

Maintenance routines are thus closely related to local context. In Hannover, standardised approaches are not used, and instead regimes are determined by the special character and function of individual open spaces. Therefore, more complex approaches are used in the iconic Herrenhausen gardens, and more intense daily routines are implemented in the summer along the city's lakes and canals. Location-specific maintenance is also part of general practice in Minneapolis. The lawn-mowing programme, for example, is divided into different categories of open spaces depending on the required intensity and frequency of mowing, taking into account dominant uses and the nature of each open space, cultural features, ecological conditions and the regional and historic context.

A logical progression of these more locally responsive approaches has been the devolution of responsibilities to levels below the citywide scale. In Hannover, maintenance groups are responsible for individual sites or small groups of sites, and carry out all the maintenance work in them. In Minneapolis, strategic decisions on park services are made at a regional or district level with the coordination of contractors or internal staff on the ground being carried out by the respective park managers. In Paris, operational staff are attached to geographical areas of the city, and are responsible for day-to-day maintenance in those areas. In addition, each park has at least one dedicated park keeper responsible for a range of day-to-day management functions.

Despite the benefits that such approaches bring through the greater tailoring of management regimes to local circumstances and the greater responsibility felt by local staff, they have not been without their problems. In Groningen, the emphasis on devolved management led to wide discrepancies in the state of repair of open spaces throughout the city and so in the mid-1990s greater centralisation was adopted. Management programmes are now determined centrally, following local consultation. Within the maintenance unit of Zürich's Green Planning Office (GSZ) there are still open space managers for every city district who are in charge of the day-to-day maintenance of open spaces in their areas. However, there has increasingly been a drive towards citywide specialist teams and away from geographically-based teams in order to drive up efficiency through optimising the use of specialist machinery, and through raising the skill levels of specialist staff.

Investing in open space management

The quality of open spaces is related to the size of budgets for management and maintenance and to the efficiency with which financial resources are utilised. In a general context of reduction in public expenditure for parks

and open spaces, the issue of alternative sources of funding becomes a priority. However, money is not the only part of the equation. The quality of public open space management also depends on the recruitment and retention of staff with adequate skills, both at management and operational levels.

Funding open space management

Two basic forms of funding open spaces management were available to the cities: core funding, more often than not biased towards revenue expenditure; and supplementary funding, often with a capital expenditure bias. Most cities utilise both.

CORE FUNDING

The primary sources of core funding are local tax revenues and recurrent central/state government grants. Although core funding levels have not fallen dramatically anywhere, few of the eleven cities could achieve all they wished through core funding only, with investment and reinvestment in capital works often the chief casualty. In addition, the general state of public finances across the world seems to have placed a squeeze on recurrent maintenance activities.

Two basic approaches to core funding were found in the eleven cases, the first of which is by far the most common and takes the form of an allocation from the general municipal budget, for which the management of public open space has to make its case alongside a multitude of other calls on that same budget. As an example, in Århus the management of open spaces is funded through municipal tax revenue, with allocation decided by the city council (Municipal Board). Funding has so far been adequate for the maintenance of existing open spaces, but funding for capital projects (renovation and new parks) is more difficult to come by, has to be especially applied for by NED to the city council, and is not always forthcoming. In Curitiba, most of the resources for public open space management come from the municipal budget made up of municipal taxes and federal and state transfers. Within SMMA, allocation to the different divisions is undertaken by the head of the agency according to the administration's priorities, although usually there is not enough for all priorities. A similar situation was found in most of the cities.

Dependence on the general municipal budget often brings with it the threat of funding cuts as more pressing needs make themselves felt. In Groningen, the high annual expenditure on open space management has tended to make it a popular target for cuts, and in recent years there has been very little scope for new investment in existing or new open spaces.