Interacting with Greenspace

Public Participating with Professionals in the Planning and Management of Parks and Woodlands
Interacting with Greenspace: Public Participating with Professionals in the Planning and Management of Parks and Woodlands

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# Introduction

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Greenspace - from that small open area at the end of the street to the large scale-woodland on the urban fringe - is one of those issues in which so many players have a shared interest. Where public parks and other accessible open spaces in people’s living environment really ‘work’, they are invariably at the centre of people’s lives, where they meet, walk, play and enjoy nature.

Cities, town and suburbs are increasingly rich in different types of green spaces. In addition to traditional public areas such as parks and woodlands, many different types of greenspace are now evident, together with new kinds of ownership or co-management arrangements. Children’s farms, community gardens, school nature areas and other small spaces create a need for intensive care and so provide many opportunities for active participation, training and education.

The contribution that attractive greenspace can make to localities and more broadly, to the quality of life in towns and cities, is now seen as being dependent upon a greater level of engagement between the ‘professionals’ on one hand, and the public whom they serve on the other. Central to the modern approach is a greater emphasis on the exchange of knowledge and the development of ideas and action on the ground with a wide array of users, neighbours, friends and community groups.

This handbook is aimed at providing an essential starting point and a source of inspiration for undertaking practices which will benefit both greenspaces and the people who use and enjoy them. It was originally published in 2003 as ‘Het park mèt iedereen. Ideënboek voor participatie in groen’, as part of the Flemish ‘Vision for Harmonious Park and Greenspace Management. This management, vision which is based on the concept of sustainable development, strives for a balance between measures focusing on people, nature and the environment.

Over the last two years, this handbook has been put into practice successfully throughout Flanders. Therefore, and because they are based on our own experiences, we wish to share the approaches and methods set out in this handbook more widely with practitioners in greenspace management and community action who are working beyond the borders of our own country. We recognised a tremendous opportunity to realise this aim by working with Kevin Collins, a forester from Ireland with experience in community participation, to produce a revised and updated English-language version of the handbook.

The handbook begins by looking at the distinct reasons for involving people in greenspace. With these objectives in mind, Chapter 3 discusses selected key questions relating to the involvement of the wider public, drawing in practical examples from throughout Europe. Instead of starting with a ‘how to...’ set of guidelines or a list of criteria for best practice, this chapter sets out to observe what actually happens in practice when people participate with professionals. Chapter 4 offers advice to get started with a participative process and to effectively build a time plan of the actions envisaged through the process. The final Chapter describes a range of tried-and-tested methods and techniques, each of which can be implemented either on its own or in creative combination with others to build a long-term participatory process.
Why involve people in public greenspace?

There are a wide range of reasons for involving people in the planning, design and management of public greenspace. So as to get off to the right start in any process, it is important to try to answer the question ‘why?’ at the very beginning. Answering this will have a major influence on the participatory approach selected, as will be illustrated in the next chapter (Key Questions).

Often, the initiator, such as the local authority, has no clear idea what aims the participation process should serve. The willingness to allow people to be involved in the initiative often seems like a contradiction. On one hand, the authority is often reluctant to fully engage with the broader public for reasons such as lack of experience, the fear of losing control over how the project develops, or even due to a scepticism regarding the representativeness of the participants or their ‘expertise’ in the field. Nevertheless, they often decide to involve the public despite these concerns, but are motivated for a variety of reasons, such as fulfilling the requirements of a related subsidy, as a way of acquiring a sought-after label or positive image, or simply as a way to secure public support to a fast-tracked plan. For example, an authority may already have a plan in mind, but expects opposition from other sectors politically or even from the public itself. Finding the support of the broader public through participation represents a way to better advance the implementation of their plans. We also see many examples where public participation is used as an instrument to restart a project that had previously stalled.

Example: In the Milan suburb of San Donati, five years of local conflict over planning proposals for a new urban development including a city park finally led to a comprehensive communication process with the public. Another example is Skelton Wood, Leeds, where the city felled trees for reasons concerning visitor safety. Despite widespread information and the creation of a contact point, there was an unexpectedly high level of protest by local residents. Attempts were made to solve the conflict by actively involving the inhabitants, and this resulted in the original plan being confirmed. The initiative has finally led to a forest management structure in which the inhabitants are playing an active and self-determining role.

In the above examples, participation was used as a last resort. Although both examples eventually got on the right track, this cannot be taken for granted. Involvement in the living environment is typically an engagement for the long term. If public participation is employed simply as a short-term instrument to arrive at an ‘accepted’ plan, this will not guarantee a level of involvement that is broad-based and deep-rooted. In order to achieve this genuine level of involvement, the participation process should not set simply to secure public support. Instead, it must aim to capture what people have in mind and what is relevant for them in their everyday life. This new attitude must have a central role in the policy and practice relating to the provision of greenspace.

Example: The Community Forestry Programme was initiated in 1990 with the primary objective of increasing woodland cover in and around major English cities. The ‘community’ is central to this vision, as both beneficiaries and participants in the process. Involvement in the afforestation was initially based on the idea that there would be less tree vandalism and less opposition against changes in the landscape with which people were familiar. However, under the programme, community forestry is now being increasingly promoted with a big ‘C’ and a small ‘f’, with less emphasis being placed on the tree and much more on the investment in the community itself.

Once-off participation alone is not sufficient and the success of a green space initiative is dependent on how it is embedded in social life. Without drifting into ideological-laden descriptions about the role of the government and about citizenship and responsibility, we aim to in this manual start from the interest that people themselves may have in participation in greenspace.

By exploring what actually happens in reality when people participate, we can describe three core ingredients for participation – quality, sense of ownership, and mutual learning – which form a common thread throughout this manual.
2.1 Quality

The first important reason to facilitate the participation of people in the initiative is to improve the decision-making process and the very quality of the plan.

By definition, public greenspaces are dynamic – they respond to the needs of society, the users. Socially inclusive planning is aimed at enabling people to fully tap into the benefits of parks and woodland, thereby allowing them to take fully advantage of the greenspace. In practice, we see that planning is usually willing to take into account what the citizen thinks, but this is often based on rigid scientific methodology such as questionnaires, and the multitude of public perception studies and enquiries made during recent decades. While such studies can indeed provide an insight in the general qualities of importance and thereby give a preliminary idea of the interests that might be at stake, they have serious limitations when it comes to planning a real greenspace. Often these studies utilise a series of pictures, and solicit standardised responses to pre-formulated questions. Such channelled information cannot provide insight in the social context within which such perceptions emerge, and even less about the language the people themselves use when they describe values and ‘connective-ness’ with greenspace.

Example: Local residents were interviewed in the planning process involving the creation of a new 17 ha park in a former railway yard in Antwerp (northern Belgium). In response to the question about how they would like the future park to look like, all of the interviewees selected the image of an open grass field. However, as the following series of quotes illustrate, the motive behind this choice differed greatly from person to person: “It shouldn’t be a green jungle”; “It shouldn’t isolate neighbourhoods from one another”; “An open park is easier to maintain”; “The women can unroll their carpets here and watch the children nearby”; “A place where I can breathe and look a bit further”; “Openness provides social control”, and more.

When people talk about ‘their’ local greenspace, it is not only about which type of scenery they would prefer, but also about a whole range of often-complex considerations which can also be very practical. If a plan is to really take into account social values, needs and interests, this can only be achieved by actively involving people in the plan-making itself, and by listening to what they have to tell in open debate and dialogue.

The public also brings a lot more to the plan. People are experts of their own environment, and with the input of this local knowledge, a plan will be better informed and more responsive to the reality on-the-ground. By bringing together a diversity of participants with different backgrounds and experiences, insights can be broadened and existing ideas can be looked at from new perspectives that may finally lead to more innovative solutions. Also, the process itself can benefit greatly from the involvement of stakeholders at an earlier stage, as this will facilitate consensus and anticipate possible conflicts, which will in turn save both time and costs.
2.2 Sense of ownership

A second, and much less tangible reason, is about the encouragement of a sense of ownership. When people feel that they can contribute to the shaping of their living environment and the greening which is part of it, then the feeling can be engendered that it also becomes a bit ‘their’ forest, park, or line of trees. This feeling can also encourage people to start using a greenspace more frequently, and to take more care and responsibility when using it. The latter factor is often an argument for joint-management.

Example: A study in England showed that almost everybody who had been involved in community schemes talked about the local natural area as "my valley", “my trees” and "our place”. The people saw the fact that they had been involved in planting trees on the site as being symbolic of "putting down roots".

Example: With its project ‘A Focus on Playfields’, about 10 years ago the City of Maaseik (Belgium) invited inhabitants to take responsibility themselves for playing fields. A contract was drawn up with the municipality, whereby the city would deliver the playing equipment and the neighbourhood would take care of the installation and maintenance, grass mowing, flowerbed weeding, litter removal and the emptying of wastebaskets. As well as visually improving the playfields and dramatically decreasing the number of complaints received, the arrangement also created a new dynamic and increased social activity within the neighbourhood.

Through regular participation, people can be shown that they are appreciated and that their views and insights are important. In this way, they become more self-confident to undertake initiative by themselves, and also gain the skills and the enthusiasm to fulfill these initiatives. Another possible advantage of participatory initiatives is that they stimulate the formation of new collaborations. People meet each other in a setting around a joint focal point – the greenspace in their living environment. Through this, the opportunity arises for networking: new participants are engaged, a ‘pool’ of experiences and skills is built up, and actions previously unattainable come into reach. As such, a participatory process can contribute to the building of ‘social capital’ that benefits the sustainability of a project. If people feel themselves more involved with their environment, and experience that positive change is possible, then authorities can build up a better relation with them which continues beyond the mere taking of a decision or completion of a plan.

2.3 Mutual learning

A third reason builds on the fact that people are interested in what happens in their living environment. They are curious about the ideas of others, they like to learn from what the ‘professionals’ have to say, and also want to demonstrate their own ideas and knowledge. In a participative process, the knowledge and the skills of the various participants come to the fore, realising significant ‘intellectual capital’ to contribute to the project, and putting in place a mutual learning process between lay people and experts. Such interactions may even strengthen the feeling that people are involved.

Example: In Vordenstein Park (Belgium), regular site walks were organised with the park’s friends group to discuss some practical choices and dilemmas of design and management with the park users. Careful attention is paid to ensure that most of the issues are relevant to the widest possible range of people. The participants and the park manager learn about each other and about different points of view. People from different ages and backgrounds bring in a diversity of knowledge and life experiences. In a very concrete way, both participants and the park manager engage in a continuous process of mutual learning. For example, the manager is keen to express his enthusiasm about how people themselves inspire
him to see things in a new perspective. Moreover, manager and users try to move toward a common understanding of the issues at stake and to arrive at decisions for joint action. During such interactive approaches, the contact with the public is kept lively, and the park or woodland is becoming a common concern for local people as well as for officials.

By jointly searching for solutions, participants not only learn about each other, but also about the subject of involvement – the environment, nature, etc. During the process, they can also become more aware of wider environmental issues. More specifically, participants gain insights into the value of preparing a management plan. They also gain an understanding for related technical difficulties and for the usefulness of particular management actions that would otherwise seem ‘unnatural’ (e.g. the need for thinning the woodland), thereby encourage an appreciation for why these actions are necessary. If the process of increasing awareness is carried out within the framework of sustainable park and woodland management, the participants learn to seek management solutions that are weighted against each other from various perspectives: nature, environmental, social.

2.4 Limitations and pitfalls

However much participation is recommended as a component of sustainable park and woodland management, we still must be fully conscious of its limits.

The participation process must try to gain representation from the widest possible range of interests. However, full representation is never possible – participating in a public greenspace is by definition a voluntary process that demands time and energy from all participants. In practice, many may not want to participate simply because they don't see the usefulness or the benefits, or even because they don't trust ‘authority’. Others might simply be not able to afford the time involved. Often the very design of a participatory process may exclude certain groups. For example, those dependent on public transport may be excluded if the meetings take place outside scheduled timetables. Similarly young parents may find it difficult to attend evening meetings if babysitting services are difficult to secure. For certain groups, the selected communication medium can be unfamiliar, and there may even be a language barrier involved.

Another possible limitation are institutional and legislative issues concerning the park or woodland, whereby the rights of the owner or of certain users may limit how much outsiders can have a say. Furthermore, issues surrounding public liability in the case of accidents or damage may limit joint management by citizens. Another example is where the design of a greenspace is the subject to an international architectural competition, in which procedural rules severely limit opportunities for participation.

Sometimes, the limitation involved is the rigidity within the institutionalised organisational structure. From an authoritative viewpoint, a formal participation process is easier to control and to mould into 'normal’ procedures. However, this can have a stifling effect on the creative input of the participants.

Another limitation may arise from reluctance among managers who feel a deep responsibility for the plan. They may feel hesitant to opening the plan up to possible change, as they themselves will bear the final responsibility if things go wrong.
Important limitations can also be related to the availability of resources, time, personnel and money. For example, an inclusive participatory process will invariably require the commitment by professional staff to considerable time outside of their regular working hours.

There are also situations in which it would be better not to initiate a participation process involving people in planning and decision-making, as it creates an expectation that policy will actually be influenced. If this potential to influence does not exist, or is at a minimal level, it would be better to postpone the participatory process.

