

Urban greenspace: values, health and equity

Greenspace can be defined as *'any vegetated land or water within or adjoining an urban area'*¹ and includes both public and private land². There is a growing evidence that greenspace contributes to positive well-being outcomes including improved physical and mental health. This is both through active engagement in recreation and the passive enjoyment of greenspace.

There has also been growing interest in the role of ecosystem services in contributing to human well-being as measured in terms of monetary, health and social values (e.g. UK NEA). However, the nature of these links is not explicitly made, to the extent that we do not know what the functional relationships are between ecosystem services provision and multiple well-being outcomes.

This ongoing research aims to explore how greenspace can be linked to ecosystem services provision and how in turn these are reflected in well-being measured both in economic and health terms. Initial research has found that there are links between greenspace and property values in Edinburgh. The ability of people with sufficient resources to purchase access to greenspace through the property market and thus capture other well-being benefits means that there are potential issues of equity in provision and access to greenspace and ecosystem services.

This equity issue applies not just to private supply and demand for greenspace and ecosystem services, there may also be important issues with regard to public provision (i.e. public parks, local amenity greenspace, exclusive access) arising from lack of political influence. Low income, or otherwise deprived, communities might be unable to either privately purchase ecosystem service benefits (e.g. private gardens) or locate in proximity to environmental amenity. Consequently they may suffer from lack of associated well-being outcomes (health and social benefits) which may incur costs to wider society (e.g. treatment for ill health). There may be a policy justification for the public provision of greenspace as a cost-effective well-being intervention. For example, those benefits could be explicitly included in the appraisal of green infrastructure projects that provide regulating services (e.g. reducing flood risks, improving water quality, or local air quality and climate regulation).

¹ <http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/greenspace.aspx>

² The related concept of open space considers only larger areas of greenspace (>500m²) that are publicly accessible (i.e. private gardens are excluded) and also includes civic space.