

Community Values

Maximising Community Contribution to Biodiversity through Urban Green Spaces

Judy Ling Wong OBE

Ninety percent of Britain's population now live in urban areas. The declining quality of Britain's urban green spaces is now a matter of extensive public concern. As part of the urban renaissance movement, the betterment of urban green spaces is rising up the agenda. There is an opening for the environmental sector to put into place opportunities, within green spaces, for the urban population to come into contact with nature, and enable them to acquire the awareness and understanding to switch on their contribution to biodiversity. The missing contribution still to be gained within the urban population is vast.

In the urban scenario, environmental gain does not stand alone. Here, the agendas of contribution to the natural environment, neighbourhood improvement and social regeneration coincide. The successful engagement of urban based new audiences demands a methodology which draws on joined-up thinking. It is about the bringing together of the social, cultural and environmental agendas, informed by an understanding of human processes.

Twin pillars of sustainable development

Relationship of people to people
Relationship of people to nature

Recognition of the power of the basic human process

We use and enjoy spaces where we are welcome
What we constantly use and enjoy is truly ours
We wish to care for what is ours

Creating and improving urban green spaces for people

Resources for community involvement seem to be everywhere and yet there still seems to be a lack of open familiar places where ordinary people can run into opportunities for knowledge and participation around biodiversity. Urban green spaces is a prime candidate. Urban green spaces can provide hundreds of focal points for change - a web of sites right in the centre of where people are, from urban parks, city farms, commons, cemeteries, council estate grounds, school playing fields, children's playgrounds, community gardens, urban woodlands, to abandoned wasteland. The spotlight now focused on urban green spaces looks forward to betterment and renewal, a chance for many themes to get in at the formative stages of new thinking.

What, perhaps, is needed more than anything is a framework for connecting people and nature in urban green spaces. The environmental sector needs to see clearly and promote its socio-cultural environmental role. This will enable it to build awareness, understanding and commitment to biodiversity within those who run urban green spaces, from local authorities to community managers of pocket spaces, and work with them to ensure urban green spaces can be focal points for spreading that awareness.

This can be achieved in a multitude of ways: strategically ensuring contact with nature within urban green spaces; linking activities which promote biodiversity into overall programme of activities within urban green spaces; promoting understanding of biodiversity as part of people-centred events, from a teddy bear's picnic night to a Mela; linking social, cultural and environmental themes for a broad base for motivation. For example, taking on the multi-cultural interpretation of the environment from plant trails of the countries of origin of the global collections of plants and trees within urban green spaces to the diverse names on war memorials.

The environmental sector needs to position itself within a socio-cultural agenda and build awareness, understanding and commitment to community development within their own project staff working with biodiversity. It needs to encourage them to reach out and welcome new audiences, working within a socio-cultural environmental agenda. It also needs to work with people whose agendas are not environmental, to establish opportunities for contact with and enjoyment of nature. Activities should be designed that give people information and practical skills so that they are enabled to bring nature into their own lives (From window box projects to assisting in transforming schoolgrounds).

Projects which link in with everyday themes can connect with nature. An imaginative teacher taught everything there was to know about sustainable development through the journey of a pair of Nike shoes from its creation to its owner's feet and finally to the dustbin !)

Opportunities now need to be provided for people who have become aware of nature to be exposed to the principles of biodiversity and consistently deepen knowledge in a way which enables them to make a practical contribution or to change their everyday behaviour to protect the environment .

Nurturing and supporting new candidates from every sector of society will enable them to shape and lead activities, and take part in representation and decision-making.

Local partnership work, can adopt an inter-agency, cross sectoral approach to project work, involving the community.

Where urban green spaces are in decline, programmes around biodiversity and sustainable development can link into a plethora of life-enhancing activities which deliver environmental quality in and beyond green spaces. Where good quality urban parks and green spaces exist, they are deeply loved and enjoyed. People value them as realms of freedom, open to spontaneity and informal pleasures and contemplation. However, their inevitable link to greenness is not necessarily capitalised on as an avenue to awareness of the intricacies of the natural world and a consciousness of the vital and powerful role of people within it.

The incorporation of the theme of biodiversity as part of the social programme within urban green spaces can make a major contribution not only to the natural environment but to the liveability of the urban environment.

The environmental sector is an essential player within urban green spaces, poised to switch on a vast contribution, through urban participation in biodiversity and sustainable development, to the quality of life of generations to come.

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