

Green and Public
Space Research:
Mapping and
Priorities

Summary

urban

*Green and Public Space Research:
Mapping and Priorities*

Summary

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Web site: www.communities.gov.uk

© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO, 2006

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

Any other use of the contents of this publication would require a copyright licence. Please apply for a Click-Use Licence for core material at www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/system/online/pLogin.asp or by writing to the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ. Fax: 01603 723000 or e-mail: HMSOlicensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Further copies of this publication and alternative formats are available from:

DCLG Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236
Fax: 0870 1226 237
Textphone: 0870 1207 405
E-mail: odpm@twoten.press.net
or online via the DCLG website: www.communities.gov.uk

Printed in the UK on material containing no less than 75% post-consumer waste.

June 2006

Product Code 06ASDO3936

Summary

This project aimed to map existing and future research into public and green space, to identify gaps in order to help set priorities for future research, and to develop a freely accessible and searchable database of all research. The project was carried out by OPENspace, the Research Centre for Inclusive Access to Outdoor Environments based at Edinburgh College of Art. The study was based on two strands 1) a desk-based mapping exercise of recent, current and planned research, and 2) a seminar of Government departments, agencies, academic institutions and other organisations with an interest in green and public space research.

Mapping exercise

The mapping was structured around two axes. The first axis was of research themes based on *The Value of Public Space*¹ but developed further and broken down into sub-themes. The second axis was a typology of green and public space based around Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17): Planning for open space, sport and recreation with elaboration from *Green Spaces; Better Places*².

Research going back 10 years was collected together with information on recently completed, ongoing and planned UK research. Only research meeting specific quality criteria was included.

Experts seminar

A seminar was held on 14th July 2004 to discuss research needs, potential gaps in knowledge and how best these gaps could be filled. Attendees also provided information on existing and planned research. The seminar was structured around the same themes as the mapping exercise.

Findings

The results of the two strands of the mapping and the seminar can be synthesised to find an overall picture to help guide policy makers and research commissioners.

There are 3 key cross-cutting themes that are common to much of the research and affect the value of any research or its ability to be widely applied. These are the general lack of baseline surveys against which to assess progress over time; methodological issues, especially the need to standardise data collection methods and techniques; the classification of social groups, currently considered to be too crude.

1 CABE Space 2004

2 Urban Green Spaces Task Force 2002

Most research has been undertaken on physical aspects, such as planning and on biodiversity. Economic values have also been a focus, but on a smaller scale. Social research is quite well covered but very patchy. Management is better covered than maintenance. By far the weakest area represented in the research is health and well-being, both in terms of social groups and types of green space.

The priorities for research into green and public space suggested by the exercise are as follows;

Economic values:

- Funding mechanisms for green space.
- The value of economic regeneration.
- Quantification in monetary terms of health benefits (of exercise etc) eg. savings to the health budget.
- Costs of crime and vandalism.
- The value of local employment provided by green space.

Health and well-being:

- Benefits in relation to key target groups, especially children, older people and disabled people.
- Longitudinal studies to test and validate health benefits over time.
- Barriers to the use of green space for health and well-being.
- The effects of risk aversion on levels of use of green space for health and well-being.

Social and community:

- The availability of nearby green space for children's play.
- Intergenerational studies into play and the use of green space, as affected by, constrained or encouraged by parents or grandparents.
- The effects of fear and feeling unsafe as barriers to using spaces of different types by different social groups.
- The difference between actual and perceived levels of crime in different spaces.
- The social setting of crime.
- Planting for safety.
- The use of lighting to increase levels of use and to reduce fear.

Environmental quality and biodiversity:

- Climate change effects on streets (storm water drainage), pollution, wind climate and plant selection and management.

Physical aspects

- Accessibility to green spaces "from the front door" in order to reduce the need to use transport.

Management and maintenance

- Maintenance of informal green spaces used a lot for play.
- What skills are needed by staff to prepare for current and future demands of management and maintenance.
- Methods of communication and information provision to the wide range of user groups in different spaces as a means of helping to raise awareness, build confidence and manage risk and fear.

More detail on potential gaps is presented in table 1.

