

Chapter 7

Eleven countries, eleven innovative cities

The context for open space management

The next two chapters look at public space management from an international perspective. The focus, however, is not on public spaces in general but instead on a particular type of public space from the typology in Chapter 3 (see Table 3.1), namely public open (or green) spaces. The research looked at the experience of open space management in a number of cities around the world; cities chosen because of their reputation for high-quality public open space, and/or for their innovative management practices. The aim was to identify lessons from these experiences that could be applied elsewhere where management practices are less developed. This chapter first discusses the analytical framework against which comparison of the cases was made. Next, the research methodology used for this and the next chapter is discussed. The third and fourth parts of the chapter focus on the first two of six dimensions of open space management identified in the analytical framework: the types of public open space and their needs; and the aspirations for public open space. Finally a set of conclusions are extracted from the analysis.

A basis for comparison

Whilst Chapters 5 and 6 focused on the management of the full gamut of public space types in one country – England – it was important that the research was not over-influenced by the inevitable peculiarities of one country. At the same time, when looking internationally, across a diversity of cultural, political and governance contexts, it was equally important that the focus for investigation was narrowed from public space generally to a more limited typology of public space if meaningful comparisons were to

be made. As perhaps the most developed area of public space management practice, the opportunity was taken to focus on the management of public urban green or open spaces.

In the post-election period following the return to power of Tony Blair in 2001 a considerable body of research on green public spaces in England was launched (Urban Parks Forum 2001; GLA 2001; University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2001; Sport England *et al.* 2003). This work culminated in the setting up of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force whose own work included a comprehensive review of the available literature and an in-depth discussion of potential policy solutions to the perceived decline in the quality of urban green space across England (DTLR 2002a; DTLR 2002b). The research provided an invaluable basis for comparing the urban open space management systems of eleven cities in different countries around the world.

From this basis, issues and challenges could be distilled into six themes, bringing together and juxtaposing the key challenges for open space managers. In doing so it reflected the ‘process nature’ of open green space management moving through understanding context, to defining a vision, to combining and coordinating actions to deliver change on the ground. The first two themes cover the context for open space management. They refer to the understanding of the set of open spaces to be managed and their needs, and to the aspirations that inform management objectives.

Management context

UNDERSTANDING THE TYPES AND NEEDS OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

The first set of issues related to the ability to understand the nature and purpose of public open space and the needs and values that are attached