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NeighbourWoods for Better Cities

Tools for developing multifunctional community woodlands in Europe

Konijnendijk, Cecil Cornelis; Schipperijn, Jasper Jan

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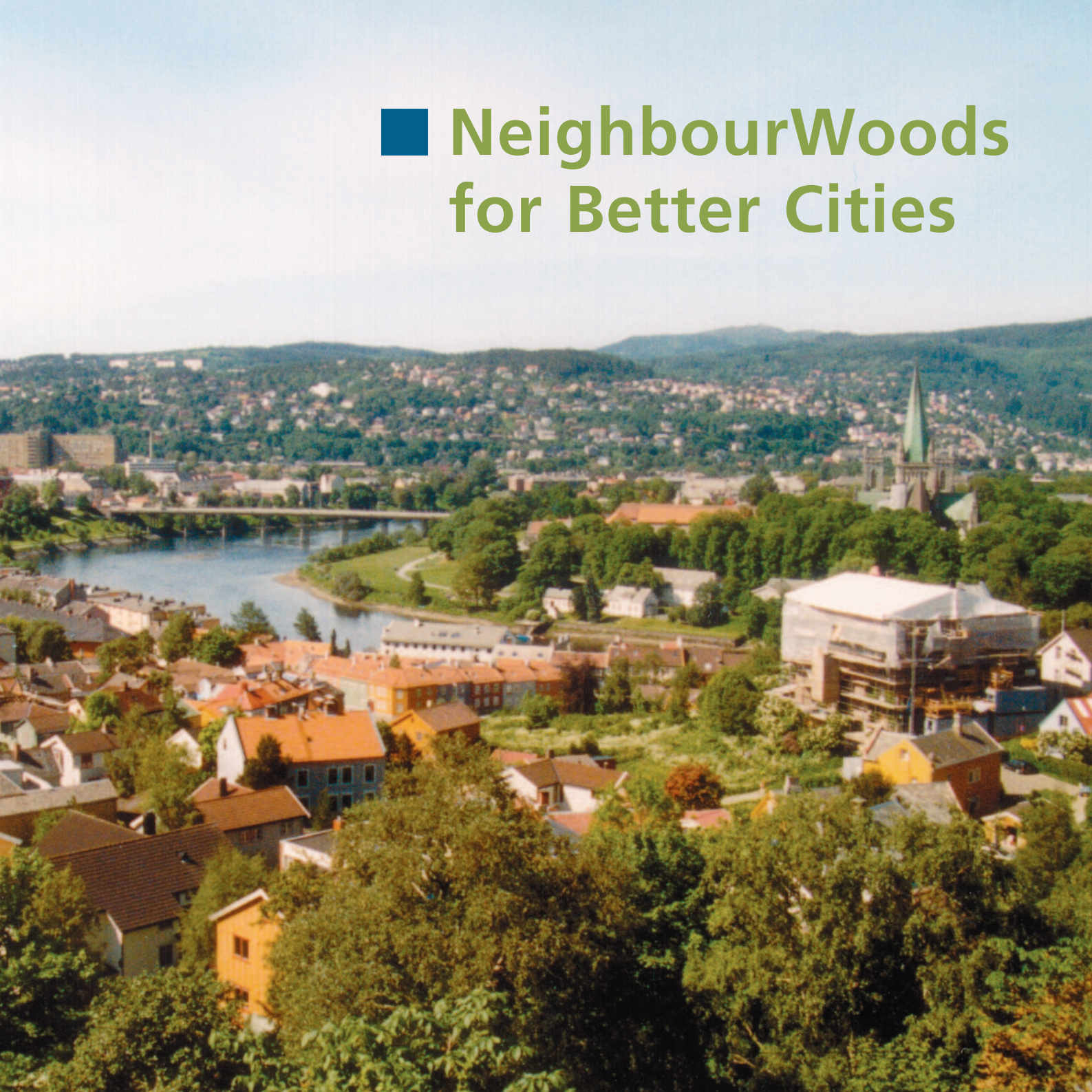
NeighbourWoods for Better Cities



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Editors	Cecil Konijnendijk & Jasper Schipperijn
Contributions by	Ulrika Åkerlund, Daniele Cuizzi, Rik De Vreese, Allan Gunnarsson, Roland Gustavsson, Diana Iskreva, Helena Mellqvist, Kirsi Mäkinen, Jens Balsby Nielsen, Ib Asger Olsen, Andreas Ottitisch, Lena Palenius, Karen Sejr, Jo Ryan, Dan Rydberg, Fabio Salbitano, Harri Silvennoinen, Alan Simson, Liisa Tyrväinen, Ann Van Herzele, Lodewijk Wiegersma
Illustrations	Ulrika Åkerlund 19r; Anders Bramme 4; Griet Buyse 13, 21, 32r; Allan Gunnarsson 29l; Roland Gustavsson 15, 18, 20, 29; Kirsi Mäkinen 26; Lena Palenius 31, 32l; Fabio Salbitano 5l, 9; Jasper Schipperijn cover, 5r, 12, 17t, 28, 30, 34, 35; Alan Simson 6, 8, 14, 16, 17b; Ann Van Herzele 11, 19l, 29r
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What is a NeighbourWood?

NeighbourWoods are woods at people's doorstep, as here in Helsingborg, Sweden.

Multifunctional woods

People like woodlands. Studies from across Europe have shown that woodlands are among the most popular settings for outdoor recreation. Most of the forest visits made by Europeans today are made to woodlands in or close to cities and towns.

In urbanised Europe, urban woodlands are a primary means of keeping city dwellers in touch with nature and natural processes. These woods can offer pleasant environments for rest, relaxation and recreation. We know that visits to woodlands and other green space can improve people's mental and physical health. Urban green areas help improve the urban climate, reduce air pollution, and protect city drinking water resources.

Urban dwellers appreciate woodlands and other urban green space, and often know a lot about their local areas when asked. The local neighbourhood park of course plays an important role, as people tend to visit the areas closest to their home most frequently. But people's appreciation for more nature-like, large areas has become clear from various studies.

Citizens of Helsinki, Finland for instance stated their preference for larger recreation areas and places for contact with nature close to their homes. Favourite landscapes were described as beautiful landscapes, varied in natural features. Favourite places were often associated with tranquillity, forest feeling, and naturalness. Visitors to the wooded Chico Mendes Park in Florence, Italy also mentioned tranquillity, as well as green and wildlife as main reasons for regularly visiting the park.

NEIGHBOURwoods are woods at people's doorstep, a natural part of cities and towns.

Neighb**OUR**woods are integral parts of the local community, involving local people in their planning, development, and management.

Neighbour**WOODS** can vary in size, shape, character and composition, ranging from small woods to large forested landscapes.

NeighbourWoods offer popular environments for recreation.

Community woods

A woodland at urban people's doorstep, providing multiple goods and services to the local community, could be called a *NeighbourWood*. For a wooded area to become a real NeighbourWood, it has to become an integral part of the local community.

Local residents are aware of the many benefits the woodland provides or can provide. A survey among residents and visitors of the Terzolle Valley, Italy, for example, showed themselves very much aware of the importance of the area for hydrological control and conservation of ancient practices and knowledge. People can visit a NeighbourWoods by themselves, or with others. Eighty-nine percent of the visitors to Chico Mendes Park in Florence, for example, came in the company of others.

NeighbourWoods have many shapes

NeighbourWoods come in many sizes and shapes. They can be small woods inside the city boundaries used for daily recreation. But they can also take the shape of large-scale peri-urban landscapes, where woodlands are part of a landscape mosaic. This is the case, for example, in the Terzolle Valley, and in the English Community Forests where the aim is to achieve a woodland cover of about 30 % of the landscape.

NeighbourWoods can serve the day-to-day needs of urban dwellers, or provide much-appreciated weekend escapes. Diversity also exists in terms of history, as some of the most popular NeighbourWoods have developed from ancient royal hunting domains, while others have been recently established as a result of afforestation policies.

The hilly landscape of the Terzolle NeighbourWood near Florence.

