ownership rights – even if temporarily and by negotiation, as in Tokyo – from under-utilised spaces in areas with open space deficiencies so that they can be utilised as public open space – also carries obvious benefits.

As seen in the international case studies, the nature of, and the pressures on, open spaces can vary either as a function of their location in the urban fabric, the uses they have, or the expectations of the different agencies with a say in their management. The natural dynamics of changes in society adds to the variation, as exemplified by the new demand for play areas in the historic parks of Paris.

Very often these pressures lead to real threats to the quality of the open spaces concerned. However, the international cases suggest that whereas these problems cannot be avoided, they can be dealt with quite successfully if they are openly acknowledged by management strategies. Thus, in many of the eleven cities, special management regimes have been set up to tackle types of open space where particular problems are more acute (e.g. Zürich's lakeside parks, the neighbourhood parks in Tokyo, or city centre parks in Groningen). In some cases this has meant more intense maintenance routines, in others a closer involvement of park users in management decisions, in others still, the introduction of more sophisticated monitoring tools. The key message is therefore that diversity in problems as well as opportunities needs to be acknowledged and dealt with.

## Formulating aspirations for public open space

The international cases cover examples where there is a strong national policy framework shaping open space aspirations and examples where open space policy and strategy are entirely a local affair. No matter how different these contexts might be, a common thread is the ability to link closely their visions for open spaces to broader national, regional or local economic, social and environmental aspirations through effective use of the available policy instruments.

In many of the cases, the spatial planning system has provided the instruments for that linkage, with particular success where open space is at risk from development pressures and/or there is a pressing need for an expanded network of open spaces. Thus often the simple inclusion of open space issues within powerful statutory spatial planning documents – even when this is not a legal requirement – has helped to raise the profile of those issues. In some cases this linkage with the spatial planning policy has come together with an equally effective connection with environmental sustainability policy instruments such as Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

A key lesson is therefore that open space aspirations need to be considered within the broader context of other relevant policy areas if they are to have resonance beyond specific open spaces interests. An important means to achieve this has been the positioning of open space policy in a hierarchy of policy instruments ranging from the national to the local, and incorporating detailed open space plans reflecting both a spatial vision and day-to-day management policies. The example of Denmark, where the requirement for municipalities to prepare 'green plans' is established in national legislation, has potentially important lessons to offer.

Significantly, in most of the cities, the commitment and performance of local administrations seems to be a much greater determinant of the quality of open spaces and their management than the national and regional legislative framework. This is not only a reflection of the devolved nature of most responsibilities and powers for the management of open spaces, but also because no matter how decisive national open space policy frameworks are, most of the concerns that define the quality of open spaces and their management can only be effectively tackled at the local level. This seems to be equally the case where the formal power is concentrated locally such as in Paris (with no national role), or where state or federal authorities have delegated their formal powers to the local level as in Melbourne or Hannover.

Strong local leadership is therefore a key determinant of success. Another key lesson emerging from most of the cases is that successful open space management depends upon a long-term commitment to a vision for open spaces that by its nature cannot be restricted to a single party agenda. All the cases have achieved results only through a sustained commitment to open spaces over many years, often through changing political administrations and priorities, and through different economic and social contexts. Only a level of consensus on the relevance of open spaces and the importance of adequate management across the political spectrum can secure that commitment.

Experiences in a number of the cities (e.g. Curitiba, Hannover, Århus and Groningen) also suggest that shared aspirations for open spaces need to go beyond the political spectrum to be incorporated by the citizenry in the image they have of their own city. The cities where this has been the case suggest that this collective 'green' image of the city contributes to convince politicians to maintain a high level of support for public open space management.

In some cases this commitment by politicians and citizens has been the result of the efforts of technical staff in the relevant open space agency, in others, of a few visionary politicians. Rarely, however, has it simply been a result of formal policy-making procedures. In this regard, marketing open spaces, both internally and externally, appears to be an important task of the open space management agencies. Indeed, agencies across the eleven cities have devoted considerable effort to persuading local politicians and citizens of the importance of well-maintained open spaces in social, economic and environmental terms.