

Valuing Parks and their Communities: Workshop Report



A workshop on community engagement and everyday participation in parks

12:00 – 3.30 pm Wednesday 22 March 2017, The Study Centre, The Whitworth & Whitworth Park

The Understanding Everyday Participation project (UEP) is working to safeguard public parks. The importance of public parks, how we use them and how we manage them, was at the centre of the event *Valuing Parks and their Communities*, hosted by UEP and The Whitworth.

During the day, representatives from Manchester City Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, community groups and the National Trust discussed the values and practices of community engagement in public parks. They considered recent University of Manchester research and the work of cultural institutions and community groups. Issues concerning the competing demands and inequalities of access amongst different user groups were also explored.

Francine Hayfron (The Whitworth Cultural Park Keeper) led a walk through Whitworth Park, highlighting the 'Art Garden' and the community archaeology project that investigated the history of the park. She highlighted the importance of working in partnership with resident stakeholders and organisations, as well as focusing on how outdoor activities contribute to the health and wellbeing agenda.

During the afternoon participants discussed the co-production of a guide to good practice to inform community engagement and sustainable management models for public parks.

That's Manchester TV reported on the event; their report is available on [YouTube](#).



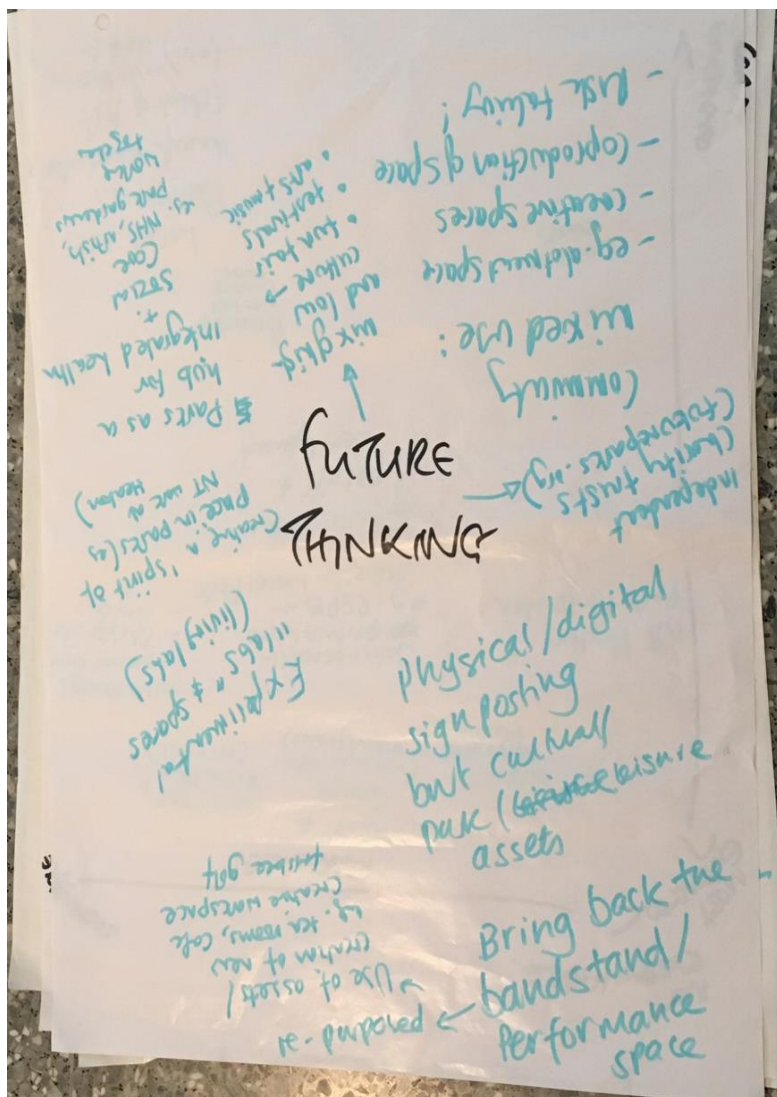
Valuing Parks and their Communities was successful in:

- sharing research evidence and good practice guidance to support joint work between cultural institutions, parks and outdoor spaces and their communities of interest;
- stimulating discussion concerning the recommendations of the recent CLG Select Committee on the *Future of Public Parks* and of parks strategies in Greater Manchester;
- exploring sustainable models for future joint-working and community engagement in parks.

