3. PARALLEL SESSIONS

1.A. Workshop: Public Landscapes for Public Health

Organised by: OPENspace research centre
Chair: George Morris, UK
Contact: c.ward-thompson@ed.ac.uk

The proposed workshop session will comprise 4 short presentations (15 mins long each) – 2 by academics (one in UK and one in EU) and 2 by practitioners (one in UK and one in Finland) - followed by an expert panel.

A growing body of evidence suggests exposure to green spaces, including woodlands, benefits mental health and can promote social contact and physical activity. Public health and health delivery systems need to make the most of available assets and
maximise the potential of nature-based solutions. The benefits of access to green space are particularly apparent for people living in contexts of economic deprivation. This workshop responds to policy makers’ need for evidence and examples of low cost use/design of natural spaces to prevent and treat ill health. The strategic approaches being delivered in Scotland and Finland will be explored, supported by academic contributions providing both a summary of the general evidence and results from a specific study of the health benefits from the ‘Woodlands in and Around Towns’ programme in Scotland.

**Objectives**

- Present two national case studies to demonstrate importance of national context.
- Demonstrate the added value of bringing health and environment sectors together to develop natural-asset based approaches to public health challenges.
- Illustrate the types of programmes that aim to improve design of natural spaces and therefore encourage access and use in different contexts e.g. WIAT in Scotland.
- Present an overview of pioneering research that adopts longitudinal and health economics approaches to evaluation, as well as best practise showing innovative collaboration between environment and health sectors.
- Provide an opportunity for research and practice to come together and provide reflective debate on working together – identifying opportunities and revealing the tensions that arise during the process.
- Provide lessons learned for researchers and practitioners wishing to undertake similar work.

**Key messages:**

- Dissemination of best practice case studies and innovative research.
- Greater awareness of the health-improvement potential of environmental resources.

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**Developing Scotland’s Natural Health Service – an example of innovative collaboration between the environment and health sectors in Scotland**

Kevin Lafferty

Forestry Commission Scotland, Edinburgh, UK

Contact: kevin.lafferty@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Since 2013 the Green Exercise Partnership has worked with a number of regional health boards across Scotland to demonstrate how to realise the health-promoting potential of the greenspace surrounding hospitals and other healthcare settings. The project has identified a set of key principles to guide site development and a range of issues that need to be addressed to mainstream the provision/improvement of accessible greenspace for a range of treatment and therapeutic purposes. Greenspace also has value for staff, visitors and the wider community and local partnerships have involved public and voluntary sector collaboration.

Building on the growing evidence base on the positive links between environment and public health, and the cross-sectoral links established through the NHS Greenspace project, Our Natural Health Service action programme aims to embed nature-based solutions into health sector policy and practice. Supported by both the health and environment portfolios in Scottish Government, the action programme seeks to achieve:

- Increased public awareness and uptake of the benefits and opportunities to use the outdoors as part of their everyday lives.
- Use of nature-based health promotion initiatives and structured interventions routinely embraced by the Public Health and Health and Social Care sectors for prevention, care and supported self-management; and
- Stronger recognition across key sectors of the shared responsibility for improving public health through prevention and early intervention.

A strong focus of activity will be on the areas of urban and rural Scotland that have low levels of physical activity and suffer from health inequalities and other aspects of disadvantage.

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**Improvements to Woods In and Around Towns: a natural experiment working with deprived communities**

Catharine Ward Thompson

CW Thompson

OPENspace research center, Edinburgh, UK

Contact: c.ward-thompson@ed.ac.uk

Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) is a Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) initiative to improve quality of life in Scotland’s urban/post-industrial areas through enhanced community access to new or regenerated woodland. Our project considers its effect on community wellbeing. It is a highly innovative, longitudinal study, allowing us to interpret cause and effect with greater confidence than most such studies previously.

The project was designed to treat interventions undertaken by Forestry Commission Scotland under the WIAT programme as a ‘natural experiment’, allowing a pre-post study of the effect of environmental interventions on health outcomes. This involved physical and social interventions to enhance access to natural environments in deprived communities. We have assessed impacts on perceived stress (as the primary outcome) and a range of secondary measures covering wellbeing, physical activity, quality of life and connectedness to nature.

The project design involved a repeat survey of residents living within 1.5km of intervention and comparison sites. Three waves of data were collected: pre-physical environment intervention (2013); post-physical environment intervention (2014) and post-social intervention to promote and encourage woodland use (2015).

The initial design treated each wave of data collection as a cross-sectional survey but, in practice, it proved possible to obtain a longitudinal cohort within this dataset. The results draw on this cohort and show beneficial changes associated with the interventions for secondary measures but not for the primary outcome. The cost implications of any changes associated with the interventions are also considered.

The presentation will also identify the challenges of conducting longitudinal research in deprived urban communities with recommendations on how best to manage these issues.

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**From Green Space to Green prescriptions?**

Agnes van den Berg

University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands

Contact: a.e.van.den.berg@rug.nl

Research on the healthy and restorative effects of green space has been rapidly expanding over the past decades, and the field is fast moving toward maturity. Findings converge in showing that regular contact with green space can enhance well-being and alleviate stress, and may even mitigate income-related health inequalities regarding chronic diseases and life expectancy. In response to these insights, there has been a surge of
initiatives to (re)connect people with nature, especially those without the ability or opportunity to engage with green space as part of their usual lifestyle. Many of these initiatives have focused on “bringing nature to people” by greening of places in people’s nearby environment, such as schoolyards, urban public spaces, hospitals, classrooms, and offices. Other initiatives have aimed at “bringing people to nature” by encouraging and facilitating adults and children to actively participate in nature-based activities. These activities range from health promotion programs and projects for the general population, like green gyms or community gardening, to more therapeutic interventions for individuals with a defined need, like care farms, walk-and-talk coaching, or horticultural therapy.

What are the challenges involved in bringing people to nature, if it is made available and accessible in principle? For example, what is needed to make health professionals write more green prescriptions? Besides a strong clinical evidence base, an important prerequisite for the acceptance of green care is a convincing explanatory framework that specifies the main pathways and causal mechanisms of these interventions. This paper will explore recent evidence to elucidate how interacting with nature and green space may promote health, and how this in turn might increase adoption and promotion of therapeutic engagement and green care by health professionals and others whose work can enhance bringing people to nature for beneficial effect.

Developing the Finnish model of Healthy Parks, Healthy People
Matti Tapaninen
M Tapaninen
Metsahallitus Parks and Wildlife Finland, Kajaani, Finland
Contact: matti.tapaninen@metsa.fi

Taking inspiration from the growing evidence base, and from the work of Australia’s Parks Victoria in the development of a Healthy Parks Healthy People approach with international applicability, Parks and Wildlife Finland is implementing a national Healthy Parks Healthy People strategy to help address health challenges. The environmental resources on which delivery depends are based largely within park management bodies, but the strategy works with business innovators, healthcare practitioners, scientists and NGOs to foster better health of individuals and communities. The strategy is being implemented in locations all around Finland and many inspiring nature-based solutions have been developed – examples of which will be used in the session. The presentation will also address the issue of monitoring the impact of the strategy and the health outcomes from specific projects and programmes.

International cooperation and sharing good practice plays a crucial role in achieving health benefits from nature as the challenge is global. There is a clear message here for public health fora to include park managers, as not only do parks and greenspace protect the essential systems of life and biodiversity, but they are also a fundamental setting for health promotion and the creation of wellbeing.