How to develop NeighbourWoods?

Access to NeighbourWoods is an important concern.

Not every wood is a NeighbourWood
Real NeighbourWoods, as we have seen, are woods at people's doorsteps, and an integral part of the local community. They cater for local demands. They are not limited to areas traditionally defined as forest, but range from smaller woods to large, peri-urban wooded landscapes.

Not all forested areas in and near cities have the same success in terms of providing multiple benefits to local communities. Woods are not really NeighbourWoods if the local community cannot use them. Use may be hampered for example by restricted or poorly designed access, or barriers such as large traffic corridors, or by a lack of footpaths. Woods may be difficult to reach without a car, lacking safe access by bicycle, bus, tram or train.

Problems also arise when woodlands are not seen as part of the local community. Local residents may feel left out of decisions concerning woodland management. When the community feels that *they* are managing the woodland, and not *we*, no feeling of local ownership will be created. Social control and use will be less. In the British town of Telford, local residents stated that they sometimes regarded local woods to be a nuisance. Some residents felt that the woods negatively affected their personal and property security and restricted views. Green walls of anonymous, badly or inappropriately managed woodlands fail to meet the wishes of the local community.

Urban woodlands may also fail to live up to their potential when management responsibilities are unclear, or when they are not seen as part of a wider green area resource, a network of urban green space. Different municipal and other public organisations are often responsible for the various elements of the urban green structure. In some cases, even the responsibility for one specific woodland is divided. In the case of wooded peri-urban landscapes, the variety of public and private owners and managers is even larger.

Woods and woodlands can only develop into, or remain as NeighbourWoods when the proper planning, design, and management are undertaken in close co-operation with local communities.

Tools for developing NeighbourWoods
This publication aims to contribute to the development of NeighbourWoods through socially-inclusive planning, design and management. It presents experiences from an international project supported by the European Commission which evaluated and developed approaches and

tools to assist NeighbourWood planners, designers, and managers. The latter are not only foresters, nor are they only professionals, as we will see. Those who decide upon the future of NeighbourWoods are the very local communities that these woodlands serve.

Promising tools were identified and tested in different NeighbourWoods across Europe, ranging from existing woodlands to afforestation projects, and from peri-urban landscapes to small neighbourhood woods.

The tools will be presented in five groups:

- Strategic tools: how can we develop a policy or vision for NeighbourWood development and management in cities or towns?
- Design tools: how can we design and structure a new NeighbourWood, or transform an existing one, to meet multiple demands?
- Management tools: how can we best translate our objectives and design ideas in the field through management?
- Information tools: how can we ensure that policy-making, design, and management decisions incorporate all important information about the landscape, the preferences and demands of local communities?
- Public involvement tools: How can we involve the different segments of local communities in planning, design, and maybe even management?

Case	Characterisation	Main issues
Helsinki, Finland	Existing municipal urban woodlands	Determine use and availability of woodlands in residential areas. Use GIS and questionnaires to map social values of green areas
Øresund Region, Denmark and Sweden	Range of different woodlands around Copenhagen & Malmö	Improve communication between users, connoisseurs, woodland managers and other professionals in woodland management. Develop joint management plans/visions
Ghent, Belgium	Planning and establishment of new urban woodlands near the city	Public involvement in the planning and establishment of new woodlands. Determine access and availability of green areas now and in the future
Telford New Town, United Kingdom	Urban woodland structure within the city, consisting of young woodlands	Revitalise existing woodlands incorporating wishes and demands of the local residents and users. Create an overview of values of the existing woodlands
Stara Zagora, Bulgaria	Municipal urban woodland park	Create a broadly supported vision on the development and management of the woodland. Use GIS to develop an information basis for management and planning
Greater Florence, Italy	Urban fringe woodlands of various age	User involvement and incorporation of user preferences in the development of a woodland management plan. Use of GIS to map woodland characteristics

Overview of the 6 case studies in the NeighbourWoods project.

Strategies for NeighbourWoods

NeighbourWoods require strategic thinking.

The need for visions

Cities are highly dynamic environments. Strategic decisions are continuously being taken on issues of urban development, infrastructure, social and economic development, land use changes, and so forth.

Like open space in general, NeighbourWoods run the risk of being treated merely as a soft issue in urban policy-making. If these woods are only seen as green dressing and not for the multiple, important goods and services they provide, they are unlikely to survive, let alone be nurtured and developed. NeighbourWoods needs to become a logical and integral part of social, economic, and environmental policies and agendas of local political authorities. Woodland issues should be considered in all aspects of land use planning.

Unfortunately, research found very few cities and towns in Europe that had developed cogent strategies for their urban woodland resources. Strategic thinking has been lacking and the focus has very much been on management plans outlining the day-to-day forestry activities in the woods. But what do cities want to achieve with their NeighbourWoods in the longer term? How will they go about conserving and developing these woods, in close collaboration with their users and other stakeholders?

A strategy or vision to generate broad support

Visions, strategies and policies set longer-term objectives and provide insight into the activities and resources needed to achieve these aims. Usually they are more formalised documents, broadly supported by authorities and citizens. They provide direction, while at the same time generating commitment from various stakeholders. The involvement of all relevant segments of the local community is crucial for achieving this.

When a vision was developed for the Terzolle Valley near Florence, for example, 95 % of residents and non-residents interviewed supported the process to bring the area under a special protected status. Support existed among valley residents as well as recreationists from nearby Florence.

Visions at different levels, and for different NeighbourWoods

In the case of the Ayazmo Park in the town of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, a vision was successfully developed for a local NeighbourWood. But successful visions and strategies that incorporate NeighbourWood-aspects are also needed at

city, regional, and perhaps even national level.

An example of a strategy at regional level is the development of a vision for the Terzolle Valley near Florence, leading to the establishment of the status of a Nature Protection Area of Local Interest. Woodlands are an important element of this peri-urban landscape, together with for example agricultural lands. Links could be established with the Strategic Plan of the Metropolitan Area of Florence, which has improving the quality of the urban environment among its priorities.

An example of a vision at national level is the Danish forest policy, which includes the ambitious afforestation objective that within one tree generation (that is 80-100 years), the forest cover of Denmark should be doubled. Urban and peri-urban areas are prioritised for afforestation, as woodland benefits (such as recreation, and water protection) are regarded highest close to where most people live. Potential afforestation locations close to cities score more points when funding has to be allocated.

At the municipal level, NeighbourWoods should be seen as integral parts of the urban green structure, and thus integrated in green structure and/or local landscape

When developing a NeighbourWood vision, overall land use plans should be considered. View on Florence, Italy.

Whom to involve in the development of a NeighbourWood vision?

- Administrators and managers: it is important to involve those people directly responsible for the NeighbourWoods, e.g. the municipal green or forestry department. But also representatives of other relevant departments, such as roads, public works, economic development, social affairs, should be considered
- Politicians: these are the people to provide political weight and support to a vision
- Experts: researchers and other experts can provide unbiased information on which decisions can be made
- Connoisseurs: local people who are not professionally involved with NeighbourWoods, but have a vast knowledge about certain aspects, for example as members of local nature conservation or citizen groups
- Local community: the people using the NeighbourWoods (or perhaps not yet). They include various groups, such as children and youths, elderly, mothers with children, ethnic minorities, all with their own preferences, demands, wishes and usage patterns
- Media: these are important as communication platform for example during the drafting as well as launching of a vision

plans. The connection between national (forest) policies and the municipal level is that of regional planning. In the Danish case, for example, regional plans are made to identify the prioritised areas for afforestation.

Visions do not only concern existing NeighbourWoods, but also the establishment of new ones. When the Flemish government and provincial government decided that a new woodland had to be established near the city of Ghent, Belgium, a first question was where this new NeighbourWood should be located. An extensive localisation study was carried out, including the use of multicriteria evaluation (MCA), which considered existing land uses and various vested interests along with the requirements of locating and developing the new woodland.

Whom to involve?

