

Wetlands Solutions *for the Future*

Learning from ALFAwetlands and
REWET Projects

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SOMER: A STRUCTURED TOOL FOR ASSESSING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IN WETLAND CONSERVATION CONTEXTS

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Wetland restoration: many perspectives

VRT nws

Belgium, 12/02/2025

The City of Aalst and nature organization Natuurpunt restore floodplain in Grote Meers to tackle flooding and drought

Local residents and Regional Landscape Council Schelde-Durme will jointly develop plans for the restoration site.

RTE

Ireland, 21/05/2023

Farmers worried over impact of re-wetting peatlands

Farmers are concerned that peatland rewetting may affect adjoining agricultural land and long-established farming practices.

ORF V

Austria, 06/08/2026

Delays in restoration project “AMooRe”

Delays in wetland restoration have partly resulted from landowners and agricultural tenants not fully supporting the projects.

**B OMROEP
BRABANT**

The Netherlands, 07/12/2018

Restoration in Peel nature reserve will go ahead despite concerns by local residents

Local residents are concerned that restoration measures will turn the area into a large, waterlogged marsh full of mosquitoes and make it less suitable for walking.

Restoration is also a societal challenge

RESTORATION
ECOLOGY

Cortina-Segarra et al., 2021

Barriers to ecological restoration in Europe: expert perspectives

Conflicting interests among stakeholders have been identified as a key barrier to successful ecological restoration.

WETLANDS
Journal of the Society of Wetland Scientists

Scholte et al., 2016

Public Support for Wetland Restoration: What is the Link with Ecosystem Service Values?

Stakeholders differ in their motivations and in how they value wetland restoration and its ecosystem services.

From fragmented evidence to systematic social monitoring

- Social acceptance is an important condition for successful restoration
- Existing studies often rely on context-specific approaches, limiting systematic comparison across wetland settings
- SOMER provides a standardized approach to examine social acceptance across wetland conservation contexts.
- **General public:** quantitatively monitor broad patterns of social acceptance → can inform policy and by showing where broader public support stands.
- For **specific stakeholders:** SOMER can be complemented by qualitative approaches (e.g. interviews) to better understand specific concerns and perspectives.

What does SOMER measure?

- Acceptability is closely linked to how people perceive the distribution of benefits and burdens



Social acceptance is operationalized through **individuals' perceptions of the costs and benefits of wetlands.**

Nature Connectedness

Perceptions and attitudes
toward Climate Change

Local Wetland
familiarity

Geographic distance
to wetlands

Explanatory and contextual factors

Operationalization

Dimensions (variables)	Role	What it captures
Perceived Costs and Benefits of Wetlands	Outcome	Whether wetlands are perceived as beneficial or burdensome in terms of flora, fauna, water management, and recreation
Nature Connectedness	Explanatory	Individuals' sense of belonging to and identification with nature.
Perceptions and Attitudes toward Climate Change	Explanatory	How individuals perceive, interpret, and evaluate climate change and related environmental changes.
Wetland Familiarity	Contextual	Individual's familiarity with wetlands based on direct experience and exposure.
Geographic Distance	Contextual	Individual's proximity to wetlands

Empirical study: The Netherlands

- Sites selected based on size, ecological condition, and relevance for inland wetland biodiversity
- Existing wetlands provided a real-world context for applying SOMER
- Online survey (N = 625*)
- Diverse sample in terms of age, gender, occupation, education, and place of residence



These sites are designated under



* after data cleaning

Analytical approach

1. Descriptive analyses

- Socio-demographics
- Key variable descriptives



2. Hierarchical ordered logit regression

- Associations between explanatory/contextual factors and social acceptance

How important are wetlands perceived to be?

Flora / Fauna / Water Management

83%



High perceived importance

Recreation

49%



More mixed perceived importance

What shapes perceptions of wetland importance?