Activity is ongoing. Since March, planning with The Whitworth for a co-produced good practice guide and case study has continued. Meetings have taken place with the Clore Leadership Programme and the Manchester International Festival (MIF) to discuss implications for the MIF participatory programme; as well as Manchester City Council library, sports and leisure officers, to consider use of research findings in a new sports strategy consultation. In addition, there are arrangements in place for discussions with the parks, playgrounds and open spaces team at Manchester City Council and UEP will be contributing to the Department for Communities and Local Government consultation *Running free: consultation on preserving the free use of public parks*.

If you are interested in getting involved in our work on parks please do not hesitate to contact UEP's parks lead Abigail Gilmore Abigail.Gilmore@manchester.ac.uk or Charlene Linton the project's External Relations & Research Impact Officer charlene.linton@manchester.ac.uk

You can read Abigail Gilmore's policy blog, [The Space to Thrive: Public parks and everyday participation](#) and Research Briefing, [The Value of Public Parks and their Communities](#), via the [Understanding Everyday Participation](#) project website.



Selected participant feedback on the *Valuing Parks and their Communities* workshop:

"I hadn't realised how many different groups engage with parks"

"Now very keen to see if some good ideas can be taken forward"

"Good to have such a diverse group of organisations represented"

"Endorsed current thinking rather than gaining new understanding"

"Vital for older people to be considered when managing parks – not just children and families"

UEP is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of their Connected Communities programme with additional support from Creative Scotland. The project involves an interdisciplinary team of researchers based at the Universities of Manchester, Leicester, Exeter and Loughborough.

Professor Andrew Miles is the UEP Principal Investigator, and can be contacted at andrew.miles@manchester.ac.uk

Website: www.everydayparticipation.org

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Report produced by Abigail Gilmore with Charlene Linton and Sarah Feinstein, May 2017



The University of Manchester



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



UNDERSTANDING EVERYDAY PARTICIPATION
ARTICULATING CULTURAL VALUES

Appendix

Valuing Parks and their Communities - Workshop notes produced by Sarah Feinstein

Venue:

Study Centre, The Whitworth, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M15 6ER

Time: 12:00-3.30pm

Agenda:

12-12.30 Lunch and networking

12:30 Welcome - Abigail Gilmore

Locally, what kinds of practices and resources can make public parks sustainable?

12.30 -1.30 Communities and cultural engagement in the great outdoors: lightning talks from researcher-practitioners working in parks and green spaces

Abigail Gilmore, UEP, The University of Manchester, 'Introduction to the aims of the event and background to Understanding Everyday Participation':

- 5-year research mixed methods AHRC research project Understanding Everyday Participation - Articulating Cultural Values
- Five areas: histories, reanalysis of survey data, cultural ecosystems, application projects, research-policy, practice nexus
- Parks have emerged as an important theme in UEP - highly important resources
- Case Study: Cheetham Park
- Approach was to use creative practice that can be used for engagement with community projects
- Worked with Jewish Museum and artists; include craft clubs, choirs, celebration of 130 years of park
- Initial analysis of project was that it wasn't sustainable in that it wasn't taken up by local community
- Public park value is realised through participation and also their existence as potential value
- Parks have private benefits for individuals as well as community, marker of 'good place to live'
- Inequalities of access to parks through physical location but also through engagement with social groups that exclude other social groups (i.e. teenagers, etc.)
- Strong expectation that local authorities should manage public parks and support access of different user groups

Varina Delrieu, UEP, University of Leicester, 'Understanding everyday participation in parks through asset and value mapping':

- Explore context of everyday participation within context of place-space through case studies including Manchester, Gateshead and Aberdeen

- Attempt to find qualitative measure to assess use-value, look at sports centres and libraries membership data
- One variable was relative asset attractiveness and trip chaining, was selection relative to home/work location or something else. One factor that became important was proximity to other everyday spaces such as schools, supermarkets, health centre
- 75% of users travel less than 2km to sport centres and libraries
- Case study also integrated qualitative measure asking people 'where are places you like to go'; visiting friends and family most frequently mentioned
- Nearly 16% of respondents mentioned a park as somewhere they like to visit in the area
- Several respondents mentioned negative feelings about anti-social behaviour of teenagers

Virginia Tandy, Independent Researcher and PhD Candidate, 'The history of heritage funding for public parks':