**Example:** In cases where there is not yet clarity as to whether or not a park will be created, it would be better to delay the participation process until a later time. It was only after the city government of Ghent (Belgium) had formally decided that the land of the area of the ‘Green Valley’ would be designed 90% park and 10% built that the green light was given to initiate the communication process with local people. For all the participants, the 90:10 ratio subsequently formed a clear basis for further participation, which could fully concentrate on the design of the park component.

Also, when there are still large conflicts over diverging objectives, or where there is not yet clarity regarding solutions surrounding personal interests (e.g. people whose land is the subject of compulsory purchase under the plan), involving the broader public at this point would bring about a polarisation which would only serve to constrain constructive collaboration.
There is no one standard approach to public participation in greenspace. Just as every piece of greenspace is physically different, so too is the governance and social context relating to it. People step into and out of the process and new needs and requirements appear. Fine-tuning is necessary in order to enable the process to take account of the finer detail and the interrelationship between the different factors and values. Just as the policy maker, the ‘professional’ forest manager, the local association and the ‘ordinary’ forest user jointly shape the forest and its value, so too does this mix shape the participatory approach that will evolve. Therefore, this manual will leave room to both the initiator and the participant to give their own interpretation how participative management should be conducted, to take account of the uniqueness of each situation. However, there are a number of questions surrounding organisation and content that arise again and again during many participative processes. Seven of these key questions are identified and explored below, in order to provide a framework for describing the critical success factors of any public participatory process involving people and greenspace.

3.1 When to involve people?

Often people express a concern that they are being involved too late and that the real decisions have already been made. Often authorities only start to communicate with citizens during the final phases in the implementation of existing plans, at which point the ‘big lines’ are already drawn and only the details remain to be discussed. In order to encourage a sense of ownership, stakeholders should actually be involved in the initial decision-making process, during which questions relating to what can be done, where and when, are explored. In practice, public involvement at such an early phase is not always possible, especially in the case of large projects where strategic decisions need to be made first.

Example: Involving the broader public in the early phases of a process demands a high degree of openness, and this can pose particular challenges. For example, the visionary process involved in the restoration of the railway yard in Antwerp North (Belgium) as a public park posed particular problems, as it took place before negotiations between the city authorities and the railway company owning the land. It was vitally important to ensure that external interferences did not disturb these negotiations, and, more importantly, that false expectations weren’t raised amongst residents. While finding the right balance between openness and confidentiality was not easy, the communication process with the public did succeed in letting a wide group of stakeholders deliver a high quality and constructive contribution to the vision.

Expectations are created as soon as people become involved in a participation process. It is therefore important that they are involved throughout all the various stages of the process. For example, one highly damaging scenario would be the organisation of a broad information meeting concerning the design plan of a new forest, followed a week later by the commencement of tree planting without informing the surrounding residents.

People are thinking ahead – they want to know what will happen with their input and how the decisions are made. In practice, sometimes people are invited at the start of a project as a source of local knowledge and ideas, and afterwards don’t get any feedback. This leads to disillusionment and distrust, undermining the chance for further engagement. Conversely, we also see that public
involvement is often limited to the practical realisation of a project: planting trees, cleaning up, and so on. Volunteers then feel used as cheap workers and complain that they have no input into the priorities of these activities. Of course, letting people take part in the planning phases of the project requires particular effort, especially where it involves the engagement of difficult-to-reach groups such as younger people and people with disabilities. However, in order to keep the enthusiasm of the people alive and to ensure that the sense of ownership with the greenspace and its management develops, it is crucial that they are being involved throughout the whole process.

3.2 Which kind of platform?

A major challenge is to design a social platform or setting that facilitates the representation of and continuing dialogue between the broadest possible range of stakeholders and interests, and out of which action can be mobilised. The design of a particular platform is closely related to the purpose of the interaction and the phase in the process. Where the intention is to inform and consult, a wide group will be targeted. Such forums shouldn’t be limited to the standard public meeting. For example, websites are being increasingly used as a wide platform. Some people like to write letters, whilst others prefer to have their say in neighbourhood meetings. Therefore, it is recommended that a combination of platforms is used, in order to maximise engagement. Wide forums are useful during the initial phase, to explore what the relevant topics are and to identify the general needs and expectations of people.

Such information is useful in the organisation of future stages, for example, in identifying stakeholders or in compiling the discussion agenda. Later in the process, wide forums may enable the generation of new ideas and feedback, and the mobilisation of collective action. They can also act as a kind of safety net for important considerations dismissed by more focused working groups.

Example: ‘Low step’ forums such as open days and actions involving tree planting and clean-up days may encourage people to make their first vital step towards engagement. Attractive events are most effective in reaching a broad public. In England and Ireland, festive events are organised with many activities such as tree dressing, mural painting, exhibitions, dance and theatre, to stimulate a greater involvement in public green space amongst people who are otherwise very difficult to reach. In Flanders, The Day of the Park is attracting an ever-growing number of participants, using popular activities such as ‘treasure-hunting’, photographic competitions, etc.

Broad platforms have important limitations in those stages when problems need to be analysed and plans need to be made. During these stages, the emphasis is on the free interaction between people, with the most preferred option being small diverse discussion groups. In such groups, people can freely express themselves in a non-threatening setting, compared with speaking out in a large group at a formal hearing. Working in small groups with plenary feedback is appropriate for creative brainstorming during the early phases of a project, and also for exploring in more depth ideas ‘fed in’ from a wider forum. The most creative setting appears to be groups comprised of mutually independent people and given specific tasks or agendas on which to work. Such groups have a greater ability to step back from predictable interaction and preconceived ideas.

Example: In the ‘creative workshops’ for the visioning of the green development of the railway yard in Zottegem (Flanders).
Antwerp North, a temporary group was formed comprising individuals active at various functional levels within the neighbourhood, the district and the city. This structure enabled people to consider existing relationships within a different context, leading to a widening in perspectives. The result was a rich discussion, with the different participants – city officials, neighbourhood workers and residents - declaring afterwards a greater awareness for different functional levels (from the neighbourhood to the city level).

On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for people to follow a continual process and to enhance collaboration via temporary discussion forums. Permanent and socially coherent groups offer more chances to strengthen the social relations within the group, and in this way, to make collaboration easier which in turn facilitates the creation of social networks and a sense of ownership. The advantage of having a permanent core of people must also be balanced with the need to ensure that the group remains open to new people, to avoid a narrowing in the discussion. One possible set-up is to have a more-or-less permanent group (this can be an existing neighbourhood or district council) complemented by temporary task groups created to elaborate particular aspects or to sustain particular actions.

While small groups can be very productive in planning, organising and collaborating with officials responsible for greenspace, in most cases it will still be necessary to keep involving the wider public in order to promote the ideas and the initiatives in the wider environment. It is therefore important to give attention to the building of ‘social capital’ through networking, especially in the area of greenspace provision where long-term engagement is most desirable. It would be the best to ensure the alternation between wider and smaller platforms. Flexibility in the organisation and openness to any opportunities that might emerge are therefore a precondition for this.

Finally, it is important, particularly for long-lasting processes, to provide a permanent and recognisable contact point. For example, in Flanders, people can always direct their questions about the planning process regarding the Ghent Park Forest towards the Flemish Forestry Association, which acts as a permanent contact point.

3.3 Who are the actors?

Greenspace provision encompasses a multiplicity of social and physical aspects of the environment, and therefore requires an overall approach within which very different ‘actors’ (or stakeholders) may play a role. Focusing on the diversity of preferences and needs will have a knock-on effect on the quality of the plan. Many people will have a direct interest in a particular park through recreational enjoyment, leisure or employment, but there are also indirect social, environmental and economic interests. Even for smaller green elements such as a line of trees, local interest can be very diverse, ranging from the identity of place to someone’s personal health. Greenspace may also be used and perceived very differently by individuals and social groups in society. For example, we know that to many Turkish and Moroccan people, parks are important places for family and group activities, and that less mobile groups, elderly, children, etc., are more or less limited to greenspace close to their home.

It is thus important to involve a wide diversity of people and to pay special attention to groups with specific needs. However, it is also important not to ‘pigeon-holing’ people into predefined planners’ categories, e.g. retired citizens, unemployed, immigrants, etc., with which people don’t identify themselves.
Of all the potential range of actors, some will, by their very nature, be more willing to participate. Other groups will be more or less ready to engage because of their interest. For many other people, their involvement in the process will gradually build up as it progresses. However, some will never be reached. If the process is limited to those active citizens, then many people who have a stake will be excluded. Networking is therefore very important and certain key actors in society who have a central position in social networks or communication channels (e.g. community workers, teachers, parish priests) can play a catalysing role in widening the basis of the involvement as time passes.

In addition, do not overlook the fact that, besides stakeholders and catalysts in networking, there are many others who can also contribute to the success of a participatory process. We think about people with a specific knowledge and skills, such as members of local historical associations, wildlife enthusiasts, people with physical disability who have developed a sharp eye for access, elderly who have a long-life experience with the environment, or young people who can create a website. Other participants have access to specific facilities (e.g. water, electricity) or may even play a possible role in selling certain ideas politically. Each neighbourhood possesses people with important strengths who, if pulled together, can represent a useful ‘package’ of skills and attributes. However, you have to seek them out.

One important group that is often overlooked in the process are the workers involved in management the greenspace. This group is key in that these people are close, on a daily basis, to the public, the greenspace and also to management itself. These individuals have specific experiences and knowledge about the specific greenspace and the various issues regarding its use, and represent the first contact point with the public. In effect, workers must be involved, as they have a key position as intermediates between people and management. Enabling interaction with the public also enhances their own work experience, satisfaction and motivation.

### 3.4 Who takes the lead?

Who draws the contours of the desired collaboration, organises the process and ensures that things progress within the agreed lines? Generally, collaboration with interest groups and the broader public demands an appropriate organisational structure, the deployment of information, communication and evaluation tools, and the involvement of people equipped with the necessary capacities. In the field of public greenspace, the manager him/herself usually takes up this role. Sometimes a third party has evolved for this. For example, a professional coordinator was appointed to facilitate the participatory platform for Forêt de Soignes near Brussels.

Often it is an underestimated fact that initiators of a participatory process must work beyond their traditional administrative framework. This does not only mean an intensive engagement outside regular working hours, but also outside the traditional structures within which decisions are made. The facilitator must indeed have enough flexibility in order to take advantage of the opportunities that arise. For example, an upcoming park event can be at the same time an opportunity to communicate a new management plan and to attract new participants. Making use of such opportunities demands the necessary alertness and speed of reaction. What is more, facilitating a participatory process proceeds largely outside of the familiar professional world and with people who have a different way of reasoning and communication. Furthermore, a culture of talking and meeting may be at variance with park departments who are more used to operating in a more formal technical fashion and to acquiring quick concrete decisions.

For all of these reasons, it is recommended to form a mixed steering group. For example, for conducting the participatory process for the design of a city park, the steering group can comprise, on one hand, officials from within the administration with responsibilities for greenspace and
other related issues (e.g. youth, culture, social development), and on the other hand, people from outside the administration who have a key position within the district (e.g. development workers, youth workers, ethnic workers). Such collaboration also has the advantage that it encourages social networking.

Sometimes it is said that if people can organise a process entirely by themselves, they will feel more connected to the results of the process, given the sense of ownership towards the process that often emerges. There are several examples where citizens or associations spontaneously take the lead in areas that traditionally belong to the domain of authorities.

**Example:** In Lomma (Sweden), the municipality bought a piece of abandoned land with the intention of creating a park. Due to a lack of resources, the project stalled and the land became totally overgrown with thistles and nettles. One old man started to maintain a small piece in the border, moving on to looking after pathways crossing the site. Other retired people from the neighbourhood observed what was happening and asked him if they could join in. Through the work of seven people, the land was transformed into a park. Now they get funds to buy machines and fuel from the local owners and residents association and from private firms. They also get plants, soil and other materials from the municipal parks department.

Participatory processes must not necessarily be directed by an authority, but in practice it is most necessary that formal systems support such initiatives via knowledge input, financial resources and the support of social collaboration. An example of support by an authority at a local level is the so-called ‘neighbourwood’ contracts between the municipality (for example, the City of Antwerp) and the residents for the planting and maintaining of greenery in squares and streets. Authorities can also play an important role in guarding the quality of the results. There is a danger that collaborative initiatives would end up neglecting particular aspects of wider interests which cannot be otherwise represented, e.g. the needs of minority groups, future generations. Without being heavy handed or discouraging the local initiative, authorities can play a kind of ethical role in safeguarding the validity of the process and ensuring that exclusion is avoided.

### 3.5 How best to communicate?

Communication can take place in a very spontaneous way. Personal contacts such as those between the park management and the visitors are often as, or even more, efficient than holding many meetings. It is, however, not taken for granted that this type of communication exists and it is also not good to start from the idea that communication automatically favours collaboration. Parks and other public green space are typically multi-functional, which also brings about the potential for conflict in opinion. Moreover, stakeholders often start with presumed ideas and stereotypes about each other, and too often concentrate first on their own interest. On the other hand, diversity in interests and stakes can be an important advantage to arrive at a high quality plan, with the requirement being that the communication is aimed at reaching consensus that is more valuable than a simple compromise between different interests.

