MP4 Work Package 1 Literature Review

As part of MP4's Transnational Assessment of Practice, researchers at the University of Sheffield carried out an in-depth review of existing research, policy and practice on place-keeping. This involved examining a wide range of academic, policy and practice documents about the urban and rural areas within the EU North Sea Region and beyond - to ascertain what we currently know about the long-term management of open spaces.

This summary document highlights some of the initial findings from the literature review. The review itself is a 'live' document which will be added to throughout the MP4 project as new information emerges and our knowledge of place-keeping increases. In due course, it will be presented in different formats including practitioner-focused briefing papers, journal articles and conference papers to reach different audiences. For more information, contact Dr Nicola Dempsey at the Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield: N.Dempsey@sheffield.ac.uk

Some headline findings

Place-keeping is a cyclical process which is dynamic and continuous. It can be considered as:

- a process which can lead to a product (a valued, sustainable and high-quality place);
- a process which is influenced by the type of product required or how it is designed, e.g. the use of high-quality materials to help reduce maintenance over time;
- a two-way inter-dependent relationship between process and product where place-keeping is considered from the outset as integral to place-making.

Place-keeping is described in theory as a component of good design, but on the whole is not currently considered at the design stage in practice.

POLICY

Place-keeping replicates the principles of sustainability at a local scale, with its focus on long-term management of places to ensure that the social, environmental and economic quality and benefits can be enjoyed by future generations.

Policies relating to place-keeping may be put into practice by a range of public service providers, e.g. parks and countryside, streets and highways, transport infrastructure, education, health and crime prevention. To make these policies effective, they need to be well-coordinated. However, good coordination (and communication) between such public sector partners do not always happen in practice.

In general, political support for place-keeping is widespread but often not manifested in practice, largely because budgets for ongoing management are limited. *Place-making* has far more support in practice where capital investments are made, but not supported in the long term by secure revenue funding. Effective *place-keeping* requires long-term coordinated action of the multiple stakeholders involved in the ownership, management and maintenance of public spaces (see funding below).

PARTNERSHIPS, GOVERNANCE + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Partnership arrangements range from the contract-based relationship, the public-private partnership and, increasingly, a user-centred approach which involves local communities through organizations such as 'Friends of' groups, charitable trusts and social enterprises.

Community/ non-governmental organizations often have local knowledge and expertise, a wide network of local contacts and political independence, allowing them to develop strong relationships with a community who may be hesitant to cooperate with the local authority.

In urban centres, the Business Improvement District (BID) is an increasingly popular private-led model of place-making and place-keeping over the long term, although there are concerns about the privatization of public space management this brings.

In some cases, partnerships can bring fragmentation and blurring of responsibility due to the sacrifice each stakeholder makes in terms of autonomy and interests.

Long-term partnerships can keep costs down, allow an outcome-based approach which provides good value for money, and form strong bonds between stakeholders. A regular tendering process can eliminate anti-competitive partnerships.

Effective place-keeping is based on inclusiveness, giving all stakeholders, particularly local communities, a voice and a part to play in the decision-making process. However, MP4 has found that in practice, there are many examples of place-keeping where the community (or parts of the community) is not involved.

There are many examples of different ways of engaging communities but there is little existing guidance about how to deal with conflict or lack of agreement in decision-making, pointing to a gap in knowledge which needs to be addressed.

To effectively engage communities in place-keeping, an 'arm's length' approach is considered appropriate where the residents do not feel they are being managed [by the public sector].

EVALUATION

While there are existing measurements of place-keeping including awards for high-quality places, on the whole, the process of place-keeping is not evaluated.

In practice, evaluation is costly and is often not possible where budgets are already limited.

There is no requirement for place-making designers to conduct an evaluation of the place once it has been created or regenerated; there is also no mechanism in place to assess how successful a space is over the long term.

FUNDING

Capital-funded urban regeneration does not necessarily lead to place-keeping in the long term. There is a danger that social, environmental and economic benefits are short-lived because no financial or organizational provision is made for the place's long-term management.

A (long-term) outcomes-based, rather than a (short-term) performance-based approach to place-keeping is supported in theory and in practice where an appropriate, long-term funding mechanism is in place.

Funding for place-keeping is restricted and insecure: it often comes from public sector budgets which are limited. There is an over-emphasis on the capital funding that often accompanies place-making which, for accounting reasons, cannot be allocated against long-term care and maintenance. Supplementary grants for funding open space management (e.g. from the charity sector) also tend to be for *place-making* and not *place-keeping*.

In practice, the cost of maintaining and managing new or refurbished public spaces is often only made apparent once the scheme had been implemented. Consideration of the long-term management strategy is therefore required early on in the place-making process.

Research and practice show that securing funding for open space management depends on the commitment, skill and political clout of relevant stakeholders to bargain over core funding allocation.

A possible solution to the insecurity of funding would be to ring-fence funds, to protect monies which must be spent on place-keeping and cannot be allocated elsewhere.