- Why are parks considered to be heritage? 19th century British invention to pacify and educated urban poor, often planned by those who designed the settings for country houses.
- Parks were in decline by the late 20th century as a consequence of the low status of parks staff and Tory policies such as Compulsory Competitive Tendering, which contracted parks management out of local councils
- The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) decided to prioritise parks 'the unloved bastard of the great heritage landscape' (Lambert, 2015, p.4) in 1996. Funding popular, everyday heritage, was seen as a new direction for the lottery distributor. While only 5% of annual spend, HLF grants for parks have the highest public awareness - and parks are used by the widest range of people of any heritage sites
- Over the last 20 years, the HLF has funded 800 of the UK 27,000 parks. Originally titled Urban Parks Programme, the grants scheme has now developed into the Parks for People Programme reflecting the shift from a major focus on repairing and restoring infrastructure to a more people centred approach to heritage, encouraging public engagement.
- Parks are a non-statutory local authority service, and despite being the most used public service after hospitals and GPs, (HLF, State of Public Parks report, 2014), in the austerity of the 2010s they have been subject to cuts. The gains made with HLF funds are now at risk.
- The 2016/17 select committee inquiry into parks had few solutions, but commented 'if the value of parks and their potential contribution is not realised, the consequences could be severe' (DCLG 2017, p. 65)

Elaine Bates, Manchester Museum: 'Valuing Nature through the Museum: working with children and families':

- Can natural history collections support a connection to nature?
- Small research study focusing on development of nature discovery gallery for under 5's and families; context of study was decline in urban green spaces, interest in target group (under 5s), impact of not having direct experience with nature for childhood development, parental interaction and exposure to nature as child will promote interest later in life
- The Biophilia hypothesis Stephen Kellert (2005)
- Indicators of nature connection in adulthood, positive emotional responses to nature and parental interaction (Cheng and Munro 2012, Ernst and Treuner 2011, Kellert 2005)
- Research design used observation and interviews
- The design of discovery galleries built on research findings; opportunity to explore both what they have seen in their daily life, read in children books and imagined space; support parental exchange
- Planned nature discovery space outside of museum; play activities in partnership with Hulme garden centre, RSPV, Lancashire wildlife trust, owl sanctuary Groundwork; linking to parks and green spaces, green space as part of new capital redevelopment

Gemma Gibb, Wild Rumpus, 'Engaging Families in and through Outdoor Arts':

- Est 2010 responding to gap of offer for outdoor activities for whole families
- Outdoor art sector seems to attract more diverse audiences
- Wild Rumpus has noted a huge demand for outdoor art targeted at families
- A lot of festivals that had previously targeted adult audiences have expanded programming to target family audience
- Most engagement online (i.e. Cultural Tourist) has been outdoor art events targeted at families
- Wild Rumpus has found equal interest in large spectacles and 'small moments of wonder'
- Positive strategy has been to create pre-event online/digital material as it makes them more likely to attend, example: podcasts, back stories, instructions for participation ('dress as one of six animal tribes'); this also responds to adults' anxiety of what to expect and how to participate
- Repeat visits to spaces post-event also notable
- Outdoor Arts Audiences reaching a more diverse audience than any other single art form: <http://www.isanuk.org/advocacy/facts-figures>
- Accessibility: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2015/nov/24/five-ways-connect-with-disabled-audiences-festival-tips>; <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/accesstartonline>

1.30-2.00 Tour of Whitworth Park and Art Garden, Francine Hayfron, Cultural Park Keeper:

- Idea to bring the outside in and inside out
- 'Art Garden' off of school studio – floor to ceiling doors can open but also even closed can visually engage with park
- Friends of Whitworth Park important partner in implementing activities with resident stakeholders and community groups, as well as for sustainable care and maintenance of park
- Community Archaeology project run in partnership with Manchester Museum and University of Manchester was an example of successful project, as it worked with multiple stakeholder groups, engaged participants in uncovering local history and created new collections
- Hayfron argues that Whitworth always work in partnership with resident stakeholders and other organizations to develop and deliver programming
- Hayfron states Whitworth constructs activities and programmes that support and contribute to the health and wellbeing agenda