For working towards consensus and collaboration, the dialogue must in most cases be organised to some extent. But this is not sufficient - good communication between the initiator and the public will need to take into account a number of preconditions. The first precondition is clarity from the very onset for all those involved about the purpose of the meeting and how it is going to run, what
will be expected from the participants, the topics up for discussion, and what will be done with the results. For example, an initiator can be very satisfied with the information gathered during a meeting focusing on a particular issue, e.g. park safety. However, the participants involved may be less than satisfied, having expected that the meeting was going to result in concrete proposals. Furthermore, it is necessary to clarify throughout the entire process what exactly will be done with the input of the participants, what won’t be taken into consideration, and why not?

At the same time, feedback is required to ensure that the initiator has accurately captured the opinions and ideas of the participants. For this reason, it is recommended to always organise at least two meetings. For example, for the visioning on the park management in Vordenstein Park in Belgium, a second workshop was organised during which the results of the first workshop and the incorporation of these results into management proposals were fed back to the participants. It is also important to pay enough attention to the records or minutes of the meeting. In this, the minutes should structure the recorded input in a way that is recognisable to the participants involved, and yet ‘ready to use’ by those responsible for integrating the views into the plan. For example, the minutes of the creative workshops in Antwerp North were structured in a way that was greatly appreciated by the participants, while also enabling planners to readily extract useful ideas.

An important precondition in communication is that it will take place with people on an equal footing. Organisational details can suggest otherwise. For example, a meeting room laid out with rows of chairs for the public and a platform at the top of the room, with microphone, for officials and experts, creates the impression that all of the power lies on the other side. Information is then presented in a formal official manner, with experts using tables, figures and inaccessible technical ‘jargon’ bearing little relationship with how most people reason on a day-to-day basis. All this leads to a ‘them and us’ relationship, which will not foster constructive collaboration.

The attitude an authority adopts during communication can be itself too dominating. For example, it is a good idea to organise discussions about design and management as far as possible in the field. This will help ensure that the problems, opinions and ideas are concrete, both for the manager and the participants. However, at the same time, the park or woodland is also the professional working environment of the manager, and there is a danger that he or she may lapse into playing a dominating role. For example, a field walk is often unintentionally misused to ‘teach’ the participants, or even worse, to convince them of the right of the manager in a particular choice. While participants will certainly appreciate the opportunity to learn, this will forego important opportunities for two-way communications and mutual learning.

Example: In the framework of the visionary process for the development and management of the Ayazmo Park in Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), a ‘Youth Round Table’ was organised. Its core idea was to give young people a prominent role in the process by approaching them as ‘experts’. They prepared themselves in advance in their schools and associations, and presented their views in a plenary session. In between, there was room for short discussions amongst the young people. The ‘professional experts’ of the municipal administration also took part in the Youth Round Table, but they were not allowed to interfere and were expected to listen as observers to what the young people were thinking and expecting. They were allowed to take the floor to react with their comments only during the second part of the debate. The young people proved to be ready and capable to contribute further in the decision-making process. The municipal experts were surprised and very much appreciated the serious attitude, opinions and ideas, many of which were used in the Park’s vision and subsequent actions.
3.6 What are we going to talk about?

The agenda of a meeting has an important influence on who is going to participate and with what expectations. A programme restricted to specialised topics will not attract the ordinary visitor. If ‘lay-person’ participates in, for example, a workshop on the biodiversity of a park, there is a great chance that he or she will be overridden by ‘experts’ such as members of nature conservation groups, nature guides and biologists. A basic requirement is that the topics up for discussion are sufficiently relevant to the people involved, and that they connect with their everyday experience. On the other hand, the agenda shouldn’t be based on preconceived ideas about what the problems are, what is or is not within people’s interest, or about what they can have a say.

The choice of the topics for discussion can be based on the results of broad platforms, e.g. drop-in events, interviews with park visitors. The needs, concerns and constraints gathered from these, together with the issues the manager wants to communicate, can be used to develop themes for further and more in-depth elaboration. The choice of the themes themselves however can be the subject of dialogue.

**Example:** The participative platform involved in the Forêt de Soignes, Brussels, follows a selected agenda. During the first meeting of the platform, all of the participants were asked to propose possible themes for three separate thematic working groups. After this, a vote took place in which the themes ‘awareness raising’, ‘access and paths’ and ‘biodiversity’ were selected. Finally, the participants got the opportunity to assign themselves to one of these working groups. The thematic working groups have developed a lot of specific knowledge and valuable ideas, and the participants have shown a great engagement, not only in the discussion itself, but also in the resultant field actions.

An important advantage of the participants themselves setting the agenda is that the topics for discussion are relevant and interesting for the majority of participants. This will enhance the level of engagement and the efficiency of their knowledge input, which will ultimately benefit the quality of the plan. Conversely, however, there are possible disadvantages. By bringing people together in separate working groups, they remain limited to their own field of interest and opportunities for mutual learning are missed, preventing people from finding out about topics that others feel are important or which are of interest to a minority. This can be partly resolved by keeping the topics sufficiently wide and by providing sufficient interaction between the different thematic groups.

People need to know the process will extend beyond mere talking, and that their input will be translated effectively and within a reasonable timescale into a concrete plan or an action in the field. Therefore, when selecting the topics, it is worth taking into consideration the extent to which the participants (and the initiator him- or herself) can actually have an impact. Furthermore, there could be a mixture of topics discussed, some of which can lead to concrete management decisions and actions in the short-term, and others relating to more long-term change. Of course, it is important to be continuously open to issues the participants themselves propose for discussion.

Finally, it is important not to be too ambitious when setting the agenda. It is not only necessary to provide within a same topic sufficient opportunities for feedback from participants, but one should also be realistic regarding the scope to influence things happen in the field. Do not swamp the agenda. Be realistic and give items enough time so that each can be fully ‘aired’. It should also be realised that, for participants, topics are not always neatly defined, but are seen to be mutually connected and interrelated. For example, an action proposal for improving the access for a park...
may evoke a whole series of discussions about many other topics, such as the biodiversity, safety, etc. Due to this, discussions can last longer than expected. A professional moderator can bring structure into the discussion, leading it towards a consensus and a practical agreement. Professionals involved in the participation process should have some moderation skill, and management often needs to invest time and skill in this.

3.7 What is it going to cost?

This question is difficult to answer in a general manual. But still, ‘what’s the cost?’ is often the first question asked. The price will be largely dependent on the type and methods applied. In the Chapter entitled ‘Methods and Techniques’, we give, where possible, an estimation of the time and resources needed. A top-end interactive exhibition can easily cost several thousand euros. However, a couple of hundred euros will easily cover the cost of a low-tech ‘drop in’ event based on photocopied maps, pencils and sticky notes for people’s ideas, and light refreshments.

A constant factor is that the preparation, organisation, attendance and follow-up of the participative processes require considerable investment in terms of working hours, and may involve in-house staff and/or outside professionals. There is sometimes an expectation that afterwards part of the cost can be recouped when people participate in actual management work. However, there is a great chance that the effort required to organise and follow-up on this volunteering work will nullify any possible saving.

Apart from the period of time required, difficulties with the lack of various kinds of resources are often related to a lack of creative thinking and the tendency to keep the whole process under the control of administration. An aspect of many successful projects around Europe is the ability to ‘think outside the box’ in order to pull in the necessary resources.

Example: A large part of the ongoing successful of the Terryland Forest Park in Galway City, Ireland, is the project’s ability to drawn in a wide range of skills and expertise from the many organisations and groups represented on its steering group. These include the organisation of community events, schools education work and public relations, all of which complement the organisational input of the leading body, Galway Corporation.
4 Building a scenario

In order to approach a participative process in some sort of ordered fashion, it is a very good idea to compile a 'storyboard' or scenario of how the process will develop. This scenario is effectively a type of time plan of the actions envisaged through the process. The choice of the actions and the course of the process itself will of course vary greatly from situation to situation, depending on the starting point and the purpose of the project. However, the development of a scenario can provide the necessary anchorage for the initiator and participants without becoming a rigid timetable into which people are locked. It is important to be flexible regarding the type of actions undertaken as well as the point at which they will happen. This aspect is vital in order to be able to react not only to new opportunities and problems, if and when they appear, but also to suggestions for initiatives put forward from the participants themselves. In practice, it is often the case that the final shape of the scenario will only emerge during the participative process itself.

Participation in public greenspace – including parks and woodlands - is very often a long-term process, particularly if it involves participation in ongoing management. Once a participatory process commences, the actual 'end point' very often moves further away or disappears from sight altogether. In this context, an important element for the planning of a participatory process is to ensure sufficient continuity, not least in order to maintain enthusiasm and to provide a consistent level of contact. In small steps, work is undertaken to improve the greenspace itself, and also to develop a culture of cooperation. Through a series of small successes and the gradual building up of experience, a mutual learning process and a relationship of trust emerge between the managers and the users.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 under the key question regarding the choice of platforms to use, it is recommended that an alternative mixture of small and large platforms be used when building up the scenario. For example, the process might kick off with a broad platform (e.g. a drop-in event, idea gathering), in order to raise interest amongst the broad public, to collect information and to get a sense of what is in people's minds. Following this, the themes that emerge from this broad platform are discussed in-depth in a small platform setting, e.g. a series of workshops. The ideas and actions that emerge from this can then be returned to a broad platform (e.g. manned information stands during a park event), to be ‘tested’ with the broader public. The central idea is to establish a continued flow of feedback between the manager and the participants, and between large and small platforms.

The following paragraphs touch on a number of supporting activities that occur in most scenarios regarding participatory processes involving public greenspace. Later on, two examples of actual scenarios are described.

4.1 Supporting activities

Preparation
The organisation of any process starts with a sense of direction as to where one wants to go. As soon as this becomes clear, and by following the key questions set out in Chapter 3, major decisions can be made regarding the organisation (timing, platform, players, etc.) and the content (i.e. the agenda) of the interaction. For example, the approach used to generate creative input from the participants into the plan will differ from that used to reach a level of co-operation with the management. The answers to these key questions must be regarded as being interconnected, and an exploration of the local situation will be necessary. Yet it will become immediately apparent what types of necessary basic information are lacking. For example, the identification of potential participants will require the park’s user profile, knowledge of the social network within the neighbourhood, etc.

When preparing for a public meeting regarding proposals for a particular greenspace, be aware that stakeholders will have a much wider view of what they regard as being relevant to that greenspace, and don’t necessary
take into account the delineation of official responsibilities. Therefore, it’s a good idea to find out beforehand about other plans or projects relating to the greenspace and surrounding area, with which local people will be familiar, e.g. traffic plans, spatial plans, urban renewal plans. The same applies to wider social issues, e.g. the lack of facilities for local teenagers, local demographics suggesting an impending ‘baby boom’, the need for ‘outdoor classrooms’ to support ecology classes in local schools, etc.

Furthermore, be aware of what was agreed in the past. For example, the issue of whether or not bikes should be allowed in a particular area might already have been decided, and bringing the issue up again without any need to will waste people’s time and may indeed resurrect what might have been a divisive issue in the past. Read though the agreed minutes of previous meeting to find out what exactly was decided upon in the past.

**Using communication to draw people in**

For many people, participation in a public initiative does not come naturally. A low ‘threshold’ that makes it easy for people to engage has to be established, and people have to be encouraged to take the first step. Communication is a vital tool in this regard, increasing the interest amongst stakeholders and presenting the initiative in an attractive way that will help draw people in. Communication also relates to the distribution of information and ideas regarding the imitative amongst the general public.

Recruiting is not merely about producing attractive leaflets. Achieving clarity about what the purpose of the participation process is, what is expected from the people, and why, is a first requirement. Therefore, existing and likely problems and challenges should not be covered up or de-emphasised. For example, a particular proposal to develop a new urban woodland may put some people at a disadvantage, such as existing site users whose use of the site will be restricted by the proposal. These concerns cannot and should not be hidden by glossy leaflets showing idyllic woodland scenes.

In order to appeal to as diverse a range of interests as possible, a combination of communication channels and media is used. This is further elaborated in Chapter 5, which explores various methods and techniques. Once a group of people becomes involved, further networking can be started through them. Finally, pay particular attention to securing positive coverage about each event and activity in the local media, including local newspapers, radio stations, etc.

**Evaluation**

Setting out the scenario of a participatory process, which will include the aims and direction, will also form the basis for the regular monitoring and evaluation of the process. Evaluations are preferably made after each activity, and should include all of those involved in organising the activity, including outside specialists brought in to assist with that particular activity, e.g. a professional moderator. It is also necessary to have a critical look, on a regular basis, over the entire participatory process, taking into account any new purposes or objectives introduced along the way. Generally, the overseeing of a participatory process and the undertaking of regulator monitoring and evaluation are best facilitated in situations where a fixed steering group is in place.

In addition, it is vital to create and facilitate opportunities whereby the participants themselves evaluate the process, particularly in relation to whether or not they see it as being effective in realising progress regarding the greenspace, and whether or not they see their own desires, preferences and concerns reflected in the work. This process should be carried out in a well thought-out way (e.g. added on at the end of a workshop), so as not to take up too much of the participants’ energy and time. Methods to facilitate participant evaluation are described in Chapter 5 (see Method 5: Evaluation).
4.2 Scenario Vordenstein Park

The 140 ha Vordenstein domain, located in the north-east of Antwerp (the largest city of Flanders), dates back to the 14th Century. It was one of the typical ‘hoven van plaisantie’ or privately-owned country estates where well-off Antwerpians enjoyed leisure time. The Forests and Green Spaces Division of the ministry of the Flemish community currently owns 110 ha of the domain.

