

“Park and Urban Regeneration. A missing link?”

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Abstract

Urban local parks are increasingly appreciated for the role they can play in the social, economic and environmental sustainability of our cities. The Government has endorsed the 'green cause' and is promoting parks as urban regeneration drivers. However, this role is problematic since it has not always taken into account the need to ensure that all of the benefits that parks promise to release are compatible and whether or not this incompatibility affects and possibly limits the regenerative potential of parks. A case study (Priory Park, in Haringey, London) will support the effort to shed some light on these issues. In particular, it will be used to test some hypotheses on how incompatibilities are produced; what their consequences are; and to observe how trade-offs can impact on the distribution of the benefits of parks among different stakeholders. This analysis will then help to assess to what extent parks are currently able to support regeneration objectives.

Certainly the park is not the only tool to tackle urban problems and sometimes it cannot fulfil this role at all, but if, as current policies suggest, its contribution to urban regeneration should be maximised, then this case study could be used to highlight a weak connection between the approach to urban green space (influenced by traditional popular image of parks) and the other policies seeking to improve the economic and social prospects of local areas, despite the rhetoric of the holistic views on the role of green in contemporary English cities.

Aims of the paper

The evolution of economic paradigms and societal institutions, the rise of some sort of ecological and environmental conscience, the persistence of a huge social divide and the endemic lack of housing (especially for London and the south east region) have had contradictory effects on urban parks. On the one hand they are subject to the pressure to provide land for new developments, on the other they are increasingly appreciated for the role they can play for the social, economic and environmental sustainability of our cities. As such, individuals and organisations as political and economic agents become stakeholders benefiting from parks in different ways. Indeed, the importance of open green spaces is now acknowledged by local authorities and government, with current discussions on urban parks focussing on issues like their protection and quality. Hence, great importance is attributed to the promotion of best practices and all those 'techniques' to achieve long-lasting improvements. The park is also increasingly mentioned in many local authorities publications and in the London plan (Mayor of London, 2004), as a fundamental element in regeneration strategies. The extent to which parks can contribute to urban regeneration objectives is however problematic. An important question seems not to have been answered yet: *are all benefits for different stakeholders compatible?* The aim of the report is to address this question and subsequently *explore how incompatibility affects and possibly limits the regenerative potential of parks.* A case study (Priory Park, in Haringey, London) will support the effort to shed some light on these issues. In particular it will be used to test some hypotheses on how incompatibilities are produced and what their consequences are, to observe how trade-offs can impact on the distribution of the benefits of parks among different stakeholders and thus to help assess to what extent are parks currently able to support regeneration objectives.

Methodology

The material for the case study has been collected using local magazines, several informal talks with residents, park users, local estate agents, local traders and a series of formal interviews to key actors like the park manager, a member of the Friend of Priory Park group, a Community Development Worker based in Hornsey, the Council's Neighbourhood Manager for Hornsey and a project officer of a Conservation Charity active in the area. No structured surveys on the park use have been carried out, although the visible characteristics of users (e.g. gender, approximate age, ethnic group, etc.) in four areas of the park have been registered during two visits made in different days of the week and at different times of the day.

Section 1

Before addressing the issue of the regenerative potential of parks, section 1 will draw a basic history of English parks in order to highlight the existence of a long-standing link between them and regeneration. In the second place, this section will follow the formation of a popular image of parks which still influences the way stakeholders look at parks today and the benefits they seek. This will help to explain many attitudes towards parks and even the origin of many current 'best practices'.

1.1 Rise and fall of the modern park.

In many respects the modern park can be seen as an early example of urban regeneration: if Victorians have saturated parks with their moral anxiety, the creation of these public open spaces was also responding to a number of practical problems related to the deep changes that industrial cities were undergoing, overcrowding and sanitary conditions in primis.

In a way the XIX century park was used for its "healing" effects on society¹. Its formal order and the rules of behaviour within it were pursuing an educational goal, a reformation project. Surprisingly, this particular form of regeneration was meant to abolish many elements (like stages for performances, facilities providing food and drinks, etc) that are nowadays instead celebrated for their ability to promote cultural and economic regeneration². That kind of activities was meant to happen somewhere else, in the pleasure garden. This was the antithesis of the Victorian park, and fell in disgrace with the establishment of the new 'reformed' parks and the (perpetual) pressure for new developments (especially in London). However this dichotomy between the order of the Victorian park and the disorder it was meant to eradicate never ceased be perceived, as if the Dionysian side of park fruition, once constrained in space, had reappeared to compete with the Apollonian on time, taking control of a number of parks at dusk.

At the turn of the century a partial concession to the former was the proliferation of facilities for more active pursuits (and sports in particular), as opposed to the original purely passive recreation inspired by the physical and psychological benefits of being in contact with nature (*delight*) (ODPM, 2001).

Park providers retained their control on the use of space and the right to judge over appropriate conduct in parks for many years, and confirmed such

¹ See Taylor, 1994, 4.

² Comedia p.27: "As Kevin Lynch noted, Battersea Park was built to provide 'wholesome recreation' in place of the rowdy joys of Battersea Field, once described by the City Mission magazine in September 1870s thus: 'Surely if ever there was a place out of hell that surpassed Sodom and Gomorrah in ungodliness and abomination this was it ...horses and donkeys racing, foot racing, walking matches, flying boats, flying horses, roundabouts, theatres, comic actors, shameless dancers, conjurers, fortune tellers, gamblers of every description, drinking booths, stalls, hawkers, and vendors of all kind of articles' (As Kevin Lynch commented, what was condemned here in 1870 reads like a blueprint for urban renewal today)."

'reformist' attitudes in a second wave after World War II (Crouch, 1994), although adopting different values and expressing different preferences for spaces and users' behaviours:

The twentieth century thus saw the formation of a new kind of functional space, the recreation ground, which was less resource demanding than the traditional park, but often contributed little in terms of aesthetic or ecological values. The post-war emphasis on standards of provision was based on quantitative rather than qualitative criteria." (ODPM, 2001)

It took a few decades before the limits of this new approach and the mismatches between the practical concerns of park managers, possible uses of 'Victorian-shaped' parks and the new aspirations of society emerged. After one century of largely successful park history a popular representation of parks had developed: ordered, safe, manicured with a code of appropriate behaviours consecrated by bylaws. This image of the park looks like another re-elaboration of the long-standing symbolism of the garden since its origin in the Indo-European tradition (although many other non-western cultures have produced a similar metaphoric role for the garden). This highly idealised image however does not seem to correspond to the reality of the park in the last decades. Like Adam and Eve in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, after the creation and a mythical period that many now would naively define idyllic, we managed to be expelled from the park: about 30 years ago we committed an original sin, or more likely a number of sins that got people out of parks, kept away by physical and psychological walls.

