in quantitative surveys, whether these surveys are fully dedicated on environmental issues and I need to tell that we don't have many of them actually. But more commonly, much more commonly, as part of modules, thematic modules on environmental issues or even single questions in more generalist surveys.

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What are the main studies where you would find these? There are lots of them, but just to look at the four main ones here. I would mentioned the British Social Attitudes Survey, which is the mainstay of social attitudes data for the UK. Understanding Society, which is largescale longitudinal study with also attitudinal data. Specific survey on nature and the environment is the People and Nature Survey for England with attitudinal data. And also, if you're interested in international data, the European Social Survey or the World Value Survey.

Now thinking of behavioural data, I probably need to make a pedantic clarification here. We are talking about still people’s reporting their behaviour and not direct observation of their behaviour which is usually costly and rare to be found in social surveys. So, behaviour is a broad term and can potentially apply to many areas of research. We can be interested, for example, in political behaviour, so that is participation and voting. And for this we can look at the British Election Study, which has a wealth of data about voting behaviour. Behaviour can also mean consumption and in this case the Living Costs and Food Survey, LCFS, which is a longstanding study with very detailed data about consumption patterns of the British population, would be recommended. Then there's also commuting and travel related behaviour and several surveys have data about these but we would recommend here using the National Travel Survey or even the Census, and I will come back to this in a little while. In terms of interaction with the natural environment, the People and Nature Survey for England that I already mentioned has some questions about the way people interact or behave with the environment, whether in terms of protection or going to visit green spaces for example. And finally, in terms of broader issues such as energy use or CO₂ emissions, we curate also OECD and International Energy Agency databases, which have aggregate data on these quantities.

A third type of data on which I am not going to spend a lot of time is qualitative data. We hold an increasingly large deposit of interview or multimedia data. This is due to the fact that ESRC funded researchers and investigators need to deposit the data they collect after their project has ended, which means there's an increasingly large number of materials, some of which are about the environment, that is available at UKDS. It is accessible via ReShare, which is a section of our website.

Now quickly, how to find and access data from the UKDS. There are basically three ways and I'm going to go through it very quickly because this is something you can find by clicking on the links on the presentation and on our website. So, either via data catalogue and there's a search tool I'm going to show you. There's also a Variable and Question Bank in which you can search variables and questions across most of our surveys. There's the same for our qualitative data resources and there's the HASSET Thesaurus which is a keyword search of the keywords present in all our quantitative studies.

So, searching the catalogue is very straightforward. You just need to enter your search terms in the main search box on our website. You will then be offered with a long list of studies, for example, when looking for climate change, that you can filter using a number of factors(?), size or date etc. And then you will finally be able to access the study page. However, and I'm saying this for maybe the less seasoned researcher, whenever you are zooming in on particular data, on a particular resource, do not forget to ask yourself essential questions about the quality of these data. So, what was the phrasing of the question that led to this quantity variables or in case of qualitative research, what was the research question and who funded the research? Is the sample of respondent representative? Are the samples large enough for your purpose and what was the population of reference? And obviously, how recent is the data. And so also maybe in order to avoid disappointment, it's also interesting to make sure that the data is readily available as opposed to subject to an application.

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Which leads me to our data access policy. So, we have four layers of access depending on the data that is being curated. The most common one is the second one, safeguarded data. A large chunk of our data is available under end user licence for which only registration is required and so in some cases filling a special licence form. And once you have registered then you can easily download any data set you like. Data more at risk of leading to disclosure is only accessible under controlled settings and subject to more a substantial application process. ReShare data, I've already mentioned, is subject to each investigator’s approval, but most of the time it's unproblematic. And finally open data, especially our teaching data set, is freely available to anyone without registering.

How to register. This is also described on our website. You can do it either via your organisation or via UK Data Archive user name if you are an independent researcher or from the private sector. Our data is free except if you are a researcher working for a for profit organisation.

Now going back to the examples, I was mentioning earlier. Let's dive in a little deeper in the type of data that we offer. So, attitudinal data. I mentioned earlier the British Social Attitudes Survey. So, it's a well-established survey since 1983 and it allows for cross-sectional, repeated cross-sectional analysis of people's views and opinions about a wide range of topics. It's really the main port of call for research on attitude in the UK. It's based on a representative sample of the UK adult population aged 18 and over and in the last ten years has an increasing number of questions about the environment. There's also a byproduct, an open access teaching data set that was derived from the 2017 BSA that offers a small subset of variables about environmental views and environmental politics as well.

Another example or point of call for people interested in attitudinal data is Understanding Society. Why so? So, Understanding Society is a really a large longitudinal survey in which the same people are followed over time and have been so for several decades now, some of them at least. So, it allows you to look at associations between your outcomes. So, attitudinal data and a wide variety of factors that have also been studied by previous waves of the survey. It has a dedicated website, in addition to the UKDS one, in which you can explore in depth the data that is available. I'm just providing an example here on the thematic environment page of Understanding Society which provides a little bit of background and then the variable search here which enables you to look in a very fine-grained way for the type of variables you may be interested in. And each individual variable has its own page for which you can see who was asked the question at which wave of the survey, and also you can have quick overview of the distribution of the variables and the number of observations.

A second study that is also, or rather a third one, that is also very interesting for people or researchers interested in environmental issues, is the People and Nature Survey for England. So, it's one of the few surveys specifically dedicated to the environment. It's commissioned by Defra and Natural England, so no data for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland unfortunately. And it started during COVID and offers 34 monthly collection between 2020 and 2022. Its questions are asked about attitude, about the natural environment, but also interactions, what people, what kind of contact people have with their natural environment and also behaviour towards protecting the environment.

So, just an example here. Most of these questions of interest are part of the Module 4 of the questionnaire. So, that's an example of question that people were asked thinking about how you live your life with the, so how are we trying to help with the environmental crisis? So, and you can see a number of answers here.

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Type of analysis derived from the PaNS, this survey shows here the contact or visits to green spaces by household income and you can see that the lower your household income, the less likely people are to visit green spaces, although the differences are not huge.

And the second, another example of data set here is the Census. So, we don't necessarily think of the Census as a survey, but it is the case that people are asked a number of questions about their commuting patterns in the Census which allows to, for example, look at the duration of commute and mode of commute by local areas in the UK, which is potentially interesting for planning, local planning policies. So, we have, there’s an interface to the Census and this is the sort of analysis you can perform from there.

Another and final maybe type of data that we hold, and I mentioned it quickly before, is International Data Bank. So, this is the UK Data Service interface to a portal to the International Energy Data and you can see that via this interface you can select a number of variables of interest such as CO₂ emissions. And you can select data that is related to either countries, regions or continent and download it for further analysis.

Is that all there is? No, of course. We have much more data. Just to name a survey that I haven't had the time to talk about in the UK Time Use Surveys of 2000 and 2014/15 which have detailed travel behaviour, much more fine-grained than what I've mentioned so far. Also, that includes data about remote working and leisure behaviour. And again, please consider the ReShare repository of deposited data, because it's not only about qualitative data. It's also about maybe less usual type or less usual type of data such as social media usage for example.

Well, that's it. I need to thank you for your attention and please do not hesitate to ask questions directly at the webinar or by sending an email at this address and I will try my best to help you. Thank you.

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