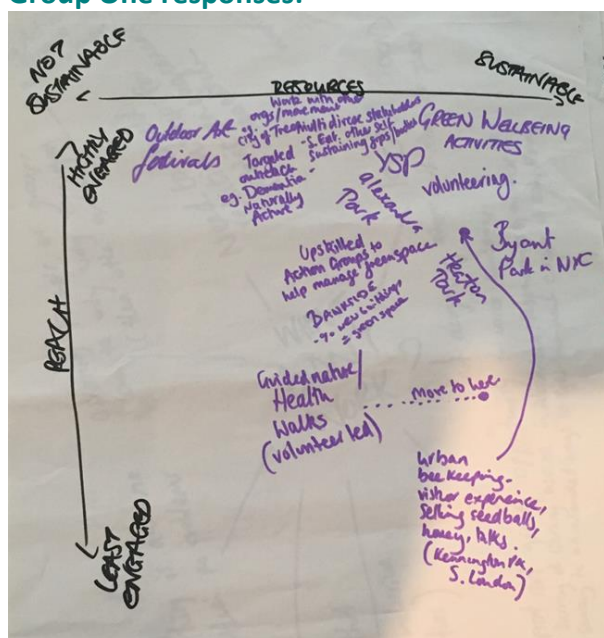
2.00 Refreshments refresh



2.15-3.15 Workshop activity, led by Esme Ward, The Whitworth/Heritage Lottery Fund

How can cultural activities and joint working with cultural institutions improve equality of access and support sustainable park strategies and business models? Which community and cultural engagement practices work (and which don't)? How can current models for sustainable development and community engagement of parks be improved? What are the leadership models for public parks?

Group One responses:

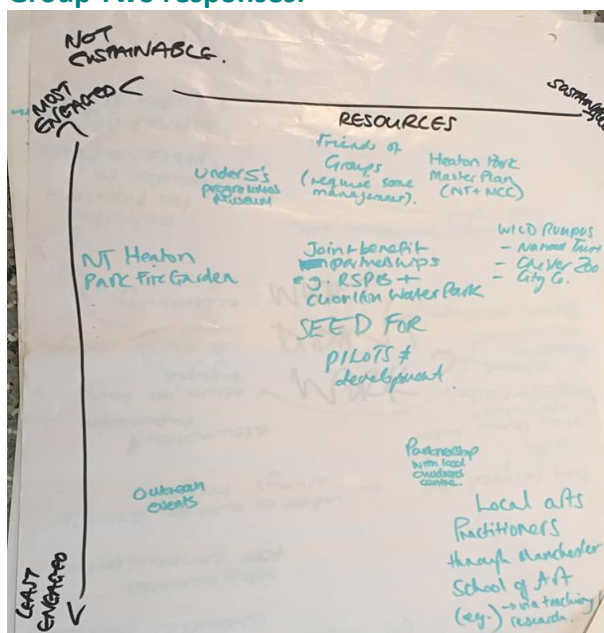


- What doesn't work: not giving space to raise current concerns in research; assuming 'friends of park' best model for engagement (rather than action groups); not having space to discuss critical failures ('everything is awesome'); lack of continuity with

projects (i.e. not knowing history of activity and projects that have taken place so can initiate a project that has not worked in past); need to build relationships for public engagement research; locked doors; devaluation of horticulture skills; assuming that people are inclusive of different communities

- Graph of Sustainability vs Engagement: see attachment
- Future Thinking: a city forest park the size of Central Park (in planning stages by City of Trees and Factory Commission); offer social contract funding for parks; central leadership coordination for parks and green spaces; private sector investment; MIF model for sponsorship schemes for parks; national urban parks; spend future airport dividends on parks; create a participatory budgeting programme for parks investment

Group Two responses:



- What doesn't work: assumptions and expectations; adults not being engaged; not having enough support; not providing enough accessibility;

indoor to outdoor doesn't always translate; activities too popular and harder to 'police' outside; different attitude and experience to open spaces; not enough consultation with local community; lack of engagement of parents (on mobile phone, dumped kids and went shopping, critical of activities – 'they threw worms everywhere', 'they painted the slide'); not enough tents or indoor provision; lack of wet weather planning; setting

- *Graph of Sustainability vs Engagement*: see attachment
- *Future Thinking*: physical/digital signposting; built cultural/park/leisure assets; bring back the bandstand for repurposed performance space; use of assets/creation of new assets for earned income (e.g. tea rooms, café, creative workspace); experimental

