



**Context:** Aarhus Municipality is the second largest city in Denmark with nearly 300,000 inhabitants living in the city and nearby areas. Although the city is relatively wealthy and a regional centre for business, education, commerce and demographic development, green space management has in the new millennium suffered budget cuts and declining standards in service levels. Forecasted demographic developments are expected to increase the pressure on green spaces and demands for green space services. In this situation, the Green Space Department in Aarhus Municipality initiated a new **policy** based on **community engagement** and deliberative planning procedures. The new policy represents a break away from more traditional reactive management practices toward a new pro-active style of management. Although not fully implemented, the new policy has changed the dynamics from a spiral of decline into positive interactions between citizens, politicians, and managers.

The **policy** is officially labelled the 'park development plan 2009-19' – or in short the 'park plan'. At the core of the park plan is a vision for quality of life for humans, fauna and flora in green environments. The park plan consists of three levels; an overarching park program, a strategy outlining a set of common objectives and finally separate action plans for each of 24 local communities in the municipality. The park plan aims to provide green space services of **high value** for the local communities. The park plan is expected to be fully implemented between 2009 and 2019 with a total of 24 action plans. The policy formulates a range of broader objectives and strategic focal areas. The development of action plans for local communities is based on a high level of citizen engagement. This includes the development of local visions and setting the priorities for new investments and maintenance levels. These may be realized in the future through local initiatives and **partnerships**. The engagement processes facilitated by the policy blends **place-keeping** with **place-making**.



Aerial photo: Urban forests south of the city centre

### Evaluation

The case of Aarhus illustrates that involving citizens in **governance**-based processes can bring a range of **benefits** such as:

- Increased interest and awareness about services among internal and external stakeholders, especially regarding political support and citizen expectations;
- Sharing of information and potential to develop new understanding of services;
- Sustaining the local identity and community building;
- Decrease in citizen complaints;
- A better match between local preferences and maintenance and investment decisions; and,
- Access to new resources e.g. volunteer work or alternative funding for investments.



New recreational landscape in Aarhus

Facilitation of governance processes may also be perceived as **resource-intensive**: time-consuming and costly in resources that otherwise could be used for direct investments and increased maintenance levels. However, the trade-off between these perceived cost and benefits illustrates a broader dilemma in the public sector between process and output values i.e. between public legitimacy and acceptance on the one hand and technical efficiency and effectiveness on the other hand.

### Transferable Lessons

The case of Aarhus Municipality demonstrates a successful example of organizing improved place-keeping through the engagement of citizens. The case shows how a positive dynamic at the local level may emerge from bottom-up processes framed within a supporting policy. A crucial factor is the need for management to understand the thinking, actions and needs of other actors in the system i.e. **the need to accommodate a more holistic view** of the inter-relationships between management, the local community and the political context.