



Empowering parks for the 21st Century

Parks International: Learning from innovations abroad



INSPIS Lahti

Community involvement



In 2008, 'INSPIS' a youth group in the city of Lahti in Finland acquired permission to hold a music festival event in the main public park, called Pikku-Vesijärvenpuisto. The event 'The Green Grass Festival' was a great success for all ages. INSPIS were given permission for the concert, on the agreement that they keep the entire park clean of dropped litter for a month before the event and cleaned up immediately afterwards. By 2018, this simple arrangement had evolved into a contractual agreement between the city of Lahti and the INSPIS Youth Group for mutual benefit.

Ten years on - INSPIS are paid under contract to collect all dropped litter, remove leaves from grassed areas and remove bird guano from the paths surrounding the lake. They carry out these activities daily and in return, they get permission to arrange a number of events a year and are provided with a basic building within which to run a community café for the park. The city gets a cleaner park and genuine engagement with the youth, that may otherwise be creating more litter and vandalism. In general the events they arrange are family orientated and therefore they serve a much wider audience than just younger people – reaching 2,000 – 3,000 attendees per year.

Key facts

- Park Area: 30 hectares
- Total cost to Lahti City Council: €13,500 PA
- INSPIS also obtain corporate sponsorship to run events



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Parque de Mayores

Healthy, Safe & Secure



'Senior Parks' are now as ubiquitous in public green spaces as children's play areas are across Spain. Whilst a significant amount of effort has gone into events for older people and what might be called the 'less sporty' in UK parks, there is not much in terms of physical infrastructure that facilitates exercise for the elderly or less able. Along with France and Italy, Spain is one of a number of European countries facing a major change toward an older population structure, in particular, high life expectancy coupled with low fertility, which will result in a doubling of the old-age dependency ratio (Oxford Journals - Spain: Promoting the Welfare of Older Adults in the Context of Population Aging, J.Serrano, J.Latorre & M. Gatz 2014).

We spoke to Sonia Agapito, Commercial Director of Industrias Agapito - Spains leading producer of public space exercise equipment who gave us an insight into the popularity of the equipment.

The concept started to take off in the early 2000's, as some regional governments sought to introduce small collections of equipment in as many neighbourhood green spaces as possible, not just in major parks – some of this original equipment is still in service due to the build quality and less rigorous use compared to 'gym' equipment.

A small percentage of this was grant funded – the rest was introduced as it was seen as a responsibility for municipalities to say: 'we care about our elderly, as well as our young people'.

As well as light physical activity and physiotherapy based movements, the equipment has evolved to include more cognitive exercise such as planning and problem solving skills.

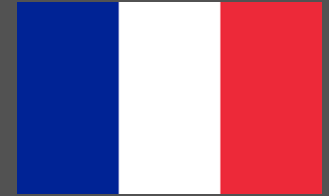
Export to the rest of Europe has increased 10 times over since 2009 – so why not in the UK?



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Accepta-flore

Well Maintained & Clean



In 2012, Plante and Cite, Frances national organisation of green-urban studies and experiment, conducted a project that sought to understand - in significant depth, what the public's perception of weeds were and how they could potentially increase their acceptance. The study was in response to two key objectives facing urban spaces – the need to reduce or eradicate the widespread use of pesticides, and the need to increase biodiversity within towns and cities. 7x towns and cities were used in the survey under an interdisciplinary study - combining an understanding of sociology with expertise in urban ecology.

The sociological survey objective was to understand how the public perceives spontaneous vegetation in urban environments and to analyse the factors of appreciation or rejection of these plants.

The study looked particularly at the 'macro-habitat' - a term applied to different types of spaces present in urban areas, anything above a square meter (m²) accommodating vegetation: within private and public gardens, parks and cemeteries, the banks of streams, woodlands, sports fields, landfills, industrial areas & abandoned places.

The main outcome of the study was a communications toolkit on how to increase public acceptance of so called 'weeds' via local authority and park specific marketing and publicity.