Vordenstein has a double structure: the largest part comprises woodland designed in a French baroque style, with forest stands divided by characteristic star-shaped alley structures. The other part is in the English landscape style, with grass fields, groups of trees and a walled ‘orangery garden’ with flowerbeds and thematic gardens.

In 2001, the Forests and Green Spaces Division of the ministry of the Flemish community decided to start a pilot project in Vordenstein within the framework of their ‘Vision for Harmonious Park and Green Space Management’. This vision strives for a balance between measures focusing on people, nature and the environment. The management plan is the central document for implementing this vision. Inherent to the harmonious management vision is a people-oriented approach. In this context, a communication process with the public was initiated in collaboration with the Human Ecology Department of the Free University of Brussels.

The purpose of the project was to actively involve park visitors and other people with an interest in the area in the design of the management plan, and to test various methods and techniques that could facilitate their participation in the process. However, along the way, a more long-term relationship of collaboration and mutual learning has gradually evolved between the participants and the professionals. This gave rise to a new challenge: how to keep the enthusiasm of the people alive, especially that of the ‘ordinary park visitor’?

Success factors

- Flexibility in the organisation and openness to any opportunities that might emerge.
- A well-thought-of alternation between wider and smaller platforms ensures a wide array of people to be reached on an on-going basis.
- By keeping the contact lively (i.e. regular field discussions, action days, a ‘friends group’), the bond between the visitors and the management can be gradually built.
Neighbourhood Survey (Method 4)

**Purpose** Inviting local people to the ‘Day of the Park’; raising interest and gathering information regarding the use and perception of the park.

**Results** The respondents answered simple questions, which provided a better insight into the usage pattern (including ‘barriers’ inhibiting people to visit the park), and key points for discussion. The survey has provided a list of addresses of people willing to become involved.

Day of the Park (Methods 6, 7, 13)

**Purpose** Raising public awareness for ‘harmonious’ management practices. Collecting people’s ideas as input for the management plan.

**Result** The visitors followed a way-marked trail taking in a number of information spots throughout the park; They wrote their ideas on sticky notes and pasted them on maps of the park. They took photos of particular places they either liked or disliked. Some took part in a photo competition. The first contacts with the public were established.

Purpose Gaining deeper understanding of the preferences and ideas of park visitors.

**Result** With the help of the survey results, a number of frequent visitors were selected, contacted and interviewed on site. The interviewees provided a better insight into their underlying motivations.

Vision Workshop I (Methods 11)

**Purpose** Involving user groups and interested individuals in the design of the management plan.

**Result** Four thematic groups were formed based on the results from the survey and day of the park. Group discussions took place on site. Next, proposals were presented and discussed in plenary, resulting in a summary of final conclusions.

Purpose Providing professional feedback to the outcomes of the first vision workshop; Evaluation of the participatory process.

**Result** The professionals presented a draft plan for discussion with the participants. Bottlenecks were jointly identified, and proposals made for solutions. Participants proposed to form a friends group.

Vision Workshop II Process Evaluation (Methods 5, 20)

Purpose Informing the broader public about the management plan, its procedure and the participatory approach adopted. Attracting new members to the friends group.

**Result** Through an interactive exhibition, the initiatives were widely promoted.

Day of the Park (Methods 10, 13)

**Result** Participants agreed about the role of the friends group, and expressed the need for regular contacts beyond the procedure for the management plan.

Purpose Formation of the friends group.

Field discussions (Method 17)

**Purpose** Engaging the friends group on a continual basis in the park’s management.

**Result** Professionals together with members of the friends group discussed practical choices and dilemmas in selected spots in the park.
4.3 Scenario Ayazmo Park

Ayazmo Park is a 320 ha woodland bordering the City of Stara Zagora in the central part of Bulgaria. The park has been gradually established from 1895 onwards. Bishop Methody Koussev organised the first planting campaigns. He imported over 150 tree species from various parts of the world. Many citizens have volunteered over the years in planting and maintenance.

The park is one of the city's landmarks and it contributes significantly to the image of the city. It is the favourite venue for outdoor activities amongst people of all ages, and contains various popular attractions, including a zoo, an open-air theatre and children's playgrounds.

The park is owned by the City of Stara Zagora. Various management problems have arisen in recent years, and it became apparent that a properly mandated long-term vision for the park was needed. It was also realised that such a vision could provide a coherent framework for developing a number of potential uses of the park, which had so far been left untapped.

In 2002, a unique opportunity arose through the inclusion of the Ayazmo park as a case study in the EU-funded NeighbourWoods project. Together with the City, a 1-year long communication process was designed with the aim to create a common vision on the development and management of the Ayazmo. Central to the approach was the exchange of knowledge and the development of ideas through communication between the various municipal experts and politicians, and between the City and the public.

The process has led to a widely-supported vision for the park. Furthermore, shortly after the completion of the process, the City started implementing the first actions on the ground, significantly raised the municipal budget for the park, and applied the same communication process to the management of another woodland.

Success factors

- The parallel construction of formal and informal platforms tends to facilitate the expression of a wide range of values, preferences and ideas, as well as the necessary technical or strategic considerations for implementation on the ground.
- The integration of pre-conditions for implementation (social relations, knowledge, resources) into the vision itself.
Interviews in the park (Method 11)

Purpose: Learning from frequent park users in order to develop a people-responsive vision about concrete management themes.
Results: People expressed their perceptions and opinions and gave their ideas for improvement. Follow-up by municipal experts, amongst whom confidence was enhanced.

Youth Round Table

Purpose: Encouraging young people to think and discuss about the future of the Park, putting forward their ideas and enabling experts to learn from these.
Results: Young people prepared, presented and discussed their ideas in front of municipal officials, experts and media representatives.

Popular Events / Essays / Stories (Methods 1, 7, 2, 19)

Purpose: Bringing the vision process to the attention of the wider public, and collecting ideas from a wide array of perspectives.
Results: People wrote their ideas on an ‘idea tree’ during an action day and spoke about the Park during ‘video interviews’. School children interviewed their families about what the Park means to them. Stories of the park were published in a ‘Story Calendar’.

Thinking Days

Purpose: Encouraging communication/collaboration amongst municipal officials with regard to the Park, reconciling their ideas with the public’s into a coherent structure.
Results: Over the course of two thinking days, municipal officials (various municipal departments, Mayor and Deputies) discussed the Park’s vision, and defined the main problems and desired directions for future development.

Brief Public Input

First Draft Vision

Purpose: Involving key stakeholders (Youth Municipal Council, Methody Koussev Foundation, etc.) and interested citizens in the development of the vision.
Results: During an initial workshop, the participants studied the first draft vision, discussed it in small groups and presented their proposals for adjustments and additions in a plenary session. A follow-up workshop was organised shortly afterwards.

Vision Workshops (Method 20)

Purpose: Securing a formal endorsement of the vision and encouraging its implementation on the ground.
Results: Municipal officials (various municipal departments, Mayor and Deputies) jointly reached consensus on the long-, mid- and short-term priorities for directions and tasks of the vision.

Final Draft Vision

Final Thinking Day

Purpose: Informing the wider public about the results of the visionary process, securing their reactions and generating action.
Results: Citizens visited the exhibition and commented on the vision. Students participated in a special discussion day. A final press conference and launch campaign facilitated the wider promotion of the vision.

Public Exhibition (Method 10)

Purpose: Learning from frequent park users in order to develop a people-responsive vision about concrete management themes.
Results: People expressed their perceptions and opinions and gave their ideas for improvement. Follow-up by municipal experts, amongst whom confidence was enhanced.

Launch Campaign
An action day – involving either a whole- or half-day – is clearly a ‘do’ activity, with interested people asked to roll up their sleeves and to get involved in some work on-the-ground. Action days are particularly effective when they are held regularly and become part of the community’s calendar, e.g. a planting day held every spring. They can also be effective when held on the same day as a wider national event or programme celebrating the environment.

By participating regularly in action days, people will regard themselves as being more connected with the greenspace (“our park”, “our trees”). It also ensures closer contact between the users and the manager, thereby promoting mutual trust and learning.

- The possibilities for action days are considerable, e.g. planting, litter collection, weeding and bark-mulching flowerbeds, collecting brash and cut branches, dredging pools, painting and repairing park furniture, collecting seeds.
- A week-long programme of actions can be organised around an appropriate topic. A number of relevant organisations, including local NGOs, can also be invited to organise and promote activities and events.
- Where it exists, a friends group (see Method 21) can initiate, organise and oversee an action day. An action day may attract interested people who may end up joining the group.
- Make sure to involve workers and their supervisors in any action day, to provide professional guidance during the event. This will also promote linkages between those who look after the park and those using it.
- The action day should ideally involve an activity within which everyone can participate without having special skills. Particular effort should also be made to involve children.
Remarks

• Remember that people come to help on a voluntary basis – they are not cheap labour!
• In organising an action day, bear in mind that, for many, social contact with each other is the main motivation for taking part.
• It is vital that the event has a pleasant and fun atmosphere.
• It is important to leave the larger and more specialised work (pruning, tree felling, etc.) to the professionals, e.g. park staff, specialised contractors.
• A limited number of actions, e.g. litter collection and planting, can be carried out by a large group during a single action day. Remember that, as the size of the group increases, so too does the need for more tools, materials and guidance.
• For ongoing maintenance activities, more can be expected from a small, motivated group. For this type of work, it is often a good idea to wait until a core group of people emerges, e.g. a friends group.

Tips

• Arrange the necessary details regarding insurance cover.
• Make sure that an adequate first aid box is ready to hand, together with someone trained in administering first aid.
• Set up a refreshments table offering soft drinks in the summer or hot drinks in the winter. Also consider holding a barbeque after the event, to promote its social role.
• Invite local journalists for some positive coverage.
• Take pictures, or even better, a video, to show during future events, e.g. an interactive exhibition.
• At the end of the event, give everyone a small present or an original souvenir (e.g. a specially printed t-shirt) as a memento of the day.

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• The larger the group, the more expensive the event
• Insurance
• Extra tools and equipment for participants (e.g. spades, painting brushes)
• Sponsorship can be sought from tree nurseries, garden centres, local supermarkets, etc.

Can be combined with:

• Friends group (Method 21)
• Field discussion (Method 17)
• Park event (Method 13)

Keep the drinks cold!
5.2 Activities for children

Children have their own world of experiences and desires that differs greatly from that of adults. In order to encourage children into the participation process, it is recommended that activities are organised specifically for them, taking into account their age, interest and capabilities. These activities can provide verbal information for planning and management regarding local values, knowledge and desires from the perspective of this important, and sizable, user group. Also, through different participatory activities, children can become more aware of their green environment, their ability to influence things, and the needs and desires of others. They learn skills to negotiate with each other, and to summarise and present their ideas.

**Scoring the park**
This method involves children scoring the greenspace themselves. Children are given a list of key spots within the park or woodland. During a walk, they then score each spot from 1 to 10. During a follow-up gathering attended by the park manager, they summarise and discuss their scores.

**What’s needed?**
Score sheets, pencils

**Planting an idea**
Each child plants a seed, bulb or a little tree or shrub within a designated area of the park or woodland. They then write down on a card their suggestions or ideas for the management of the greenspace. They stick this card into the ground beside their seed or bulb, or attach it to their tree or shrub with a piece of string. Afterwards, the organisers collect all of the cards and sort them into various themes for management.

**What’s needed?**
Seeds, bulbs, shrubs or trees, cards, string, pencils

**‘Park of dreams’**
Using sticks and balloons, children plant a ‘park of dreams’ in the area prior to development. They then attach a little card to the stick, with a description of how the greenspace should look like. At the end of the day, each child takes home his or her balloon. The children can be ‘recruited’ through youth organisations or local schools.

**What’s needed?**
Sticks and balloons, cards, pencils
Workshop

Working in groups of five, the children create a photo-collage of their ‘fantasy park’, based on their desires and preferences surrounding key places in the greenspace (e.g. forest stand, pool, meadow, avenue). An enlarged photo of the scene itself is used as a basis for the photo-collage. After a short break, the children then summarise their findings and suggestions and communicate these to the park manager.

In a follow-up meeting, the park manager explains the solutions s/he has in mind for the different ideas the children came up with, how these are incorporated in the plan, why particular ideas couldn’t be taken onboard, and when actions will start on-the-ground. The children get the chance to react and to provide further detail, if required by the manager. It is important that the children are able to recognise their input in the final plan.

What’s needed?
Enlarged photos, magazines, scissors, stick-glue

Role-playing

A practical survey by the children themselves, based on role-playing, enables them to directly experience the needs of different users. For example, children from a youth club might be able to borrow wheelchairs from a local retirement home. Working in small groups, they then explore the park or woodland while sitting in the wheelchair, and afterwards discuss and report their experiences. Such an exercise can precede a workshop where children propose ideas for improving the greenspace.

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Relatively cheap methods, but require follow-up time to process the information gathered.

