



Directions in green roof research: A bibliometric study



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ABSTRACT

Green roof research is a multidisciplinary and new research area. We conducted a bibliometric quantification to assess the rate of publications in specific areas of research for this novel research area based on the scientific literature as available from the Web of Science. Bibliometric research can provide valuable information about changes in the trends within a particular area of research. For example, we found that the number of publications in this field increased in the last two decades at very similar pace to other pre-established academic disciplines. We also found that papers on green roofs were classified into 32 research areas. There was very little change in the frequency of most research areas through time. The percentages of plant sciences, forestry, marine and freshwater biology and biodiversity conservation of the total research areas classifications used each year increased significantly with time, while architecture decreased significantly with time signifying an increased interest in environmental issues and less focus on architectural issues. The distribution of publications between countries has been skewed, with the USA and the EU conducting 66% of the research, and thus allocation of research effort is focused in those continents and predominantly in temperate ecosystems. However, there has been a sharp increase in the number of countries that conduct green roof research. Our work provides a suite of indicators that can be combined to give a useful picture of the development of green roof research and identifies the challenges which lie ahead for this novel research area.

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1. Introduction

The establishment of growing media and plants on the roofs of buildings has taken place since ancient times [1]. Greened roofs provide benefits far beyond the aesthetic aspect. They store rainfall, which delays runoff and promotes evapotranspiration [2]. During hot weather, green roofs reduce heat flux through the roof by evapotranspiration, physically shading the roof, and increasing the insulation and thermal mass, thereby lowering the energy demands of the building's cooling system [3–5]. They reduce pollutants such as carbon dioxide [6]. Green roof habitats show promise for providing local habitat that can support a diversity of

flora and fauna [7–11]. However, it is only relatively recently that comprehensive research has been undertaken.

One of the driving forces behind the upsurge in green roof research is the need to provide a solid scientific knowledge to guide future sustainable urban design and management. Green roof research, as an interdisciplinary scientific effort, can play an active role with the integration of ideas, which are derived from a variety of disciplines, including engineering, biology, architecture and geography [12].

One way of monitoring the emergence of new fields is to examine the papers published on the topic. A more simple yet more comprehensive approach to understanding the growth of a field may be offered by bibliometric quantification [13] of a related specific term during a determined period of time. Bibliometric studies are an established tool, used to survey research areas and hundreds of such papers are already published in various fields such as Ecology [14], Medicine [15], Psychology [16] and Economics [17]. These studies synthesize existing knowledge to understand trends and understand where information may be lacking in the various fields. Using the ISI Web of Science to construct a database

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of all the papers published on green roofs in the last two decades, the objectives of this work were to (1) portray the change in the yearly rate of publication in green roofs research, (2) identify the most studied research areas in green roof research, (3) characterize some essential trends in green roof research in terms of research areas and studied systems, and (4) identify the challenges which lie ahead in green roof research. Compared to more established research areas, green roofs is a relatively young research area. However, research in this field is on-going in the last two decades and we believe that this bibliometric approach can provide a thorough and unbiased overview which will help in evaluating past directions and recognizing areas that have been overlooked.

2. Methods

We used the ISI Web of Science (<http://www.isiknowledge.com>) to search for peer-reviewed journal papers on green roofs. Specifically, we used the search terms “green roof*”, “living roof*”, “gründach”, “ecological roof*”, “roof garden*”, “turf roof*” and “sod roof*”.

We searched the literature published on this database on green roofs to extract (1) the total number of publications listed each year, (2) the geographical locations of authors, and (3) research areas. Clarifying the geographical distribution of the authors allows us to categorize the climatic conditions and the ecosystems that papers are considering.

It is important to note that not all green roof research will be captured by the Web of Science. Research may be reported in websites, in languages other than English (e.g. there is an extensive literature in German starting from the early 1960s) and some conference proceedings or technical reports not indexed by the Web of Science. However, the peer-review process serves to some extent as a reasonable filter for rigorous scientific work.