Not only the different authorities, such as the city administration, the regional government, or the state forest service are party to developing a NeighbourWood vision. There are a number of private actors that come into play. Of course the public at large and different interest groups, such as nature conservation and recreation associations, farmers and other land owners should be involved, but

actively involving the private sector, such as local businesses, waterworks and utility companies, can assist with generating much needed funding and support for NeighbourWood development and management.

In Denmark, a special agreement was signed between the Danish Forest and Nature Agency, the city of Copenhagen, and Copenhagen Energy, a private enterprise supplying energy and drinking water to Greater Copenhagen. The agreement set the objective of establishing 8 new woodland areas in the surroundings of Copenhagen, with a total area of 2,600 ha. The prime function of these woodland areas will be to protect the drinking water sources for the city of Copenhagen. Funding from Copenhagen Energy will be crucial for success.

The process of preparing a NeighbourWood vision

The process of developing a vision requires a step-by-step approach. This starts with outlining the issues at hand, followed up by a joint formulation of objectives. After this, those involved will define how these objectives can be met, over which period of time, and allocating a certain mix of resources.

Experience shows that it might be a good idea to organise two parallel processes that interact: one official vision drafting process within the municipal (or other) administration, and one parallel public involvement process. The two processes are to interact during critical phases, so that all interests are considered and as much as possible integrated into the final vision or policy. The process needs formal acceptance and broad support of relevant stakeholders.

The Ayazmo Park in the city of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, is a very popular woodland park, close to the centre of the city. In spite of its popularity, no vision for its management had previously been developed. Therefore it was decided to embark on a visioning process that involved the relevant municipal departments (in a formal process) as well as the public at large (in a parallel process). The linking between the two processes was arranged by a special bridging team consisting of representatives of the municipal green department and a local environmental NGO. Moreover, the results of the public involvement process were integrated in the formal process, for example by means of public workshops.

The public process consisted of a series of events during which local people were informed about the park and the ongoing

The Visioning Process. Developing a NeighbourWood vision requires a public involvment component, parallel to a more formal process.

Different users have different views, as here in Eastern Helsinki.

process. These events, such as a special park event, a youth forum, interviews in the park, and public workshops, were used to gather people's preferences and ideas for development of the park, and they are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this publication.

The process showed the importance of different activities to reach various segments of the public. The importance of whom to invite and how this should be done also became clear. Attractive titles for the events, such as *Let's together discuss the future of NeighbourWood X*, and good announcements in the media, showed themselves crucial for success.

The formal process involved several Thinking Days during which experts and administrators from different municipal departments jointly discussed the status of Ayazmo, as well as the potential directions that its development might take. Summaries of the public process were presented at the Thinking Days. The bridging team developed the vision step by step, progressing after each Thinking Day.

When the vision was ready, a formal launch was organised, consisting of a press conference in the presence of the mayor and deputy mayors, as well as an exhibition for the public. Results of the public process, such as children's drawings and essays, were presented at the exhibition.

Elements of a sound NeighbourWood vision

Based on the experiences from Stara Zagora, the following key elements of a good vision can be given:

- Introduction: brief history, background, info about the NeighbourWood's role and identity.
- Visioning process: description of steps taken in developing the vision, as well as of the stakeholders involved.
- Overall framework for the vision, e.g. stating the overall objectives, as well as the relationships between the four main components of the vision (see below). For each of the components below, information is provided about existing resources, the directions (ways to go), tasks (ways of acting), and actions as specific activities within the tasks.
- Component 1: NeighbourWood qualities and functions. Information about the physical qualities of the area (also as perceived by the users) and about how to preserve and develop qualities.
- Component 2: Social relations. Information about the players (e.g. munici-

pal departments, the public) and the way these can work together.

- Component 3: Knowledge and skills. What skills and knowledge are available within the group of players?
- Component 4: Mobilisation of capacities. What is the capacity of the players to act collectively to preserve and develop qualities and to capture external attention and resources?
- Setting priorities between the directions, tasks and activities.

Visions benefit from clear messages and concepts that travel well and can be understood by all stakeholders. The concept of a Green Ring around the Danish city of Roskilde, for example, is powerful in its message and well-know among politicians as well as citizens.

The »Gentse Feesten« in Ghent, Belgium have been actively used for raising public awareness about development of a new NeighbourWood.

NeighbourWood design

Telford, designed as a forest city.

Location of the NeighbourWood
When the decision for establishing a NeighbourWood is taken, and a suitable location has been found, the real work starts. A new wood can only become a NeighbourWood, visited by many and serving many different functions, if it has the right characteristics. This is where the NeighbourWood designers come in.

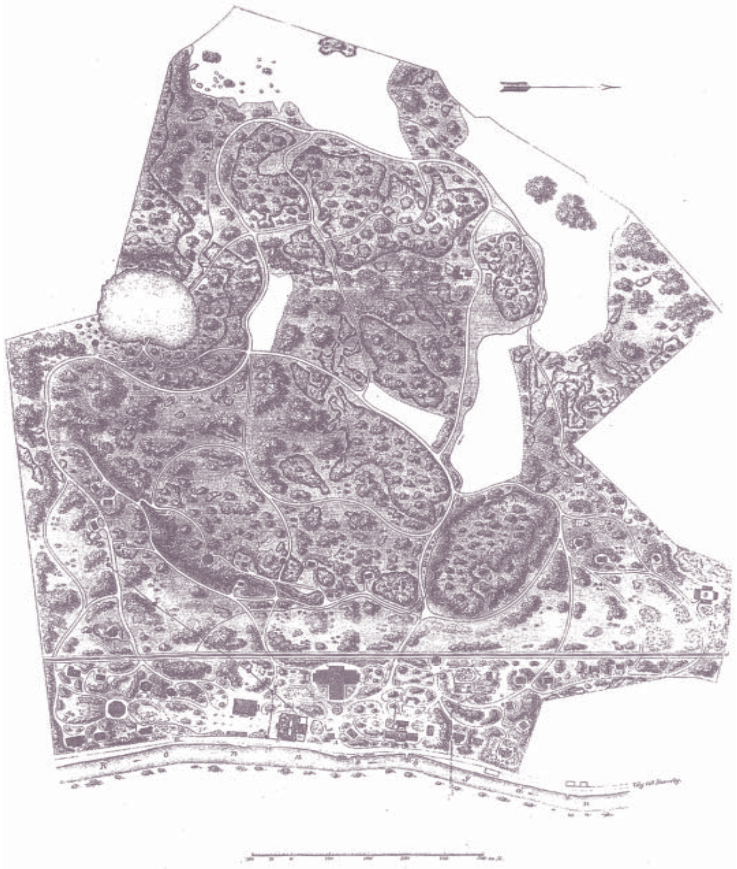
Design starts with considering alternatives for the location of the NeighbourWood within the existing landscape. Establishing a NeighbourWood may not be an improvement in all situations, of course. Careful consideration should be given to the character of the existing landscape, for example in the case of valuable open landscapes, areas with special cultural-historical qualities, valuable wildlife habitats and so forth. Where possible, woodlands should be positioned within reach of future users, and with good access. This will not only promote future use, but also enhance the possibility for establishing close links with the local community, and a feeling of ownership.

Designing the wood for different purposes
The next question that should be clarified is what purposes is the NeighbourWood to serve, and how can these purposes be best met by design, and later by management. NeighbourWoods differ from other types of woods, as we have seen, and this also poses special challenges to design. Recreation will often be a primary objective, for instance. It should become clear what types of recreation are preferred, as these also have their own requirements in terms of woodland design, recreational facilities, and so forth.

Central questions to deal with in the design process are:
- The mix between different landscape elements: woods, open spaces, water, etc.
- Boundaries and borders of the NeighbourWood.
- Choice of tree species, planting distance, age classes, etc.
- Infrastructure, facilities, for example for recreation.
- The quality of the designed experience.

Studies show that people have differing preferences for different forest types and different ideas of how a woodland should look. This is of course important to know for designers, as they can then »play« with various forest types to cater for various needs.

Design for recreational use
The design of a recreational infrastructure is often an important task. The preferen-



Good NeighbourWood design aims at achieving an attractive and varied landscape. (Ronneby Brunn Park, Sweden; design by Flindt).

