

Recent findings on urban green space & health

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This presentation will describe two case studies from OPENspace research centre's recent work, exploring links between access to green space, perceptions of and activities in green space, and health.

The first study was part of the GreenHealth project, supported by the Scottish Government and undertaken in collaboration with the James Hutton Institute and the Universities of Heriot-Watt, Glasgow and Westminster. It was undertaken with residents of deprived urban communities in Scotland. Using independent, GIS-based measures of green space in the study, we found evidence of a link between green space quantity and both perceived stress and mental wellbeing. We also found a significant association between higher levels of green space and lower levels of physiological stress, as indicated by diurnal salivary cortisol patterns in a sample of unemployed men and women. This is important in using a biomarker to demonstrate the salutogenic effects of environmental settings such as green space within the context of people's everyday lives.

The second study focuses on urban forestry and has been supported by the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). It involves a natural experiment to study the effects of improvements under the FCS Woods In and Around Town (WIAT) programme in disadvantaged urban communities, compared with similar communities without such environmental interventions. The study design uses a repeat cross-sectional survey of the community resident within 500 m of the local woodlands/green space to examine wellbeing, perceptions of neighbourhood quality of life, neighbourhood environment, and local woodland qualities, frequency of woodland visits and levels of outdoor physical activity. Results from a pilot study will be presented as well as the design of a larger, multi-site study now under way.

The presentation will conclude with an overview of this and other opportunities for further research on green and healthy cities.