Problems of dog fouling, litter, vandalism and illegal fires, compounded by street drinking and rough sleeping, typified Mint Street Park in Southwark, London, despite being only a little over one hectare in size. Untouched since the 1970s, it had no lighting and high walls with narrow slit entrances, which people would walk around rather than through. The park was used by a number of homeless people when the weather was fine, although other visitors looked on them with suspicion and fear. The site suffered badly from vandalism. Cars were driven in and dumped there. The park also became a meeting place for drug users. It was used by street drinkers and for rough sleeping." (Description of Mint St. Park in Cabe Space, 2005b).

But then, who is responsible for the decline of the Victorian park?

1.2 Blame it on the parkie.

He embodied the soul of the park. The park keeper was involved in liaising with the public, in opening and closing the gates, in ensuring decency and peacefulness, in cleaning, in coordinating works and supervising the general care of the park. Then, suddenly, he disappeared taking the key of our beloved park with him...

“Certainly the public perceive this loss of staffing, and it is perhaps the most common cause of complaint about park decline, even if mobile maintenance crew (whether direct labour or contracted) still maintain existing standards of upkeep” (Comedia, 1995)

Central Government's cocktail of Coercive Competitive Tendering and budgetary cuts led most Local Authorities to redefined the park keeper's role and to opt for an internal reorganisation, creating larger directorates through mergers. “Typically, parks departments have been merged with leisure and cultural services departments” (ODPM 2001). In this way parks have gradually gone down in the political agenda and reached the bottom when that park services were made non-mandatory for Local Authorities!

In this scenario of constant search for the cheapest option - from the end of 1970s to the end of the 1990s the expenditure for urban parks and other open spaces dropped by 1/3 in percentage on the total budget of Leisure Services (DTLR, 2002a) - outsourcing (not necessarily based on outcomes) was one of the favourite solutions, leading to the withdrawal of park staff.

The first casualties included the shrinking of open space use by the more vulnerable section of the community (Burgess, 1989, 472). The elderly provide a good example:

[0] *“For those people the parks had become dominated by one group and the sense that the park catered for different groups and different users had been lost. In the past the park keeper used to mediate between different and conflicting groups of users. ‘The presence of the park keeper meant that the lads would behave better and the standard of care of equipment and planted areas were much higher’ The groups felt that different users have different needs” [...] “They felt that a park keeper would represent their interests and the balance between users would be restored” (Comedia, 1995, 50)*

A vicious circle of non-use, fear (risk is not always real, but often only perceived) and avoidance was triggered. It is not surprising then that the park keeper still embodies security and quality management, and fulfils “a vital symbolic role in removing the ambiguity of ownership in open spaces” (Burgess 1989, 466).

1.3 Rebirth. A remake of a classic: green is good!

The old park keeper has evolved into what it is now called the park ranger, mirroring the changes introduced by the New Public Management (NPM) in park service departments. NPM has initiated many local authorities to sophisticated processes and work methodologies previously unknown. This graft has given birth to a 'technology of parks' and redefined the role of park managers, now required to be familiar with assessments, balance scorecards, audits, standards for quality of service delivered and so on³. The 'modernisation of the sector', still on-going, is a priority for the Government, very keen to address the 'park issue' through the funding of institutions that disseminate good practice and champion the green cause⁴ and direct (generous?) funding⁵.

However, the endorsement of the cause of parks by the government is only the climax of a process that has been developing since the early 1990s, an evolution that runs parallel to the gradual mutation of renewal and redevelopment approaches to urban problems into regeneration as we understand it today and the consolidation of the governance model over the traditional government one (Leach and Percy-Smith, 2001, 5).

The cornerstone of this new attitude to parks is the influential report by the Urban Green Space Taskforce (DTLR, 2002a), with its recommendations. Since the very beginning it makes clear that:

"[R1] The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should make it a priority to provide high quality parks and green spaces to serve the needs of people in disadvantaged area. This objective should be at the heart of regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes which target such areas." (DTLR, 2002a, p.20)⁶

Therefore a fundamental link is (re)-established between urban parks and regeneration. The resurgence of the regenerative effect of parks on society and the economy (although on terms quite different from Victorian times) is further reinstated in a number of documents, studies and reports that pre-date and follow the "Green spaces, better places" (DTLR, 2002a, 36) publication. For instance, the mayor of London in his introduction to "Guide to preparing open space strategies" (MOL, 2004b) for the London Plan, states:

The wide variety of open spaces in London makes a valuable contribution to the quality and character of the capital's environment, contributing to my vision of a sustainable world city. They contribute to the positive image of London as a place to live, work and visit. They

³ One of the main characteristics of the document by the Urban Green Space Taskforce (DTLR, 2002a) is the stress on the importance of performance indicators.

⁴ (the Urban Park Forum dates back to 1999, the Green Flag Award to 1996, while Cobe Space has been set up in 2003)

⁵ (ODPM, 2002, 48-51 and 65-73)

⁶ Other key recommendations are R22, R31 and R37.

improve the quality of life and can encourage people to live and work in London. They give places their identity and have an important role to play in promoting regeneration objectives. [...]
Creating and managing high quality public spaces is essential to delivering an urban renaissance in London.

It is then almost impossible to isolate 'green' matters from the wider problems affecting the quality of urban spaces and the poor state of many areas of UK cities after the economic and social challenges of the second half of the XX century.

The decline of parks is now seen as just one element of the wider urban regeneration issue, and 'park regeneration' as a separate concept makes little sense: connections to the socioeconomic aspects are too thick to be artificially removed, unless, one only wants to focus on the physical refurbishment of parks. Obviously the latter is an essential tool, which has to be matched to appropriate management to secure long-term sustainability and to put parks back on the map, but in the context of current policies seems rather limited. However, policy has started looking at parks only recently compared to other aspects of regeneration, or at least it could be argued that park renewal has developed relatively independently from mainstream regeneration and that they have only recently been converging.

One possible reason could be in the origin of parks: as we have seen, frequently they are Victorian creations that still retain heritage significance. This can encourage the perception of parks as recipient of conservation initiatives rather than tools for regeneration action. Green areas were traditionally taken for granted, disconnected from the outside like some sort of "heterotopias" (Foucault, 1984), with the occasional exception of parks in city centres.

