



Scoping of options to develop or extend a database of greenspace research

Project Code: UE2b(04)GR5

Who this research is intended for: Environmental agencies and practitioners, local authority planners, , planning policy-makers, conservation bodies and those involved with developing green space for people, health or biodiversity.

Objectives of the project

The brief for the scoping exercise was to investigate options and make recommendations to extend and develop existing/planned resources to incorporate a wider variety of information sources. These sources of information could include case studies, grey literature, research from other European Member States and, in particular, references which may be used by communities and greenspace practitioners to help them develop good practice and implement relevant policy.

The client group want a publicly available, accessible and easily searchable database which can be used by practitioners, community and voluntary groups, policy makers, students and researchers across a wide range of sectors (e.g. environment, health, housing, regeneration, community, planning, enterprise, equality and diversity). There should also be recommendations on how a database should be resourced and a mechanism for updating and maintaining it.

Background

In 2003, Greenspace Scotland, Communities Scotland, NHS Health Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage (the 'Quality of Life' Group) commissioned a literature review to draw together existing research and literature linking greenspace and quality of life. As part of this study a small number of project case studies were also collected. This information was presented in a written report and summarised in an access database.

The 'technical report' was subsequently used to produce a series of topic-based briefing notes and a publication called 'Making the Links – Greenspace and the Partnership Agreement' that demonstrated the contribution to the four key areas of the programme; growing Scotland's economy, delivering excellent public services, supporting stronger, safer communities and developing a confident and democratic Scotland.

The QoL Group, identified a need for a shared and accessible database of greenspace research which would be widely available to practitioners, community groups, policy makers and researchers. SNIFFER with stakeholders identified the need to draw together the findings of Scottish and UK research and case studies relating to greenspace, by developing a searchable, website-based database.

ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) had developed a database, though this did not fully meet the requirements of the client group. The client group were keen to minimise duplication and where possible to develop a publicly accessible and searchable database in partnership with others and to add value to existing work.

Key Findings

The key findings from the survey were:

- a clear demand for a greenspace research database covering a wide range of policy areas
- the requirement for a database which extends beyond academic peer reviewed research and includes evidence from a wide range categories including case studies and demonstration projects
- a database that will be used in a number of different ways, with a strong emphasis on evidence which supports project development and funding
- quality control (or critique) will be important if a diverse range of evidence is to be included to ensure that users are drawing on the 'best' evidence to support their delivery of project goals
- the ability to identify evidence from Scotland was considered very important, followed by the rest of the UK. (This is most likely to be a reflection that the majority of the respondents are working in Scotland, however, it does indicate the perceived importance of being able to identify projects within the areas covered by the devolved administrations of the UK.)
- a wide range of potential users were identified, including local authorities, agencies, NDPBs and NGOs. Community groups were also considered to be important users; this means that accessibility and ease of use (in relation to terminology, database interface and search facilities) will require careful attention
- Greenspace Scotland was clearly identified as the preferred 'host' for a database
- regular updating is required, with quarterly being the preferred option
- a high degree of interest from responding organisations in joining a partnership to develop and resource a database.

Recommendations

The conclusion from the audit of existing databases was that there are none that cover the mix of policy areas in relation to greenspace except the ODPM commissioned database. The ODPM database, whilst comprehensive in terms of recording academic and agency commissioned research, does not cover the range of evidence sources sought by stakeholders.

It is recommended that a research database is developed which complements the ODPM project and rather than attempt to incorporate the two, they should be developed as mutually supporting and parallel structures with clear linkages between the websites and search engines.

Further Information

Copies of the research outputs are available for free download from www.sniffer.org.uk/search.asp

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Partners

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