The Amsterdamse Bos in the Netherlands is an example of a well-designed NeighbourWood, mixing woodland, open space and water.

ces and opinions of the public are to be carefully considered in this matter. A survey among visitors to Chico Mendes park in Florence, for example, showed that only 18 % felt that the present provision of recreational facilities and social possibilities is sufficient. They proposed adding of refreshment stands and playgrounds, as well as more opportunities for games and animation.

Many NeighbourWoods have become social theatres, where people not only go to experience nature, but especially also to enjoy the company of others. Care has to be exercised when considering the introduction of facilities into NeighbourWoods, and particular attention paid to the cultural differences that may occur across Europe. In Telford, for example, it was found that the appearance of man-made objects in the NeighbourWood was seen as an intrusion into a natural setting, and thus diminished the quality of the experience of being there.

Diversity often seems to be appreciated by users. Rather than solid woods with closed canopies, mosaics of land use with woods, open space, and water elements are appreciated. The success of the Amsterdamse Bos, The Netherlands, with its equal shares of woods, open space and water, and its clever manipulation of microclimate, clearly shows this. In spite of this NeighbourWood being more than 60 years old, it is still extremely popular with the urban dwellers.

Demand for design guidelines

Because of the specific demands to design, those involved in NeighbourWood establishment have often asked for some sort of design guidelines. Within the Danish state forest service, for example, district foresters involved with afforestation have developed an informal manual for guiding the establishment process. Issues dealt with include, among other, the technical requirements of afforestation, the involvement of other stakeholders, and choice of tree species. The more aesthetical considerations, however, are not often dealt with. Moreover, a thorough landscape analysis should proceed any NeighbourWood establishment project.

Design for transformation

Design does not only come in when new NeighbourWoods are to be created. It could also be that existing woods are no longer acting as true NeighbourWoods, as the demands and preferences of local communities have changed. Or perhaps management has not been able to

develop the wood according to public expectations after initial design and establishment.

The New Town of Telford, England was built during the 1960s. From the very start, it was given a dense and extensive green structure. The image of *Telford, Forest City* was cherished. But while trees and woods have grown, the demands of the population have changed. People are not very interested in dense green walls, or in woods that seem to fall beyond community control and have become anonymous and even – in some people's minds at least – dangerous. A survey in the Woodside estate of Telford showed that people felt that many woodlands were in need of appropriate management. On the other hand, they greatly appreciate greenspace in their living environment, and paradoxically there was some evidence that the scary places were also considered to be some of the best places.

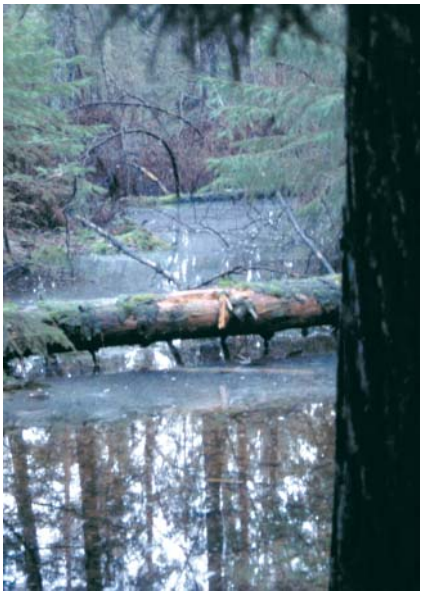
Thus designers need to come in to »redesign« the local woods, in close collaboration with the local community. Perhaps woods will need to be opened up, in order to enhance visibility and reduce feelings of insecurity. Paths may need to be improved or re-aligned to pick up on a variety of microclimates to improve the quality of the woodland experience. Also, the presence of managers could be improved, both in person and through more visible management activities in the woods. As not all woods will have the same design requirements, local design plans should be developed. One should bear in mind however that design is not a one-off activity, it's ongoing and should always be seen in the light of the design / management / design continuum.

Changing demands may require redesigning of NeighbourWoods, as was the case for the Chico Mendes Park in Florence, Italy.

Flowering plants can provide an extra attraction.

Management of NeighbourWoods

Management is all about implementing NeighbourWood visions.



Not only foresters manage NeighbourWoods

Management is needed to conserve, develop or transform the NeighbourWood, so that it can meet the demands of the local community, now and in the future. NeighbourWood managers are often working with the woodland and not in the least with the local community on a daily basis. They are very important links between the NeighbourWood and its neighbourhood.

NeighbourWood management is not only the task of foresters. As these woods can have very different sizes, shapes and functions, other professions are or should be involved. These include, among other, horticulturists and park managers, ecologists, and landscape architects. It is not unusual for »language difficulties« to emerge when the experts jointly need to decide on NeighbourWood management, and joint references and working methods need to be sought.

When a new management plan had to be developed for the historical woodland park of Ronneby Brunn, Sweden, professionals from different disciplines were involved. In order to facilitate communication between, for example, foresters, landscape architects and ecologists, on-site discussions were organised to get a better understanding of each other's language and approaches.

Discussions between disciplines can be aided by finding so-called reference landscapes. These landscapes, known to different experts, can be studied and visited and thus act as a comparative reference for the NeighbourWood. This will not only help with developing a better understanding of its present situation, but would also provide insight into managing future change in the woodland. For a new woodland to be established near the Belgian city of Ghent, for example, the newly afforested landscapes of the English Community Forests or the Dutch Randstad could act as reference.

The discussions and cooperation between different experts could be encouraged by involving future managers, such as students of forestry, landscape architecture, or landscape ecology. This approach was used for the forest of Skrylle east of Malmö, Sweden, an intensively used recreation woodland. Students of landscape architecture, landscape engineering, and forestry were asked to study the Skrylle forest, and develop their vision for future management. Ideas were presented to the foresters managing the area and facing the challenge of transforming the forest after a major

Interviews with connoisseurs can provide important information for management.

storm. Discussions led to a better understanding of the many different values and potentials of the NeighbourWood, and not in the least the social and cultural ones. Perhaps more relevant than the actual results of the management planning exercise was the understanding achieved between experts and students from very different backgrounds.

The role of connoisseurs

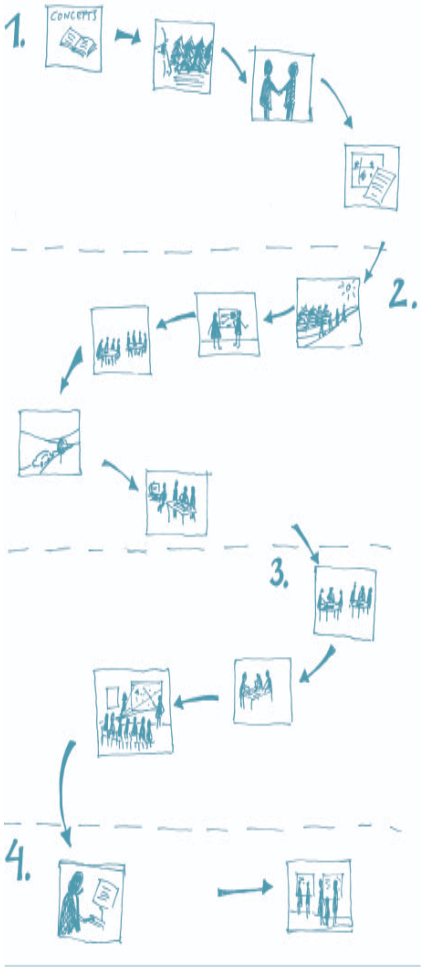
Not only the local green department or forest service decides on the management of NeighbourWoods. So-called connoisseurs can provide essential contributions to management discussions. These connoisseurs are local experts with a deep knowledge of the NeighbourWood concerned, often with a high interest in a specific aspect, such as birdlife, fungi, butterflies, but also local history, horseback riding, or orienteering. These people often act as leaders in local organisations, such as a local nature conservation society, or association of horseback riders.

