

Contextual needs in urban open space

The eleven cities also illustrated a number of problems associated with particular types of public open space. Many of these relate to the intensity of management responses required in highly dense urban areas where open spaces and green features are coming under pressure for a variety of reasons:

- conflicts between green and the built structures in urban areas;
- difficulties controlling development pressures in areas of high land values in order to keep existing open space and provide new spaces where none exist;
- the intensity of use of city-centre parks, requiring intensive management regimes, often exacerbated by the original (often highly particular) design solutions adopted;
- conflicts between occasional events and everyday leisure use, the former bringing with them problems of littering, noise, drug use and vandalism;
- the challenges associated with the replacement of ageing street trees and green landscape features without undermining visual qualities in often sensitive areas;
- differences in management and maintenance expectations and therefore between the quality expected by different organisations responsible for public open space, for example between the municipality and housing corporations in Groningen;
- standardised and insensitive legal duties towards traffic safety which tend to shape the management systems for the spaces to which these duties are applied.

Another set of problems relates to the diversity of open space needs and the existence or otherwise of management systems that explicitly acknowledge diversity. This was relevant in relation to the control of introduced pest plants and animals in natural or semi-natural areas in Wellington, related to the need to conserve the sensitive ecology of New Zealand.

In some places, this diversity was inspiring innovations with regard to some particular space types that were then transferred to others. In Hannover, for example, the cemetery sector was the first to adopt more innovative and effective management systems tied to legislation specific to its needs. Legislation in the 1970s determined that cemeteries should be financially self-sustainable, and that cost should be covered by income. This led to new, decentralised management practices which were later adopted in other parts of the open space management service. In a number of the case studies, new opportunities were being seized around a water theme, with recent developments or collaborations in Århus,

Groningen and Malmö leading to the creation of new water-based spaces with specific management systems. In Malmö, for example, this has led to the integration of drainage ponds and canals into the park system.

Formulating aspirations for public open space

Defining a clear set of aspirations for the different types of public open space is an important stage in developing and implementing an open space management strategy. For individual public spaces these are likely to be quite specific, but should also reflect the different forms of value added by public open space. Just as the problems associated with particular public open spaces vary, so aspirations are also likely to vary, depending on who is defining them, the nature of the space being considered and the functions that a space needs to cater for. It is therefore important to understand who defines the aspirations for public space, who is involved and through what mechanisms. In this regard two key sets of aspirations are of particular importance: the aspirations for public open space defined through the political process at different spatial scales (national, strategic, local) and the aspirations of the wider community (residents, businesses, users of public open space, particular interest groups, children, etc.).

The policy context

Three types of policy were apparent across the eleven cases: national policy, spatial planning policy, and local open space policy. The extent to which urban open space represented a national interest varied between cities, from no explicit national interest – in the USA and Australia – to open space policy being almost entirely established at the national level. Tokyo was the clearest example of the latter approach, where an aspiration to increase the area of open space per capita has been a longstanding national goal for urban areas. Thus since the 1920s, national policy has viewed open space as a refuge from the effects of natural disasters such as earthquakes. More recently, the policy has been viewed as a countermeasure to the heat island phenomenon; as a boost to the tourism potential of Japanese cities; and as part of the effort to provide for the leisure needs of children and the increasing numbers of elderly.

Sometimes, however, particular forms of open space are subject to their own legislation over and above general open space policy provided elsewhere. In Denmark, for example, allotment gardens were recently preserved by special legislation, and can only be removed for national purposes.