Can be combined with:
- Action day (Method 1)
- Photo-walk (Method 6)
- Idea collectors (Method 7)
- Park event (Method 3)
- Stories of the park (Method 19)

Children interviewing adults

This method involves children interviewing their family and other adults about the greenspace. This can be organised as part of a school project or homework, by contacting local schools and explaining the task to interested teachers. The children themselves summarise the responses they gathered, for example, by writing about “what the park means to me, my family and our everyday life” This can all be compiled into a short report, which is later published in the school magazine, park newsletter or in a local newspaper.

See also Stories of the park (Method 19)
5.3 Drop-in event

During a drop-in event, participants freely walk in from the street over the course of a couple of hours, and in an informal manner, ‘log’ their desires and ideas concerning the design, planning and management of the greenspace. This method can be used as a broad platform at the start of a participatory process, or later on, as a way to gather reaction to various proposals.

Drop-in events represent a ‘low step’ method of public participation. They require minimal commitment, generate lots of opportunities for social contact, and avoid the formality associated with meetings that often turns people off.

- A drop-in event can be organised relatively quickly, and normally doesn’t require more than one preparatory meeting.
- The invitation for people to drop in should be attractive and appealing to local residents.
- Involving individuals active on the local social ‘scene’ in the organisation of the event will increase its attraction, and hence, participation.
- By holding the event over several hours, more time is allowed for in-depth dialogue with those who do drop in.
- There must be a sufficient number of organisers on-hand during the event, to make sure it runs smoothly and to avoid people having to wait.
- A good idea is to ask people to indicate with a sticky dot on a street plan roughly whereabouts they live. This will give a picture of which parts of the neighbourhood are and are not represented.
- Participants can be asked to draw their ideas onto a site map, or to write them down on a piece of sticky notepaper and attach this to the map. A short list of questions can be provided to give guidance.
- Afterwards, the results are gathered, prioritised and processed. They can also provide the basis for further forums, such as a vision workshop (Method 20).
Example of a drop-in event, Everslaarsbos, Lokeren, Flanders

In December 2000, the town of Lokeren asked for the advice of a local neighbourhood committee about the design of an urban woodland located in the buffer zone between a residential and an industrial area. In January 2001, the committee organised a drop-in event to gather the views, preferences and ideas of the local residents. The steps involved were as follows.

1. Preparation
The organising team studied the relevant reports and plans, and visited the site. A preparatory meeting was held, setting out the programme and the division of tasks.

2. Attractive invitation
Leaflets were handed out in person, posted through the letterboxes in the surrounding streets, and displayed in prominent places, such as the town hall, bakery, butcher, petrol station, schools, etc.

3. Drop-in event
The actual drop-in event was held between 20.00 and 22.30 on a weekday.

   - Reception table
     On entering the hall, the participants encountered a reception table. At this table, the organisers explained the purpose of the event and asked the participants to visit the other tables in the hall in a set sequence (as described below). Participants were also asked to indicate where they lived on a street map of the neighbourhood. Tea and coffee were also offered at this table.

   - Information table
     At this table, participants were shown various information regarding the site, including a land register map, a map showing the area under the compulsory purchase order, a map of the adjoining industrial area, etc. A photo album was also available, with pictures of forests and various landscape scenes. A member of the neighbourhood committee was also present, to provide further information.

   - Ideas table
     At the ideas table, a blank map of the site was available for participants to add their ideas to, either by drawing them directly onto the map, or by writing them down on sticky notepaper. A guiding list of questions was also stuck onto each side of the table. A member of the committee was on hand to offer encouragement and to help people express their ideas.

   - Action table
     At this table, the participants were asked to formulate their proposals for future actions, and to place these into an ‘action box’.

4. House-to-house survey
After the drop-in event, a list was made of the ideas collected. During the following weekend, a house-to-house survey was carried out. During this, residents were asked to select and rank their 10 favourite ideas arising from the drop-in event. They were also asked whether or not they wished to receive, for a small charge, a copy of the final report of the neighbourhood committee. Following this survey, the committee wrote up their advice based on the results of the drop-in event, and included in the appendix a list of the 20 most preferred ideas arising from the house-to-house survey.

5. Follow-up
Each residence in the neighbourhood was sent a leaflet summarising the results of the process. Full copies were also available, for a small fee.

What’s needed?
- An appropriate room in a familiar, informal setting, located as close as possible to, or ideally within, the site
- Approximately five tables, with chairs
- Pencils
- Lots of sticky notepaper
- A street plan of the surrounding neighbourhood
- Sticky dots
- Multiple copies of the blank site map, to replace copies as they become crowded with ideas
- Action box
- Refreshments and biscuits

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Relatively cheap

Can be combined with:
- Interactive exhibition (Method 10)
- Park event (Method 13)
- Idea collectors (Method 7)
5.4 Neighbourhood survey

All of the streets or neighbourhoods within the ‘catchment’ of the park or woodland are included in a survey. A survey can be used at the very beginning of a participatory process, to collect information about the usage pattern, opinions and ideas about management, and also to gauge people’s level of interest in getting involved directly. A survey can also be organised in a later stage, for example, to evaluate changes in management.

- The main types of information that give an idea about the usage pattern of a park or woodland are: age category, household or family composition, frequency of visits, distance from the living/working environment, and the reason / motivation for visiting.
- Also provide some questions that gauge opinions regarding current management and ideas for improvement, and questions designed to draw people in, e.g. “Would you like further information about progress?” or “Would you be interested in getting directly involved?”
- Keep the list of questions to a minimum. Provide short, concise multiple-choice questions presented in an easy-to-understand language, with no room for ambiguity about what’s being asked. Questions inviting ideas should be kept open, so that the respondents can express their views in their own words.
- Distribute the survey as widely as possible through different channels, including the local authority newsletter or website, the local newspaper, leaflet stands in public places, etc.
- Stress that all of the information will be processed confidentially and in accordance with national data protection legislation.
- Give the respondent the choice of whether or not they wish to give personal details (name, address, telephone number, etc.). People who respond positively to the question asking if they would like to get involved should be reminded to note down such details, to enable follow-up contact.
- Mention the final date for the survey to be returned.
- Build up a database of addresses. In the later phases, this will become an invaluable resource for sending out information about what’s going on, to let people know about upcoming activities, etc.

Remarks

- Surveys are relatively expensive. Think carefully about what exactly you want to get out of it. Will the acquired information be useful and applicable?
- The processing of surveys can be easily carried out using user-friendly spreadsheet computer programmes.
- Due to the high cost, it is better to combine the survey with, for example, an invitation to a park event.

Expensive method, particularly in relation to the cost of design and printing, distribution and processing.

Can be combined with:

- Park event (Method 13)
Example of a neighbourhood survey: Vordenstein: Give us your ideas!
5.5 Evaluation meeting

Include regular opportunities for evaluation throughout the participatory process, to check that the process is heading in the right direct. In practice, this involves checking that the participants are happy with the participatory methods and techniques being used, and with how their ideas are being implemented. As part of a group discussion, participants can review what has happened, and based on this, come up with ideas for the participatory approach in the future.

- An evaluation session should ideally take place after an important step in the participatory process, e.g. at the end of the design phase, before actions are planned.
- Plan the evaluation as part of a broader programme or event, so as not to take up too much of people’s time.
- For a group discussion, a number of open questions can be given as a guide (see example). If time is very tight, evaluation can be limited to the filling-out of an evaluation sheet, using the same open questions.
- It is also recommended that the organising team evaluates itself. For example, the team could get together for 15 minutes after a participatory event, to review its work.
- A more in-depth evaluation of the overall participatory process should be carried out periodically by the overall initiator, be it the local authority, NGO, etc.
- Pausing to socialise (e.g., coffee break) is often an excellent opportunity to explore in an informal manner the general level of satisfaction amongst the participants.

“Where do you live? Paste a stick dot on the map”. A handy way to evaluate the general spread of the participants.
Example of questions used to guide an evaluation meeting

During the participatory process for the management of the Vordenstein Park, an evaluation session was held during the second visioning workshop. The questions listed below served as a guide for the group discussion. The evaluation of the approach used up to that point was combined with questions regarding ideas for future co-operation.

1. How did you find the workshops?

Did the workshops meet your expectations? If not, why not?
Where you able to get across your ideas? If not, what prevented you?
Did these workshops also lead you to new ideas? If yes, which ones?
Through the workshops, do you feel more involved with the park and the plans?
Do you have ideas to improve the approach?

2. How could we work together further?

Through our survey and dialogue with people, we have learned that many people are willing to be kept informed and possibly to work together actively in the long term. There are several ways possible:

• working together in
• providing information: organising guided tours, exhibitions, a course on maintenance, etc.
• working together in the management itself: the maintenance of the gardens, planting, pruning, collecting leaves, working in the vegetable garden, helping with security.

What do you regard as a suitable way to work together, and what seems less suitable? Why?
Can you think of other ways to get people involved?
Would you like to be involved yourself in one or more of these ways? If yes, which ones?
A possible idea to organise different ways to working together is to establish a permanent group of visitors, managers and other interested people (a kind of ‘Friends of the Vordenstein Park’ group). What do you think about this? What could such a group do?

Tips

• Clearly agree when the evaluation forms, if used, will be collected.
• Two important questions in any evaluation process are “Who were not involved?” and “Who should also be involved?” Particular effort should be made to ‘draw in’ those identified by such questions.

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• Moderator
• Time spent preparing and reporting

Can be combined with:

• Vision workshop (Method 20)
5.6 Photo-walk

With this method, participants go for a walk in the park or woodland, equipped with a camera. They are asked to take pictures of places and things they like or dislike, and to write their impressions on each photo (this is vital to enable others to understand the meaning of the image, particularly where it represents the photographer’s non-visual experiences). The photo-walk is a very direct way to learn more about people’s perception of the greenspace. People also find it fun to do, with many adding creative touches, personal antidotes, poems, etc.

- With a photo-walk, it is not really necessary to plan everything in advance. It can be done when the park is crowded, enabling the photographers to make contact with people.
- Polaroid cameras do have an advantage in that the participants can write their comments immediately on the margin or back of the photo.
- If the event is announced in advance, give the participants the opportunity to use their own camera. In this way, photo-enthusiasts can really get their teeth into the exercise! In such cases, provide them with a free film.
- The photo-walk can be tied in with another activities, such as interviews with frequent visitors (Method 11) or a field discussion (Method 17). It can also be undertaken as part of a total package of activities during a park event (Method 13).
- The photos can be used afterwards to liven-up an interactive exhibition, a newsletter or a website. Be sure to credit the picture-taker in all cases!

There’s a photographer in all of us!

A photo-walk during the day of the park in Vordenstein: “Culture and nature: a harmonious whole, the charm of Vordenstein in one photo.”

“This tree is a good place to play.”
Some variations

- The task to carry out a photo-walk can be given to a group, such as a thematic group in a vision workshop (Method 20). In such cases, the photo-walk can be combined with group discussions in the field, with the photos used during the follow-up plenary presentation to illustrate the issues to others in a concrete, tangible way. Digital cameras are used so that photos can be presented using a LCD projector.

- A photo-walk is ideally suited for children. Ask them to take a picture of their favourite places, and also of places that they avoid or feel uncomfortable with. Afterwards, they can tell the group exactly why they took the various photos. A photo-walk can also be combined with a photo competition.

What’s needed?

- Sufficient cameras and film
- Pens

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Depends on whether or not cameras must be provided.

Can be combined with:

- Interviews with frequent visitors (Method 11)
- Park event (Method 13)
- Vision workshop (Method 20)
5.7 Idea collectors

There is a wide range of simple ‘tried-and-tested’ techniques that encourage people to express their knowledge and ideas. These are particularly suited to drawing in input from the general public, and are most useful during the initial stage of a participatory process. Specific themes can be selected out of the information gathered, and these can be fed into other methods later, for more in-depth exploration (e.g. in a vision workshop).

Many of these techniques have a low ‘threshold’ that makes it easy for people to become engaged and to participate.

Participants read the suggestions of others, agree or disagree, and build on them.

Canvassing cards

Using attractive, colourful canvassing cards, participants are asked to answer a number of questions designed to identify their opinions and desires about the design and/or management of a greenspace. Strong A4-sized coloured paper is recommended, with individual sheets folded in two along their longest side. A number of questions are printed on the left hand side, with sufficient space after each question to allow people to fill in their answer. On the right half side, paste a Polaroid snapshot of the participant. The cards can then be stuck onto a panel as part of an interactive exhibition set in the window of the local civic centre, etc. A colourful, attractive display will attract the attention of other visitors and passers-by, stimulate discussion and further ideas, and may attract more people along to the next participation event.

What’s needed?

• Enough cards with pre-printed questions
• Writing material
• Polaroid camera and film
• Pasting material, pins, sticky tack

Video diaries

Individual visitors sit on a chair or stool in front of a video camera, and answer a few set questions regarding the greenspace. These questions are written on a board hanging within view of the interviewee. A montage of the various entries collected can create an amusing and fun video that could be played as part of, for example, an interactive exhibition or a park event. This activity is perfect for families.

Example of questions

• Introduce yourself.
• What makes you visit the park?
• What do you like in the park?
• What do you want to be changed?

What’s needed?