Connoisseurs combine a strong attachment to the NeighbourWood with a vast knowledge and refined taste of the landscape from their particular perspective, although care sometimes has to be exercised in assessing just how representative of the community these connoisseurs are.

Undoubtedly, involving these people will enrich management. Their knowledge of the location of rare fungi, the preferences of bird species, and local folklore can help woodland managers to take the right decisions for maintaining or promoting benefits. Finding the right people to get involved in for instance the preparation of a new woodland management plan can take time. Often the snowball method works well: connoisseurs and the local community will point in the direction of those with the most relevant knowledge.

In the case of the woodland park of Ronneby Brunn, connoisseurs from very different walks of life were involved in discussions about future management of the area. Apart from group discussions, connoisseurs were taken on a walk through the forest by researchers supporting the process. On the walk, they were asked to point out their special places in the park, which were later marked on a map. In this way, a very special map of the area was created. Not only did

Students of fields such as forestry and landscape architecture could be involved in developing management plans. A mutual learning experience for them and for managers



the map include the traditional information about forest stands and paths. Also outlined were for example places of historical interest, as well as favourite routes and places for orienteering and horseback riding.

Involving connoisseurs is important, but not always easy. They are largely volunteers and their time is often limited. Giving them a meaningful role in the process is therefore crucial. Agreement should exist on the level of actual influence they will have on future management. Are they only advising local managers? Or are they actually formulating new management objectives and directions together with the managers?

Managing with the public

Management does not only have to be the task of professionals and experts. Experiences show that involving the public in different management tasks can be beneficial. The public can benefit by feeling more involved, better informed, and more aware of management needs. For woodland managers, better relations with the public could be a result.

There is no such thing as »the public« and the involvement of different groups will require different approaches. The group of connoisseurs, representing different types of knowledge and interest groups, has been mentioned before, but other major groups need to be considered, including children, youths, the elderly, young mothers, and ethnic minorities.

In today's urban societies, many children lack regular access to forests and nature. Awareness about natural processes and values is often rather low. By actively involving children of different ages in NeighbourWood management, stronger links with and better understanding of nature can be achieved. Children could be given more responsibility for their own natural environment.

A very good example of how to involve schoolchildren in NeighbourWood management has been the case of the Filborna woodland in the Swedish town of Helsingborg. Schoolchildren of different ages were turned into woodland managers, and given responsibility for carrying out management tasks. More information about this example will be provided elsewhere in this publication.

Is the general public interested in being actively involved in NeighbourWood management? This is not always the case, and differences exist between different segments of society. Only 1/3 of the visitors to Chico Mendes Park in Florence

Not all residents are aware of the need to cut trees for maintaining NeighbourWood qualities.

The public can be involved in planting and management, as shown for the case of Ghent.

showed themselves willing to actively engage in park management tasks. When asked about what types of activities they would prefer to be involved in, they mentioned taking care of animals, assisting children, and organising special activities for park users. Not many respondents opted for planting trees and flowers, pruning of trees, or cleaning up.

Special management agreements between authorities and citizen groups have been drawn up in parts of Europe. A local association is responsible for part of the management and supervision in Chico Mendes Park. Especially a group of elderly association members is taking care of various aspects of day-to-day management. One of the municipality's aims with the agreement was to reduce management cost. The level of management and supervision would probably have been much lower if only the municipal green department had been involved.

The involvement of non-governmental organisations in NeighbourWood management has become rather common in England, where organisations such as the Woodland Trust are responsible for management of a large number of urban woodlands. In the case of Telford, the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust manages some attractive and popular woodlands south of the city, to the satisfaction of the woodland users.

Management plans are not only about trees

Experiences with NeighbourWood management show that more is considered today than which trees to cut and what tree species to plant. In Ronneby, Sweden, an attempt has been made to prepare a socio-culturally based management plan, in which management tasks are defined that can promote the area's many socio-cultural values. More integrative management that considers socio-cultural, ecological, environmental, and economic aspects and elements requires the availability of an extensive information base. Traditional woodland inventories focusing on boundaries, forest stands, tree species composition, age, and so forth are no longer sufficient. Inventories need to include information about, for example, recreational use, cultural-historical elements, biodiversity values, and people's favourite places. Those preparing management plans can draw upon local community resources, and on more detailed local maps.

Information for planning, design and management

Types of information to consider in the planning, design and management of NeighbourWoods

- Basic information about the NeighbourWood, including location, boundaries, size, structure, land use types
- Environmental/ecological information, including information about flora and fauna, special habitats
- Socio-cultural information, such as people's preferences, recreational use, cultural-historical values
- Planning and management information, related to the policy, planning and legal framework, past management practices, economic and other resources for planning and management

What information to consider?

As will have become clear, NeighbourWoods are complex resources to plan, design and manage. They are woods of many different shapes and sizes that need to meet very diverse demands of local communities. Moreover, they are situated in high-pressure urban environments. If planners, designers and managers are to take the right decisions, they need to be supplied with sufficient information.

Starting from scratch

Where to start when hardly any information is available about the NeighbourWood? As the example of the Ayazmo Park in the Bulgarian town of Stara Zagora shows, there will always be relevant information. The problem often is to bring the existing information together, to compile additional information, and to present the available information in an accessible and attractive form.

In Stara Zagora, researchers started with compiling a relatively simple database with key information about the woodland park. A field inventory sheet was prepared and used for registering basic information about the area, land use, roads and paths, water elements, tree species composition, and special features. This information was used to prepare the first accurate, digital map of the NeighbourWoods. The map provided the basis for a basic Geographical Information System (GIS) to assist decision-making in planning and management.

In Telford, a GIS-map provided insight in the division of different green elements in the various city neighbourhoods.

Information about the planning, management and legal context often exists only in part. While decision-makers often have a general idea about the policies, plans, and regulations of direct relevance, NeighbourWoods are to an increasing extent seen in a wider urban development and land use context. This should be reflected in the information base used for decision-making.

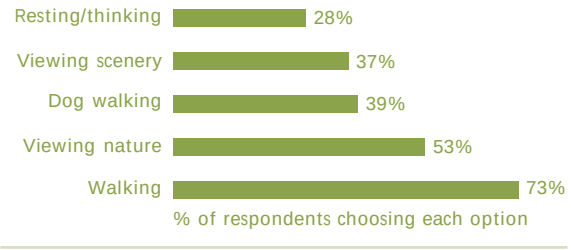
Ideally, information about the available financial and other resources should be presented in comparison to, for example, the different NeighbourWood elements, characteristics, and their management needs. How much money does maintaining a certain recreational facility require, for example? What extra resources could be set aside for transforming a coniferous stand to a mixed wood?

Ecological information

A next step could be to include ecological information. Connoisseurs and local nature conservation groups are a crucial resource here. Birdwatchers, for example, often have a detailed overview of the presence of different species of birds in an area, including their nesting sites. Similar information, ready to be mapped, could exist on insects, plant life, and so forth. In the Terzolle Valley near Florence, a map of forest types was presented based on an existing classification system of regional forest types. Aerial photo information was combined with a field survey. The digitised information was supplemented by information directly relevant for management, for example relating to stand structure stability and the vulnerability of forest stands to wildfires.

In Helsinki, people were asked about their favourite NeighbourWoods.

Top 5 woodland activities among residents of Telford, UK.



Although thematic maps, representing a specific theme relevant to planning and management, were developed as part of an expert system, they turned out to be useful tools to be used for communication between experts and members of the public as well. A botanical survey was carried out in woodlands in Telford, and will be updated every two years. This provides an ecological snapshot of the areas and allows wildlife and habitant information to be brought together with the basic woodland characteristics, cultural-historical information, etc. to inform and guide future management activities.

Experiences with thematic mapping and GIS show that this is a good way of obtaining information and overview of different aspects. But the process could be technically demanding, requiring resources, and not easy to understand by all actors. Moreover, it brings along the risk of over-simplification, as only some aspects can be covered by the GIS. That said, the tool is potentially a powerful means of monitoring change, for example of NeighbourWood size, character, species composition, and so forth. But this requires regular updating of the information.

