

## GOVERNANCE

### 1.1 PLACE-KEEPING - AN ISSUE THAT MATTERS

Open spaces are highly relevant locally and citywide. They can range from the small pocket-park in a neighbourhood to a large park of citywide or even regional importance. They can be either grey (squares and streetspace) or green (parks), and can fulfil multiple functions for social life: cultural activities; biodiversity and ecosystems; and business environments.

They also have an economic value for both public and private sectors through individual and commercial spending power and the proven impact on surrounding property values. So the role of place-keeping (maintenance, care, joint responsibility and ownership in the broadest sense) within the long-term safeguarding of open spaces is not only important for cohesion within local communities but can create economic benefits as well.

Why must it be sustainable? Because in economically difficult times, place-keeping budgets are the first to suffer, despite their significant contributions to health, wellbeing and local economy. And while funding is available for construction and retrofitting, it is not available for maintenance or staffing; and while political credit exists for exciting new open spaces, it does not do so for their day-to-day management. Poor or non-existent place-keeping can lead to a waste of resources due to the cost of future regeneration when it is cheaper to systematically maintain.

### 1.2 WHY IS IT AN ISSUE FOR POLITICIANS?

For place-keeping to become an integral part of planning, design and economic improvement at the most fundamental level, the baton must be carried by the politician who has it in his/her power to ensure it is given the same level of importance within masterplanning and regeneration as place-making.

And place-making needs to be accorded the same gravity as other dimensions of well planned urban infrastructure. Economy and prestige, and health and happiness have their roots in, and benefit from, well designed open spaces sustainably cared for long term.

There is a political choice to be made: safeguard open space investments and their positive effects or condemn them, their surrounding communities and local businesses through underfinancing.

### 1.3 THE FIVE THEMES

MP4 analysed some of the many good place-making and sustainable place-keeping examples throughout Europe which bring together public and private stakeholders and create strong, longstanding partnerships.

This process identified five themes particularly pertinent to quality, sustainable place-making and place-keeping, namely: governance, partnerships, finance, policy, and evaluation. These are the catalysts for enduring open spaces and enriched neighbourhoods.

This document deals with Governance. Its four sister documents each discuss one of the following themes: partnerships, finance, policy and evaluation.

Firth Park Clock Tower



## 2 GOVERNANCE - KEY ISSUES

**Governance of open space is key to its quality and its contribution to society.**

Governance is the sphere of relations between government and other actors in civil society or non-governmental sectors – including the private sector and community. It also refers to the processes of interaction between these in defining their roles and relationships. The idea of governance is that government does not work in isolation but through these types of relations. In the context of MP4, the theme of governance/engagement refers to the involvement of the local community and how members can be engaged and retained. It is recognised that there is some overlap with another of MP4's themes; partnerships.

The outcome of any open space place-making project and/or place-keeping activity is the result of the combination of purpose of the project or activity, the setting (whether a large park or a small square), the people involved and the process to involve these. **People and process are what governance is about.** While governance affects what open spaces are like, in turn these are a reflection of how they are governed.

The balance between experts and users in place-making and place-keeping of open space is an important factor. Traditionally, in the public sector governance of projects has been technocratic, but there is considerable evidence of the benefits of community involvement.

Successful community engagement in place-making and place-keeping of open space can yield the following benefits:



Ripples in the Pond, Firth Park

- Valuable insights and experiences from those who engage
- Community's understanding raised by involvement in technical details
- Improved legitimacy of the project and 'buy-in' from the stakeholders
- Improved relationship between policymakers and the community
- Bringing together of local people through a common interest, empowering communities and helping generate social cohesion
- An expression of active citizenship associated with greater social justice
- Services that are better suited to local people's needs

Certain key issues need to be addressed, however, when widening engagement in place-keeping of open space:

- **The range of community members who get involved:** the 'usual suspects' may contribute a lot but may get most out of the system, while some types of open space user may be more difficult to involve and there is a danger of leaving out some groups
- **Timescales and nature of public sector processes:** long timescales may contribute to people disengaging, and considerable changes in public administration have severe effects on the process – e.g. budget cuts, staff reductions, etc
- **Nature of place-keeping of open space:** the role of residents in place-keeping has to be clear, and the involvement of community members in physical works needs dedicated support; there is a danger of putting too much pressure on community groups and delegating too much responsibility.

## 3 EXPERIENCE FROM THE MP4 PARTNERSHIP

The following projects from the MP4 context demonstrate new approaches in the governance of place-keeping activities across Northern Europe.

### 3.1 EMMEN REVISITED EMMEN, NL

**A village community involved in the creation and long-term maintenance of a new village centre:**

Emmen Revisited (ER), a joint-venture organisation between Emmen Municipality and the Housing Corporations operating within the municipality since 1998, aims to improve the social and living environment in urban districts and villages. In the small village of Barger Compascuum, ER worked with the local community in a structured approach, establishing community representative bodies which were involved in decisions around the design of the redeveloped village centre pedestrian-friendly shared space. The success in the place-making stage has led to continuing collaboration between the community representative body and ER in establishing joint place-keeping. In this case the trust built up during place-making laid the foundations for long term community involvement.

