

## The social structuring of recreational visits to the Belgian coast in 2022

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Coastal destinations are highly popular for leisure, yet the effects of spending time at the coast on mental and physical health have remained underexplored. There is particularly a lack of knowledge about who performs what types of visits to the coast, i.e. how coastal visits are socially structured. Therefore, we aimed to increase our understanding about the social structuring of coastal visits and to give context to the effects of the coast on human health.

We compiled a dataset via a survey data from a sample (N = 1939) of the adult Flemish population about their visits to the Belgian coast. The survey queried the respondents' number of day visits and/or longer stays per season in the previous year and the following characteristics of their visits: how often they performed specific activities, which of the 14 municipal seaside resorts they visited, who they were with, what they mentally and physically experienced, and what reasons they had for not visiting the coast more often. The respondents' geo- demographic (including residential proximity to the coast), socio-economic, and health profile was also inventoried. Then, we focus on distinguishing orthogonal dimensions that structured the variation in coastal leisure activities and the social company using specific multiple correspondence analysis. Lastly, we distinguished clusters of individuals who are located at aggregated locations in the multidimensional cloud using ascending hierarchical cluster analysis.

Four relevant dimensions were retained. They structured the data on the basis of the level of engagement (47.36%), the natural vs. urban environment of the activities (10.00%), the social company during the visit (i.e. differentiating visitors with partners and kids from those visiting the coast alone, with friends, or with a club; 5.53%), and the purpose of visiting (i.e. differentiating visitors of family and friends from explorers; 4.27%). Five clusters of individuals were defined: visitors with a 'generalist' activity pattern are typically middle-aged, higher educated adults who visit the coast with partners and kids; 'engagers in nature' typically have the coast embedded in their lives and are highly socially and physically active; 'engagers in the city' are typically young (18-29y) or old (>=65y), physically active, higher educated, and frequent visitors of the coast and do so mainly alone, with friends, or with a club; 'disengagers in nature' are typically young, socially isolated individuals with a low income; and 'disengagers in the city' are typically retired (>= 65y) off-season visitors with a partner that often go eating out at the coast. The 'engagers in nature' and 'engagers in the city' gained positive experiences from their visits exceptionally often.

The data and social structuring of leisure activities highlight the importance of considering both individual and activity related factors in assessing the effects of the coast on human health. We anticipate that the acquired data will contribute to unravelling and quantifying the mechanisms behind relationships between the ocean and human health in Flanders. The data is openly available at <https://doi.org/10.14284/625>.

### Keywords

Coastal Visits; Human Health; Experiences; Tourism; Recreation