February 2020

Dear <<First Name>>,

As someone with an interest in the work of SWEEP, we'd like to draw your attention to a new project we are developing on 'Social preferences for environmental net gain projects'. You'll find further information below, or by downloading the Project Summary.

Download Project Summary >

If you would like to find out more please do get in touch with Dawn Scott on sweep@exeter.ac.uk. Or do feel free to forward this on to other relevant colleagues.

Kind regards
The SWEEP team

Social preferences for environmental net gain projects
Outline for proposed new SWEEP project - Dr Michela Faccioli

Background

The importance of the natural environment for wellbeing and economic prosperity is increasingly recognised. However, it is threatened by non-sustainable land use and development decisions that contribute to environmental degradation.

To counteract this, the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan commits the UK to pursue a 'net environmental gain' approach to development decision-making. This recognises that environmental damages from land use or development in given locations need to be compensated by investments in extra conservation elsewhere such that, developments deliver environmental benefits to society which outweigh the environmental costs. However, at present, there is a major knowledge gap concerning the practical implementation of such a policy.

From an economic decision-making perspective, the costs of projects such as the delivery of outdoor recreational access or the provision of biodiversity habitat are readily available, however, the scale of the social benefits afforded by such projects are frequently uncertain or entirely unknown. Most of the environmental goods that people appreciate are in fact delivered without the intervention of markets and there is no readily available market price that signals the value of these goods.
The location of any compensation scheme is also a major determinant of the benefits it delivers. For example, locating an open-access woodland near to an urban fringe can generate massive recreational benefits. However, if you take an identical woodland and locate it in an area remote from settlements and with poor accessibility, it can completely negate these benefit values.

And of course, as the location of a compensating project varies so the socio-economic characteristics of the benefiting populations will also vary, as projects move closer to or away from richer or poorer communities.

Suggested approach & timeline

It is therefore important to better characterise and understand the role of space on preferences and values so as to provide more accurate information that policy-makers and developers can use to take decisions. We propose to address this through the use of academic techniques that allow us to value preferences for non-market environmental goods.

These include discrete choice experiments (DCE), which are survey-based valuation approaches that can be used estimate people's preferences and willingness to pay for environmental goods. This project will rely on the design and implementation of a spatially-explicit DCE survey. We will examine individual preferences and trade-offs for compensation projects defined across multiple dimensions including recreational access and the provision of biodiversity and wild-species compensation.

Given the ambition of the project it will run for approximately 18 months, starting in spring 2020. This will facilitate the design of the experiment with stakeholders and partners, the collection (through surveys) of the data necessary to address the project questions and undertake analysis of that data.

Are you interested?

We are looking for interested partners to work with us to co-design and co-deliver this exciting initiative. We are keen to explore case studies within the South West of the UK initially but are also interested in sharing the learning more widely. Please contact us to find out more at sweep@exeter.ac.uk, and for more general information about SWEEP please go to www.sweep.ac.uk.

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