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1 Dr Jinvo Nam and Dr Nicola Dempsey

2 Acceptability of income generation practices in 21st century urban park management:  
3 the case of city district parks

4

5 **Abstract**

6 There is growing interest in understanding the benefits of parks and green space in financial terms,  
7 particularly from policymakers and decision-makers. Applying a financial value is an increasingly  
8 popular practice designed to communicate urban green space benefits to budget holders. This is  
9 pertinent for local governments who routinely struggle to secure funding for parks, given their non-  
10 statutory status around the world. To address this, it is perhaps inevitable that the application of a  
11 wide range of funding models to parks is being explored. However, there is little empirical evidence  
12 that users and residents share this sentiment. This paper aims to address this gap in knowledge by  
13 exploring how feasible and acceptable such income generation practices are for stakeholders directly  
14 involved in using and managing parks. We asked local residents, parks managers, community groups  
15 and academics in one northern English city how feasible and acceptable they considered different  
16 income generation practices if applied to their local parks. The findings showed that overall, income  
17 generated by cafés and organised events were considered acceptable by residents but to a lesser extent  
18 by community groups and professionals. Voluntary donations, car parking and increased taxation  
19 were considered unacceptable by all stakeholders, while using the planning system to secure funding  
20 was considered acceptable. The findings suggest a variety of acceptable income-generating practices  
21 which may help stakeholders to address pragmatically the current challenges of managing urban parks.

22

23 Key words: green space management, urban parks, funding, acceptability, feasibility, community.

24

25 **1. Introduction**

26 The positive contributions of parks and green space to the health and wellbeing of urban residents are  
27 well-cited (WHO, 2017; Crompton, 2007) and highly valued (Fongar et al., 2019). To communicate  
28 this value to those holding the purse-strings, there is increasing interest in the monetisation of benefits  
29 of urban nature (Mell et al., 2016). There are inherent difficulties in accurately estimating these costs  
30 and benefits, e.g. for mental health and well-being (Dobson et al., 2019). For example, Randrup and  
31 Persson have found that, in Nordic countries, the value of long-term management is often  
32 underestimated (2009). Due to the non-statutory nature of urban green space, there are long-standing  
33 difficulties in accessing funding for long-term management. This is due to the general  
34 stagnation/reduction in funding for outdoor recreation, parks and urban nature, which is a challenge  
35 faced around the world (Watkins, 2019; Eldridge et al., 2019). In the UK, their discretionary status  
36 means parks have a low priority and many local governments do not keep records on their expenditure

37 (CABE Space, 2006a). This makes a parks department's case for more resources very hard to make,  
38 and adversely affects the ability of park managers to sustain the social, environmental and health  
39 benefits of parks (Whitten, 2019). To address the issue of inadequate funding, income generation is  
40 becoming an increasingly important part of the remit of parks. While uncommon in parks in England,  
41 income generation practices are long-standing in some countries, e.g. the USA (Kusisto, 2013) and  
42 being piloted elsewhere, e.g. in South Korea as a response to policy changes where parks are not  
43 being developed and thereby susceptible to encroaching development (Oh, 2019; Kim, 2015; Nam  
44 and Kim, 2019).

45

46 While the economic case for generating income from parks may resonate with political decision-  
47 makers, we do not know if other stakeholders share that view. For example, fund-raising and income  
48 generation may be more effective in high-profile city parks (Smith, 2019) meaning other, less high-  
49 profile (e.g. district) parks are adversely affected. Residents may or may not share the concerns about  
50 loss of public space through commercialisation that are often voiced in academic literature (Zukin,  
51 2005; Minton, 2017). This paper aims to address the lack of empirical research on the feasibility and  
52 acceptability of different models of funding urban parks. We asked residents, park users, parks  
53 managers and community groups in the city of Sheffield about their perceptions of different funding  
54 models when applied to district parks. Firstly we outline the history of funding parks to contextualise  
55 the current discourses in parks management. Within this discussion, we present a range of funding  
56 alternatives which have been applied to parks in different settings around the world. We then present  
57 our analysis of perceptions of acceptability and feasibility and explore potential catalysts and barriers  
58 to introducing alternative models of funding. The paper concludes by reflecting on the ongoing  
59 challenges in the current context of urban parks management.

60

## 61 **2. A brief history of funding parks in England**

62 Although never statutorily prescribed, parks have been ubiquitous in the urban landscape since the  
63 19th century (Whitten, 2019). The improvement of citizens' health and well-being was a strong driver  
64 behind the Victorian parks movement to address poor air quality and crowded, unhealthy conditions  
65 in rapidly urbanizing towns and cities (Dempsey, 2012). The creation of parks was partly borne out of  
66 the strengthening of local government from the 1870s onwards alongside a competitive spirit between  
67 authorities to improve their urban environments (Walker and Duffield, 1983). Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>  
68 century, the responsibility for parks has been embedded within the local government (Whitten, 2019).  
69 Costing between £30-40,000 (around £3.5m today), parks were expensive to create, requiring private  
70 philanthropy through the donation of land and money (Walker and Duffield, 1983). To ensure the  
71 moral welfare of park users through 'innocent, pleasurable recreation and instruction' (HCPB, 1835),  
72 park keepers were employed to police acceptable standards of behaviour.

