URBAN REWILDING AESTHETICS AND PEOPLE'S NEEDS INTO MULTIFUNCTIONAL BLUE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN - PROJECT UPDATE

Alessio Russo[1*], Alice Goodenough[2], Adam Sheppard[1], David Cheshire[1], Giuseppe T. Cirella[3], Francisco J. Escobedo[4], Kevin Harrington[1], Christoph D. D. Rupprecht[5], Mallika Sardeshpande[6]

1 SCHOOL OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE, CHELTENHAM, UK
2 COUNTRYSIDE AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE, CHELTENHAM, UK
3 UNIVERSITY OF GDANSK, SOPOT, POLAND
4 USDA PACIFIC SOUTHWEST RESEARCH STATION, LOS ANGELES, CA, USA
5 EHIME UNIVERSITY, MATSUYAMA, JAPAN
6 CENTRE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SYSTEMS, SCOTTSVILLE, SOUTH AFRICA
* ARUSSO@GLOS.AC.UK

PROJECT AIMS

- Investigate the challenges and multifaceted benefits associated with urban rewilding in British cities.
- Establish close collaborations with local authorities, public land managers, and communities to explore the practical aspects of implementing rewilding initiatives.
- Examine the policy implementation challenges and consequences of transitioning towards "wild" aesthetics and management objectives within urban landscapes.
- Explore the overarching goals set by local authorities and the obstacles they face in transforming these aspirations into tangible outcomes.

OBJECTIVES

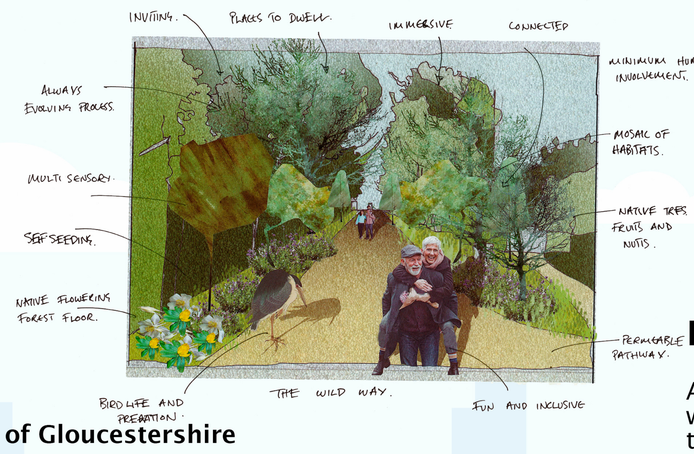
- Develop a set of resources to aid local authorities and land managers in making informed decisions about urban rewilding initiatives.
- Provide guidance on the strategic implementation of urban rewilding, specifying suitable locations and types that benefit local communities.
- Offer practical solutions to mitigate potential adverse effects and prevent the exacerbation of inequalities within urban areas arising from rewilding projects.

METHODOLOGY

Focus Group:
A focus group was conducted with local authorities to explore their understanding and utilisation of the term "rewilding" and to identify their objectives concerning rewilding initiatives in their respective areas. The results obtained from this session served as a foundation for further investigations. NVivo 12 was used for the coding of qualitative data as well as for generating a word frequency query.

Design Workshop:
A three-day design workshop was organised, involving national and international speakers and participants. The workshop focused on exploring the possibilities of rewilding Cheltenham's former elevated Honeybourne railway line, now a cycle and public footpath. Three distinct scenarios were proposed: intensive rewilding, moderate rewilding, and a "signature" landscape. This research through design approach aimed to analyse the opportunities and barriers to rewilding in urban areas, utilising design as a tool for generating knowledge and understanding.

Online Survey:
An online survey was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the general level of citizens' needs regarding rewilding and its impacts on inclusion, health, and well-being. The survey included images generated form original photographs and AI show three distinct degrees of rewilding from formal signature landscape to moderate and intensive. The questions associated with each image ask the participant to rate the space depicted from most liked to least liked. The survey also included the utilisation of the 5-item World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) across the three landscape scenarios to evaluate subjective psychological well-being.



Urban rewilding workshop at the University of Gloucestershire

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Key Results - Focus Group

Urban Exclusion: Some believe rewilding excludes human needs in urban contexts.
Conceptual Challenges: Issues with interpretation and application of the term "rewilding".
Scale Requirement: Perceptions of large-scale settings for rewilding projects.
Rural Origins: Rewilding models predominantly emerging from rural landscapes.

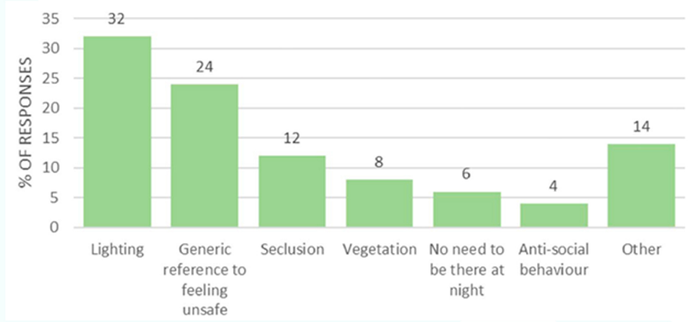
Key Results - Online Survey

Value of Existing Wild Areas
Residents and visitors value existing wild areas in familiar green spaces.
Understanding of Urban Rewilding
Most respondents have moderate to good knowledge of urban rewilding.
View urban rewilding as a valuable feature in Cheltenham's green spaces.

Images A,B and C. Showing signature, moderate and intensively rewilded landscapes respectively

Landscape Preference
Moderately rewilded landscape (B) was the most favoured

Wellbeing and Rewilding
Moderately rewilded scenes generate the highest wellbeing responses.
Perceptions of Safety
Moderately rewilded spaces are perceived as the safest.
Intensively rewilded landscapes are perceived as the least safe spaces.
Concerns about potential increase in crime or safety issues in rewilded areas represented 26.9% of responses.



Lack of Lighting: Participants frequently expressed concerns about the absence of lighting.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE PROJECT

A national survey will be conducted to explore how rewilding is interpreted within UK local authorities. This survey aims to identify alternative terminologies or conceptualizations that local authorities may use to describe rewilding, if not referred to directly as "rewilding".
Additionally, this survey aims to explore the diverse barriers associated with the implementation of rewilded aesthetics and to acquire a deeper understanding of the motivations of local authorities.
Finally, the project includes a community validation workshop where we hope to explore the types of opportunities and exclusions that rewilded urban environments present for different groups.

This work has been supported by the UKRI-funded RECLAIM Network Plus grant (EP/W034034/1).

Vector images designed by Freepik