

Collaborative planning of urban green areas

Publicly accessible environments such as parks and greens, groves and forests, influence well-being and quality of life, and effective planning for these environments can promote social sustainability. Residents' values related to urban green areas are as important as ecological and technical issues and can affect urban nature planning and decision making (Faehnle et al., 2007).



Photo: Andreas Duess

People attach different values to urban green areas and have various expectations from them. Some enjoy walking in peace and quiet while others 're-charge their batteries' by cycling or running. Some might want to use these areas as community gathering places and organise events there. It is an important challenge for a planner to incorporate all these values and wishes into planning and make the areas enjoyable for as many people as possible. It is not always an easy task; the same area cannot be simultaneously a noisy theme park and a tranquil getaway for bird watching. There are also economical, technical and ecological restrictions that need to be taken into account.

Information on values and preferences is needed in developing enjoyable environments. Attractive urban green areas encourage people to maintain their health by outdoor activities.

Planning of urban forest in Laurent (fictitious situation)



Photo: Andrew Bourke

The city of Laurent is a relatively small and lively community. With a population of 14,000, one of the city's finest attributes is the small-town atmosphere. On the outskirts of the city of Laurent, there is a beautiful mixed forest with several footpaths running through it. In the middle of the forest there is a small lake where people can go fishing. Unfortunately, there are still many community members who rarely visit the forest.

The city planning officials launch a **planning process for developing the recreational and social use of the forest**. They have received a considerable sum of money and now they have to decide how this money is going to be spent.

Public events - World Cafe

In the beginning of the planning process, two public events are organised for the community members. The planners want to enquire what kind of values people attach to their forest, how they use it and what kind of experiences they expect to get from it. During these events, the **World Café** method is used to encourage people to express their opinions. Participants are provided with maps and images to support discussions and enable participants to assign values to certain locations.

During these events the participants identified these values. The most favoured values and uses were:

- Beautiful sceneries
- Tranquillity, peace and quiet
- Observing nature and learning from it
- Bird watching
- Cycling
- Fishing
- Small-scale outdoor events

Assembling a working group – Stakeholder analysis

A **working group** is put together. The planners conduct a **Stakeholder Analysis** in order to systematically identify all relevant stakeholders and assess their impact on a planning process. Based on the analysis, they invite people to join the working group. The working group members include:

- Planners themselves
- Representative from the local cycling club
- Representative from the local fishing club
- Representative from the local bird watching society
- Representative from the local art community
- Local school teacher
- Two local tourism entrepreneurs
- Two teenage students from the local school
- Member of the city council

First working group meeting – 6-3-5 Brainwriting

The working group holds its first meeting where the **6-3-5 Brainwriting** method is used to generate ideas for developing the forest. The results from the public events are used as a basis. Several ideas are recorded and in the end six of them are identified as the most promising ones:

- Bird watching tower by the lake
- Cafe in the middle of the forest
- Fishing boats for rent
- Cycling route for mountain biking
- Poetry festival
- Guided tours through the forest

A report of this first meeting is produced and posted on the city website for commenting.

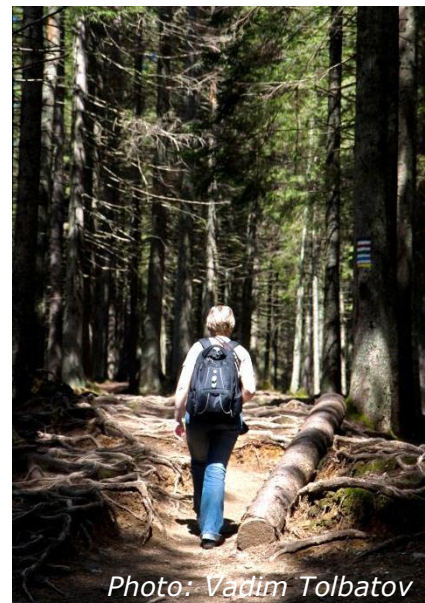
Second working group meeting – SMART, scoring

In the working group's next meeting, the six alternatives are evaluated using the **SMART** method. Three of the alternatives receive highest ranking.

1. Bird watching tower by the lake
2. Poetry festival
3. Cycling route for mountain biking

However, there is not enough money to implement all these and the three alternatives are ranked using a simple **scoring** method. The bird watching tower by the lake and the cycling route for mountain biking receive the highest scores. In an ending discussion, it is agreed that these are included in the new plan for the forest. The local school and the art community decide to raise funds together for the poetry festival and organise it after all.

A report of this meeting and its decisions is posted on the city website for commenting.



REFERENCES

Faehnle M., Bäcklund P., & Tyrväinen L. 2011: Looking for the role of nature experiences in planning and decision making: a perspective from the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. *Sustainability: Science, Practice, & Policy* 7(1):45-55.

More information about planning of urban green areas

THE HELSINKI METROPOLITAN AREA

The Helsinki metropolitan area in southern Finland includes the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen. The area is 765 km² and has about 980 000 inhabitants. Several research studies have been conducted in order to evaluate and enhance the degree of involvement in participatory situations. A few of them are listed here:

Faehnle M., Bäcklund P., & Tyrväinen L. 2011: Looking for the role of nature experiences in planning and decision making: a perspective from the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. *Sustainability: Science, Practice, & Policy* 7(1):45-55.

Mäkinen, K. & Tyrväinen, L. 2008: Teenage experiences of public green spaces in suburban Helsinki. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 7(4): 277-289

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Sipilä, M. & Tyrväinen, L. 2007: Collaborative planning of urban forests - promoting the health of residents? *Open Space People Space* 2. Innovative Approaches to Research Excellence in Landscape and Health. South Hall Conference Suite, Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh <http://www.metla.fi/hanke/7220/openspace-posteri-092007.pdf> (Poster)

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Tyrväinen, L., Mäkinen, K., & Schipperijn, J. 2007: Tools for mapping social values of urban woodlands and other green areas.

Yli-Pelkonen, V. 2006: Use of ecological information in urban planning. University of Helsinki, Faculty of Biosciences, Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences. *Yliopistopaino, Helsinki*. (Dissertation)