keep the balance between offering a good-quality inspiring environment, and designing a robust environment that resists misuse.

Several of the eleven cities have developed mechanisms for monitoring the performance of their management systems, the needs of individual parks, and the interaction between the municipality and open space users. Some of these systems are internal to the municipal administration whereas others serve as tools to involve stakeholders in management decisions. Such systems have been put in place to fulfil a number of purposes, chief amongst which is the desire to secure effective cost management. Nevertheless there has been a general trend to move from an exclusive focus on financial aspects, to a progressive concern for open space quality.

The first and quite obvious lesson coming from the experiences is that effective monitoring systems are essential to securing good-quality open spaces. The second lesson is that effective and comprehensive monitoring requires a considerable effort in developing the parameters and the criteria to feed into the system. This is not an easy task as systems have to be generated locally to be appropriate to local contexts, and there are clear cost, time and manpower implications that probably explain why the majority of the cities examined have not yet arrived at this stage.

A final lesson concerns the importance of monitoring users' interactions with open spaces and their management. All eleven cities have well developed complaints management systems, whether or not dedicated to open space issues. The first key point here is the need to link those systems to management and maintenance decision-making, as achieved in Minneapolis, Malmö, Melbourne and Århus. This is not just a matter of securing users' support, but also of making good use of an invaluable source of first hand information on open space performance.

The further key point is the need to carefully consider the equilibrium between understanding and recognising the importance of users' views and responding promptly to these views without losing sight of strategic and long-term objectives of open spaces management. Examples from Groningen illustrate the tensions that might emerge, and the need for public open space managers to maintain an appropriate balance between satisfying local demands and maintaining a strategic perspective.

Open space maintenance

A common trend across most of the eleven cases has been the effort to restructure public services provision and open space maintenance within it. Public-sector agencies in the chosen cities have been experimenting with ways of delivering services that are more integrated and outcome-focused, that decentralise responsibilities and are less bureaucratic. The degree to which these changes have been implemented varies considerably. How these changes have been implemented also varies, with some cities radically restructuring open space maintenance organisations and others incrementally changing practices without significantly altering organisational structures.

A first important lesson is the importance of clearly defined and properly resourced maintenance plans as tools for structuring, coordinating and delivering maintenance routines. As the experience of Hannover, Groningen and other cities demonstrates, such plans allow for clear linkages between daily maintenance routines and long-term management programmes and policy priorities. Some cities have invested considerable effort in increasingly sophisticated maintenance planning tools. Results so far are encouraging in terms of better use of resources, the quality of maintenance being achieved, the ability to secure funding on the basis of accurate and demonstrable information, and the ability to identify trends in the performance of open space designs, facilities and equipment, and thus prevent costly remediation work.

A second lesson is that there is no single best way of organising maintenance routines. The majority of the cities examined opted for some form of geographical basis, with maintenance teams allocated to areas or districts within the city to benefit from the detailed knowledge of, and sense of responsibility for, individual parks or areas that are fostered by this approach. By contrast, Zürich organises maintenance by task specialisation, with specialist teams covering the whole city and benefiting from the optimum use of specialised skills and machinery. Therefore although there seems to be a case overall for some form of geographical reference to maintenance routines, equally important is the consistent application of whichever approach to maintenance is adopted, so that specialist/geographically bound knowledge can be developed and put into practice.

On the issue of contracting out the management of open spaces, in general the evidence confirms that contracting out should be viewed as an outcomes-focused, mutually supportive partnership between the parties, rather than as a cost-cutting exercise. The experiences in the eleven cities demonstrated that both in-house and contracted-out maintenance services can be organised efficiently, as long as the strengths and weaknesses of each approach are recognised. It is important to emphasise the setting and monitoring of clear standards of delivery, with due consideration to cost/quality ratios, whether the key relationships are between municipal organisations and private contractors, as in Malmö or Curitiba, whether one public body delegates maintenance responsibility to another, as in Melbourne or Hannover, or whether a voluntary sector organisation is the partner, as in Tokyo.