

TRAINING NEEDS

The ongoing training of employees was a priority for most of the cities. In Tokyo, the approach has been that workers pick up their skills in park management through doing the job. Nevertheless, because differential skill levels have been a problem, the government plans to provide a comprehensive training system that will ensure similar skill standards across the park system.

In Melbourne, operational staff already undergo a training regime covering core competencies, plus education skills and personal effectiveness. Middle management, by contrast, participate in a ‘focused manager’ programme, whilst Parks Victoria has initiated a degree course in park management at Deakin University, and actively supports the programme through curriculum input, lecturing and a scholarship scheme.

In Curitiba, the municipality has gone furthest, creating the Free University of the Environment (Unilivre). Its Reference Centre for the Management of the Urban Environment has helped to improve the knowledge of municipal professionals and acts as a reference point for the exchange of experience and research. However, in spite of the initiative, a lack of clearly defined policies on skills has meant that there are few incentives for lower-level staff to upgrade their skills.

In Malmö, there is no shortage of essential skills and training programmes at management levels. The main problem is that for a long time manual labour in parks maintenance in Sweden had a very low status. This led, over time, to low expectations on parks workers and to low performance. Although the Parks Department has been actively investing in a range of dedicated courses for their staff, municipal parks organisations across Sweden still suffer from the effects of the earlier approach.

By contrast, the benefit of a positive approach to skills and training was visible in the number of long-serving staff in some of the cities. In Århus, a recent study on the skills of long-serving staff showed that a major reason for the success of NED has been the acquired skills of its employees to manoeuvre in the political environment. Detailed knowledge of the key people, places and funding possibilities has helped to ensure that the right decisions are made at the right times. Similarly, one of the reasons given for the success of the Parks Board in Minneapolis is the cadre of longstanding senior employees who, between them, have a vast knowledge of the board’s historic practices. There are now efforts to record and systematise the knowledge of long-serving staff so that it will not disappear when these individuals retire.

Conclusions

Coordination of public open space management activities

The first lesson that emerges from the international cases is that open space management remains primarily a local government responsibility along the state-centred model (see Chapter 4), and more often than not, local decision-makers and especially local politicians hold the ultimate responsibility. However, fragmentation is a common phenomenon. Indeed, with the notable exception of Minneapolis, the evolution of open space-related services in the different contexts has been marked in the past by increasing fragmentation.

In a few of the cities this has now been substantially reversed through relatively recent amalgamation of responsibilities, leading to organisations in charge of all aspects of open space management. In the majority of cases, formal responsibilities for open space management remain fragmented and dispersed among divisions within a municipal department, between different levels of government and between mainstream public services and special purpose agencies.

However, the fact that they have managed to achieve good results in complex institutional environments suggests that the way different management responsibilities are coordinated is probably more important for the quality of management and open space, than the formal distribution of those responsibilities. The many examples of effective delegation arrangements, multi-divisional strategic plans, service agreements between departments, and so forth, corroborate the point. The key message is therefore that although it would be ideal to have a management structure that replicated the integration and independence found in Minneapolis, Paris and to some extent Melbourne, it is the other cases that suggest more widely applicable lessons.

In the majority of the eleven cities, open spaces management is carried out by a municipal parks/open spaces department, often as part of a larger directorate, which is responsible for most but not all management tasks and has to liaise with other bodies within and outside the municipal administration. In this regard, two points are of particular relevance:

- First, it is the quality of the working relationships between those with responsibility for open space management that is the most important variable in influencing the better coordination of separate open space responsibilities and interventions. Having all key players under the same organisational structure does help, but good coordination can be achieved where this is not the case, as in Århus, Zürich, Malmö and Wellington.