In the last few years the situation has changed and 'green regeneration' now looks like a sort of mantra in both policy documents and the media. While the rhetoric has changed very quickly, the practice of green regeneration and the perception that users and other stakeholders have of parks is still contradictory, as will be highlighted later.

A detailed analysis of the causes of this revival or the shapes it takes is beyond the scope of this report, but the process has certainly been facilitated by a number of conditions, like the relative abundance of parks in UK towns, their flexibility as facilities, and their 'marketability', that is by the appeal of the benefits that parks generates for a large and diverse public of stakeholders. In particular, the current enthusiasm for green regeneration seems to lie at the crossing between current developments in urban regeneration and environmentalism, but also reflects a long tradition which saw the formation of an idyllic collective memory of parks that is not always compatible with some regeneration concerns like social inclusion, i.e. "taking society back in", with its contradictions and conflicts that the Victorians were so eager to leave out. So even blaming the parkie does not help, as it seems to confirm and ideal of order and security, the ideal of a policed park "free from sin" that keeps "real" society and its problems out rather than addressing them.

Section 2

Diverse stakeholders expect a pool of heterogeneous benefits from parks and assume a variety of attitudes to them. This section seeks to sketch the range of preferences for forms, features and roles of urban parks. The outcome will be a map, which will be used as a reference point to discuss the contradictory demands currently addressed to urban parks. The map will also be used in section to interpret the information gathered from the case study.

2.1 A stakeholder map.

Parks have the potential to provide many economic, social and environmental benefits to different stakeholders. Table 1 attempts to provide a list of actors with stakes in the park. Inevitably some simplifications have been made. A major one regards the Local Authority, which certainly is not a monolithic entity but rather the opposite, as single departments can pursue different goals (see Carmona, de Magalhães et al. [ODPM, 2002a, 40]). In addition, this taxonomy provides a “loose” framework, as it is static and mono-dimensional while the different groups are not mutually exclusive categories: they tend to overlap and change over time as individuals join many of them simultaneously and can move from one group to another. The factors driving this multiple and transient ‘affiliation’ are more than could be listed here; nonetheless some regularities can be identified: the demand for open space tends to vary around age (children, teenagers, adults, elderly) and the role played in social networks and institutions (like the family). The result is the formation of complex (and sometimes self-contradictory) aspirations that in turn aggregate in complex coalitions and interest groups.

The table differentiates groups starting from the values sought instead of the resulting preferences, as working backwards, that is creating categories according to the preferences expressed would prove even more difficult, sensible as it is to the specificities of the context (e.g. adults are not necessarily parents so they might not be interested in the provision of play areas, residents can express preferences for the provision of sport facilities according to their age or social status which do not automatically match the aims the goals of conservation groups, and so on).

A last observation on the beneficiaries of parks is that they are not simply the users that enjoy a direct contact with the park, but also non-users like businesses and institutions that indirectly tap the parks’ values and have themselves their saying on how parks should be.

Table 1 - A stakeholders map for a local park⁷.

Stakeholder	Benefits from Parks	Preferences for and attitudes towards Local Urban Parks
Local Authorities (and central government):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community involvement • Fulfill an educational role • Improve mental and physical health • Promote social inclusion • Promote biodiversity and nature conservation • Increase tax yield as a consequence of adding value to properties surrounding ('good') parks • Increase borough attractiveness for investors, developers, employers, tourists, etc. • Reduce pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention/Expansion or the 'green stock'. Loss of parks in certain areas is an option if this is balanced by the creation of other green areas in areas of low provision. • Expand the involvement of the community, in particular in the form of 'Friends of Park'. • Remove barrier to access: physical and psychological. • Improve safety and safety perception through design (avoid overgrown plants, poor sight lines, poor lighting, etc.), CCTV and staffing (including gardeners, park police, etc.). • Provide education facilities in the parks. • Support schools without playing fields / areas. • Supporting volunteering groups and providing them with dedicated facilities. • Provide sport facilities and promote physical activities. • Reinstate heritage sites / features. • Use parks in territorial marketing strategies.
Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to environmental quality thus to marketability and the improvement of margins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable, depending on the targeted market and LA requirements (policies and section 106 agreements). Nevertheless they frequently try to minimise of open spaces size and quality to increase the number of units and reduce marginal costs.
Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost the investment (owners get a price premium) • Provide valuable facilities that improve the life quality (owners and tenants) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong concern for the park maintenance and for a balance between the minimisation of noise from activities held in the park and the range of facilities provided (aspirations then vary according to the age and social characteristics of the residents). • Owners are more focussed on long-term issues too compared to tenants.
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can improve employee productivity • Contribute to the image the business environment suggests to clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general quality can be a primary concern [depending on the type of business].

⁷ Sources: ODPM 2004, Payne et al., 2002, Cabe Space, 2005, Cabe Space, 2004b, HLF, 2003, McNeely, 2001, Bengochea Morancho, 2003, City Parks Forum, 2003, Cheshire and Sheppard, 2002, Tyrväinen and Väänänen, 1998, Valentine 2004, Zuckin, 1995, Comedia, 1995, Tinsley and Croskeys, 2002, Chiesura, A., 2004, Rishbeth, 2001, Ravenscroft and Markwell, 2000, Burgess et al., 1989, Mayor of London, 2004a and 2004b, McInroy, 2000, Wolf, 2003 and 2004, GLA Economics 2003, Bondi and Domosh 1998.

