



Outdoors & Health  
Network



## Presentation to the UIBEN networks UCL, Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2009

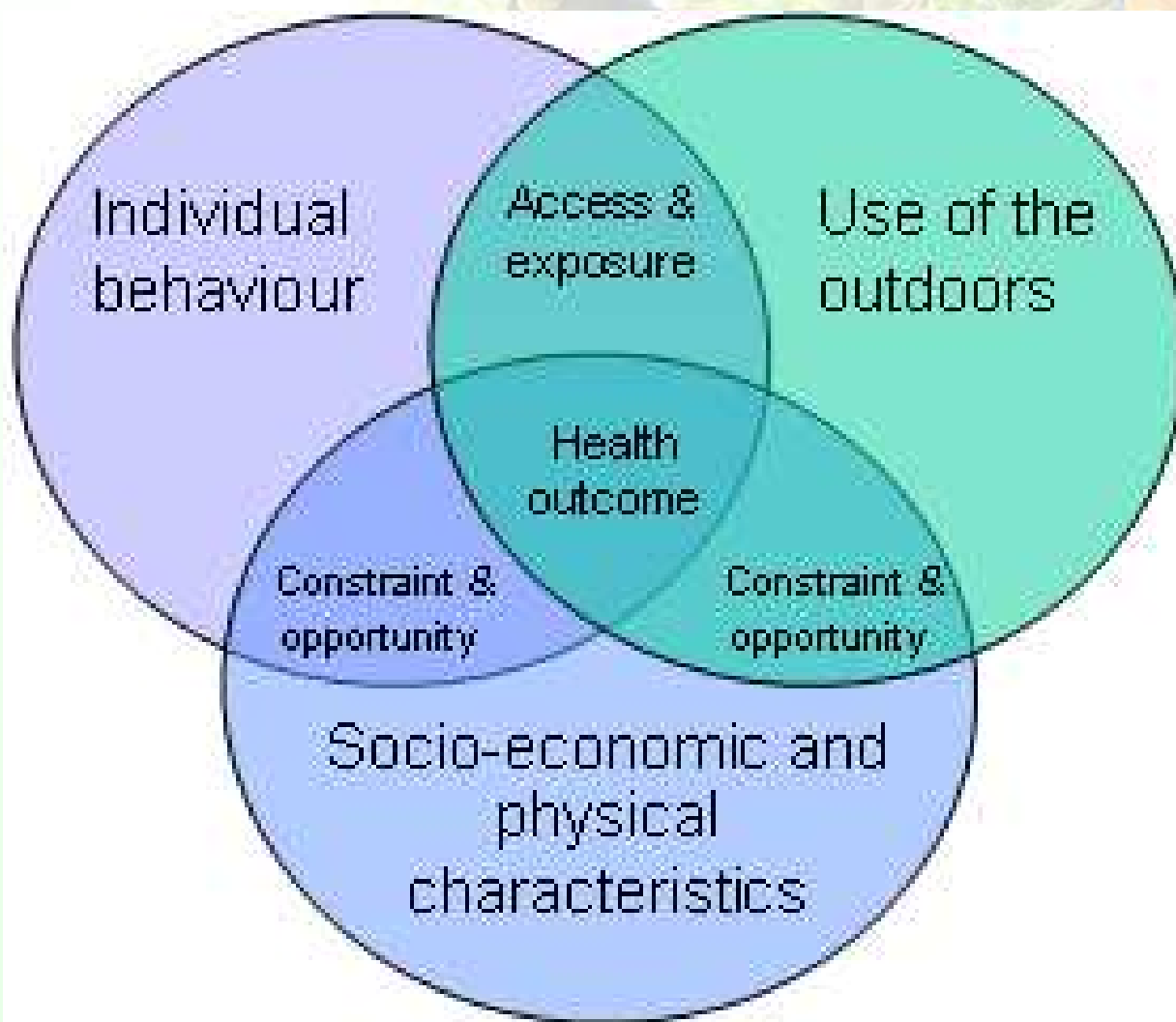
*Society's relationship with the  
natural world and the role of the  
outdoors in health and well-being*

