

All the international cases illustrate a proactive attitude towards the involvement of the community in open space management. Although there is no one common approach to how this should be done, or to what extent communities should participate, a key dimension of successful open space management seems to be a willingness to engage local communities in the task, and to use creative means to make this happen.

The challenges faced by each of the eleven cities to create a framework for community involvement where none exists already vary considerably, from the complete restructuring of management systems, so that they are not simply reactive, to developing better direct channels of communication with local communities. In some places resulting participation have been mostly at the level of statutory consultation about new capital investment in the neighbourhood (e.g. Paris), whereas in others, an actual transfer of management responsibilities to volunteers and neighbourhoods has been achieved (e.g. Tokyo).

Despite this variety, some common themes have emerged, and those can provide the basis for useful lessons. First, in all cases, there have been clear benefits from sharing with the community the responsibility for managing open spaces. The most obvious benefit has been the harnessing of active support for open space issues that is vital if those issues are to remain on the top of local, regional and national political agendas. The power of neighbourhood-level organisations to influence higher-level resource allocation decisions in Århus was a clear example of this. In some places, technical staff in the municipal parks and open space department have been very skilled in using this pressure from below to shape decisions from above.

Second, in cases where community involvement is well established, even if just on a consultation basis, it provides a ready means of assessing changes in the needs and preferences of users of open spaces. These can subsequently be factored into open space management systems and either provided for, or their impacts ameliorated.

A further key lesson is that whatever its form, effective community participation needs an information system to facilitate the dialogue between open space managers and the community. The BORG system in Groningen with its visualised scenarios is perhaps the most sophisticated

example of this (see Box 8.4), but much simpler processes of discussion and exchange of information between municipal staff and the community seem to work equally well.

Lastly, the cases suggest that whereas increasing community involvement in open space management adds to the quality of both management processes and the open spaces themselves, this is not without its problems. Active communities can skew priorities towards their immediate concerns and leave other equally important issues and sectors of the community without the necessary resources. In this context open space management can too easily become primarily reactive, whilst long-term or strategic objectives can be neglected. Paris and Groningen provide examples where this occurred. The lesson is that community participation in open space management is immensely beneficial, but needs to happen within a framework that gives weight to different voices within the community and takes into account immediate and localised demands as well as long-term aspirations and city and region-wide objectives.

Notes

- 1 The experts were: Århus: Karen Atwell, Danish Building and Urban Research; Curitiba: Eng. Carlos Eduardo Curi Gallego, Cobrape Curitiba; Groningen: Gerrit Jan Van't Veen, Kirsten Mingelers and Iefje Soetens, STAD BV; Hannover: Kaspar Klaffke and Andrea Koenecke, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Gartenkunst und Landschaftskultur; Malmö: Tim Delshammar, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; Melbourne: John Senior, Parks Victoria; Minneapolis: Peter Harnik, Trust for Public Land; Paris: Michel Carmona, Le Sorbonne; Tokyo: Aya Sakai, Royal Holloway, University of London; Wellington: Shona McCahon, Boffa Miskell Limited; Zürich: Professor Peter Petschek, HSR Hochschule für Technik. See (CABE Space 2004) for a more detailed discussion of the case studies.