'labs' and spaces (living labs); create a 'spirit of place' in parks (e.g. NT work at Heaton); parks as a hub for integrated health and social change (e.g. NHS + Whitworth park gardens working together); mix of high and low culture (e.g. funfairs, festivals, arts and music); community mixed use space (e.g. allotment space, creative spaces, co-production of space, more risk taking!); independent charity trusts

[illegible]

maintenance regimes or different
resource requirements to manage;
communicating in one voice

- *Graph of Sustainability vs Engagement*: see attachment
- *Future Thinking*: new governance models; local ownership and management; free Wi-Fi; ecological public health; contemporary bandstand/band stages; high-line; well-designed fitness trails (not outdoor gyms); medicinal plants area; children being board members for parks; citizen science programmes; spaces for flexible work environment; Wi-Fi interactive interpretation; dedicated dog areas; outdoor classes; bike hire schemes; as part of prescription from doctors/health offer; linked green space to parks/impact corridors; outdoor cinema; spaces to support skills or micro-businesses (e.g. cooperative woodlands); outdoor classrooms – parks as curriculum; tree top walks; pop up seasonal cafes; natural play areas/tree houses; great signage explaining local wildlife

- *What doesn't work:* raising expectations of the community without the resource to deliver initial ideas/concepts; doing things to people (not with them); lack of interpretation; not managing expectations; infrastructure that needs constant updating/upgrading (e.g. poster cases); attempting to run events with community leadership that alienates other members of the community; tepees; not anticipating the different

The diagram is a conceptual model for resource management, organized into a 2x2 matrix based on two axes:

- Vertical Axis (Left):**
 - Top: **NOT ESTIMABLE**
 - Bottom: **ESTIMABLE**
- Horizontal Axis (Top):**
 - Left: **NOT SELECTED**
 - Right: **SELECTED**

The central horizontal line is labeled **RESOURCES**. The vertical line is labeled **BATCH**.

The four quadrants are defined by these axes and contain the following elements:

- Top-Left (NOT ESTIMABLE, NOT SELECTED):**
 - Seasonal Bedding Plants**
- Top-Right (NOT ESTIMABLE, SELECTED):**
 - PLAY EQUIPMENT** (with a note: "but... installation + repair + upkeep")
 - BENCHES** (with a note: "ready to go... size of rare + encourages engagement")
 - Planting (Chips)** (with a note: "most + motivation")
- Bottom-Left (ESTIMABLE, NOT SELECTED):**
 - VOLUNTEERS** (with notes: "and leaders figure out... professional support... eg. 10:1 ratio for 1 volunteer")
 - TESTS** (with notes: "not visible... not core")
- Bottom-Right (ESTIMABLE, SELECTED):**
 - CHARITABLE TRUSTS** (with notes: "partner with local... stimulate... partnership / awarded ownership")

Arrows indicate relationships and flows between these categories, such as from "PLAY EQUIPMENT" to "BENCHES" and from "BENCHES" to "Planting (Chips)".

- formal avenues and have big social impact (e.g. Lightoaks Park)
- *Graph of Sustainability vs Engagement*: see attachment
- *Future Thinking*: HLF as key funder – revenue funding not just capital/restoration funding; tax incentive for charitable donation; loan schemes (e.g. picnic blankets, games); political investment ready; shed for volunteers to keep tools and green waste removal; income generation (e.g. car parking, pitches, ice-cream, bowling, tennis tents, mini or temporary park rental to raise awareness and funds, bike hire and learn to ride classes); local authority budgets review and rethink; corporate tax explicit costs and direct benefit; cultural ambassadors for parks; park keepers; park army (alternative to park run); national parks service; long-term unemployed schemes; partner with environmental activists; reverse social engineering; café and loos; workspace; Wi Fi; specialist landscape and parks grounds work and gardens; job creation schemes for parks; chargeable family led events (e.g. den building, teddy picnics, social sports events, seaside in the city, funfair events/bouncy castle, fireworks)

Esme Ward led delegate groups in a final discussion on future thinking. Key themes included income generation; den-building schemes; pop-up activities; park activism; infrastructure improvements (sign-making) to guide visits; natural play areas; different kind of investment; partnership models; sustainable resources; local engagement by using local practitioners and spectacle events; seed funding for pilots for risk-taking; co-production for creative work space; destination café/tea rooms to fund park; bring back bandstand as creative space; MIF model for partnerships; City of Trees and investment; re-imagining sustainability (i.e. private sector or rich benefactors, no more government support in future); social enterprise models and membership schemes.