

Outdoor Cities Project

(funded by Bupa, June 2013-June 2016)

Context

Our health and wellbeing are intimately related to the environment in which we live. Natural settings are particularly beneficial in promoting physical activity and for helping us cope with the stresses of modern life. In many situations, getting people to spend more time outdoors, being physically active, can be vital not only for enhancing health and wellbeing, but also for strengthening environmental awareness and responsibility.

Yet in our increasingly urbanised world, people are becoming disconnected from nature and achieving health, wellbeing and sustainability has become more difficult. In a context in which cities across the world are witnessing both increased levels of non-communicable disease as a result of physical inactivity and the detrimental impacts of climate change, finding ways to actively reconnect people with their environment is of crucial importance.

Examples from a number of cities across the globe show that innovative approaches to urban design, transport and open space can enable people to engage with the outdoor environment in ways that enhance individual health and wellbeing.

However, little is known about the extent to which different social groups are able or willing to access such initiatives, nor whether the potential benefits of such interventions are available to all on an equal basis. Until such understanding is gained, cities across the world will remain unable to provide all of their citizens with the full potential to live healthy and sustainable lives.