What to keep in mind when carrying out a social survey?

- The development of the questionnaire benefits from involving experts as well as main stakeholders. Main problems and issues to be addressed by the survey can be discussed
- Plan for events that can be used for enhancing the success of the survey, such as a Day of the NeighbourWood where questionnaires can be distributed. Experiences show that questionnaires handed out to people in person have by far the highest response rate
- Does the questionnaire have the right tone and language? Is it not too long, and is it clearly readable? Are the questions precise? Does the questionnaire capture all relevant information?
- Each survey should involve a try-out of the questionnaire among a small number of respondents, after which adaptations can be made
- To get a good overview of public opinion, a high response rate is important. This rate can be increased by providing an incentive for completing the questionnaire, such as a prize draw
- Follow up of the first mailing or hand out by telephone or post is important
- Respondents should be properly informed about the objective of the survey, as well as of the results

The human element

In the case of NeighbourWoods, socio-cultural information is a very important basis for decision-making. Or rather: should be, as detailed information on aspects such as recreational use, let alone user preferences and cultural meanings of the area, is seldom available. Having a general idea of how the wood is used today is one thing. But do people like what they see and use? Would they have ideas for improving the area? And how about those citizens not using the NeighbourWood: why are they not benefiting from the wood?

Social surveys could be a first step in getting better insight of people's use and preferences, as the examples from various NeighbourWoods show. In Telford, a survey was used to gather information that could help assess which local woodlands people like to visit, and to identify key attractions and barriers to woodland use.

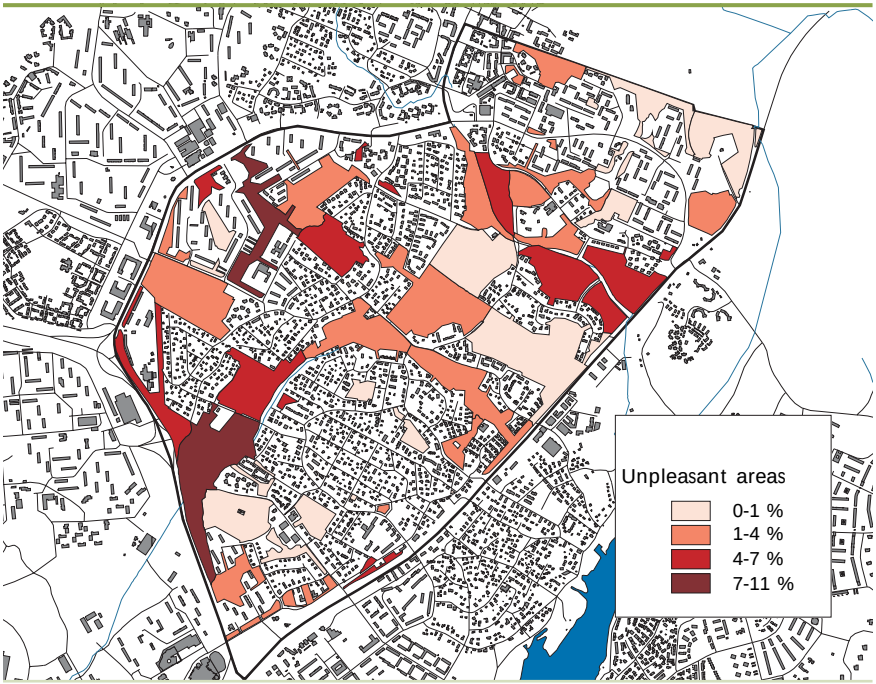
A survey can yield a lot of information about public preferences. It is a promising tool for providing information about the needs, hopes and fears of the community. Questionnaires can easily be manipulated to return very specific and reliable information. Moreover, a social survey is an

easily transferable tool that can be developed anywhere to suit any particular situation. Drawbacks of surveys include that they can be time consuming and expensive, involve limited interaction between managers, experts and the public, and often require expert input in terms of questionnaire design and analysis of results.

In the survey among residents of the Woodside estate of Telford, questions were asked about use patterns, preferences, as well as possible improvements to the local woodland areas. The questionnaire used included different question formats, allowing for more qualitative statements to be included.

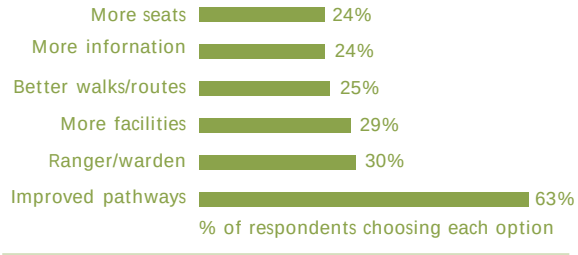
What do the public think?

Surveys cannot capture all relevant social



Social mapping can also show which areas that are not considered as NeighbourWoods by local communities, as demonstrated here for part of Helsinki.

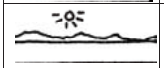
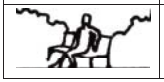
Changes that would improve woodland use and enjoyment, as mentioned by residents of Telford.



information, for example due to their more rigid format and lack of personal contacts between interviewer and respondent. In order to obtain deeper insights in people's ideas and preferences, other methods should be used. These could include interviews, focus group meetings, and so forth. In the case of Telford, it became clear that a question about preference for different tree species and forest stands did not yield usable answers. Therefore, a public workshop was used to present sets of photographs of different woodland views to people, who could then comment on these and rate then for their attractiveness. From this, the researchers were able to determine their relative preferences (a psychophysical approach).

In the Chico Mendes park, the communication and involvement process aimed at gaining better understanding of preferences towards woodlands included a survey, as well as perception interviews and connoisseur interviews. The entire process was described by the researchers as a customer satisfaction analysis. For the perception interviews, well known static views/spots were selected, as well as a popular route along these views. Visitors were accompanied to the different sites and along the route by researchers, and asked to score what they saw. Although the method provided more detailed information, it still did not include the perspectives of people not using the park while a house-to-house survey might. In a district of the city of Helsinki, Finland, a social survey was used to undertake social mapping. Through a widely disseminated questionnaire, residents' opinions on green value functions and values were assessed. Moreover, people were asked to identify their favourite places and most used areas, as well as areas with specific qualities. The latter could relate to, for example, beautiful scenery, forest feeling, freedom and space, and peace and quietness.

Social mapping can provide crucial information about user experiences.

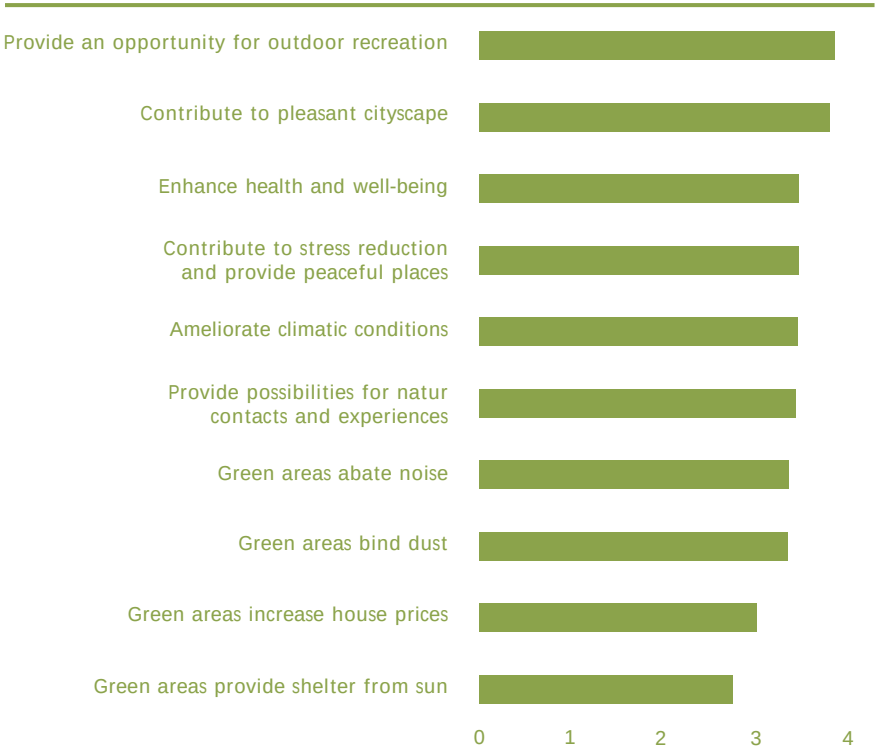
		Green area number, where the quality is found:	Cannot find within my housing area	Cannot say
	'BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPE' Places or areas that you find beautiful and attractive (beautiful scenes etc.)		☐	☐
	'VALUABLE NATURE SITE' Valuable nature area or place with a special feeling of nature (e.g. natural vegetation, fauna, fascinating rocks, bedrocks, shorelines).		☐	☐
	'FOREST FEELING' Area or place that feels like a "real" forest.		☐	☐
	**'SPACE AND FREEDOM'** Area or place where you can enjoy space and freedom.		☐	☐
	'ATTRACTIVE PARK' Constructed park that is exceptionally beautiful (flower beds, constructions, valuable trees, tree lines, places to stay).		☐	☐
	**'PEACE AND TRANQUILITY'** Area or place that is peaceful and quiet.		☐	☐

