



## Green Infrastructure can promote economic development

**A recent study** has concluded that the green infrastructure concept has been successful in integrating green space policy with economic development policies in the north-west region of the UK, by emphasising the links between the economic benefits of green spaces and growth policies.

**Green space in urban areas** is valued for many reasons, including health benefits for citizens, preservation of the environment, moderating climate change impacts and providing space for social interactions. However, depending on the context in which it is being used, green space has been described in a number of different ways, including by the term 'green infrastructure'. Green infrastructure (GI) generally refers to green space as a networked resource with numerous social, economic and environmental benefits.

This study explores how the concept of GI is being integrated into wider policy areas by focusing on regional development policy in the north-west of England. In the UK, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) established in the late 1990s, had the primary purpose of developing the economies of the different regions. From early on, the North West Development Agency was prepared to involve other policy areas that could be connected to the aims of the RDA. Several regional GI partnerships were formed to help shape regional policy development.

The study analysed how GI policy was developed by assessing policy documents in the north-west region and interviews with policymakers and practitioners at regional and local levels, across a range of disciplines, including planning, conservation and economic development. The analysis focussed on how the economic value of GI projects was linked with the regional economic development agenda. It revealed a shift in emphasis from valuing green spaces, such as the countryside, coasts and urban parks, in purely environmental terms, to viewing green spaces as valuable resources essential for sustainable development.

A key strategy in the programme to promote GI has been to link GI to economics, e.g. by associating green infrastructure with more conventional infrastructures and highlighting the economic benefits of GI. That is, the economic value of the functions provided by green space has been made explicit. For example, a list of 11 economic benefits of GI was established, which has been used to support the development of GI in the north-west. Among the benefits listed are tourism, recreation, economic growth and investment and land and biodiversity.

In addition, cooperation between regional decision makers and green space policymakers, including conservationists and park managers, helped ensure the success of this programme.

The study suggests the actual term 'Green Infrastructure' has been useful in getting the attention of economic development policymakers by explicitly linking green benefits with economic benefits. In particular, by associating GI with more traditional 'grey' infrastructures, such as transport and drainage, GI is seen as an integral part of economic development, rather than as an optional addition.

This GI approach has also been useful in ensuring growth policies are 'green'. In this way, GI is seen as a valuable resource that enables sustainable development, rather than being viewed as a barrier to growth.

**Source:** Horwood, K. (2011) Green infrastructure: reconciling urban green space and regional economic development: lessons learnt from experience in England's north-west region. *Local Environment The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*. 16: 963-975.

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