Stakeholder	Benefits from Parks	Preferences for and attitudes towards Local Urban Parks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract and retain employees, especially if particularly skilled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They favour the provision of features for passive recreation (benches and kiosks). • Parks need to fulfil employees needs only for a limited number of hours (working hours and lunch break in particular) • Enhance park capacity to host events. • Increase the number of events in the park. • Extend opening hours.
Retailers, Pubs and Restaurants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to attract large number of visitors, especially non-resident to increase the number of potential customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair and restore the historic landscape. • (Increasingly more willing to) provide facilities like cafés, toilets, meeting rooms and park furniture, recreation and play facilities to enlarge audience.
Conservation Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many parks have heritage value • Park recreation features encourage people to be involved in, and make decisions about, their heritage more easily than formal indoor museums and exhibitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favour the availability of exhibition space, interpretation and signs; and the organisation of heritage education events and activities in the park for children or adults. • In some cases excessive recreation is seen as a menace to the protection of heritage features
Environmentalists and Ecologists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play an essential role in: CO2 absorption; ensuring a degree of humidity in the atmosphere; the rainfall and flood regulation; temperatures moderation; erosion reduction; conservation of fauna and flora / biodiversity, acoustic isolation, buffer incompatible uses, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise the 'amount' of green space in urban areas, not necessarily open to public (in some case they explicitly advocate a preference for the separation between recreation between recreation and wildlife conservation) or in use. • Inclusion of 'wilderness' elements in urban parks.
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the opportunity to socialise and share common experiences • Break from house routine • Provide benefit for their children (see below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be secure and safe, therefore they give preference to dedicated and separated spaces space, controlled and supervised provision of equipment. • Provision of facilities like toilets and cafés.
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor play as the primary mechanism to become acquainted with environment and contribute to physical development. • Support the experience of independence, stimulate creativity and imagination and give privacy to experiment with their identities, develop their own notion of morality and empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often prefer diverse and flexible landscapes (in terms of surfaces, forms, materials, opportunities for creative and manipulative play etc.) such as waste ground and open spaces, rather than formal playgrounds • Secure place • Aspirations are largely mediated by parents who have different views and seek personal benefits as well (see above)
Teenagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide space for sport and places for gathering • Offer privileged places for identity definition (as part of the process of transition to adulthood). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freely accessible space to hang out at different time of the day and night. • Look for a territory, a non-mediated public space where they can hang out. As a result teenagers contest environments planned by adults.

Stakeholder	Benefits from Parks	Preferences for and attitudes towards Local Urban Parks
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This group overlaps completely with the others, so benefits vary. <i>It is defined in opposition to teenagers (see above)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to promote safe, ordered, clean spaces⁸.
Elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give the opportunity to engage in simple, non-challenging activities without extensive planning or necessity of long-term commitment, to get exercise and to be with other people Provide experiences that are missing from the typical daily life, experience cognitive or aesthetic stimulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A place to relax, stay with young children and contemplating nature. They support the conservation and reinstatement of traditional park features (flowerbeds, bandstands, etc.). Surprisingly they also express a preference for recreation (possible reasons: looking after their grandchildren, and their improved health conditions, despite active participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity decreases with age). Prefer secure space, thorough direct supervision by park police, park rangers, and etc. or informal social control mechanisms.
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits do not differ because of gender, but women's experience of public space is strongly limited by fears of attacks. 	
Gay & Lesbians	<p>As above. In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like other public spaces they provide a stage for political representation (this is also typical of ethnic groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above, although There are different patterns like the request for dedicated parks and, unlike women, this group often claims visibility as a political representation (more characteristics of gays than lesbians).
Ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can provide a link with their home country or the group identity in general through symbolism, physical experience or facility provision Represent accessible leisure facilities Provide a space for political representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of adequate space and facilities for extended family gatherings Tend to express needs for particular features, such as facilities dedicated to the sports popular within that group As other groups are very sensible to security issues (esp. in areas outside their neighbourhoods) Can be less aware of heritage features and favour different aesthetics (different backgrounds)
Disabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the same values enjoyed by the other park users especially with regards socialisation and contact with nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on physical access to the park (barriers, layouts, etc.) Look for the provision of dedicated facilities inside the park

⁸ Undoubtedly this preference is presented as too simplistic and stereotyped. It also ignores crucial discussions on contested space, the privatisation of public space, etc., but in this case it is used only for the purpose of highlighting a ground of conflict (incompatibility) between two groups over the use of parks.

The map lists a set of heterogeneous values, sometimes expressed within the same social group. Some of them could be tagged as “old” as opposed to “new” values (e.g. contact with nature versus ecological benefits), while benefits could be distinguished between those that contribute to the regeneration of the environmental, economic, and social condition of an area (e.g. reducing pollution, attracting and retaining workers, enhancing an area’s identity and re-binding neighbourhoods, etc) as opposed to ‘regeneration-neutral’ benefits (e.g. a place for young children to develop their independence, a place for political representation etc). However, the boundary here becomes blurred as it is strongly case-specific: for instance conservation can become a driver for regeneration in areas where this is valued, but it could also be an obstacle if it denies residents and workers the provision of new facilities, especially if the local area already suffers a lack of such facilities.

Such preferences are the result of a historical sedimentation as the Victorian Park gradually evolved into the sports ground, and after its years of “decadence” and with the new call for a green regeneration came to be seen as a fundamental driver for urban renewal in a broad economic, social and environmental sense. Actors and their expectations from parks have now multiplied to such a degree that the despite an almost unanimous call for quality and maintenance of parks, the picture resulting from the overview of the general preferences expressed by stakeholders is fragmented into a number of dichotomies: active versus passive recreation, formal and conservative aesthetics versus the provision of modern facilities, strong supervision against limited mediation, etc. Since the availability of parks is limited and the structural capacity to accommodate different uses of most green spaces is restricted (because of their size, morphology, etc.), differences are likely to turn into incompatibilities and actors to compete over the consumption of parks, thus complicating the work of regeneration (for instance by exacerbating exclusion).



Figure 1 - Priory Park location in London

Section 3

This part of the report looks at how different preferences towards possible uses of green space interact, and thus at the way stakeholders access the 'green benefits', in the everyday experience of a real park. Priory Park in North London will provide the setting for the observation and the findings discussed in the second part of the section.

3.1 Priory Park: the second life of a local park.

Priory Park is located in the London Borough of Haringey (LBH) as shown in figure 1. It was laid out in two phases. The first one included the acquisition of land in 1891 by Hornsey Local Board that created a Pleasure Garden⁹ in 1896. This was later expanded to the actual size of 6.5 ha in 1926 to include tennis courts, a bowling green and a putting green. A café, public toilets and a paddling pool were added in 1960 (Haringey Park Services, 2005). (fig.2). Its history shares the same evolution pattern of many other Victorian parks as described in section 1: it underwent a period of decline in the last two decades of the twentieth century until it was eventually refurbished in 2002-2003 with an investment of £75,000 by the owner (LBH). The current annual budget for the park is £76,000. The refurbishment initiative has been driven by local residents organised in a "Friends of Priory Park" group. The Green Flag Award had an important role in shaping the current form and management of Priory Park as a first application was turned down in 1999, bringing the Friends and especially the Parks Service to reconsider standards and arrangements for the park. The award is based on a series of characteristics grouped around various areas of intervention: a welcoming place, healthy, safe, secure, clean and well maintained, sustainability, conservation and heritage, community involvement, marketing and management.

⁹ Despite its name, its layout and the date of creation reveal its Victorian age nature (the last pleasure gardens disappeared around 1850).



