

BOX 8.4 GRONINGEN



Scarce inner-city green space

Groningen (population 177,000) is known throughout the Netherlands for its progressive policy on public spaces. It became the first city in the mid-1970s to give priority to people over cars and to subscribe to the concept of neighbourhood-based services.

The BORG management system

At the end of the 1980s various developments at the national level led to a shift from a centrally managed, sector-based approach, to an emphasis on consultation and civic participation, an approach that became known as neighbourhood-based services.

However, experience showed that focusing services on the local area had been taken too far and the introduction of a complaints hotline in particular had led to ad-hoc, reactive problem solving, at the expense of regular, planned work.

Moreover, devolved management and neighbourhood-based services were resulting in inefficient management and to wide discrepancies in the state of repair of public open space in the various neighbourhoods throughout the city.

A policy reversal was adopted and management programmes were once more determined centrally. This resulted in a new system of management, known as 'Groningen Public Space Management' (Beheer Openbare Ruimte Groningen – BORG) through which the condition of all public open space can be regularly evaluated, tailored management programmes can be developed, results can be verified and, more importantly, opened up for discussion.

Under BORG management, desired outcomes are informed by visualised target scenarios. The town is also divided into structural elements such as the city centre, parks, trading estates, and so on, whilst the management quality to be attained in each structural element is established on the basis of both photographs and predetermined criteria. This enables all stakeholders, experts and lay people, to agree on the desired quality of public open space management and to determine precisely the results that need to be achieved. The system can also assess the effect of damage and pollution on the visual quality of public space.

Experience has shown that the link between outputs and projected costs established through BORG has given open space managers a greater level of trust in budget applications. This has to some extent also reduced threats of cuts in the budget for open space as it becomes easier to demonstrate the benefits for the city as a whole of open space management expenditure.