The results could easily be mapped and presented in a GIS. Combined thematic maps clearly showed which Neighbour-Woods were the most appreciated, and which were not. The visual presentation of the information provided a promising tool to be used in planning and management. The method is communicative, and relatively easy to use in a public involvement process.

Bringing information together

As we have seen, there is a lot of information to consider in the planning, design, and management of Neighbour-Woods. How can this vast amount of – often very diverse – information be presented in an accessible form, to be readily available and used by decision-makers?

GIS has proved to be a very useful tool in this respect, not in the least because of its visual and communicative qualities. Different thematic maps can enhance »territory reading« by experts, politicians, as well as lay persons, as long as they are presented in a clear, informative and attractive way. In many cases, the initial investment in the systems is high. Many methods require a certain level of technological knowledge. Moreover, information becomes really interesting when regularly updated. This requires a long-term strategy for information management.



Green area benefits and functions in Helsinki. Scale: 1 = not at all important, 2 = not very important, 3 = relatively important, 4 = very important. Missing answers 1.4-2.4 %.

Involving the public

Good relations with the media are important for NeighbourWood managers.

The need to involve the public

NeighbourWoods are woods of and for the local community. To maintain or develop true community ownership of the wood, people should be involved in the decisions affecting it. Involving people can help avoid or manage conflicts. Public involvement can generate crucial support for those promoting the importance of NeighbourWoods, for example within municipal policy-making. Where an urban wood is anonymous and not being considered part of the local community, involvement can generate a feeling of shared responsibility.

Public involvement can take many forms, occurring at very different levels. Most important is flexibility in terms of adapting the level and methods of involvement to specific NeighbourWoods. Involvement starts with consultation, where the local community is asked to give their opinion about visions and plans prepared by experts. It can take the shape of full participation where experts and the community jointly develop these documents, starting from the major objectives. In some cases it can even extend to transferring decision-making responsibility and management tasks to the local community. There is no blue print for the perfect public involvement process, as every situation is unique. But a true NeighbourWood cannot exist without some form of community involvement.

Elements that could be part of a NeighbourWood website, based on the example of the Parkbos Ghent

- State of the art of the project, including maps
- Facts and figures
- Background information
- Information about the policy and planning framework
- Reports of public meetings
- Agenda of events, such as excursions
- Overview of existing recreational possibilities and routes in the area
- Information about wildlife in the area
- Special, attractive features, such as a treasure hunt and a children's page
- Frequently asked questions and answers
- Contact details of the project team, and opportunity for providing feedback

It starts with good information

Informing relevant audiences about the local NeighbourWood, the benefits it provides, the challenges it is facing, the options for possible management and so forth is an important first step. Many methods of informing and raising awareness are available. The local media, represented by local newspapers, radio, or television, often provides an important plat-

A NeighbourWood Day can be a good way of starting a public involvement process. This was experienced in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria.

Residents obtain a large part of their knowledge about NeighbourWoods through the local media. Article from Helsingborg Dagblad, October 2003.

De skapar rum för rast och ro

"De har roliga idéer. De som normalt skiter skog tänker bara på att ta bort varbarmat träd, medan barnen skapar små rum. Deras idéer behövs."

form. NeighbourWood managers can benefit from having good relationships with the local media. By regular contacts, letters to the editor, or weekly columns they can make sure that positive news about the wood gets out.

The Internet has become another important medium. In the case of establishment of a new NeighbourWood near the Belgian city of Ghent, a special Internet site provided an important means of informing relevant audiences. The Parkbos Ghent site (www.parkbos.be, in Dutch only), managed by a special project team, has aimed to provide actual and accurate information about establishment of the woodland, raise awareness, and provide opportunities for feedback.

Experiences from Ghent show that the Internet is a powerful medium, through which different groups can be reached. The response rate of users was rather low, however; not much feedback on the afforestation project was provided through the website as compared to other means of communication. A website therefore should not be used as the only means of information. Indeed, there is some evidence from the UK that decision-makers rarely access the web for information. Websites are immensely useful however, and a successful NeighbourWood web site should be attractive, regularly updated, and thus requires significant resources.

Organising a NeighbourWood Day

Other ways of raising interest and awareness are amply available. A successful tool has proven to be the organisation of a special NeighbourWood Day, during which various activities are organised. A park event was organised at Ayazmo Park in Stara Zagora as part of the development of a vision. The objectives of the event were to draw attention to the park and its problems and opportunities, to

Guided walks enhance contact and understanding between public and managers.

promote the ongoing vision process, and to gather issues and ideas in a broad sense. Many different people participated in activities such as guided walks, activities for children, and the painting of park facilities. People could write their suggestions for improving the park and glue these to a special idea tree. The events could also be used for handing out questionnaires, such as »how are we doing«-questionnaires to find out how people feel about present woodland management.

Of course the success of this type of event is highly dependent on the weather, a good organisation, effective announcing through the media, and so forth.

In the Terzolle Valley and in Ghent, existing summer events were used to promote the development of visions for the respective NeighbourWoods in the area. Using existing events can limit the amount of resources and organisation to be provided by the green or forest department. Moreover, they will probably attract more people.

Walking in the NeighbourWood

Guided walks with citizens, hosted by the forest managers, provide an excellent opportunity for awareness raising, as well as direct interaction. Facing real situations, preferences and suggestions can be discussed. In the case of the Terzolle Valley, groups of visitors were guided to different forest types, and asked to give preference scores. This was followed up by discussions in which reasons for scoring were explored. Discussions out in the woods have been rewarding to both managers and visitors alike. This activity can be rather time consuming, however, as groups should be kept rather small for mutual satisfaction. If one has the ambition to obtain a broad overview of citizen preferences, this tool might not be the most efficient.

Woodland walks do not limit themselves to guided walks with visitors. Experts and connoisseurs could also be brought to the forest, as we have seen. Local managers and connoisseurs could be asked about the special spots, which has proven to be very informative for those trying to get a deep insight into the characteristics of the NeighbourWood.

Storytelling

Storytelling is as ancient as humanity, and stories are still an excellent means of communicating. With regards to NeighbourWoods, people could be asked to tell their personal stories about the local wood, in writing or in person, and perhaps even in front of a camera. Stories could help in incorporating local and

Things to consider when involving children

- Young people give great attention to detail, which can be complementary to general visions and ambitions of professionals
- Children and teenagers are communicative and creative when given attention and responsibility to act
- Children and teenagers will feel more at home in a NeighbourWood after an involvement activity
- Don't ask children what kind of forest they like or want. It is better to ask about what kind of activities that can be conducted, to let them show you the activity, or participate together with them. Children have an action perspective
- Make the wood into *their* forest and step aside. Children need spaces where they are allowed to put their mark
- Children are experts of their own living place
- Young woodlands (5-15 yrs) seem suitable as laboratories for young people with simple tools

Children are an important group to consider in public involvement programmes.

traditional knowledge about the wood. In Stara Zagora, some of the stories were used to compile a special story calendar. The calendar was sent to inhabitants of the city and can help to enforce links between the local wood and people's daily lives. Moreover, stories can assist with enhancing links between the generations, as grandmother's special memories of the wood may be rather similar to those of the grandson. Alternative ways of storytelling include asking children to write or draw about the NeighbourWood.