Figure 2 - Priory Park layout

The final outcome of this renewal process is a heavily used park, which has now won the Green Flag Award for three years in a row, sanctified as a model to be followed and sharing the same standards of other hundreds of parks in England and Wales. Thus, Priory Park could be seen as a “model park” that fits into most of the requirements that current policy on green regeneration express. The following paragraph will try to compare the latter with the preferences expressed by some of its stakeholders.

3.2 The context

In order to understand the preferences expressed by those who have an interest in Priory Park, the park and its urban context need to be further described. Two aspects in particular seem relevant: its location in relation to the profile of the local neighbourhood and to the other green spaces in the area.

Priory Park is located in the west part of the Hornsey ward. From a spatial point of view, Hornsey is built around its High Street, a shabby parade of small shops (currently the target of a small physical regeneration scheme). The High Street plays a fundamental role as a crucial east-west corridor for cars in north London. A railway running north to south draws Hornsey eastern boundary, separating it from the busy commercial area of Wood Green, while Priory Park marks its western end. Most of the areas around these main arteries (the High road and its continuations towards Crouch End and Muswell Hill – see fig.1), are largely owner occupied two-storey buildings which, although consistent in type, improve in condition as one

moves westward, towards the park and the neighbouring wards. However the appearance is misleading as Hornsey also hosts large council estates off the high street. The ward's socio-economic characteristics reflect the tenancy regime and confirm the existence of pockets of deprivation. In terms of ethnicity the area is very mixed and includes significant BME communities. The usual pattern of difficult socio-economic situations, cultural barriers and exclusion raises its toll and calls for urban regeneration. The circumstances are worsened by the lack of facilities dedicated to some sections of the community, namely teenagers and, again, ethnic minorities. As table 2 underlines, the scene is strikingly different in Crouch End and Muswell Hill, the other two wards facing the park and inhabited to a large extent by long-established white middleclass families. Since the park has also a very good provision of entrances on the south and western sides (fig.1) the characteristics of those two neighbourhoods greatly contribute to influence the expectations of those with an interest in Priory Park, as the next paragraph will illustrate.

Table 2 - Wards profile, key data

	Crouch End	Hornsey	Muswell Hill
Household: living in council and RA	15.2%	33.0%	29.4%
Employment: unemployed (% of working age)	27.2%	37.7%	30.8%
Social Grade: C2+DE	20.1%	36.3%	21.7%
Ethnicity: white British	66.8%	56.2%	70.5%

A second interesting element associated with the location of the park is its relationship with the other green spaces in the area. Priory Park is in proximity of Alexandra Palace Park, Crouch End Playing Fields and Stationers Park (fig.1), a substantial amount of green areas within walking distance from most of the three wards. Stationers Park is another award winning park but its capacity is severely constrained by its very small size; Crouching End Playing Fields do not allow access unless people are members of the sport clubs, which makes it a privatised space. Finally Alexandra Palace Park, which draws the boundary of Hornsey ward at north, serves a large area but the scarce provision of facilities on its lower end side and the low standard of maintenance discourage many users from going there, amongst all the people living in the council estates literally on the other side of the road. The result is that despite the supposed choice among different local options park users converge to Priory Park, thus the limited mobility¹⁰ of many users who will not go to

¹⁰ Not only because of physical limitations (affecting for instance moms with prams, disabled and the elderly), but also because of the psychological barriers which people belonging to ethnic minority groups or refugees, often with limited English fluency, can encounter if they leave their neighbourhood.

more distant parks. Hence the importance of local provision of green spaces, the related pressure on Priory Park (over 100,000 visitors per year according the Haringey Parks Service), and the central issue of quality as one essential incentive to use.

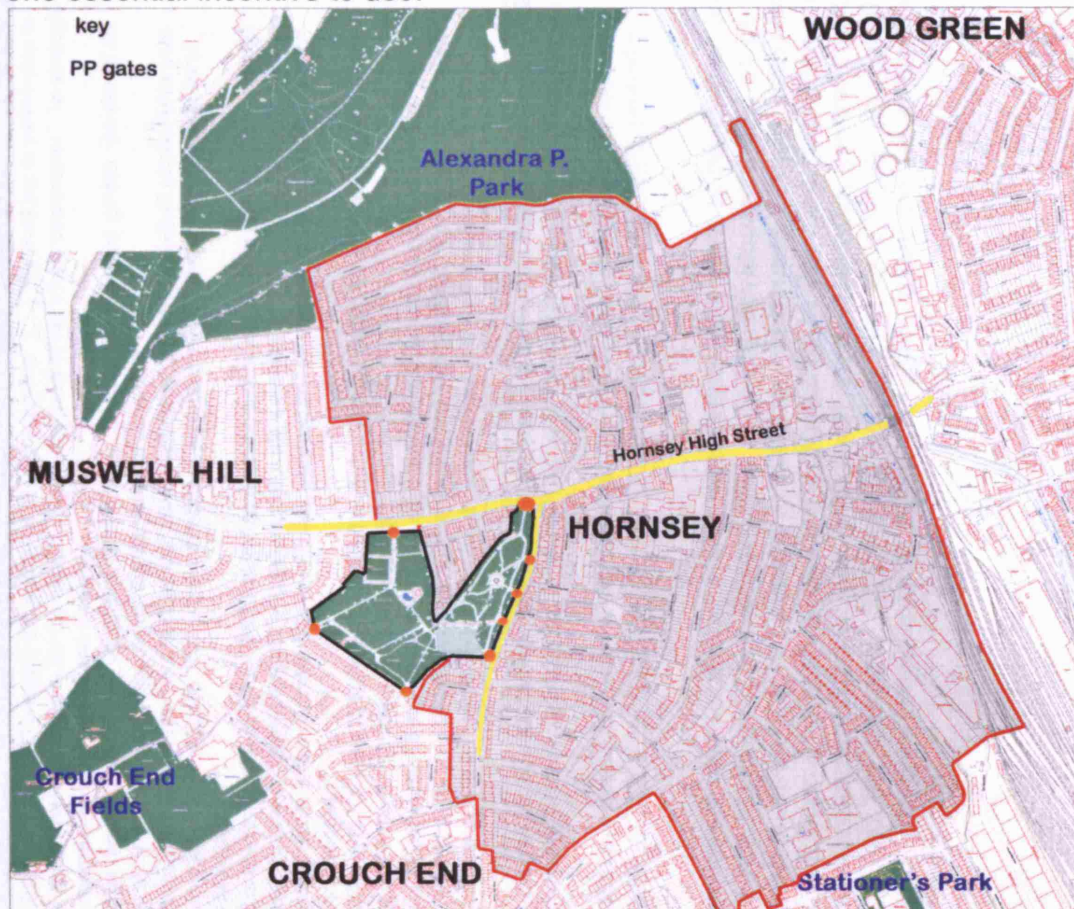


Figure 3 - Hornsey and Priory Park area

3.3 The stakeholders in Priory Park

Having introduced the urban context surrounding the park, it is now time to introduce the actors: the following map, built on the model proposed in section 2, summarise the stakeholders positions towards Priory Park.

