



Urban green space qualities reframed toward a public value management paradigm: The case of the Nordic Green Space Award

Andrej Christian Lindholm*, Cecil C. Konijnendijk van den Bosch, Christian Philip Kjøller, Sid Sullivan, Anders Kristoffersson, Hanna Fors, Kjell Nilsson

Aalborg University, Department of Political Science, Fibigerstræde 1, Room 32, DK-9220 Aalborg East, Denmark

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 December 2013
Received in revised form 12 October 2015
Accepted 13 April 2016
Available online 22 April 2016

Keywords:

Innovation
Nordic countries
Public parks
Quality assessment

ABSTRACT

The change toward a public value management (PVM) paradigm in the public sector has challenged urban green space managers to rethink how they define and assess their services. In the Nordic countries, the challenge has resulted in the development of the Nordic Green Space Award (NSGA), as a new shared standard. This article reviews the NSGA scheme and its development. The development of the scheme embodies a methodology for how the question of 'what makes for a good urban green space' collectively can be addressed within a particular regional context. The resulting scheme relies on 'structure and general aspects', 'functionality and experience', and 'management and organisation', as three principal themes and provides an easily manageable, unified and affordable approach to assessment of a variety of urban green spaces. Conceptually, the scheme resembles other comparable assessment schemes; however, its credibility rests on its regional grounding in the Nordic context.

© 2016 Elsevier GmbH. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

A central question in contemporary urban green space management is: "What makes for a good urban green space?" In the urbanization era, the qualities which defined a good park or other type of public green space have customarily been associated with provision of ample recreational opportunities and an improved (healthy) environment for urban dwellers (Conway, 1991; Sandström, 2002; Zieleniec, 2010). In addition to these 'traditional' qualities, contemporary green space planners and managers also need to accommodate a wider range of urban green space qualities that are valued by local communities, politicians or society more generally, e.g., those related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, promoting city attractiveness and competitiveness, or public health agendas and outdoor education (Walker, 2004; CABE Space, 2004b; Konijnendijk et al., 2013), as well as considering parks and green spaces as essential parts of larger green infrastructures (Sandström, 2002; Tzoulas et al., 2007).

Answers to the central question, thus, have changed over time regarding which qualities of urban green spaces are valued within a broader social-cultural and environmental context. Walker (2004)

has framed the change in understanding as a 'paradigmatic change' away from a 'traditional' management focus on maintaining existing green and recreational infrastructure toward a 'new public value' (NPV) focus that includes a wider range of services and functions that urban green spaces are required – or can be required – to deliver. Most planners and managers would probably argue that they can provide green spaces of high quality and great public value given sufficient funding for investments and subsequent management. The reality and challenge for most 21st century green space managers, however, is to prioritise and ensure an effective provision of 'good green space' under resource constraints, weak political support and increasing demands for satisfying more or less conflicting demands from various user groups (Randrup and Persson, 2009; Dempsey et al., 2014). Moreover, what today comprises a 'good' urban green space is up for continued debates and relates to discussions and tensions between professionals, politicians and the public (Lindholm et al., 2015a). In an applied managerial or planning perspective a central challenge is to recognise how the important and valued characteristics of urban green spaces, i.e. qualities, can be specified, assessed and then delivered on site in order to know whether green space management is on the right track (Lindholm et al., 2013, 2015c; Smith et al., 2014; Greenspace Scotland, 2008).

In this paper we investigate those challenges based on a study of a collaboratively developed scheme for assessment and promotion of urban green space qualities in the Nordic countries. The scheme, the 'Nordic Green Space Award' (NSGA), emerged from a shared

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: acl@dps.aau.dk, christianlindholm@gmail.com (A.C. Lindholm).

interest among key stakeholders in Sweden, Denmark and Norway in providing a practically viable solution to the managerial needs for serviceable solutions to the fundamental question: “*What makes for a good urban green space*”? The resulting methodology, developed and piloted during the period 2009–2012 and then implemented more broadly since 2013, combines both institutional and procedural aspects, such as legitimisation, ownership and acceptance within the organisational field of public green space management, and operational and functional aspects, such as quality criteria, assessment, promotion, funding and administration.

The paper presents, analyses and discusses the contributions to urban green space management by the NGSAs and its underlying methodology, in terms of how ‘a good urban green space’ can be specified and subsequently assessed with a viable and practically applicable methodology. In perspective, our narrative on the development of the NGSAs scheme and its subsequent adoption is a case for, and a contribution to, understanding broader developments within urban green space management as well as public management more generally. We consider the NGSAs experience of interest to professionals, authorities, academics and users in Nordic and other countries given the need to deal with identification, development, recognition, legitimacy, assessment and management of urban green space qualities.