73

74 As principal providers and managers of parks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, local governments became  
75 increasingly dependent on national government for funding, although parks provision remained a  
76 discretionary duty. A focus on sports and active recreation developed with parks provision in the  
77 early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century including football, bowls and tennis (Walker and Duffield, 1983) and more fee-  
78 paying activities, e.g. boating (McRobie, 2000). Conway (2000) does not agree that users' leisure  
79 needs also changed, arguing that most people come to parks, not for organized sport (despite  
80 constituting a significant amount of parks space and budgets), but for natural places to walk and play,  
81 suggesting a mismatch between resources and users.

82

83 A policy focus on indoor recreation and growing interest in countryside due to increased (car)  
84 mobility waned the interest in parks during the 1960s (Walker and Duffield, 1983). This made for an  
85 uncomfortable time for parks managers particularly in the early 1980s when parks were not included  
86 in the government's Standard Spending Assessment for local government (Elborough, 2016). This all  
87 contributed to a marked decline in funding (Barber, 2005), which significantly worsened park  
88 conditions. It is perhaps no coincidence that discussions began exploring how clubs and local  
89 communities could take on responsibilities for specific (sports) facilities (Walker and Duffield, 1983),  
90 generating income where possible. Meanwhile, the cost of running parks was absorbed into borough-  
91 wide budgets: making calculations for individual parks became increasingly difficult (Lambert, 2015).

92

93 As funding and quality of parks declined in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a fresh approach was needed.  
94 Political pressure led the Conservative government to grant significant funding to improve many  
95 historic parks and green spaces around the country (Elborough, 2016). This was continued by the New  
96 Labour government in 1997, bringing significant funding via neighbourhood improvement  
97 programmes, under its 'Cleaner, Safer, Greener' tagline (ODPM, 2002). Similar area-based initiatives  
98 were also happening in the Netherlands, Scandinavia and the US (Dempsey et al., 2014). Such  
99 investment, which aimed to bring renewed vibrancy to neighbourhoods and increased awareness and  
100 interest in parks, has recently been jeopardized in England by extensive government funding cuts  
101 since 2010 (Layton-Jones, 2016) which are more significant than those of the 1980s (HLF, 2016),  
102 reigniting the debate about generating income from parks.

103

### 104 **3. Funding and income generation in parks: a long-standing arrangement**

105 Examples of income generation associated with parks are varied but tend to fall into key themes:

106

#### 107 ***3.1 Planning and housing***

108 Planning agreements for new housing and commercial development can ensure funding for green  
109 space provision and management (CABE Space, 2006b). Regent's Park is a historic example of where  
110 income from housing has (partly) contributed to its establishment and management; this was a

111 widespread practice in the laying out of London's squares in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The increased  
112 house prices associated with living near parks has been well-documented (Panduro et al., 2018) and  
113 the selling of development rights on parkland is used as a means of raising money in some cities, e.g.  
114 in Albany, US (Kusisto, 2013).

115

### 116 ***3.2 Endowments***

117 Endowments are secured via a large initial sum of money to provide sustained long-term investment,  
118 often through the property or stock market (CABE Space, 2006b). National organisations, e.g. the  
119 Land Trust, manage green spaces around the UK on the basis of endowments. Local examples include  
120 the Central Park Conservancy (founded 1980) in New York and Milton Keynes Parks Trust (1991)  
121 which benefit from large real estate portfolios (Layton-Jones, 2016). An independent charity with an  
122 endowment recently formed to manage the parks in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Newcastle City Council,  
123 2018). The large amount required for an endowment (or equivalent to cover future maintenance costs)  
124 can be a significant stumbling block (Layton-Jones, 2016). Small-scale endowment models are used  
125 elsewhere to ensure ongoing maintenance of memorials or sponsored features such as park benches  
126 (e.g. The Royal Parks, 2014).