A bibliographic database consisting of 300 references was produced in Endnote X2. In order to compare the yearly trend in the number of publications to another newly emerging field, we compared the trend we found for green roofs research to the trends for landscape ecology research, which is also an emerging field of research over recent decades [18,19]. A major and continuous growth in green roof research began in 1992. Therefore, we checked also the trend from 1993 to 2012 and in parallel, the corresponding trend of the first 20 years in landscape ecology research (1977–1996). We plotted the yearly change in the number of publications for these two disciplines and compared the slopes after fitting a linear trend line.

We also used the research areas categories provided by the Web of Science. These categories were assigned at the level of individual publication. Each publication can be assigned to more than one research area. For each year starting from 2001 (prior to this year, there were only one or two publications each year in green roof research) we recorded the number of articles assigned to each category. We used the country of affiliation of authors for assigning geographical distribution of papers.

For evaluating possible changes in the frequency of research areas over time, we used Spearman rank correlation coefficient [20], a non-parametric measure of correlation. It was used here to test the strength and direction of the relationship between the frequency of a research area and time. $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

Publications on green roofs appeared only sporadically in the late 1960s and during the 1970s (Fig. 1). Until 1992 only four publications were listed by ISI. The number of papers steadily increased from the early 90 s, reaching 74 papers published in 2012.

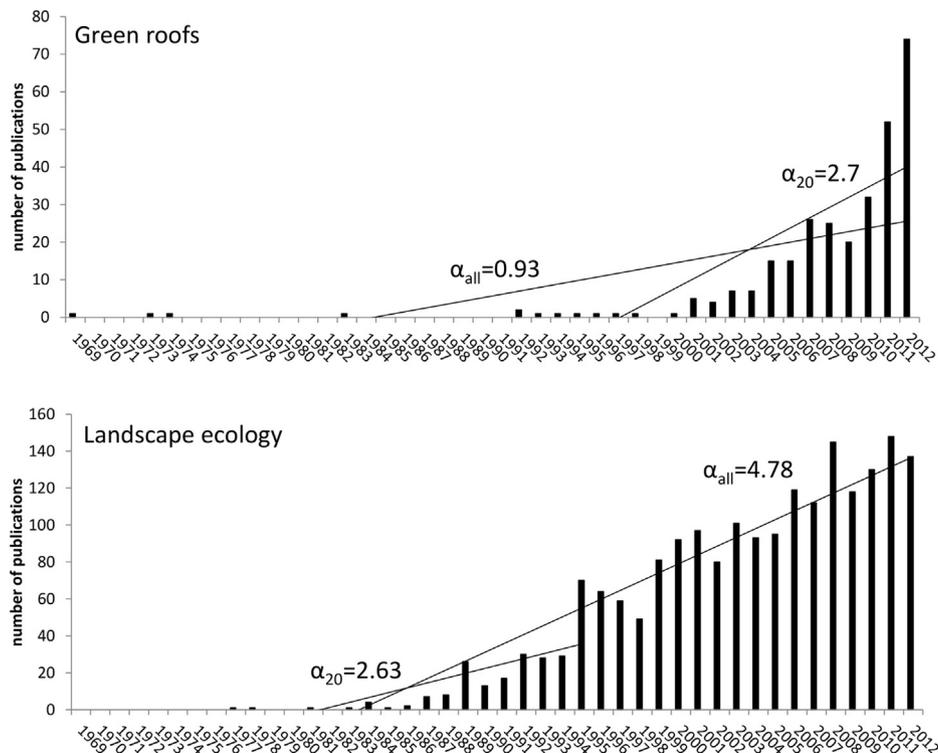


Fig. 1. Yearly rate of publication in green roofs research (upper graph) compared to landscape ecology research (lower graph). α_{all} represent the slope over all years while α_{20} represent the slope of only the first 20 years: 1993–2012 and 1977–1996 for green roofs research and landscape ecology, respectively.

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