• Video camera and an adequate supply of tapes
• Chair or stool
• A board to display questions
Idea tree
A tree serves as an idea gatherer. People are asked to write down their ideas for the management of the greenspace on coloured cards, and to hang these up on a tree adorned with balloons and ribbon.

What’s needed?
- Tree
- Cards
- Balloons
- Ribbon
- Sticky tape
- Writing material

Idea stalls
This method is a simplified version of the drop-in event (Method 3). In the street or, if possible, within the greenspace itself, one or several tables or tents are set up. Passers-by are then encouraged to write down their ideas and desires on pieces of sticky notepaper, and to stick these onto a map, plan or model of the greenspace. They also use pencils to drawing on a paper map their ideas for, e.g. new footpaths and cycle tracks. This technique can also be used in the later stages of a participatory process, for example, in order to prioritise the results of a drop-in event or gauge the opinion on the results of a vision workshop.

What’s needed?
- Copies of maps with a indication of orientation points, entrances, paths, photos of key locations
- Sticky note paper
- Writing material

Tips
The organisers need to be present throughout, to explain the purpose of the idea-gathering event and to listen to the feedback and comments.

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Encompasses a range of relatively cheap methods

Can be combined with:
- Action day (Method 1)
- Drop-in event (Method 3)
- Interactive exhibition (Method 10)
- Park event (Method 13)
- Idea competition (Method 8)
5.8 Idea competition

An open idea competition can stimulate interest and kick-start a creative thinking process amongst users and local people. The competition can be based on a wide range of topics, such as the design of a new park, ideas for new park furniture, a name for a newly opened walking route, or a logo for a newly planted woodland. Entries can be evaluated either by the public or by a mixed jury of professionals and ‘laypeople’. In most of the cases, the winning design provides the starting point for further work by planners and designers. In all cases, the winner and runners-up all receive prizes for their entries. Some sort of certificate or souvenir should also be given to everyone else who entered.

The call for entries to the competition should include the following information:
• name and location of the greenspace (park, woodland, etc.)
• the purpose of the competition
• the prizes to be won
• the format of the applications (size of entry sheet, in drawn or written form, view from which perspective, etc.)
• the rules and procedures of the competition
• age categories, if children are included
• the closing date for entries
• a contact point for further information
• in the case of an exhibition, information on the venue and opening time
• place and time of the prize-giving ceremony

Public scoring

On arrival at the venue where the entries are being displayed, members of the public are give three coloured sticky dots to be stuck next to the exhibited designs. The following score system can be used:

- 1st choice (3 points)
- 2nd choice (2 points)
- 3rd choice (1 point)

At the end of the exhibition, the organising team count the points given to each design. The announcement of the results completes the public scoring.

What’s needed?

• Display panel with information about the purpose of the competition, to let people know what’s expected
• Details of the greenspace itself (plans, (aerial) photos, model, etc.)
• Display panels and pasting material for the submitted entries
• Coloured sticky dots for scoring
**Preparation**
- Establish the competition rules and procedures.
- Put together an attractive invitation calling for entries, and distribute accordingly.
- In case of an exhibition, preparation will include organising a suitable venue and equipment (tables, display stands, etc.), and letting local people know of the event.

**Some variations**
- The sticky dots used for public scoring can be included as part of an attractive invitation to the exhibition.
- During their visit to the exhibition, members of the public can be ‘drawn in’ further into the wider participation process. For example, they could be invited to write down any ideas they have about the greenspace on prepared idea cards (see Method 7).

**Remarks**
- When selecting the require format for entries, consider what is feasible for the non-professional. Also bear in mind what format might suit the possible use of entries after the competition is over, e.g. articles in local newspapers, public exhibitions, material for a website.
- Make the exhibition as accessible as possible. Ideally it should be located on the site itself, or in a highly frequented venue (e.g. local civic centre, shopping centre, library, school hall).
- The more people who are attracted to the exhibition, the less the chance that public scoring will be influenced by the friends of any one applicant.
- A public scoring system enhances the status of the results and the involvement of the public in the project. If a jury is used, make sure it doesn’t become dominated by professionals.
- Seek sponsors from local businesses for the prizes.

**€€€**
Relatively expensive, particularly as it often entails an exhibition

**Can be combined with:**
- Idea collectors (Method 7)
- Interactive exhibition (Method 10)
- Art studio (Method 12)
**5.9 Interactive website**

A website can be used as a broad participative platform, allowing continuous communication between visitors and other interested people, and the manager. In addition, it is a way to engage the broader public, allowing those who cannot actively participate to track the process, the various activities, what's happening with the greenspace, progress made, etc. Using an interactive web page, interested people get the opportunity to contribute feedback, suggestions and opinion directly to the planner or the project centre.

The following are key elements of any interactive website concerning a greenspace.
- A page about sustainable management, good practices, etc.
- A page with reports covering past activities (preferably with photos).
- A page with a calendar of upcoming activities and events.
- As well as the manager, local associations (e.g. nature groups, photo groups, senior citizens, etc.) should also have a regular input on the website. The more diverse the better.
- If a friends groups exists, it should be involved as far as possible in the management of the website. The website can support the activities of the group, as well as attracting new members.
- A forum enabling website visitors to communicate interactively with the manager.
- Links to other relevant websites.
- Tie in any updates of the website with the distribution of newsletters.

**Tips for website design**

1. Start simple, in terms of structure and form. Start with a number of key headlines, each linked to its own page, and build from there.
2. Avoid ‘busy’ and moving backgrounds – they distract from the information. Go for a uniform background that provides a good contrast with the text.
3. In terms of text, use a large font size (10-12 size is usually sufficient), and avoid busy colours, underlining and unnecessary symbols. Keep paragraphs short, use bullet points, and avoid long-winded text.
4. Logos can be in GIF format. Use JPEG format for photos. Test which compression factor to use: gradually compress until the onscreen photo becomes unacceptable, and go back a step. Where needed, ensure that photos become active whenever the cursor moves over them.
5. The same applies to links with other sites. Check these links fully before going online, and check regularly to see that they still exist.
6. The welcome page should be simple, but should invite the visitor to proceed further. Include a number of 'candies', for example, an announcement of an upcoming event.
7. The homepage should include a simple, logically structured index of the pages dealing with the various topics. On each page, make sure to include a link back to the homepage.
8. Bear in mind that website visitors want to scroll information quickly, so keep the pages short. Having to scroll horizontally can be annoying and turns visitors off.
9. Include necessary plug-ins that use software on the visitor’s computer to run video clips, audio clips, etc.
10. Update the pages on a regular basis, so that infrequent visitors can see changes. In this way, the website, and by association, the whole participatory process, gains a dynamic identify.
11. Get rid of irritating pop-ups that send the visitor off automatically to other pages, despite their wishes.
12. Review other similar websites on a regular basis, to get new ideas on format, set-up, navigation, etc.
Tips for the design of an electronic newsletter

- Use a simple but attractive layout.
- The page that people receive in their electronic letterbox should have an introductory paragraph, headlines accompanied by ‘news bites’, and links to the respective pages where the full articles can be found.
- A standard contents overview gives a clear idea of what’s in the newsletter, and allows the reader to become familiar with the overall structure of what’s going on in the project. For example:
  - A message from the manager
  - ‘Hot news’
  - Reports of past activities
  - Agenda
  - Policy news
  - Children’s corner
  - Miscellaneous

- In-depth reports of activities can often be too comprehensive for a newsletter. If so, offer a link to a summary as well as the full version.
- Always use the same sequence in setting out the topics.
- Include contributions from participants as far as possible. These can include articles, photos, poems, stories, etc.
- On the website, include a page where all of the electronic newsletters can be found. This allows new people and others interested in the project to bring themselves up to speed with what happened in the past.
- Send a printed version of the newsletter to interested people who don’t have internet access.
- A newsletter should contain in its printed version a maximum of 5 pages.

Tips

Nowadays, a person who is skilled in computers and web-design can often be found amongst the participants.

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- Can be expensive in cases where it has to be commissioned.
- Time needs to be spent to keep the website continuously updated.
5.10 Interactive exhibition

An interactive exhibition seeks to raise the interest of the general public on a particular project or plan, for example, a design concept for a new park. In an attractive and appealing way, the visitors are informed about the plan, how it was formulated, and about how it will be further developed. Using a variety of techniques, including audio-visual aids, visitors are encouraged to react to the proposals. The latter can be the result of, for example, a vision workshop (Method 20).

- Pay careful attention to the informative aspect. Be fully open, but use the least possible amount of text. As a general rule-of-thumb, panels should be legible from a distance of 2 metres. Avoid technical jargon and abstract language. Professional help in developing the panels is recommended.
- Enhance the exhibition using photos taken by the users themselves (see Method 6), including photo collages made by children (Method 2).
- Given the investment made in creating the exhibition, and the number of people likely to see it on any given day, it is often advisable to run the exhibition over a couple of weeks.
- The entrance should be inviting. The exhibition should also have a presence outside, such as a sign, to encourage people passing by to enter.
- It is important to have enough people from the organising team present. They act as contact points with the visitors, transforming the exhibition from a passive to an interactive event.
- The careful positioning of the information panels and tables manned by members of the organising team facilitates interaction with the visitors.
- In order to provide rapid feedback concerning the reactions of the visitors, the exhibition could be accompanied by a talk café (see Method 15).

Room layout

Visitors are sent in the desired direction using:
- a clear starting point (with a member of the organising team directing);
- numbered panels and tables, at which members of the organising team are available; and
- signposting.
Example layout for the exhibition of a management plan

1. A reception table with information folders on the park or woodland, ‘manned’ by members of the friends group or organising team.
2. A welcome panel setting out what has happened up to now, and the purpose of the exhibition.
3. A panel with a street plan, and coloured sticky dots for people to indicate where they live.
4. General information and photos on good park / woodland management practices.
5. A panel setting out the overall grand vision for the park or woodland, with photos of the current situation, simulations of the desired situation, and sticky notes for the opinions and ideas of the visitors.
6. A table with copies of maps setting out the overall vision, with pencils and sticky notes for people to add their own comments and ideas.
7. A table to gather further ideas, with pencils, suggestion sheets, and an idea box.
8. A panel setting out the next steps in the management and participatory process, including the activities of the friends group. The panel should also ask if people are interested in getting involved (Do they wish to be kept further informed? Would they like to help in a particular initiative? Do they have an interest in joining the friends group? etc.), and if so, to leave their details with a member of the organising team.

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- A considerable investment of time is required in order to prepare, to provide support over several days, and to process the input gathered.
- The cost of materials can vary greatly. Be aware that expensive, ‘glitzy’ exhibitions can create a sense of distrust and suspicion amongst people, and can therefore be counteractive!

Can be combined with:
- Photowalk and photo competition (Method 6)
- Drop-in event (Method 3)
- Park event (Method 13)
5.11 Interviews with frequent visitors

Frequent visitors who are familiar with the park or woodland and interested in cooperating are interviewed about various management issues in order to reveal more in-depth information. The interviews take place on location within the greenspace itself, thereby making the issues discussed and solutions proposed more tangible. Interviews are an excellent way to get a better understanding of ‘why’ people behave, think and act the way they do. They also represent an informal method of participation through which confidence between management and visitors can be strengthened.

- Frequent visitors can be sought out using neighbourhood surveys (Method 4). Additional interviews can be carried out with people who are directly involved in management, including workers, technicians, landscape architects, etc.
- Interviews can also be undertaken with particular user groups, such as those with special needs and interests, in order to better understand their particular requirements or to test management proposals.
- The topics and issues that are dealt with during the interview can be fed in from a previous neighbourhood survey (see Method 4) or a drop-in event (Method 3).
- The walk during which the interview takes place is planned, with a number of fixed questions centred on key locations or features within the park, e.g. the pool, the flower beds, the fountain, a special tree, a playing space, a grove of trees.
- The information gathered from the interview can be fed directly to management, or used to develop an agenda for a subsequent vision workshop.
**Preparation**
- Identify frequent users, via a neighbourhood survey, day-to-day interaction within the park, etc.
- Select key locations or features within the park.
- Draw up a list of opening questions.
- Inform participants before interview if they need to bring appropriate clothing and/or rubber boots.

**What’s needed?**
- Recording equipment
- Camera

**Remarks**
- The interviews are carried out individually or in small groups (maximum of three people). This will allow each person to give his/her opinions in full.
- Interviews can be carried out at different stages of the participatory process, e.g. at the onset (to gain insight into the local perception of the park, to get initial inspiration for management), or later on to test people’s reactions to changes in management practices.

**Tips**
During the interview, take photos of the different places and features referred to by the user. These can help greatly to crystallize the various comments made. The photos can also be displayed alongside the comments as part of an interactive exhibition (see Method 10).

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Time needed to prepare, to conduct the interviews and to ‘process’ the information gathered.

**Can be combined with:**
- Neighbourhood survey (Method 4)
- Photo-walk (Method 6)
5.12 Art studio

An art studio will stimulate people to express their creativity and to develop new skills. Art as a means of participation appeals to many people who would otherwise seldom or never voice their opinions. For people of all ages, including children, participating in an art studio can be a fun and rewarding experience. It also provides tangible results of people’s involvement. Through participation in art, the bond between the greenspace and the visitors can be greatly strengthened.

