Accessing and generating data

University as a Living Lab toolkit

Accessing existing data

You may wish to undertake analysis of existing datasets in order to verify known issues, or to reveal issues not yet known about. Existing datasets can also help establish a baseline and starting point for your new project.

However, within the University, operational datasets are distributed across various departments and are not always easy to find or straightforward to access. The Department of Social Responsibility and Sustainability is the first point of call for sustainability-related data. They can point researchers to where existing datasets are held, give advice on whether it is possible to access it them.

The University is in the process of carrying out an audit of data, and once this is completed, it will be much simpler to find out what datasets are held and how they can be accessed. In the meantime, there is a small list of datasets available at https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=251988936 (EASE log in required)

There are other sources of existing data from outside the University that can provide additional insight and broader contextual information. Key sources of local relevance include:

- City of Edinburgh Open Data Portal (http://edinburghopendata.info)
- datasets curated by the Edinburgh Cityscope project (https://github.com/EdinburghCityScope),

Finding datasets relevant to a particular theme can take some time, and identifying data sources should begin as early as possible.

You may also wish to request access to data held by private organisations and companies – in some cases a partnership agreement may be needed in order to access such data under specified conditions.

Generating new data

Your Living Lab research project may of course use any of a wide range of research methods, as covered by numerous research methods courses offered across the University. Data may be gathered or generated using:

- observation
- surveys
- focus groups
- interviews
- digital tracking approaches
- etc.

You may wish to use more participatory approaches to generate different ideas related to solving the real-life problem in question, such as ‘hack’ sessions.