Barger Compascuum Village Centre



Further information:  
Emmen Revisited  
[www.emmenrevisited.nl](http://www.emmenrevisited.nl)

### 3.2 FIRTH PARK SHEFFIELD, UK

**Involvement of a long established Friends of the Park group in a city setting:**

Friends of Firth Park is a voluntary residents' organisation with an interest in their local park, and has worked in collaboration with Sheffield City Council for many years. Members have been fully involved in the decision-making around the redevelopment of a neglected pond in the park to provide a multipurpose area. Different members in the group offer different inputs according to their interests, ranging from organising events to planting. Following completion of the redevelopment, Friends of Firth Park's continuing involvement in place-keeping is expected to be channelled mainly through the running of events in the regenerated space.

Firth Park Wetland Area



Further information:  
Friends of Firth Park  
[www.sheffield.gov.uk](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk)

### 3.3 GET MOVE HAMBURG, DE

**Young participants creating and maintaining a space for themselves:**

In the large, early 1970s housing estate of Steilshoop in Hamburg, young people have engaged in the development and running of open space facilities in the neighbourhood through their participation in a charity called 'Get Move'. This is supported by a non-profit company, Alraune, which has worked in the area for a couple of decades to support youth apprenticeships and is currently engaged in the redevelopment of a park to provide a range of facilities for the young. Not only has 'Get Move' been fully involved in decision-making about the redevelopment, it will also take on responsibilities in the maintenance of a new basketball court on completion, and has engaged in activities which are focused on the reduction of violence.

Get Move Boys



Further information:  
Get Move  
[www.stadtteilbuero-steilshoop.de](http://www.stadtteilbuero-steilshoop.de)

## 4. KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

After analysing the practice of place-making and place-keeping around Northern Europe and implementing innovative pilots in five partner cities, the transnational MP4 partnership has come to the following key findings and policy recommendations on the governance of place-keeping based on practical experience:

- Opportunities should be created to explore and develop innovative involvement of government, businesses and communities in the place-keeping of open space, while being responsive to the context of the project
- Giving a leading voice to local people and businesses through a process based on respect and dialogue can be critical to the success of regeneration and ongoing management and maintenance of open spaces, strengthening local ownership and responsibility
- Consideration should be given to the fact that citizen or community participation may put pressure on public organisations, raise public expectations and cause disappointment for some. Realistic possibilities and limitations of public participation need to be clear from the start
- Engagement in projects by potential stakeholders depends on the prospect of mutual benefits and trust in the lead organisation. Public sector agencies need to set out a clear and transparent position regarding the issues to be addressed in place-making and place-keeping of open space, and the possibilities and responsibilities. This includes defining the standard for which the public sector is responsible
- Consideration should be given to who may be engaged, how they may benefit and what they may contribute. Resident organisations, especially those with an already existing interest in open space, can help draw in other public funding and build a sense of long-term ownership through their involvement. Businesses can contribute if they clearly see the benefits, and the duration of their involvement may depend on their interests
- People tend to think that place-keeping is the responsibility of the public sector. Collaboration between the local authority and the community during place-making can create a sense of co-ownership that will help provide a good base for continuing place-keeping
- If long-term community engagement is sought, place-keeping activities need to be clearly defined and communicated to the relevant stakeholders. These can range from regular clean-ups and maintenance to the staging of events. It will depend on the scale and nature of the open space, with community involvement in place-keeping generally being more possible in smaller neighbourhood facilities
- Community engagement in place-keeping processes can help establish trust and working practices for continuing involvement in place-keeping. The issues around place-keeping should, however, be raised and addressed as early as possible in the process. In addition, community involvement in long term place-keeping tends to fluctuate, and needs constant support from the public sector
- Uncertainty within the public sector (e.g. regarding budgets, responsibilities, decision-making, etc.) can be a barrier to wider engagement in place-keeping or can increase the length of the process. Public sector agencies must seek to establish the highest possible degree of certainty in any place-making or place-keeping process, though freedom to innovate is also critical
- There is great potential in adopting a 'whole place' approach to the management of our built and natural environment, where open space can complement other resources such as education, health, etc. This would require more complex governance arrangements, but can be more cost-effective and sustainable

MP4 is a European project (2008-2012) that focuses on innovative approaches for planning and designing, maintaining and using private and public open spaces. MP4 stands for 'Making Places Profitable, Public and Private Open Spaces.' It was funded through the European Union Interreg IVB programme for the North Sea Region. The nine project partners in six countries demonstrated how place-making, which is improving open spaces physically, can offer positive social and economic benefits on the long run. Its main aim, however, was to identify transferable successful methods of sustainable, long-term maintenance (place-keeping) and to influence planning policies from European level downwards to local neighbourhoods to ensure place-keeping is not only incorporated into citywide masterplans, but given as much consideration as place-making in every open-space investment.

**For more information on MP4, please visit [www.mp4-interreg.eu](http://www.mp4-interreg.eu).**



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