This problem has emerged distinctively during interviews to social workers belonging to the Turkish and Kurdish community.

Table 3 - Coalitions in action and preferences expressed for Priory Park

Stakeholder ¹¹	
Local Authorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LB of Haringey Recreation Service Open Space Strategy Vision: "To enrich the quality of life for everyone" [...] "by working in partnership to provide safe, attractively designed, well used and maintained open spaces for the benefit and employment of the whole community". Its strategic objectives repeatedly mention the importance of community involvement and inclusion. • The different areas of the park, which fulfil different functions, are clearly separated. With the exception of the Victorian garden, the rest of the park gives the users a good view through the park without visual obstacles, favouring the sense of security. • Priory Park provides some sport facilities (esp. tennis pitches), but the 'hard surface are' currently hosting 2 (half) basketball pitches is in poor conditions compared to the rest of the park and has a lot of unused space. It also hosts a series of playschemes (in summer) and support local schools in need for a recreation area. Two sport clubs uses it. • The Park police reports to the Parks Services and is not residential in Priory Park (they visit the park on average 30 hours per month), although their occasional presence, the large amount of users, and the frequent presence of gardeners provide a constant effective monitoring. In addition high standard maintenance helps to reassure users and weaken fear of crime thus reinforcing park use and ultimately security. The Park Police can enforce Priory Park's by-laws (currently under revision). • Crime accidents are virtually zero in the park, and even in the areas of Hornsey perceived as dangerous the crime rate are not as high to let the Community Development Worker access funding under the 'crime reduction action group' • In Haringey the Park Services is part of the Leisure Department. They have to liaise with other departments (social services, education, waste management, and - very marginally - planning). In other cases the scenario is much more complex and as the number of other players is higher. Also they do not deal with utility companies with the exception of Thames Water that needs to get access every six months to check a flood retention tank
Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people living in the houses directing facing the park are owners. Informal chats with local estates agents revealed that a property on the park could ensure a price premium of about £10,000 compared to the other properties. A 'second ring' of properties includes a more balanced mix of cheaper council and private rented properties. • Local residents mainly express their preferences through a direct participation to the 'Friends of Priory Park' (that counts around 250 members). The group, whose credo is "Preserving and protecting our park", has been very active since the refurbishment. They are constantly involved in

¹¹ No specific data has been collected for groups like: employers and local shops and restaurants (the area is residential and the main business is retail, based on small shop serving the residents), developers (the only big development still to be is located more than 500 metres from the park and ads do not mention it as it happens instead for old houses directly facing the park advertised by local estate agents), gay and lesbian (no signs of gay's venues were registered in the area like happen in the relatively close Hampstead), elderly (observation found representation in line with local area statistics), environmental groups (Priory Park is already listed in the Haringey UDP and the Haringey Biodiversity Action Plan as a 'Local ecologically valuable site' - Haringey Parks Service, 2005) and disabled (the park has plenty of easily accessible entrances on all sides of the park (9), dedicated toilets (2) and play areas for disabled kids).

Stakeholder	Current features of Priory Park (PP) and Stakeholders' Preferences
	<p>consultations and can even manage directly an area in the park (the dog free 'Philosophers' Garden). Priory Park has never been mentioned in the local assemblies (a part from the skateboarding issues mentioned below), because 'The Friends' are quite effective in lobbying the Leisure Service Department "to get things sorted when something does not work in the park, so complains stop at that level" (interviews).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the residents are dog-walkers. In Hornsey and the neighbouring wards they are "very vociferous about trying to avoid changes of use of some areas in the local parks" (interviews). As everywhere else dog-walkers follow a well-established routine using the park early in the morning and late in the afternoon, so it has not been able to interview them directly. From the interviews carried out with other actors it seems that they favour semi-wilderness where they can unleash the dog and not bother for the dog mess. For this reasons they also use Alexandra Palace Park.
Conservation Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 'heritage capital' of Priory Park is limited but well protected: a marble fountain originally in St. Paul is the main attraction, located at the centre of the formal garden. 'The Friends' are very effective in protecting heritage as they highly value it. There is at least one charity that works with locals to highlight the local area heritage (built, natural, cultural and social), working especially with schools, organising afternoon clubs and activity days, talking about history, etc.
Parents and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In interviews they expressed their approval for Priory Park as a safe and well-equipped park for kids. The park is perceived by users and non-users in the area as a space for moms and small children during the week (it has a wider and more diverse audience in the week-end). Indeed during the visits this was the predominant group with a number of small children ranging between 120 and 250. With a ratio children/mothers of about 1.5. Very few men (no more than 5 in total) were accompanying the children. Young children tend to concentrate in the paddling pool while the older ones favour the formal play area. Some of them use the main green with their parents. A smaller number of children with their moms uses the Philosopher garden (a small dog free area provided with benches and artwork).
Teenagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teenagers in Priory Park rarely become confrontational, sometimes they use facilities meant for young children but adults and park police intervene almost immediately to stop them. As admitted by the park staff, teenagers use the facilities (basketball, football, and sometimes tennis), but not on a daily basis. A surveys done by a community development officer proved that the most popular activity among teenagers is driving mini-motorbikes or use the playstation or play music. A recurrent complaint is they do not have anywhere to go. So many teenagers, especially from the north side of Hornsey High Street tend to walk towards Wood Green, to the back of the shopping centre ("more happening in Wood Green" - Interviews) Perception by the other groups is that teenagers enjoy the park because they can play sport. Park staff are conscious Priory Park is providing only very limited facilities for teenagers Among this category as subgroup has not emerged: the skaters. "Roughly 90% of them are aged between 7 and 16 years old" (interviews). At the moment they do street skating. In summer, for 1 week, Priory Park and the other local parks provide temporary mobile skating ramps. At the moment there is a consultation ongoing to decide where to build a permanent facility. Priory Park have been short-listed.
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With the exception of few girls jogging in the park (but it might be that early in the mornings and late in the afternoon there is a bigger number of runners), the large majority of women visits the park with young children. Some old women used the park as well, either on their own or with others to walk and sit on benches in both the recreation area and the formal garden, their number was in the region of only 1/6 of the total number of women.
Ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a Community Development Officer put it, "I don't know them [the Friends of Priory Park] directly, but I have worked across this borough for about four years now and most Friends groups are probably 90 to 95% white British. BME do not engage in groups" a lot. "Maybe they feel they don't belong to here". The Park Manager working with 9 of such groups in the area supported this data.

