

BOX 8.3 PARIS



André Citroën Park

Paris (population 2 million, 10 million in the Île de France region) has a long tradition of open spaces, including forests, major parks and squares.

Centralised powers

Paris is perhaps unique for the historic importance of city government and the fact that all powers over open space are vested in the municipality. Since it gained the right to self-government in 1977, all decisions rest with the Mayor who also has fund-raising powers. Responsibility for open spaces is delegated to the Department of Parks and Gardens, under the Deputy Mayor for Green Spaces. All the resources come from the city's budget. Advertising is banned in the city's open spaces and income from leasing facilities goes back to the city treasury since French law forbids hypothecation of revenue.

Open space provision

Although 20 per cent of the city's area is open space, its distribution throughout Paris is uneven. In 1973, the Paris Region adopted a standard of 300 metres as the maximum distance to the nearest park, but at the time this excluded 75 per cent of the population. Successive administrations seized every opportunity to create new open spaces within deficient areas, almost doubling the overall open space area. Despite clear progress, the difficulties in achieving the 1973 target prompted the incoming mayor to adopt the more pragmatic 500 metres goal.

This has led to all opportunities being systematically considered, including the creation of new open spaces in all major urban renewal projects, but also the creation of micro open spaces by acquiring and demolishing derelict housing. Major urban renewal sites tend to be located in the peripheral districts of Paris whilst in the high-density areas most new provision relies on the micro open spaces. In such cases the municipality either purchases derelict housing with the specific purpose of creating open space (*dents creuses*) or alternatively they landscape the backyards of existing houses.

Antisocial behaviour

Traditional management has kept antisocial behaviour under control with very low levels of vandalism in the city's open spaces, despite the absence of community involvement in the decision-making process. This is a tribute to the traditional doctrine of discouraging these acts by repairing any damage without delay. Where vandalism or antisocial behaviour persists, the layout and design of open spaces are modified to address the problem.

Park keepers based in each garden are responsible for supervision, enforcement of regulations and locking the gates. In the last ten years the department has created its own parks police who are trained to intervene in conflict situations. This force is mainly deployed in tourist or problem areas.