Public meetings

Public meetings represent moments and places of communication and exchange among actors. Knowledge from a technical/scientific level can be compared and criticised from the perspective of the specific knowledge of people living and acting in the area (consultation meetings). Exactly who issues invitations to the meeting is very important; people might decide not to show up if the meeting is not organised by a generally respected organisation. It is also important to decide whom to invite. The agenda should ideally be set together with stakeholders. At the end of the meeting, the main conclusions should be clearly summarised, for example by an independent facilitator. A report of the meeting should be sent to the participants, as well as those others invited, as soon as possible. Reports should capture the richness of the debate, and show participants that their inputs have been taken seriously.

Children can be asked to express their ideas through drawing and writing. The Filborna woodland in Helsingborg stimulated creativity.

User boards and *Friends of the NeighbourWood*

Public meetings could be more formalised, and for example take the shape of »user boards«. In Denmark, for example, user boards have been established for all of the country's forest districts (at regional level). These boards are mainly used as advisory councils, informing the woodland managers about what lives among the main interest groups. In the case of real NeighbourWoods, however, these regional boards will not suffice, as many issues will be very local. Having local boards means that participants will often have a real feeling of ownership and feel strongly about local issues. Like with public meetings at large, there are several drawbacks to consider. The location and timing of the meeting need to be carefully considered, as most people will participate in their free time. The role and authority of the meeting need to be clearly defined to avoid disappointment.

In some cases, a group of strongly involved citizens could decide to establish a *Friends of NeighbourWoods X*. This association could act as a watchdog, but also be a very powerful ally for woodland managers, for example in the political process. As with connoisseurs, however, care sometimes has to be taken in establishing whether friend groups remain representative of their community, or whether they evolve into self-interest groups.

Watching the children in action was like watching the civilization history of man. They were acting as small copies of Robinson Crusoe coming to a vast corner or the world: opening the glade, putting up a fence against the dangerous world outside, building the dens and planting something for pleasure and maybe profit – Experience of researchers working with children in the Filborna NeighbourWood.

Involving different parts of the public

Different types of users and other citizens will require their own public involvement approaches. Special groups to consider include, among others, children and young people, the elderly, the socially deprived, and ethnic minorities.

In Stara Zagora, a youth round table was organised as part of the visioning process. Young people were treated as experts about the local woodland park. The round table was aimed at fostering awareness among youths, often a difficult group to get involved with NeighbourWoods. Moreover, the event meant to encourage participation and obtain insight in the specific needs, preferences and ideas of youths. Children were involved in woodland management in the case of the Filborna NeighbourWood in the Swedish town of Helsingborg. Groups of schoolchildren of different ages were given actual management responsibility, and asked to shape the woodland to their own liking. The aim was, among others, to explore the qualities and contributions that children and teenagers can give to the development of NeighbourWoods.

Professional managers had the opportunity to discuss management with the children. For the youngest children, an introductory fairytale provided a historical context of being a brave saviour and defender of nature. Children were not only asked to actually transform parts of the young woodland, but also to communicate their ideas and preferences through writing and drawing.

Feedback and evaluation

When people have been involved in NeighbourWood planning, design, and management, they have a right to get feedback on what has happened with their ideas. Moreover, it is important to evaluate with them how the involvement process worked. A thorough evaluation of public participation in urban woodland planning has been carried out in Helsinki, Finland, by the local university.

Experience has shown, for instance, the need to adapt the mixture of public involvement tools to the specific NeighbourWood-situation, and to be flexible. If new issues and groups emerge, do not hesitate to use new involvement tools.

More information

The information in this booklet is based on the following NeighbourWoods case study reports:

Åkerlund, U. and Gustavsson, R. (2004) The Skrylleskogen study: Interactions between coming managers and connoisseurs on the way to a refined management planning. Department of Landscape Planning Alnarp, Swedish Universty of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp

De Vreese, R., Van Herzele, A. and Konijnendijk, C.C. (2004) Case study Ghent report. Flemish Forest Organisation, Melle

Gunnarsson, A. and Palenius, L. (2004) The Filborna study: Children and teenagers as urban woodland managers. Department of Landscape Planning Alnarp, Swedish Universty of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp

Gustavsson, R., Mellqvist, H. and Åkerlund, U. (2004) The Ronneby Brunn study. Testing a social-cultural based management planning, and the connoisseurs and action oriented approach as communicative tools in pract. Department of Landscape Planning Alnarp, Swedish Universty of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp

Salbitano, F., and Cuizzi, D. (2004) The Greater Florence case study report: Activating a permanent participatory process to woodland management, plan and regulations at different scales. DISTAF, University of Florence, Florence

Sejr, K., Nielsen, J.B. and Konijnendijk, C. (2004) Urban woodland policies in Denmark: A case study of urban woodland policies as an element of current green structure planning in Danish communities and the co-operation between public authorities. Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Frederiksberg

Simson, A. and Ryan, J. (2004) NeighbourWoods in Telford. Research report 2004. Leeds Met University, Leeds

Tyrväinen, L., Mäkinen, K., Schipperijn, J. and Silvennoinen, H. (2004) Mapping social values and meanings of green areas in Helsinki Finland. Department of Forest Ecology, University of Helsinki, Helsinki

Van Herzele, A., Salbitano, F. and Iskreva, D. (2004) The Ayazmo Park case study report: Action research in collaborative woodland management. Department of Human Ecology, Free University of Brussels, Brussels

Wiegersma, L. and Olsen, I.A. (2004) NeighbourWoods: Comparative analysis of three urban woodlands in Denmark and the Netherlands. Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Frederiksberg

Additional information about developing NeighbourWoods can be found on the following websites:

English Community Forests, *www.communityforest.org.uk*
Large-scale English programme for the development of wooded landscapes for multiple benefits

European Forum on Urban Forestry, *www.efuf.org*
This Forum brings together urban woodland planners and managers from across Europe

European Urban Forestry Research and Information Centre (EUFORIC), *www.urbanforest.info*
Includes the NeighbourWoods project website

National Urban Forestry Unit, *www.nufu.org.uk*
Case reports and manuals (e.g. for planning urban woodlands) can be ordered here.

TreeLink, *www.treelink.org*
General information portal on the benefits of urban greening and urban trees

Urban Woods for People, *www.svo.se/urbanwoods*
Website of a French-Swedish project which aims to develop manuals for urban woodland management for various audiences

Woodland Trust, *www.woodlandtrust.org.uk*
Includes downloadable woodland management guides

NeighbourWoods

Danish Centre for Forest, Landscape and Planning • KVL
www.sl.kvl.dk
E-mail: cck@kvl.dk

Department of Science and Technologies of the Forest Environment
University of Florence
www.unifi.it/distaf
E-mail: fabio.salbitano@unifi.it

The Leeds School of Architecture, Landscape and Design
Leeds Met University
www.leedsmet.ac.uk
E-mail: a.simson@leedsmet.ac.uk

Department of Landscape Planning Alnarp
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
www.lpal.slu.se
E-mail: roland.gustavsson@lpal.slu.se

Department of Forest Ecology
University of Helsinki
www.honeybee.helsinki.fi/mmeko/english
E-mail: liisa.tyrvainen@helsinki.fi

Flemish Forest Organisation NGO
www.vbv.be
E-mail: rik.devreese@vbv.be

Human Ecology Department
Free University of Brussels
www.vub.ac.be/MEKO
E-mail: ann.vanherzele@vub.ac.be

European Forest Institute
www.efi.fi
E-mail: andreas.ottitsch@efi.fi