

Wild Ways – A scoping study on influencing pro-environmental behaviours to facilitate urban rewilding

Siân Moxon and Dr Justin Webb

Abstract:

There is an urgent need to rewild cities to mitigate alarming biodiversity decline. Private urban gardens are central to this effort, but changes in how residents manage these spaces are reducing their vegetation and wildlife habitat. Urban designers can propose initiatives to rewild city gardens by increasing their greenery to reverse this trend. But encouraging positive environmental behaviours in residents – such as adding plants, water and habitat boxes, rather than paving over front gardens, felling trees and laying artificial lawns – will be critical to their success.

A cross-disciplinary project, applying behavioural-science methodologies to design research, aims to investigate pro-environmental behaviours in relation to improving the biodiversity of private gardens within Greater London. Ultimately, it aims to develop an intervention strategy using the design-led 'Rewild My Street' urban-rewilding campaign as a test case. The first phase is a scoping review to understand the capability, opportunity and motivation factors influencing pro-environmental behaviours.

A literature search is underway to screen, critically appraise and code the existing literature on understanding and influencing pro-environmental behaviour. Key themes will be identified using the COM-B behavioural model, which posits that

behaviour derives from an interaction between one's capability, opportunity and motivation to carry out a behaviour. The Behaviour Change Wheel framework will help identify potential intervention options, such as education, persuasion, incentivisation, coercion, training, restriction, environmental restructuring, modelling and enablement.

This study makes an important contribution to an emerging research field by mapping the body of work on environmental behaviour. Its findings will benefit other researchers in the field. Designers that understand how to engender positive environmental behaviours could drive citizen-centred, sustainable post-COVID-19 redevelopment of cities worldwide – both for biodiversity, and wider environmental and health benefits.