*Dr Melanie Smith &*

*Professor Andrew Church*



## *Relationship between health outcomes, use of the outdoors and individual behaviour*





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# The need - background

- Research to date has identified health benefits of activity outdoors e.g. Florez et al (2007)
- Research has identified the mental and social benefits of engagement with natural environments, e.g. Gezler (1992), Uzzell & Moser (2006)
- Recent (Oct.2009) report commissioned by English Nature highlights the importance of natural landscapes for recreation, and recommends EN examine further the link to health
- Gaps exist in understanding the complex relationships between access to and use of the outdoors and links to health outcomes
- Better understanding on the factors that underlie individual behaviour decisions – role of advice
- Research and informing health policy and environment policy, particularly with regard to outdoor interventions – before studies and what questions to ask



# Overview of our objectives

- to examine the relationship between individuals' health and well-being and their use of the outdoors.
- focus on the 'natural' in spaces where people can engage with nature
- looking at physical and mental health as well as social inclusion and well-being
- develop an inter-disciplinary framework and methods for investigating the relationship between the outdoors and health



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# Who's in our network





# Principal Investigator



## Professor Jane Farmer

Co-Director and Chair of Rural Health Policy and Management, UHI

*Rural health care management and policy*

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# Co-investigators

Prof. Catharine Ward Thompson > Landscape architect, outdoors access

Prof. David Uzzell > Environmental psychology

Prof. Richard Mitchell > Epidemiology and public health

Prof. Andrew Church > Tourism & leisure geographies

Prof. Neil Ravenscroft > Land economy & outdoor recreation

Prof. Michael Depledge > Environment & human health

Dr Liz O'Brien > Social forestry

Dr Steve Cummins > Epidemiology and public health



# More co-investigators

Dr Birgitta Gatersleben > Environmental psychology

Dr Peter Varley > Sociology, marketing and adventure tourism

Dr Margaret Currie > Rural health resource planning

Dr Jung Jin Park > Landscape and environment

Genevieve Adkins > Interpretation

Prof. Sandra MacRury > Clinical diabetologist

Prof. Pete Higgins > Outdoor education

Prof. Martin Price > Sustainable mountain development

# Our activities

- **Website:**

[www.outdoorshealthnetwork.co.uk](http://www.outdoorshealthnetwork.co.uk)

- **Networking**

- to exchange knowledge, build a sharing culture within the network and plan coordination between the academics and network partners



# Our activities

- **Project development**

- to assess the current gaps within data and research on the links between outdoor use and health and test out new ways of inter-disciplinary working in this area

- **Proposal writing**

- networking events will focus on producing proposals for future research that will extend the ideas generated, and tested, through the project development activities



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# Networking activities

**Speed dating** – breaking down barriers

**VC Roundtables** – discipline specific perspectives, research interests

**Buddying** – day in the life...

**JISCmail** – exchanging interesting information

**Website** – sharing with the world plus members area

**Workshops** – inter-disciplinary discussions

**Telephone conferences** – keeping in touch, progress updates



# Project development



- **Pilot 1 – gathering quantitative data on outdoor use and health over time**
- **Pilot 2 – alternative explorations of data collection across the life course**



# Pilot 1 – Quantitative data

How social and biological/ medical scientists can work together to collect information through questionnaire and survey techniques?