Stakeholder 11	Current features of Pribny Park (PP) and Stakeholders' Preferences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For data on the ethnic mix refer to the tab 2. It is important to stress that there are hard-to-reach communities. "They don't have locally a structure as such that you could find what I would call a community keeper. There is a Kurdish advice centre, with Turkish speaking people, but I would not say there is a 'community use'. And I think a lot of the Turkish community don't speak good English, especially the older generation, so they stay together" (Community Worker). • During the interviews conducted the Park staff did not perceive the exclusion of some ethnic groups from the park and tend to look at the audience as an overall number.

3.4 Competing uses

Priory Park shows a limited number of incompatibilities, which is perhaps one of the (many) reasons why it is seen as a successful park. However, the reason for this is probably not that incompatibilities are successfully addressed, but rather that they do not have the possibility to surface.

If it is true that there are some optimal conditions for this to happen. First, the largely homogeneous characteristics of the Crouch End and Muswell Hill surrounding the park tend to translate into identical aspirations (e.g. residents, parents, conservation groups, etc), as mentioned in par.3.2. In the second place, smaller social groups and some other stakeholders (e.g. developers, gays, etc) are missing, (as emerges from the comparison the number of categories in tables 1 and 3). Finally, the parks service team has been successful in creating trust and establishing a continuous exchange of feedbacks with users, despite neither they nor the park police are residential. However, at the side of what can be called 'trivial' incompatibilities (like the one between dog walkers and the other park users, easily solved with the creation of a (small) dog-free area, and the one over the use of the greens for formal sport training like football and rugby for kids, eventually accepted by the Friends of Priory Park), there is one that takes the form of an explicit conflict.

It involves the Friends of Priory Park, representing a large coalition of other groups (conservationists, adults, the majority of the residents, etc) and local teenagers. Nothing really unusual here, but in addition to what used to be "physiological"¹² events, like the occasional improper use of small children's and other facilities by the youngster and access to the park after dusk when the park is closed, there is a new request: skateboards facilities in the park.

The claim is also supported by some parents¹³ who value skateboarding as a sport and "a way to achieve". The availability of a local facility would also allow them to avoid long trips to take the younger kids to other skate parks in London. Furthermore, some residents see the facility favourably because they believe the skaters will stop using other 'inappropriate' places, like Hornsey Town Hall. Even a young local councillor, particularly active with adolescents is supporting their cause¹⁴, in part as a response to the insufficient availability of facilities for young people in Hornsey. In the interviews with other local people, the Community Development officer and the shop owners the problem of the absence of a youth centre regularly emerged so the young people passion for skateboarding can also be read from this perspective (despite

¹² To be fair it could be argued that part of this does not relate simply to the well known patterns of confrontation typical of adolescents, but also a more pathological event due to the chronic lack of facilities dedicated to teenagers, especially in the Hornsey area as confirmed in all interviews.

¹³ For traditionally skaters tend to affirm their own identity by challenging their family and the 'institutional' society. They produce a counterculture. (Borden, 2001; add second source).

¹⁴ This unique coalition substantiates the idea that the categories tend to overlap and preferences and benefits are peculiar to every single case and alliances temporary.

some controversy on the capability of the ramps to address the “real” needs of the teenagers – see table 3). In this sense Priory park becomes a place of conflict which reflects the problems of the area surrounding it. Hence the need to truly integrate the park in its context: Priory Park cannot be considered as an island in Hornsey, so policies and initiatives tackling problems in the local area and decisions on the park should not be considered in isolation. The resistance opposed by the group of Friends is summarised in their statement, also useful to clarify the type of interests they defend:

“Our reasons are as follows:

- *too noisy an activity as housing backs onto all areas of the park but especially the bowling green which has been earmarked for this.*
- *likelihood of noise at night - we have people in the park playing in the playground after the park is closed.*
- *already have problems with mini-mopeds tearing through park so likely that people will skate through the park to get to the site.*
- *loss of green space - a third of the bowling green will disappear under concrete.*
- *lack of supervision - there is no park warden. The parks constabularies are based in Finsbury Park and take ages to get here if there is an emergency.*
- *without the supervision lack of first aid facilities.*
- *loss of enclosed football area which young kids currently use the bowling green for.*
- *possible graffiti on the skatepark area.*
- *we have suggested a trim trail around the park for older kids to use and would also like to develop the green either for boule / petanque or we have considered cricket practice nets*
- *currently the club is used for children's parties - would they want to book it if there was skateboarding activity close by?*
- *we have suggested alternative sites - the ... (old playground) near Rectory Gardens*
- *there is already a skatepark at Ally Pally [Alexandra Park] currently being refurbished*
- *kids will still continue to skate outside Hornsey Town Hall whatever the council hope - because it's cool*
- *what happens when skateboarding goes out of fashion as it did in the 80's and we are left with a concreted vandalised site”*

The two parties have been so vociferous that their argument over the skateboards has drawn the attention of the media at local¹⁵ and even national level, but so far no agreement has been reached.

If this dispute constituted a macroscopic clue of incompatibilities in the use of the park, during the visits to it another element emerged: the very low level of use by ethnic minorities. As previously said the area is predominantly white, but a number of communities especially from Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds live close to the park. Still, in two distinct observations on weekdays people of ethnic minority background accounted for less than 13% of the total users and only a very small fraction of this percentage were

¹⁵ (Boldry, E. and Grey, R., 2004, 2004; The Independent, 2005)

Turkish/Kurdish. The statistical relevance of this data is limited and need to be supported by further evidence as it could not be confirmed by official data (no surveys were conducted for the park), but are consistent with the perceptions of the interviewees. In addition the way the park was used is non-standard:

- It is mainly limited to the two (half) basketball pitches.
- It includes only children and teenagers, while most of the parents do not use the park at all.
- Participation is often restricted to formal activities organised by the council and local sport clubs (mediated)

Because of this (limited) use by minorities, visitors and the park staff did not reveal any concerns about exclusion during interviews and informal chats. The absence of visible obstacles that prevented groups from accessing the park further corroborated these opinions. Plus Priory Park is a safe place and there is no record of attacks to people. An exemplar clue on park users' perception is given by this interviewee when asked if some group in particular is excluded from the park:

"No, if you look at the numbers... Obviously they are white middle class. I think it reflects very much the area. I don't see anyone excluded"
(Interviews)

The obvious explanation is the existence of some types of barriers, whose origin is not necessarily an incompatibility (real or perceived) even we have seen that the effect, the exclusion, is the same. This is of particular interest as Green Flag Award's criteria to assess quality include as criterion n.1, "a welcoming place", which highlights the importance of taking into account social access to parks, (that is encouraging use from all sectors of the community) and warns that this "requires an understanding of the reasons why some people may be deterred from using a green space."