Ecological importance

- Nature connectedness
- Climate change awareness
- Observed climate-related phenomena
- Occupation: employed / unable to work / students
- Age: older cohorts
- Gender: womn



Recreational importance

- Observed climate-related phenomena
- Closer proximity to wetlands
- Occupation: students
- Household size: larger households



Implications to further explore

- **Younger cohorts: consider experiential education**
 - Support greater integration of experiential environmental education into school curricula
- **Older cohorts: consider stewardship approaches**
 - Explore stewardship-based programs that may foster psychological ownership and engagement
- **Employed respondents: consider economic relevance**
 - Highlight the socio-economic relevance of wetlands alongside environmental benefits
- **Men: consider broader communication framing**
 - Emphasize both ecological and socio-economic benefits of wetlands

Summary

- **Social acceptance is multidimensional**
 - Ecological and recreational perceptions are shaped by different factors.
- **Context matters**
 - Nature Connectedness, Climate-related perceptions, Socio-Demographics, Familiarity, and Proximity help explain variation in acceptance.
- **SOMER supports systematic social monitoring**
 - By combining ecological, social, and contextual dimensions, SOMER can complement ecological monitoring and support more socially responsive wetland conservation.

References

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THANK YOU

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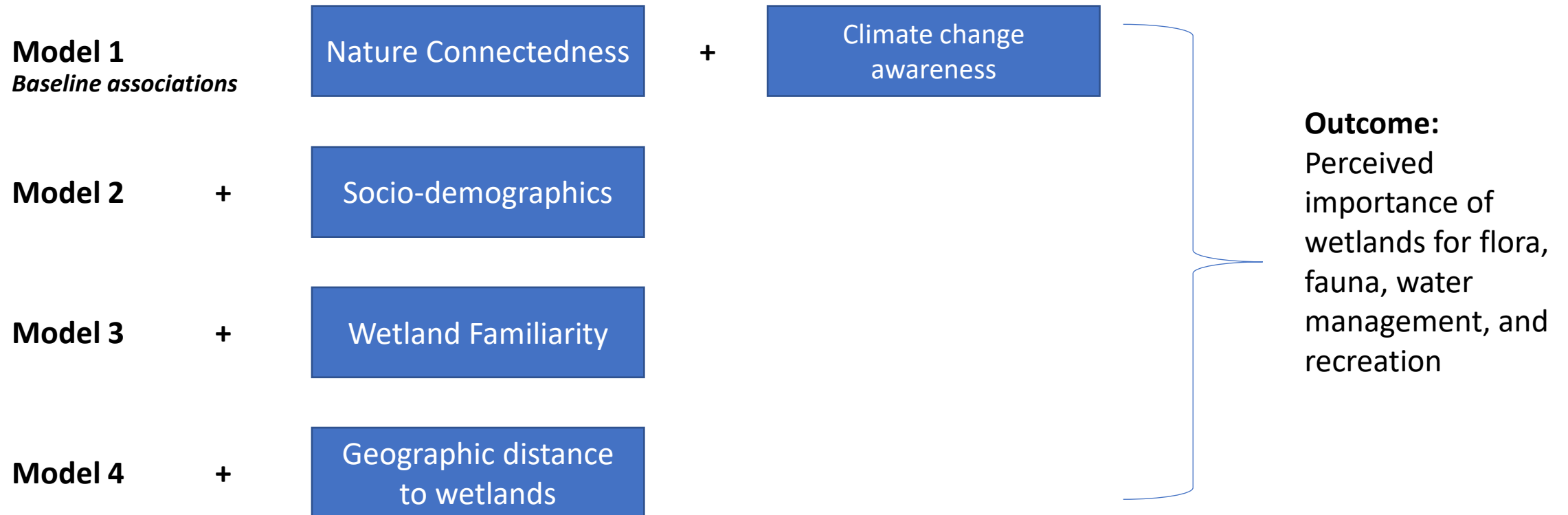


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BACK-UP

Back-up: Hierarchical ordered logit regression



Back-up: Main Descriptive Results

Sample

- 625 valid responses
- Women slightly overrepresented (53.4%)
- Relatively highly educated sample (47% had at least a bachelor's degree)
- Majority employed (67%)

Wetland perceptions

- 83% considered wetlands important for flora, fauna, and water management
- 49% considered wetlands important for recreation

Contextual factors

- 61% were familiar with their local wetland
- Distance to wetlands ranged from approximately 2–104 km (M = 32 km)
- Among reported climate-related impacts, **more intense precipitation was most commonly observed (33%)**

* after data cleaning