

BOX 7.1 TOKYO



Tree planting by volunteers

Tokyo (population 12 million within Tokyo Prefecture, 8 million in inner Tokyo) suffers from an endemic shortfall of green open space (6.1m²/person, compared to 8.5m² /person in Japan) and it has been a long-standing goal to increase this figure.

Meeting national aims through private-sector involvement

There has been a shift in the approach to urban open space management since the Japanese economy went into recession in the early 1990s from the historic interest to increase provision, to current goals concerned with achieving better quality. This resulted in attempts to develop parks as public amenities suited to diverse social needs rather than to provide standardised urban open spaces.

Traditionally, political power has been highly centralised in policy and budgetary terms but recently greater independence of local government has been encouraged. After 1998 Japan started to look at partnerships with the private sector, including open space provision in the context of limited land resources. This has involved:

- agreements for the rooftops of privately owned buildings to accommodate open space in addition to the established land use;
- relaxing of regulations to allow for agreements with private owners in order to establish urban open spaces for limited periods on unused land;
- extension of the PFI approach to urban open space management;
- introduction of more competitive practices by contracting out maintenance work.

Community participation

Revisions to the Urban Park Act 1956 have fostered greater community participation in the management of open spaces by enabling NGOs and community groups to establish and manage facilities in public open spaces. Local government retains overall responsibility, but can entrust management to other organisations such as the Park Preservation Society in the case of ‘city-wide’ parks, or much more local organisations in the case of smaller community parks, which tend to be used by the elderly. The Inquiry Commission of City and Regional Planning, established by central government, has proposed three kinds of action to improve the involvement of active local groups:

- better support for local groups already engaged in management;
- a comprehensive system for training volunteers to maintain skill levels and establish standards;
- relaxation of restrictions to allow the construction of park centres as bases for these local volunteers.