• The ideas for designs originate from the participants themselves in close collaboration with local artists (sculptors, stone masons, woodcarvers, metalworkers, etc.). Students from art, design and technical schools and colleges can also be involved to give guidance. The experts should keep an eye on the work to make sure that the designs are feasible, both technically and financially.
• A choice is made regarding the designs to be ‘realised’. Also see idea competition (Method 8).
• Within the park or woodland, it should be relatively easy to find an area suitable for use as an open-air art studio.
• Artists create and install the pieces of art, if possible with the help of the participants. Alternatively, and ideally, the participants realise their own designs themselves.
• Whatever the result, it should be celebrated.
Example of an art studio, based on the design by children of wooden signposts for a children's farm

1. Preparation
Seek artists / craftspeople (including students) who are willing to work with children. A preparatory meeting involving the organising team and the artist is held, to decide on the design topic, programme, division of tasks, materials required, etc. Ideally allow a minimum of one organising team member for each group of five children.

2. Attractive invitation
Don’t forget the names of the artist(s) involved.

3. Art studio (1st session)
1.30 pm Introduction
A short explanation about the purpose and the programme of the art studio, followed by a walk through the children's farm to decide where and what type of signposts are required.

2.00 – 4.30 pm Design
Short explanation about the materials. The children start working individually or in small groups, with guidance and advice from the artist. The designs are then labelled and stored.

4. Selection of designs
Also see idea competition (Method 8)

5. Art studio (2nd session)
1.30 pm Introduction
The winning designs are presented, followed by a technical talk about how the designs will be realised into real signposts.

2.00 – 4.30 pm Realisation
The artist, supported by members of the organising team, allows the children as far as possible to realise the design. The children also apply the first layer of sanding and varnishing. Subsequent sanding and varnishing are done later ‘behind the scene’ by the organising team, to save time.

6. Art studio (3rd session)
The completed signposts are installed on location with the help of the children, and a festive launch is held involving the director of the farm, parents, the local press, etc.

Design topics
Examples include gates, fences, mosaics pavements, fountains, flowerbeds, lampposts, signposts, benches, waste bins, wall murals, sculptures and statues.

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• A relatively expensive method, particularly in relation to the professional support and materials required.
• Cost for guidance can be minimised by inviting student artists to get involved.
• The costs of materials can be minimised by using locally sourced material and suppliers, recycling waste material, seeking local sponsorship (e.g. local DIY store), etc.

Can be combined with:
• Idea competition (Method 8)
• Interactive exhibition (Method 10)
• Park event (Method 13)
5.13 Park event

The park event is a fun, festive occasion involving a diverse array of activities. It creates an opportunity for managers and visitors to meet each other in a relax and enjoyable setting, and is a great way to involve the broader public. For many, it can be the first step in the participatory process.

- The organisation of a park event requires considerable organisation, particularly for the first time. Keep a record of all of the organisational details involved (suppliers, budget estimates and quotes, entertainment contacts, material, etc.), as this will help greatly with the organisation of subsequent events.
- It is good idea to talk with the surrounding residents during the planning of the event, to let them know what's being proposed, to inform them of possible disturbances expected on the day (e.g. traffic, parking), and to allow them to have their say.

Tips

- A park event is a great opportunity for a friends group to raise its profile and to attract new members.
- A park event is an opportunity for information and awareness raising on good management practices (via leaflets, treasure hunt, etc.), and for the ‘deployment’ of idea collectors (Method 7).

Checklist for the organisation of a music concert

- Stage (elements to construct the stage, tent, sound and lighting equipment, etc.)
- Programme (contact the artist or booking agent, agree contracts, artist accommodation, etc.)
- Catering (agreement with a drink and food supplier, catering equipment, cutlery, glasses, cups, catering for artists and roadies)
- Furniture (hire tables, chairs, etc.)
- Toilet and wash-up facilities
- Electricity (supply, lightening)
- Arrangements for event set-up and deconstruction
- Budgeting and finance
- Announcement /PR (advertisement, sponsor list)
- Division of tasks amongst the organising team
- Public safety issues

Music fits well with a park event. Munich, Germany.
**Some tips for environmentally-friendly park events**

- Use recyclable drinking cups.
- Avoid driving back and forth with heavy vehicles, to avoid soil compaction.
- Use Fair Trade products.
- Provide sufficient opportunities for waste disposal, including sorted recycling bins.
- Buy products with the least amount of packaging.
- Buy products from local firms and shops.
- Keep an eye out for other opportunities to promote the environment.
- Inform the public about the measures take, to promote green awareness and education.

**Example: ‘Nocturne’ in the town of Ieper, Belgium**

These are guided group walks carried out in the evening time, following waymarked trails that taking in characteristic and atmospheric places throughout the park or woodland. At each location, various performances take place: a piece of theatre, poetry reading, a piece of art, a lighting performance, a dance performance, etc. The Nocturne can be based on a specific theme.

**Example: Tree dressing in England**

This celebration is shared by many cultural traditions across the world, including in England, where it takes place during the first weekend of December. Tree dressing is a popular activity whereby special and characteristic trees are decorated with different materials and ornaments. It is an opportunity to celebrate an aspect of the local natural environment, i.e. the tree, with a knock-on increased awareness of, and sense of responsibility and care towards, the natural environment in general.

Schools can be drawn in to make the ornaments. In addition, artists, craftspeople, story tellers, dancers, nature activists, municipal green and environmental services, lighting experts, local shopkeepers, youth associations, etc. can all lend a helping hand.

**Examples of park events**

- Park concerts, theatre performances, antique and curiosity markets,
- neighbourhood festivals, sports events, ‘Nocturne’ events, tree dressing, live radio programmes, flower and plant shows, fashion shows, a speaker’s corner, ‘Day of the Park’, etc.

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Depends on the activities, but an expensive undertaking in most cases.

**Can be combined with:**
- Neighbourhood survey (Method 4)
- Photo-walk (Method 6)
- Art studio (Method 12)
- Action day (Method 1)
‘Planning for Real’ is a user-friendly method to actively involve people in the design of a particular greenspace, to bring them to a consensus, and to take the first step towards an action plan for realisation. The participants gather around the model of the site to be designed, and get the opportunity to express their ideas in a non-technical and visual manner.

- Central in this method is a large 3-dimensional model built on a basic, large-scale map (e.g. 1:250).
- During the Planning for Real session, the model is placed on a table, and a series of suggestion cards are spread out around it.
- By placing the cards on the model, the participants indicate what they wish will happen, and where (e.g. a playground, parking spaces, toilet, trees, etc.). Problem issues can also be identified (e.g. litter, unsafe places). There are also empty cards on which people can write their own suggestions.
- At the outset, suggestions are proposed on an individual basis. Through subsequent discussion within the group, the cards can be gradually reorganised as a consensus emerges.
- An essential part of the process is prioritising (Method 16). All of the suggestions for actions are written on the cards and organised in a sequence according to priority.
- During the entire process, professionals observe and answer questions, but do not take part actively in shaping the discussion.

Tips
- Involve residents, schoolchildren or art / architect students to build the model. This can be great fun, as well as representing another form of participation.
- Organise a site visit with the participants before the Planning for Real session.
- The material can be adapted according to the topic. For example, pins and strings can be used to mark out desired footpaths.
Programme of a Planning for Real session

1. Introduction (10 minutes), during which the participants gather around the model, and the moderator explains the aims and the process.

2. Participants place individual suggestion cards on the model (30 minutes).

3. The participants discuss the suggestions and rearrange the cards until overall agreement is reached (30 minutes).

4. Participants write down the results on priority cards. These include suggestions and respective locations.

5. Participants prioritise the suggestions by placing the priority cards on a matrix with four separate columns headed ‘Now’, ‘Soon’, ‘Later’ and ‘Possible Actors’ (i.e. who should undertake the action) (30 minutes). See Prioritising (Method 16).

6. A discussion about the next steps closes the session. Working groups are formed to discuss the most important issues further (20 minutes).

Duration 2.5-3 hours. It is possible to split the session into two sessions that deal with ‘suggestions’ and ‘prioritising’ separately.

Remarks
In order for professionals to be able to interpret the results accurately, it is vital that they observe the discussion and take notes throughout.

What’s needed?
Map or aerial photo (1:250)
Material to make the model, e.g. polystyrene, papier-mâché, cocktail sticks or pins, thick and thin cardboard

Expensive method (assistance, moderator, model, etc.), but can be offset if using volunteers

Can be combined with:
Field discussion (Method 17)

‘Planning for Real’® is a Registered trademark of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (UK) www.nifonline.org.uk

At the end, the participants are surprised with a ‘green’ gift.
5.15 Talk café

A talk café is an informal alternative to a conventional hearing. A number of key figures in the decision-making regarding a particular plan gather in a local café and are asked questions by the public. The method is particularly flexible and useful to gain rapid feedback concerning people’s reactions to, e.g. a new draft design plan for a park, or an unexpected situation. The emphasis is on the solving of questions and uncertainties present amongst the broad public.

• A talk café can be organised relatively quickly. Basically all that’s needed is to invite the key people, organise the venue and announce the event.
• Space is made in the café for a small podium and chairs (no tables) for the panel of invited people. The public sits in the rest of the café, gathered around the tables or next to the bar.
• A moderator presents written questions (previously collected, for example, through an interactive exhibition) to the panel, along with questions and reactions from the floor.
• Ensure a relaxed atmosphere and sufficient time for social contact during the break, and afterwards.
Example of a talk café after an exhibition about a plan for a new park

1. Preparation
The organising team studies the written questions and remarks that are collected during an exhibition (the idea box), and summarise these under various headings for the talk café. They then select key people to invite. Preparatory meeting with the moderator (method, programme, division of roles). Practical arrangements with the café-owner.

2. Attractive invitation
A leaflet is handed out in person or posted in through the letterboxes throughout surrounding streets, and displayed in prominent places such as the town hall, bakery, butcher, petrol station, school, etc.

3. Talk café on a Sunday afternoon

3.30 – 4.00 pm
Music, ordering of drinks.

4.00 – 4.45 pm
Moderator presents the panel of local politicians and planners. She/he then reads the various questions and remarks and asks the people in the café to add their own thoughts. A person on the panel is asked to give an explanation.

4.45 – 5.00 pm
A short break with music, during which people have the opportunity to write down additional questions on blank forms.

5.00 – 5.30 pm
The moderator continues the talk café, taking on board additional questions from the floor.

5.30 pm onwards
Talking, with music.

What’s needed?
• A suitable café as close as possible to, or ideally within, the site. A tent can also be erected for the occasion.
• A podium and some chairs for the panel.
• Microphones for the panel.
• Sufficient ‘roving’ mics for questions / reactions from the floor.
• Music (ideally live).

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Relatively cheap

Can be combined with:
Interactive exhibition (Method 10)
5.16 Prioritising

Bringing a ranking or prioritisation in terms of what should happen, and when, can be useful in situations where many different ideas are ‘on the table’ or when opposing opinions exist. Prioritising is preferably made as a group activity, so that a general consensus or agreement concerning the results can be reached. On the other hand, more people can be drawing in by using methods targeting individuals, e.g. community surveys, interactive websites.

- If prioritising at a group level, the results should be translated there and then into the first draft of the action plan. See Planning for Real (Method 14).
- If prioritising on an individual basis, the results are analysed afterwards. The subsequent report then forms the starting point for decision-making or for further discussion.
- In drawing up the possible list of priorities, avoid oversimplifying opinions and ideas, as critical details can be lost. Try to counter this pitfall as much as possible by using a careful formulation of words that best encapsulates the original idea.
- Watching how others score can produce a learning effect, promoting further thinking and discussion, and eventually leading to people reconsidering their particular standpoint. Therefore, provide a mechanism that allows people to change their scoring.

A round of scoring

A round of scoring can bring some order of importance to a large mass of ideas, using a method most people are familiar with. A list is made of all of the ideas collected during a drop-in event, idea gathering, etc. Through a door-to-door survey, people are asked to look down the list and to pick out what they feel are the best ideas. From a list of, say, 50 different ideas or options, everyone can pick up to ten choices. The results are then summed up and a report is made.

After the results are processed, be sure to recognise related ideas that, if taken together, can give a more accurate view of people’s preferences. For example, several ideas relating to various aspects surrounding children may receive a low number of votes individually, and as such could be discounted. However, grouping these ideas together, along with their respective number of votes, could reveal a more widespread support for measures to promote children’s play within the greenspace.

The above method can also be used to test public reaction to different outline plans. This can take place during an interactive exhibition, whereby participants are given three coloured sticky dots to rank their preferred options.
Prioritization actions matrix

This matrix enables the structuring - in a participative and easy-to-understand format - of an outline action plan, based on the questions: is the action of immediate, medium- or long-term priority, and who is going to take the lead? (The finer details regarding additional expertise needed, resources, operational matters, etc. are left for a later stage.) Using proposed actions fed in from a previous exercise (e.g. a Planning for Real session, drop-in event, idea gathering), the priority actions matrix is filled in through a group discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Soon</th>
<th>Later</th>
<th>Who takes the lead?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park regulations</td>
<td>‘Dog toilet’</td>
<td>Dog trail</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove unsafe trees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planting native shrubs</td>
<td>Varnish seats</td>
<td>Friends group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to benefit wildlife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing lighting</td>
<td>Coordinating the tasks</td>
<td>Development and</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at street entrance</td>
<td>of various personnel</td>
<td>implementation of a drainage plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regarding safety and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fence method

This method is an excellent way to reach a majority standpoint within a group where conflicting opinions exist. This method is usually applied after a discussion concerning the relevant topics fails to provide even a tentative consensus.