A few factors that came out of the survey that greatly affected acceptance were:

- Diversity of weed species
- Floral appeal of particular plants
- Ability to recognise and name plant species
- Presence of litter in weedy areas
- Perception of mis-management e.g. 'somebody not doing their job', rather than the presence of weeds themselves

Some of the recommended approaches to improving acceptance were:

- Education of regular users on 'weed' plant species
- Promotion of certain areas as 'macro-habitat' rather than empty space
- Explain the challenge of reducing pesticides
- Bizarrely - density of weed cover obtains more acceptance than sparse weed cover in some cases

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Pork crackling with Wifi!

A Welcoming Place



In 2016, Etecsa – the only telephone company in Cuba – installed wifi routers in 18 public parks across the country. For many Cubans, this meant they were able to go online for the first time. A 2018 Guardian article that centred around the night time use of ‘wifi parks’ in Cuba read:

“One such wifi park in Havana shows how it has become a new kind of meeting place: crowds of people with smartphones, tablets and chairs turn up to cluster together around the wifi antennas, to a soundtrack of shouts of ‘conectifail!’ meaning ‘connection’ ...and with vendors selling internet cards, drinks and snacks, and shouting slogans such as ‘Pork crackling with wifi!’”

In the UK, such night-time use of public parks is unusual, and often reserved for two extremes – highly organised Autumn/Winter events (Illuminations, Halloween or Christmas) or perceived as only for wandering groups of youths and the perception of danger that brings with it.

As with the Central and South Americas, in many parts of the Middle East parks and green spaces are routinely used by all ages of the community throughout the evening into the early hours of the morning. At one particular park in Abu Dhabi, Green Flag Award judges began to understand the normality of such use, as the park management explained that they had decided to extend the lighting of the park to as late as 3.00am. This facilitation of the middle aged and older community members with a place to meet and socialise capitalises on the park as a free amenity in the cool night-time air.

As a result of the increased community presence - anti-social behaviour, graffiti and vandalism in the park was rare.



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Freiburg – a sustainable city

Environmental Management



In the 1970's the City of Freiburg was faced with a challenge. The proposed solution to the regions energy needs was a nuclear power station – however that would increase rainfall in the area which put at risk one of the areas primary roles as one of Germany's famous wine growing regions, the Kaiser Stuhl. Strong civil protests ultimately led to the cancellation of the nuclear project in 1975. A strong environmental movement that extended to the heart of its leadership led to the choice of a future underpinned by sustainability, of alternative energy production and better energy use.

The city makes extensive use of heat and power sources to districts that are dominated by apartments rather than individual houses. There is also extensive use of sustainable solar sources and even water power, plus screw turbines found in a number of the city rivers. The City's Civic Hall is the worlds first net-surplus building generating more energy than it uses.

With transport, the car is most certainly not king. A well planned sustainable transport network includes many kilometres of well used cycle routes, with peoples travel distances increasing – from up to 15k - with the advent of electric bikes. An extensive tram network also brings green corridors into the heart of the city. Existing areas have been regenerated with cars parking moved underground and replaced by community green space which percolates through districts streets which are designed to put people and nature first.

Involving local people in design, planning and management decisions was key at all stages. Much use is made of local referendums, and individual families get to work with architects to shape the design of the buildings they will live in - and to agree together who they will live with.

The city is now a desirable place to live – and still expanding, with a new district under consideration. Greenspaces are at the heart of streets, with it possible to walk out their front door into an area free of cars where people and children's play are given priority.



Some key principles of success

- Driver for change - a cause
- Sustained political will
- Inclusivity - listening and involving in decisions Core design for healthy communities & nature
- Retaining the tools to bring about change
- Good planning, good design, good management,
- Commitment and sustained investment



Further Information

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Natural England

- Annual MENE Reports
- Natural England GOV.UK Blog

Email: david.solly@naturalengland.org.uk

Green Flag Award

- Resources tab on greenflagaward.org
 - Management Plan platform

Email: carl.mcclean@keepbritaintidy.org