

# Science for Environment Policy

## Approaches to park management influence attitudes towards nature

**Green spaces like urban parks** can counteract the loss of plant and animal species caused by urbanisation. For many city dwellers, parks provide most of their experiences of natural spaces. Researchers have compared different methods of park management in Paris and Berlin, and assessed how they influence citizens' attitudes towards nature.

**Increasing urbanisation is a threat to biodiversity**, by destroying or fragmenting habitats for instance. To counteract the loss of biodiversity, city planners can incorporate **green spaces** such as parks, where urban fauna and flora can flourish. Local authorities can encourage citizens to support urban wildlife explicitly through official communication (e.g. media, poster campaigns) and implicitly (e.g. park design, education, management). These methods shape the use and appearance of parks, and therefore people's expectations of urban green spaces.

In this study, researchers investigated how park management differs between Paris and Berlin, two European metropolises of similar climate. They also assessed differences in public attitudes towards **urban nature**.

The researchers selected six parks in Paris and seven in Berlin, and assessed the size and content (such as hedges, flowerbeds, meadows and areas for dogs) of each. To assess park management goals and strategies, they interviewed seven park managers in Berlin, and one manager in Paris where management of all parks and gardens is centralised. Managers were asked about measures used (such as the pruning of trees, fertilisers, pond clearing and security guards), objectives, and about existing public involvement such as communication or education schemes.

Park managers in each city reported similar objectives — to preserve urban biodiversity while raising public awareness, and there were few differences in the design and content of parks between the two cities.

However, each city implemented park management objectives differently. In Paris, urban wildlife is preserved by physically separating human users from areas of park land, using physical barriers or regulations. This is coupled with a system of teaching and communication, designed to raise awareness of urban wildlife issues. Local authorities emphasise teaching people to observe, but not disturb, urban nature. By contrast, Berlin allows city dwellers more social and cultural freedom in use of park space, and strongly encourages them to be involved in decision making processes for park care and management. Naturalist associations are permitted to conduct environment-themed education and communication activities.

The researchers also gathered data from 25 park users in Berlin and 37 park users in Paris, using a questionnaire. All participants were members of neighbourhood councils and therefore likely to be committed to the planning of urban spaces. The questionnaire assessed four different visions of nature identified in environmental philosophy: (1) nature to be contained (mastery over nature), (2) nature as commodity and ornament (objectification), (3) nature to be safeguarded (stewardship) and (4) up close with nature (oneness with nature).

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*(continued)*

The questionnaire showed both Paris and Berlin park users had similar attitudes towards nature, with only one significant difference. Paris' park users were more likely to view nature as something to be contained or 'mastered'. The researchers suggest this could be due to the 'exclusive' methods used in Parisian park management. In contrast, the weaker control attitude in Berlin may be the result of associating the generally pleasant park experience with a more unmanaged-like landscape within the parks, as well as of a stronger identification through involvement with these nature spaces.

The researchers predict that the attitude that nature is to be mastered would undermine acceptance of schemes to encourage urban wildlife. For example, allowing uncontrolled growth of natural vegetation in urban green spaces, which is a strategy that boosts biodiversity and is used in both Berlin and Paris, may be perceived as an undesirable lack of control. Other research indicates that direct personal experiences of nature are more likely to change public behaviour than communication strategies based only on information.