The process starts with the compiling of a list of the contentious issues. The two extreme views surrounding each issue are written down at opposite ends of a line. A further line is added vertically midway through the first line. Taken together, these represent a graduation between the two opposing views, and a ‘fence’ representing a neutral position.

Participants are then asked (preferably after a subsequent group discussion) to indicate their ‘position’ on the issue by placing a mark or a sticky dot at that point along the line that represents where they stand on the issue. For example, regarding whether or not to admit dogs into the park, a participant can clearly indicate that s/he is strongly opposed to the idea, by placing a mark at the respective end of the line. Alternatively, if s/he doesn’t have any strong views on the matter or understands equally where both parties are coming from, s/he can place the mark in the middle, where it ‘sits on the fence’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cyclists are allowed in the park</th>
<th>No cyclists in the park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Mark distribution" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Mark distribution" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dogs are allowed in the park</th>
<th>No dogs in the park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Mark distribution" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Mark distribution" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remove rhododendron along avenues</th>
<th>Let rhododendron develop freely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Mark distribution" /></td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Mark distribution" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.17 Field discussion

During a discussion carried out on the site itself, problems, opinions and ideas about design and management can be explored in a very tangible way. The manager and participants engage in the discussion on an equal footing, which results in mutual learning. By organising regular field discussions, the bonds between the users and the managers can be strengthened considerably.

- A field discussion requires relatively little preparation. However, an attractive invitation (with a tear-off response slip) is necessary, along with a small programme setting out proposed topics for discussion at particular locations or stops within the woodland or park.
- Keep the number of topics limited (one to five) but still sufficiently diverse to be of broad enough interest for everybody. For continuity, try to hold regular field discussions, and don’t leave too long a gap between subsequent meetings.
- The topics for discussion should be preferably related to short-term decisions or management measures.
- Keep the number of participants limited. If the group is larger than 20, it is better to split it up.

- If possible, provide some coffee and other drinks at the end of the meeting, so that the participants and the manager can continue to talk afterward in a more social setting.
- Afterwards, circulate minutes to each participant as well as to other interested people in the database of addresses.
- The use of recording equipment eases the writing of the minutes.
- Field discussions can also be organised for children (Method 2).
- The manager can also present to the participants issues arising from broader public consultation (Methods 3, 4 and/or 7) but as yet unclear. Such issues can include apparent contradictions, uncertainties, confusion, and also, inspiring ideas.
Examples of a question list for a field discussion surround the theme of ‘accessibility’

- What do you think about the ban on dogs and cyclists?
- Are there too many, enough, or too few entrances in the park?
- How should the surface of the paths look like?
- Should a new walking path be introduced into an area currently unused and with a high wildlife value?
- Is additional control necessary, and how should it be organised?
- What about the joggers?

Preparation
- Programme of topics for discussion.
- Exploring the site and selecting discussion stops.
- In the invitation, remind the participants to wear suitable shoes and clothing.

What’s needed?
- Paper, pencils, clipboards to write on
- A small plan of the park for each participant, with stops marked out
- Recording equipment

Variations - part of a vision workshop
- If the site and weather allow, a vision workshop (Method 20) can involve a field discussion.
- The participants are divided into small groups (approximately six people plus an organiser) to hold a discussion about a particular topic.
- Each group is given a list of questions as guidance and a little map setting out the discussion stops and the route to be followed.
- After the field element, everybody returns to the indoor venue for the next part of the vision workshop (see Method 20 to see what follows).

Remarks
- In field discussions involving the manager, ensure that the discussion is a two-way flow, and isn’t inadvertently dominated by the manager him- or herself.
- Extra visual elements (photos, sketches) at each discussion stop can help initiate the debate.

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Cost involves time and preparing the minutes afterwards.

Can be combined with:
- Photo-walk (Method 6)
- Planning for Real (Method 14)
- Vision workshop (Method 20)
When people express ideas about the management of ‘their’ woodland or park, they like to refer to examples from elsewhere. An excursion is an informal activity whereby the manager and the participants visit another woodland or park. Together, the group can be inspired and form collective reference images. Such an excursion is a learning experience that also strengthens the bond between users and the manager.

- An excursion is easy to organise, particularly where there is a friends group already active or in the process of being established.
- In the invitation, make sure to mention that interested family members or friends of the group are also welcome. This will help to expanding the friends group.
- The woodland or park to be visited can be an excellent example of best management, or perhaps not such a good example. Either way, it will form an invaluable learning opportunity, allowing people to discuss pros and cons.
- A guided tour is recommended where the manager isn’t familiar with the woodland or park being visited.
- An excursion can be a stimulus for people to think ahead regarding possible changes to their own woodland or park.
- Often the suggestion to visit another park or woodland can originate from the participants themselves - be sure to use this opportunity and to organise a visit.
Preparation
• Invitations
• Organisation of transport
• Making the necessary agreements with the woodland or park to be visited

What’s needed?
Transport

Tips
If the excursion isn’t guided, the manager should visit the woodland or park beforehand. This will allow him / her to explore it and to identify contradictions or similarities that can be brought up with the group during the actual excursion.

Remarks
• It is best to organise an excursion after one or more field discussions in the participants’ own woodland or park, so that people can compare the two greenspaces side-by-side.
• An excursion is an excellent activity to organise together with the friends group.
• A social event could be organised with the corresponding friends group of the woodland or park being visited. This will allow the different groups to draw from each other and to establish contacts for future exchanges.

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Cost depends on transport and whether or not a guided visit is necessary.
5.19 Stories of the park

Personal memories and stories passed on down through the years within the local community create a store of reference points from which people draw to interpret their daily living environment and to look forward to their future. In situations where people have built up a certain bond with the park, these stories can provide an insight into the deeper significance the park has for them and their everyday lives. They also represent a valuable source of local information, revealing the history of the park, how local use has changed through the years, various problems that arose in the past, etc. By acknowledging the stories people have to tell, management can identify opportunities to create closer linkage and connection between the park and the local ‘reality’.

- Park stories can be collected through talks, both in and outside the park, and different people can be involved.
- Interviews of older park users by children and young people can revitalise stories from the past, and can produce a powerful learning effect across generations. Also see activities for children (Method 2).
- Interviews in the park provide an insight into places that have a special meaning for people. Visitors can be asked to show places that have a particular significance for them, and to explain why.
- Interviews with people who witnessed the past, or with members of particular user groups (e.g. minority groups, people with special needs) can unearth stories that place the park in an entirely new perspective.
- By publishing a selection (via a newsletter, calendar, book, etc.), the stories themselves can become more widely known amongst users, and in that way, form part of the identity of the park.
What’s needed?
Recording equipment
Camera

Tips
• The collection of stories through personal interviews can be included as part of other methods. For example, during a video diary (see Method 7), people could be asked to give small stories or anecdotes they and their family have about their use of the park.
• Provide illustrations with photos (places in the forest or park), draws by a local artist, children’s drawings, etc.
• Stories about the park or woodland can be used as the basis for a competition (see Method 8).

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The main cost is the publication. However, this can be spread out over time. For example, short stories can be published initially in the local newsletter, and later collated and published in a book format.

Can be combined with:
• Activities for children (Method 12) (children interviewing older members of the community)
• Idea collectors (Method 7) (video diary)
• Photo-walk (Method 6)
• Idea competition (Method 8)
A vision workshop aims to engage stakeholders in a positive discussion during the early stages of planning. The creative input of the participants is central. Work is initially carried out in small discussion groups, in order to promote mutual understanding and to facilitate the flow of ideas. The results are then presented and discussed in plenary. The moderator plays an important role in building consensus and summarising the conclusions.

- A very mixed group is recommended, in order to encompass the different needs and interests involved, and to achieve a rich discussion and creative ‘brainstorming’. A checklist can be of great help in getting the right mix of people.
- Also try to secure as great a diversity as possible within the discussion groups themselves, from ordinary park visitors to wildlife watchers, from residents committee members to city officials, and from young people to elderly members of the community. Such a mix can be ‘preordained’ on the basis of the information gathered beforehand from those wishing to participate. As people enter the venue, they can then be pointed towards a particular group.
- If the topic is very wide, different groups can focus on different themes.
- However, they are only a tool; the interaction between the participants themselves is by far the best stimulant for creating ideas.
- To best facilitate subsequent action, it is crucial that the planners themselves are present and carefully follow the discussion. This will enable them to build up a full understanding of the underlying considerations and the ways in which the participants are thinking.
- Records or minutes, complete with an invitation for people to react, are sent to the participants, and also to all those who were invited.
Example of a vision workshop

- **Reception**
  Participants are welcomed and assigned a table number.

- **Introduction (10 minutes)**
  The moderator welcomes everyone and explains the purpose of the workshop. Each participant introduces him- or herself.

- **Presentation by the planners (20 minutes)**
  The planners provide information about the site and present their own preliminary ideas about the design, using rough sketches and photos.

- **Brainstorming (maximum 60 minutes)**
  After this presentation, the groups gather at their respective tables. With the help of some questions as guidance, the participants in each group engage in discussion. One member of the group keeps a note of all of the proposals made.

- **Break (15 minutes)**

- **Presentation and discussion (15 minutes per group)**
  An appointed individual from each group presents the proposals arising from his or her group. The moderator encourages the discussion and takes notes of the points of consensus.

- **Summary and conclusions (10 minutes)**
  The moderator summarises the discussions and attempts to draw conclusions.

### Preparation
- List of selected participants.
- Attractive invitation with a 'tear-off’ confirmation strip for people to return.
- Lots of telephone calls in the days running up to the event, to encourage people to turn up.
- A preparatory meeting involving members of the organising team, the moderator, etc.

### Room layout
- Round tables have a major advantage in that everyone can see everyone else. If rectangular tables are the only type available, join them together to create as close to a square as possible, again to promote lines of vision.
- Limit the number of participants to a maximum of eight per table. This will ensure that everyone will have enough time to speak.
- Provide a table with all of the materials needed (paper, pens, copies of maps, plans, etc.) in the centre of the room or up against the middle of one of the walls.

### Tips
- A small group of 20-40 people (5-8 per discussion group)
- Duration approximately 2-3 hours

### What’s needed?
- Attendance list
- Flip charts
  (one for the moderator plus one for each group)
- Pencils
- Maps, plans, photos of the site
- Refreshments

### Remarks
A follow-up workshop should be held. During this, the planners present a more detailed vision of the design, within which the output of the first workshop is clearly incorporated. The groups discuss this proposal, and particular themes are explored in greater depth.

### €€€
- Moderator
- Time needed for preparation and reporting

### Can be combined with:
Field discussion (Method 17)
5.21 Friends group

A friends group is a loose and open network of people who, because of their personal interest, engage themselves in the design and management of a particular woodland or park. A friends group provides a sense of continuity in a long-term process of involvement. A culture of cooperation is built up step-by-step, both within the group itself, and between the group and the manager. The group constitutes as broad an array of people as possible, so that different interests come to the fore and networking is encouraged.

• The idea of establishing a friends group can be proposed by the initiator during a workshop (see Method 5), following which the group is established during an inaugural meeting.
• During the inaugural meeting of the group, it is useful to get outline agreement regarding the general purpose and responsibilities of the group, financing, the frequency and format of meetings, etc., along with the choice of name for the group. While all of these details can evolve further over time, reaching some sort of outline agreement at the start will help forge the group’s identity at an early stage.
• A friends group can play a leading role in the organisation of participative events and other actions on the ground.
• Keep the group open - it cannot become a ‘closed shop’ made up of a tight knot of members. At every opportunity (for example, in the minutes), stress that new members are always welcome.
• Initially the organisation is often very spontaneous. After time, there will be a need for formal rules and procedures, and eventually, some sort of legal status.
Example scenario of an inaugural meeting of a friends group

Introduction (15 minutes)
The moderator welcomes the participants and outlines the purpose and the programme of the meeting.
Each participant introduces him- or herself.
An initiator or one of the organising team sets out the draft agenda of the meeting:
• What are the substantial aspects the group is going to focus on?
• Can the meeting come up with a suitable name for the group?
• What are people’s initial thoughts regarding how the group should operate?

Discussion in small groups (maximum 45 minutes)
5-10 persons within each group, with a member of the organising team taking notes.

Break (15 minutes)
Refreshments and finger food

Plenary presentations and discussion (maximum 45 minutes)
A representative from each group presents that group’s views and ideas on each point on the agenda.
The moderator takes notes on a flipchart or blackboard.
The moderator leads the plenary discussion to reach consensus.

Summary and conclusion (10 minutes)
What’s to be done, and when and where the next meeting will take place.
The meeting should take approximately 2 hours to complete. Ideally, the number of people involved shouldn’t exceed 30.

Cost largely associated with the starting phase (publicity, reporting, moderator). Afterwards, most of the tasks can be divided amongst the group itself. Later, the group can also collect funds by itself to carry out activities.
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