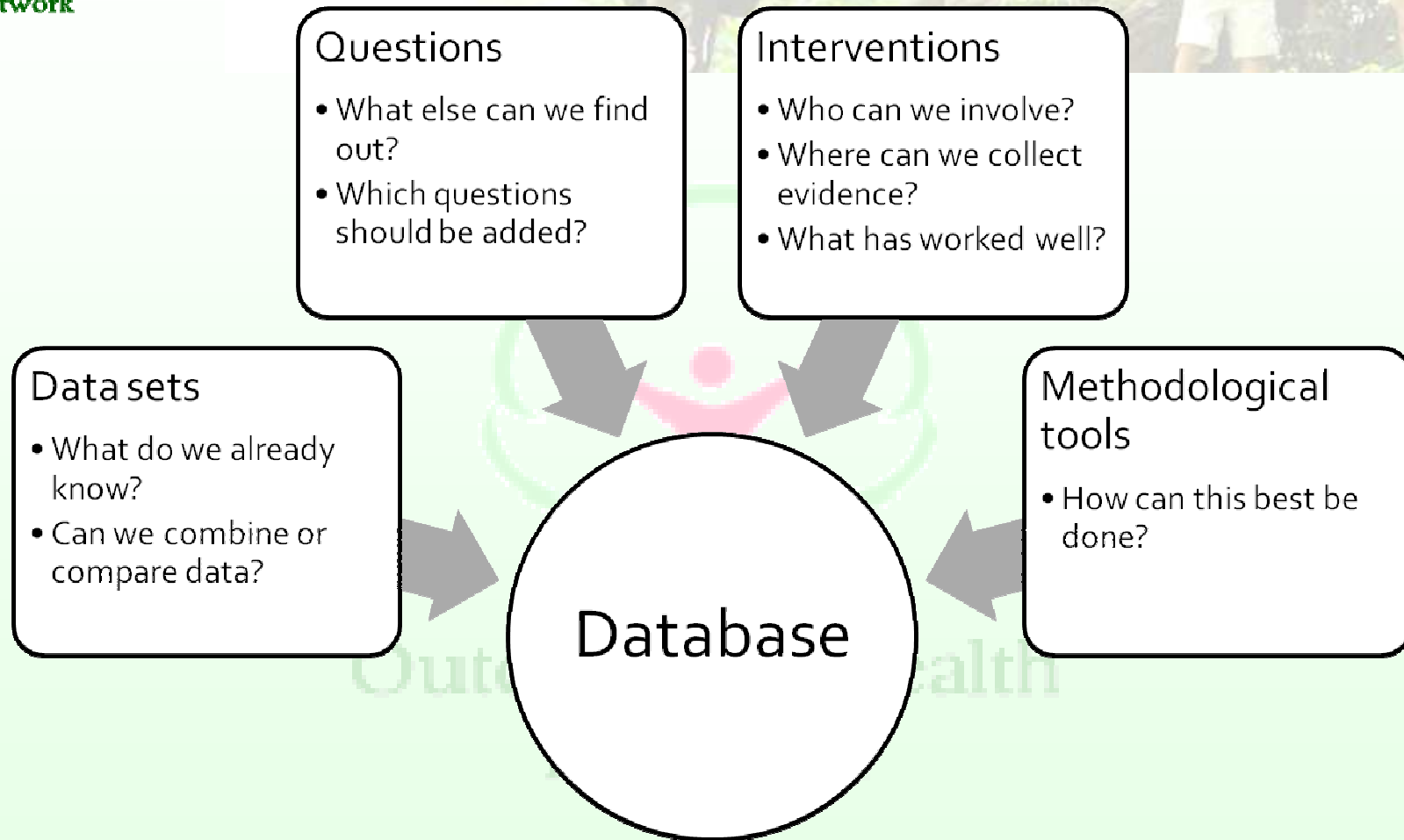
How can we combine information about health, access to greenspace, and the environment most effectively to explore the connections between these factors?

What information is available and how can we gather data where gaps exist?



