

BOX 8.2 HANNOVER



Former gravel pits, now recreational spaces

Hannover (population 500,000), the capital of Lower Saxony, benefits from a rich heritage of urban open spaces ranging from the historic gardens of stately homes to the extended meadows of the river Leine and the Eilenreide forest. These have earned the city the label 'City of Gardens'.

Improving maintenance through decentralisation

Hannover, like other German cities, has experienced a decrease in population. To address this problem, the authorities focused on making urban living more attractive including efforts to maintain the quality of its open spaces.

Budget cuts and outmoded management practices led to new initiatives to re-focus the maintenance of open areas. In the 1980s the KGST, an institution under the German Cities Federation, engaged consultants to improve efficiency in local government. Hannover, like most German cities influenced by the KGST initiative, adopted a more business-oriented management style based on the new principles of citizens being treated as 'customers'.

When the open space sector became one of the pilots, the previous management approach was reversed and outcomes and user satisfaction rather than cost became the measure of efficiency. The need to improve communication with the public on open space matters also helped to redirect the focus of the administration's work.

All employees of the Environment and Green Space Division (FUS), responsible for managing Hannover's open spaces, receive ongoing training in innovative management practices through the city's association with the Faculty of Landscape Architecture (University of Hannover). Recently the KGST added another initiative, its IKO Network, a forum to compare management efficiency in different cities using key indicators. Hannover also participates in the Standing Conference for Green Space (GALK), which brings together local urban parks and open space administrations throughout Germany for the exchange of information and experiences and the discussion of management problems.

FUS (part of the Environmental Services Department) coordinates all management tasks (planning, construction work, maintenance) and is responsible for the overall financial coordination although each section has its own budget and can reinvest any income from charges. Maintenance tasks are fixed in working plans with responsibilities clearly defined geographically so that each group feels responsible for an individual site or group of sites. About 90 per cent of maintenance work is carried out by the city's own workforce.

Departing from previous standardised maintenance practice, decentralisation has permitted maintenance activities to be determined individually taking into account the special character and function of open spaces. Different regimes can now be applied to historic gardens, to the highly used 'promenades' or to the wildlife parks.