The materials that underpin this article were generated as part of development of the NGSAs scheme in the period 2009–2012 and its subsequent implementation. Materials include project documents, trade journal articles, working papers and reviews, meeting agendas and minutes, workshop presentations, final reports, personal communications with NGSAs participants and representatives of the wider Nordic green space sector, as well as personal notes and observations. These materials were used for providing narrative about the NGSAs and its ability to transform the concept of quality for urban green space management in the Nordic countries within broader shifts in public policies. The section on the ‘The challenge to rethink quality’ describes the broader need for rethinking and specifying quality as a concept in urban green space management as well as articulating what are the perceived difficulties in the development of new thinking on quality in the NGSAs. The section ‘Development of a new perspective on quality’ introduces the methodology used for developing the NGSAs scheme. In the section on the ‘NGSAs scheme’, the criteria and operation of the NGSAs scheme are presented, as is a brief overview of the subsequent implementation of the scheme in the Nordic countries (in the period 2013–2014). Finally, the merits of the NGSAs scheme are compared and qualified, set against the general challenge of rethinking quality in the context perspective of changes in reform orientation, other assessment schemes applied in urban green space management as well as against the scientific approaches for evaluation.

2. The challenge to rethink quality in urban green space management

2.1. Quality in the era of new public management

The development and operationalisation of the concept of ‘quality’ to support effective management practice have been a key ingredient in reforms and change of urban green space management in the Nordic countries from the late 1980s onward (Hansson and Knutsson, 1991; Lindholst, 2008; Nuppenau, 2009; Lindholst et al., 2015a). The quality concept has in particular been adopted and implemented as ‘standards’ for maintenance operations by sector professionals who were increasingly faced with challenges related to competitive tendering and contracting out, budget pressures and cost cuts, and demands for improvement of overall

effectiveness. These challenges were key in generic new public management (NPM) reforms (Hood, 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995) as well as their implementation in urban green space management in the Nordic countries (Randrup and Persson, 2009). By addressing the challenges from NPM-oriented reforms, quality has become conceptualised through quantifiable technical standards rooted in a horticultural/environmental knowledge base (Lindholst et al., 2015a) – or what from a generic perspective on quality (Reeves and Bednar, 1994) can be seen as an expression of a ‘compliance-to-specification’ approach. Fig. 1 provides an example from Denmark of how this approach to operationalising quality is conceptualised for maintenance purposes.

In Sweden, the first national quality standard for maintenance operations in urban green spaces was introduced in 1989 by the publication of the ‘Maintenance manual for outdoor environments’ (Persson, 1989). The standard was subsequently developed and revised in the ‘Maintenance manual 98’ (Persson, 1998). The revised standard from 1998 subsequently formed the basis for the development of maintenance standards for different types of green spaces such as those in and around cemeteries (Andersson et al., 2004) and housing areas (Persson et al., 2009). In Denmark, the first national quality standard was introduced in 1998 by the publication of the ‘Quality specification for urban green spaces’ (Juul et al., 1998). Revisions based on practical experiences has later been amended (Kjøller and Kristoffersen, 2015) as well as the standard has been adopted for maintenance of cemeteries (Guldager et al., 2010). Norway did not witness the same level of formalisation of quality standards; however, similar standards are used in many Norwegian municipalities (Lindholst et al., 2015b). The impact of the widespread adoption of these standards has framed the sector’s shared understanding of ‘quality’ as synonymous with a ‘compliance-to-specification’ methodology for maintenance operations, such as grass cutting or tree pruning, and ‘green’ elements, such as grass surfaces or trees (Lindholst et al., 2015a). The focus on effectiveness and cost-savings in management have furthermore resulted in a widespread ‘operational myopia to other factors’ with little emphasis on formulation and implementation of operational policies and strategies that address the wider functionality and contributions of urban green spaces (Randrup and Persson, 2009).

2.2. Quality in the era of public value management

Throughout the 2000s, public reforms have complemented the NPM orientation with a public value management (PVM) orientation (Moore, 1995; Stoker, 2006; Alford and Hughes, 2008) – a change that is echoed within urban green space management (Walker, 2004; Wolf, 2004; Randrup and Persson, 2009; Dempsey et al., 2014). From the perspective of the PVM orientation, urban green space managers are confronted with a new set of challenges regarding provision of urban green space services. PVM requires managers to provide services, not according to pre-defined standards decided by politically elected representatives, as prescribed by traditional NPM doctrines, but through deliberative and inclusive searches for the inherent economic and societal values that can be provided for a range of more or less well-defined stakeholders. The challenge of PVM implies deliberation in vertical and horizontal networks and blurs the managerial norms and roles as they have been previously established in NPM. Instead of a ‘top-down’ orientation, managers are now called for to orientate themselves ‘outward’ and ‘upward’ in the quest for defining and providing services of public value through networked governance. According to Moore (1995) the challenge requires management to develop organisational strategies, creating policies, engage in partnerships, cross-sectoral collaborations and community involvement as well as a continuous search for alternative sources of funding. The shifts in the role of green space management include, for example, a shift

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6549658>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6549658>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)