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# Mapping what's out there

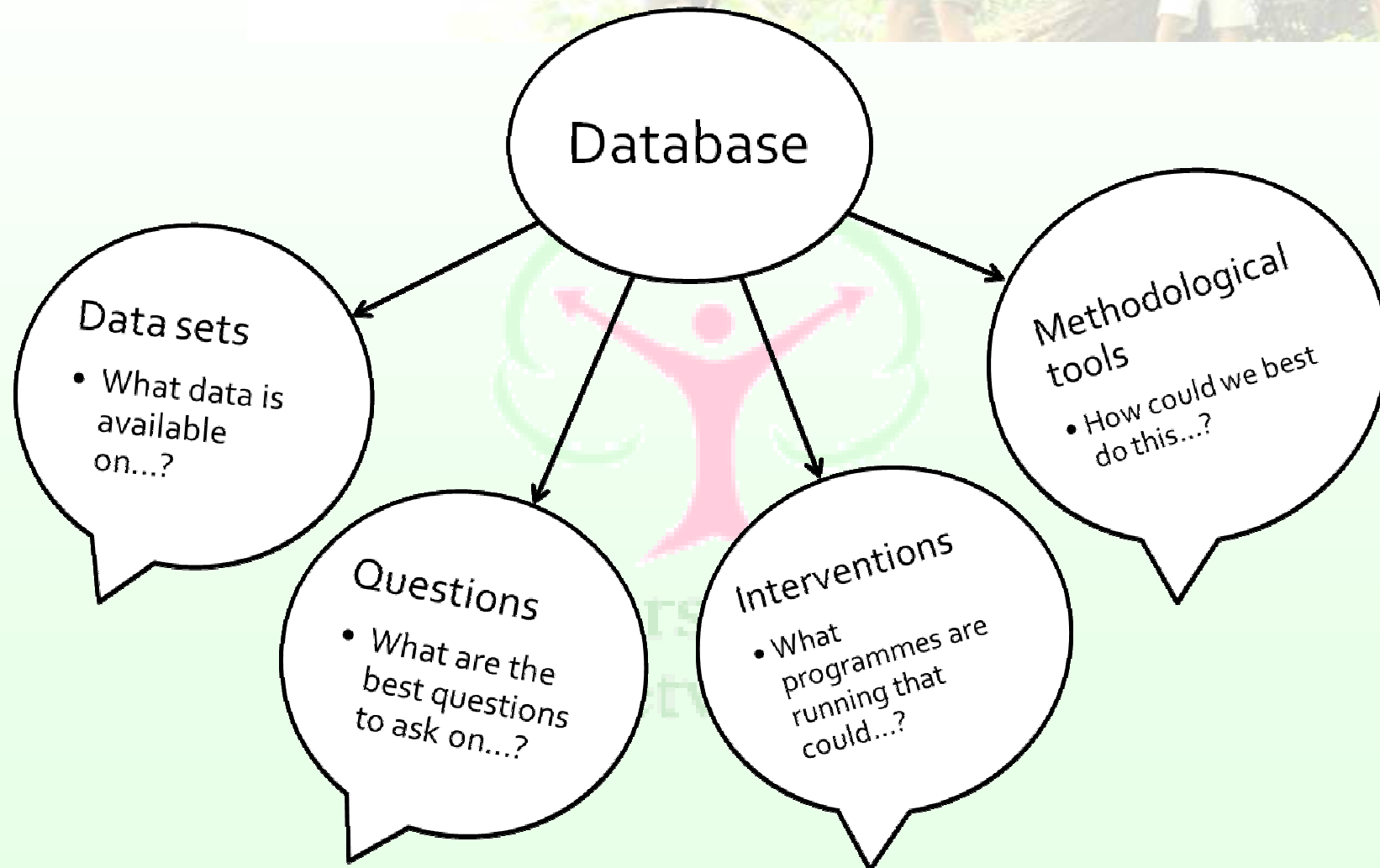


**Identification of gaps**



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# Outcome of mapping exercise





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## Pilot 2 – Qualitative data

Looking at alternatives to data collection through questionnaires/surveys

Can we unpick the relationship between individuals and their experiences, perceptions and use of the outdoors

How can we make this data acceptable as evidence to health professionals and policymakers

How can we link qualitative data with health data to view links between outdoor activity and health benefits?



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# Life histories narratives

In-depth interview technique that takes participants back through their life thinking about a specific focus – experiences and use of the outdoors

- Influence of childhood experiences
- Who they went with and what they did
- What moods, emotional state, crises
- How has the experience changed over time
- How use of outdoors has linked with health



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# Participatory research

- “Step it Up Highland” community walking groups in Aviemore and Nairn used as two case studies
- Looking at current use of outdoors & real time health indicators
- Community members involved in deciding data collection methods – e.g. video recordings or diaries
- Mixed methods approach
- Participants will help collect their own outdoor activity and health data
- Examines the quality of their experience outdoors
- Does involvement in data collection influence behaviour e.g. use of pedometer increase walking



# Future Activities

- **December '09 meeting Inverness**
- **Life History interviews & analysis**
- **Participatory research – community based data collection**
- **Input from Pilot Groups into database**
- **Discussion papers**
- **Final group meeting March 2010**



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# Outcomes

- **Database of related research in outdoor use, health, environment**
- **Life Histories**
- **Participatory research**
- **New networks**
- **Findings will inform the future research activities of the Outdoor Health Forum chaired by William Bird**
- **Generation of research proposals – emerging themes are already apparent e.g. use of longitudinal data in outdoor use & health**