

Interaction within Park Management. On Management Styles and Views of Urban Biodiversity in Three Swedish Park Management Organisations

Summary of thesis

There is currently a lack of knowledge on interaction and communication within Swedish park management organisations. There are also uncertainties about motivational factors and views on management and maintenance in park management. In addition there are varying views among park managers on the concept of biodiversity in an urban context.

The objective of the thesis is to contribute to an increased knowledge on work within Swedish park management organisations. To examine the complex reality that daily work in park management organisations entails, the following research questions were addressed: What is work like within Swedish park management organisations with regard to interactions between groundsmen and officials? How is urban biodiversity perceived by park managers (including groundsmen and officials) in relation to maintenance?

The park management organisations within three municipalities of varying sizes (10000–500000 inhabitants) were studied in depth with reference to work at the tactical and operational levels. The main focus was on interactions between groundsmen and officials regarding maintenance and views on urban biodiversity.

Staff with different professional roles were interviewed in depth and participatory observations were made of day-to-day work at the operational and tactical levels. In the park management organisations, different views on maintenance were identified and resolved into four different management styles: the aesthetic, the economic, the ecological and the social management style. When comparing views and norms on maintenance, there were more similarities than differences between the three cases. The aesthetic management style, which is distinguished by an ambition to achieve a well-kept appearance, free from weeds and litter, predominated within the operational level, with minor contributions from the other three management styles. The economic management style, which is distinguished by (limited) available resources, which means that maintenance is accommodated to budget and to existing tools, machinery and methods. This management style is often combined with views from some of the other styles, but when making priorities, the resources available are crucial. The ecological management style, which is distinguished by working with nature as a reference model and an ambition to achieve an environment rich in experiences, includes a considerable element of long-term thinking and an active choice to consider biodiversity. The social management style in caring for green spaces, which has their social function as the main goal, places the focus on the public's experiences, recreation and accessibility. Active users, who may contribute in different ways, are interesting to park managers who favour the social management style above the other styles.

A in-depth phenomenographic study was carried out on views of urban biodiversity, which was assumed to have impact on choices of methods for maintenance. The results showed that urban biodiversity is perceived as 1) species and biotopes, 2) ecological connections and processes, 3) an intrinsic value, 4) something that can be changed (in either direction) by human activities, by maintenance or no maintenance, 5) a piece in the political play and 6) a quality of experience. The variation of experiences was the dominant perception among most park managers. A consequence of this finding, where urban biodiversity is being perceived as something more than variation among genes, species and biotopes, is a drift of perspective that makes communication on urban biodiversity complicated and causes the issue to fall between the cracks or become overlooked if perspectives mismatch.

In terms of interactions between park managers within and between organisational levels, there were more differences than similarities between the three cases studied. Such differences related to e.g. creation of new arenas for interaction between staff from the operational and tactical levels the determination of missing links in communication between nature conservation experts and groundsmen. A similarity between the cases with regard to interactions was that staff working at the operational level sometimes experienced difficulties in getting their opinions and proposals to the tactical level. Functioning communication between levels emerged where relations were long-standing. The pre-conditions for functioning interactions were better within the operational and tactical levels. Organisational and cultural obstacles sometimes impeded interactions between organisational levels and between the park and nature sectors.

Within the three park management organisations studied here, two different views of management were distinguished: A conventional way of thinking (traditional culture) with a static view of management and a novel way of thinking (innovative culture) including new ideas within management. These formed two subcultures within the organisational culture of the park management organisations, complementing each other and existing in parallel. The traditional culture is distinguished by experience-based knowledge deriving from years of practice. Within this culture skills and familiarity with day-to-day work within practical performance are rewarded. The innovative culture is distinguished by more highly educated staff, questioning of traditions and creative thinking. Within this culture skills and familiarity with day-to-day work are complemented with knowledge of facts and understanding. This culture includes an encompassing kind of leadership as well as staff collaboration, networking and getting sharing of responsibility.

Divergent views on biodiversity, management styles and cultures may lead to the objectives formulated for park maintenance not always being coherent. Effective park management and the creation of sustainable urban green spaces require skills development and increased interaction between the operational and tactical levels within organisations, concerning work towards coherent objectives and strategies. Involvement in and understanding of co-existing perspectives within an organisation can lead to greater interaction between actors within that organisation, while also providing the conditions for successful and proactive work, ready to meet and initiate change. Organisations must learn to manage the differences between their constituent levels and sectors and thus increase the possibility to expand the diversity of green spaces and make them sustainable in an ecological, economic and social sense.