During the research it proved impossible to carry out interviews with people belonging to this group so further investigation is needed, but certainly the way consultation on the park was conducted for the park leaves the hypothesis open. The Friends of Priory Park are still the main channel for assessing local needs while the surveys are done by mail, at borough level and with very limited indications on single parks. This means these surveys are not the appropriate way to engage with self-referential communities less empowered to express their needs and aspirations compared to white middle-class residents. Even if the doubt remains, the result is similar to the well documented quarrel on skateboarding ramps: the fruition of the park looks 'reserved' to a main group that 'owns' Priory Park.

Current policies identify the engagement of local residents in park refurbishment and management as a tool to ensure use and ultimately quality and the sustainability of these achievements. Active participation and identification also contribute to surrogate the role of the old park keeper, removing ambiguity on ownership and establishing an acceptable code of conduct along patterns paralleling the Victorian tradition.

But in the case study the participation of (part of) the residents seems to contribute to crystallise a status quo and distribute the privilege within the

coalition originally involved in Priory Park refurbishment and still very active in fundraising. In this sense the park excellence universally recognised to Priory Park has not prevented what a report by Comedia described in 1995:

“Many parks do have ‘Friends’ groups or ‘user’ groups, but these in themselves may not necessarily be representative of all local interests. For the concerns and interests of local house owners, dog-owners, Sunday footballers, teenage groups, festival organisers, advocates of night time floodlit pitches, parents with young children are not always compatible. Public consultation, like public meetings, can quickly be hijacked by most vociferous and best-organised groups. But this does not mean that the commitment to widening debate about, and ownership of, local services and facilities should be abandoned.”

In this situation a limited amount of benefits are released to the whole Hornsey community and for the moment the opportunity to respond to the requests of teenagers or to improve the quality of the environment for ethnic minorities is not taken. The park becomes a limited resource that fails to deliver all its celebrated benefits because the regeneration of the park has not evolved into a regeneration-through-the-park, that is it has not been used as a synergic tool to tackle Hornsey’s “wicked issues” (Leach and Percy-Smith 2001). The potential is there, but the park still resists the attempt of re-connection from other initiatives targeted at the weaker sections of the community (e.g. the Council’s activities in the social housing spots, off Hornsey High Street), highlighting a tension between a traditional role of the park with its set of values (a peaceful refuge in a densely populated area, a place dedicated to kids and a unique ecological and heritage capital) and the capacity of the park to change to accommodate new requests that is ultimately the role the park could fulfil as a regeneration driver.

Section 4

4.1 Conclusions

The deafening campaign by the government for the promotion and valorisation of English parks is based on the range of benefits they can deliver to a wide audience of stakeholders, from people that use the park, to Local Authorities, to employers, to developers, etc. A relevant number of studies have been commissioned and published by agencies like Cabe Space and best practice is promoted since the late 1990s with the Green Flag Award and the Urban Park Forum. As a result the role of the park has been rediscovered after years of neglect and decline, for its potential to support the improvement of economic, social and environmental conditions of many areas in our cities. Indeed it is turning into an interesting tool of regeneration. Yet current discussions seem to ignore the relationship that links the different types of benefits available from parks, which can take the form of an incompatibility. As the case study has illustrated, a park deemed to be of excellent quality (the Green Flag award winning Priory Park) can see its regenerative potential undermined by forms of incompatibility and competition between the requests

of various stakeholders and can fail to address some of the more pressing problems of the urban area surrounding it.

The case study has a substantial limit in the little evidence on the preferences of some stakeholders (namely ethnic minorities), that would require further investigation in order to explain to which extent the non-use at the root of the exclusion from the benefits is due to the characteristics of the park itself or instead to other possible reasons, like a lack of adequate information by park administrators, i.e. the way consultation is done. It would also mean the need to shift the concept of inclusion from the passive idea of the removal of barriers to a more positive one focussed on how to create incentives to use. Another limit that further research could address is the particular stage in the history of Priory Park which was analysed: residents have been directly involved in the refurbishment of Priory Park creating the basis for a very strong identification and sense of ownership by this group, so the re-distribution of the benefits to a wider number of stakeholders might have been more difficult than in other cases. However, it could be argued that a strong sense of ownership or any other element that can feed resistance to change, can develop independently of initiatives like refurbishment (e.g. just because the park is located in a certain area, etc.), especially if the stakeholders are many and with marked differences. The case study has presented a limited number of stakeholders and the analysis of their competing preferences has been developed predominantly around social issues. This should not constitute a limit, as it is reasonable to assume that more complex cases would multiply the number of actors and interests, thus the chances for incompatibility. The exemplar quality of Priory Park (a model to follow) and the fact that its history is similar to that of thousands of others parks suggests that the findings of this report could be to a certain extent generalised.

In particular the evidence has suggested that ignoring incompatibility between the preferences of different users, manifested through conflict among stakeholders and non-use by some sections of the community, can result in a degree of exclusion from the distribution of the park benefits. A park, even a well-managed one, can dramatically contribute to the improvement of the quality of the public realm (MOL, 2004a) and deliver benefits to only a part of the community (businesses and public sector included), even if large and representative. Nevertheless it can fail to make a difference for some people (social dimension) or to involve key players that could enhance economic regeneration.

Certainly the park is not the only tool to tackle urban problems and sometimes it cannot fulfil this role at all, but if, as current policies suggest, its contribution to urban regeneration should be maximised, then the case study could be taken as a useful lesson to highlight the dangerously weak connection between the approach to urban green space (often too self-referential and more sensible to the relationship with other green spaces than with urban space, in line with open space hierarchy principles and more traditional views on the role of parks) and the other policies seeking to improve the economic and social prospects of local areas, despite the rhetoric of the holistic views on the role of green in contemporary English cities. It still has to be

understood how practice could strengthen the link and awards and success stories reconsider the way parks are seen as successful.

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