Table 1:			
Theme	Mapping exercise	Stakeholder seminar	Remaining gaps
Economic values	Substantial research carried out in many aspects but not all applicable to the UK and those sub-themes of most interest are not so well represented (funding mechanisms, economic regeneration).	Many gaps identified, some being filled, eg. work on property prices. Quantifying health benefits, costs of crime and vandalism and the value of employment provided by green space are gaps yet to be filled.	Funding mechanisms for green space. The value of economic regeneration. Quantification in monetary terms of health benefits (of exercise etc) in green space eg. savings to the health budget. Costs of crime and vandalism in green spaces. The value of local employment provided by green space.
Health and well-being	Weak in the amount of existing research, with most on physical health. There is some general research on green spaces and health.	Preventative health is receiving some attention at the moment and there is work examining different types of green space and health. some is targeted at key social/health groups. Gaps include longitudinal research, barriers to use and the effects of risk averse behaviour.	Benefits in relation to key target groups, especially children, older people and disabled people. Longitudinal studies to test and validate health benefits over time. Barriers to the use of green space for health and well-being. The effects of risk aversion on levels of use of green space for health and well-being.
Social and community	Much research available but very patchy in its coverage. Some is more general in nature and there is much on social exclusion, though more on some groups than others. Safety in play is well covered but fear of crime not so well covered. Education and training has little research.	Work on social values of green space has recently been a focus and also some on the needs of users. Children and young people are only receiving a small amount of current attention. Gaps in research include data on the availability of green spaces for play and intergenerational research. Safety and reducing crime has many gaps. One concerns the picture of risk and safety, another the costs of vandalism and crime, a third the comparison of actual versus perceived crime levels and the fourth the social setting of crime.	The availability of nearby green space for children's play. Intergenerational studies into play and the use of green space, as affected by, constrained or encouraged by parents or grandparents. The effects of fear and feeling unsafe as barriers to using green spaces of different types by different social groups. The difference between actual and perceived levels of crime in different green spaces. The social setting of crime in green spaces. Planting for safety. The use of lighting to increase levels of use and to reduce fear.

Table 1: continued			
Theme	Mapping exercise	Stakeholder seminar	Remaining gaps
Environment and biodiversity	There is lots of research on general environmental quality, microclimate, the benefits of trees and biodiversity (the most heavily researched area).	There are several projects in the pipeline that fill gaps, but the main one remaining is climate change.	Climate change effects on streets (storm water drainage), pollution, wind climate and plant selection and management.
Physical aspects	Planning represents the most heavily researched area of all. Design and landscape perception is also well covered. Linkages and movement between green spaces is poorly covered in the amount of research.	Access to green space is receiving attention. The major gap is about the need to use transport to gain access to green space.	Accessibility to green spaces “from the front door” in order to reduce the need to use transport.
Management and maintenance	There is a lot on management, much less on maintenance. Skills and staffing and communication and information have very little research available.	Maintenance of informal green spaces needs more attention. Skills needed by staff to meet current and future demands is a gap in knowledge. Improved methods of communication need to be developed.	Maintenance of informal green spaces used a lot for play. What skills are needed by staff to prepare for current and future demands of management and maintenance. Methods of communication and information provision to the wide range of user groups in different green spaces as a means of helping to raise awareness, build confidence and manage risk and fear.

Conclusions

This green and public space mapping exercise has demonstrated that there is a huge body of robust research available, from a variety of sources. This research has concentrated on some important thematic areas and covered key types of green and public space, mainly those used by most people most of the time, such as streets and parks.

The past research reflects the policy concerns that have been high on the agenda over the last 10 years around the world. As UK government policy on green space evolves over time it is inevitable that the focus of research effort will need to move in order to reflect the emerging priorities. The collection of information on recently completed, ongoing and planned research, while not guaranteed to be comprehensive due to limitations on the data collection and the cooperation of some organisations, shows where this shift in focus is currently moving. The use of the stakeholder seminar, while limited in its scope and the time available, served a valuable function in identifying a number of gaps in the existing body of research, some of which are being wholly or partly filled by ongoing work. The remaining gaps have been identified and from them the tentative research programme outlined in section 6 above has been suggested.

This report and the accompanying database provide a useful snapshot of the research situation in 2004 albeit limited for the reasons outlined above. The report should be used as a starting point for debate and no doubt once it has been disseminated to a wide audience the picture it presents will be found by some people to be incomplete. This is to be expected and welcomed but we hope that any extra information is made available to the DCLG to help flesh out the information contained in the report even further.

The accompanying database, once launched online, should also provide a valuable tool for a wide range of people and, if kept up to date, help inform the wider green and public space community about what has been carried out and what is in progress. This should be of use in formulating policy, in proposing further research and in informing planners and managers of green space of the results so as to help them in their work. Ultimately this exercise will have been successful if, in 10 years' time, there is a visible and positive difference to be seen in the state of Britain's green and public spaces.

References

CABE Space (2004) Value of Public Space

DLTR (2002) Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas And Green Spaces, Interim Literature Review

ODPM (2002) Green Spaces, Better Places

ODPM (2002) Living Places; Cleaner, Safer, Greener

ODPM (2003) Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation.