

# Walking, Focusing and Evaluating the Cultural Ecosystem Services of Drylands

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## THE CHALLENGE: CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM SERVICE ASSESSMENT

Cultural ecosystem services (CES) are inherently difficult to assess, due to their largely intangible nature. Several quantitative and qualitative methodologies are currently used for CES assessment, including monetary evaluations (earnings or willingness to pay), surveys, interviews and focus groups.

While each provides important information, quantitative data often fails to capture non-material values of certain CES, while even qualitative methods, such as surveys and interviews, yield findings pertaining mostly to opinions and preferences, but not to experiences.

## A NEW APPROACH: CAPTURING THE DEPTH AND INTENSITY OF CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM SERVICES (CES)

In the current study, we implemented a novel methodology that combines walking interviews in natural landscapes and the technique of *Focusing*, in which we asked people to focus on different aspects of the landscape, which may seem as mere “background”.

In our study, we used focusing to gain a better understanding of people’s authentic overall experience, and thus a better understanding of the CES of a specific area. In focusing sessions, the information comes from one person, with the other person only listening actively without prejudice.



## METHODS

We performed walking-focusing interviews with 30 people in Bor Hemet trail, in the Negev Desert, using a specific protocol (see frame below). Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed.

## THE PROTOCOL

We asked participants to focus on different aspects of their experience. This included several prompts and follow-up questions, aimed to allow them to do this as they walked:

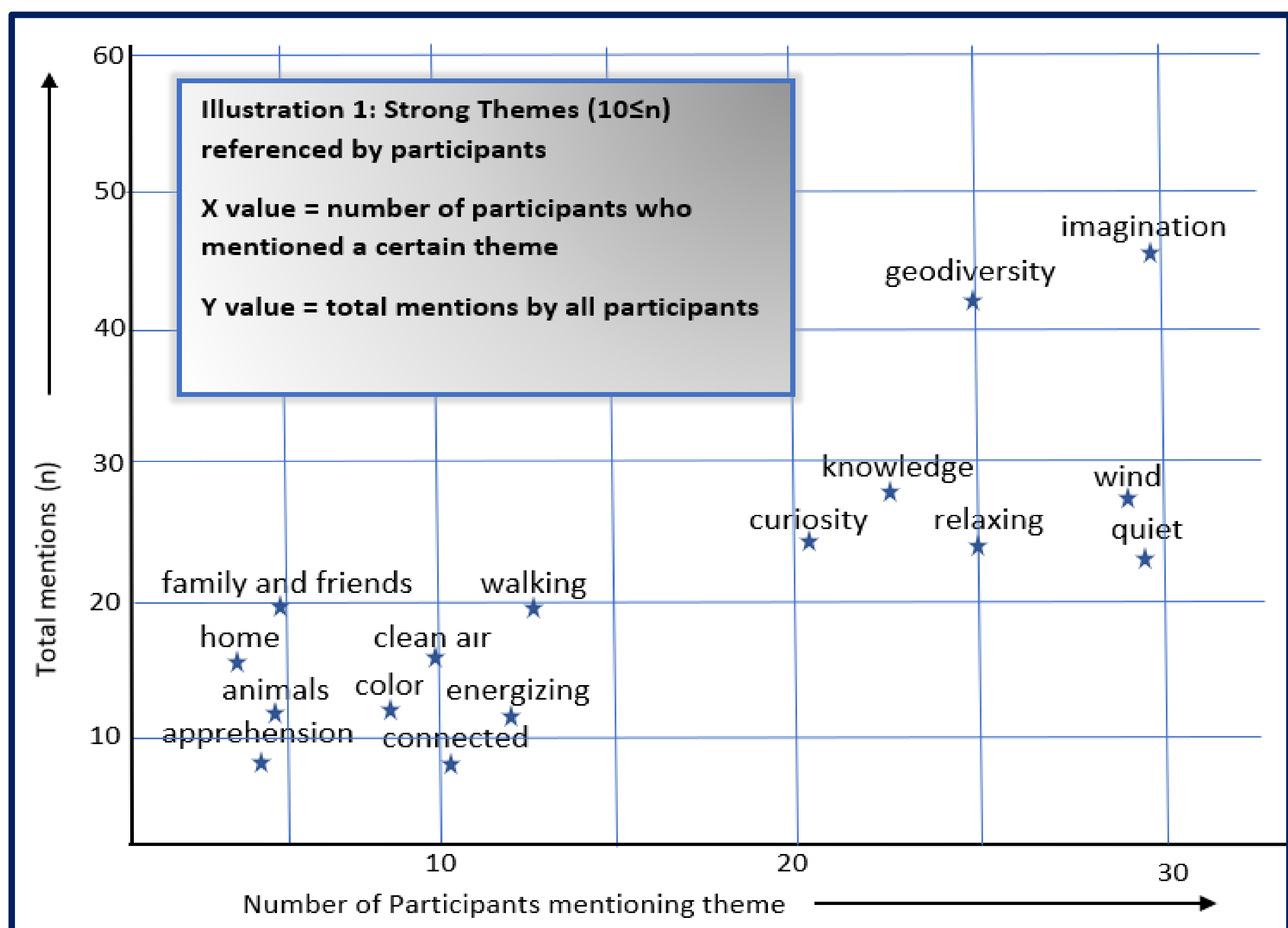
- Let’s walk quietly for a minute. Focus on the physical experience of walking. Then, tell me what comes up?
- Look around – what do you see? How does your body react to it? Why?
- Focus on something close – “Zoom In”
- Close your eyes and focus on other senses
- Give a “personal name” to your experience (Why did you choose it?)

Guidelines:

- No interviewer input, only follow up questions,;
- No judgement, no leading, accept what comes;
- Circle back to here and now, the physical experience;
- Ask: Why? What else comes up?

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## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Main themes found (at least 10/30 participants) are presented in Illustration 1.

- Findings indicate that, as drylands often have less conspicuous fauna and flora, focusing enabled participants to notice and address them more clearly.
- The analysis supports the need to recognize the importance of geodiversity and of other a-biotic landscape attributes for cultural ecosystem services assessment.
- Lastly, focusing was found to be very suitable for getting deeper, more intricate and authentic information about people’s experience of nature. Focusing also enabled very pure data coming almost completely from the interviewee with minimal content from the interviewer.