127

### 128 ***3.3 Businesses and residents paying for parks***

129 Parks budgets have long been covered by taxes levied on individuals. However, given the  
130 discretionary nature of parks, this means they are susceptible to cuts when savings need to be found  
131 (Lambert, 2015). Sponsorship is also used to generate income in city parks around the world, as a  
132 form of advertising and can lend itself well to sponsored events in parks rather than covering ongoing  
133 maintenance costs (Harnik and Martin, 2015). Potters Fields Park in London is run by a charitable  
134 trust and raises large sums for the temporary use of its prominent location along the Thames (e.g. for  
135 filming and product promotion). The trust uses this steady income to manage other parks in the  
136 neighbourhood (Dempsey, 2018) making it a unique example which generates significant revenue.  
137 Other models, such as the Business Improvement District (BID) have been explored in relation to  
138 parks. BIDs are found worldwide based on businesses contributing to the upkeep of the public realm  
139 that they rely on for their consumers (The Means, 2014). As legally and geographically defined  
140 partnerships (Sandford, 2018), BIDs supplement services additional to those provided by local  
141 government (CABE Space, 2006b), tending to focus on activities around cleanliness, safety,  
142 marketing and increasingly, urban greening (Shared Intelligence and ATCM, 2013). The BID's  
143 applicability to parks is limited. Parks often do not fall within BID areas as they often cover retail/  
144 commercial parts of towns and cities. A recent project piloted a "Parks Improvement District" in  
145 Bloomsbury, central London, based on the example of Bryant Park (USA). However, there was little  
146 interest from Bloomsbury's local businesses given the perception that they already paid for parks  
147 through the business rates (Nesta, 2016b). Applying the BID model is considered contentious in this

148 way, challenging the democratic nature of parks as truly publicly accessible spaces (Smith et al.,  
149 2014). While there are longstanding critiques of the BID model as aggressive privatization and  
150 commercialization (Zukin, 2005; Minton, 2009), commercialized activities are on the rise in parks.  
151 Some local governments in the UK recognise a notion of ‘sweating the assets’ to increase the income  
152 generation opportunities (Lea, 2018), which is closely linked to ‘activating parks’ through  
153 programming and events (Ivers, 2018).

154

### 155 ***3.4 Commercial enterprises in parks, site-specific programming and events***

156 Income generation in parks is not new: ice cream vans, circuses, boat hire and cafés are longstanding  
157 examples (Gilroy and Snell, 2012; Harnik and Martin, 2015; Layton-Jones, 2016). At the small scale,  
158 community events are important ways of animating parks and raising funds (Bristol City Council,  
159 2008). The nature and scale of this commerce is however changing as income generation is explored  
160 as a mode of park activation (Ivers, 2018). Newer examples include pop-up cinemas, theatre  
161 productions, music festivals and sports events (Smith, 2018). Private companies are establishing a  
162 more permanent presence in some parks (Walls, 2013) such as the Go Ape high-rope tree climbing.  
163 Some researchers indicate there may be a tipping point at which it is no longer acceptable for  
164 commercial activities operating in parks. Events can require closing entrance gates and fencing off  
165 sections of parks, temporarily removing public access. Other concerns have been raised about parks  
166 relying on too many events (Smith, 2019) and hefty entrance fees (Dempsey, 2018) causing noise  
167 pollution (The Telegraph, 2012), traffic and litter (Harnik and Martin, 2015). However, such activities  
168 are attractive for local governments to generate income while diversifying users through ‘temporary  
169 privatisation’ (Smith, 2018), rather than politically unacceptable alternatives such as selling off  
170 parkland (Lea, 2018). Temporary privatisation can also be politically palatable in high-profile settings  
171 for high-profile events. At the 2012 Olympic/Paralympic Games in London, space in Greenwich Park  
172 was ‘borrowed’ for equestrian events, despite the high-profile opposition even though the same  
173 ‘borrowing’ happened in less affluent parts of the city and went unobserved in the media – e.g.  
174 shooting on Woolwich Common (Smith, 2014).

175

176 There remains a strong academic and public discourse that central government is expected to fund and  
177 manage urban green space (Mathers et al., 2015; Powell and Bucks, 2018). However, this is  
178 somewhat at odds with recent policy and income generation models which mark a shift away from  
179 traditional local government funding and taxation initiatives (Nesta, 2013). In some examples, local  
180 governments tend to share some parts of green space budgets, management or ownership between  
181 public and private sectors with communities to minimise risk and share responsibility (Drayson, 2014).  
182 But there is limited empirical research examining the different funding models, how acceptable they  
183 are and how this relates to what is feasible according to different stakeholders, including community

184 groups, professionals and local residents. With this in mind, this paper will answer the question: how  
185 feasible and acceptable are different income generation practices in urban parks?

186

## 187 **4. Methodology**

188

### 189 ***4.1 Site and sample selection***

190 We conducted a cross-sectional (snapshot) quantitative and qualitative study, employing resident  
191 questionnaire surveys and interviews/ focus groups with community groups and parks managers. This  
192 was carried out at six district parks across Sheffield (Fig.1): Parson Cross (PCP), Manor Fields (MFP),  
193 High Hazels (HHP), Richmond (RMP), Meersbrook (MBP) Parks and Bolehill Park (BHP). The parks  
194 are within residential areas, but their socio-economic profiles differ significantly. According to the  
195 English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (DCLG, 2015)<sup>1</sup>, PCP and MFP are in the country's 10%  
196 most deprived areas, while BHP and MBP are in the country's 30% least deprived areas, with HHP  
197 and RMP lying in the 'middle' bracket. Community involvement (i.e. an established Friends Group<sup>2</sup>  
198 associated with the park) was also a selection criterion to ensure that stakeholders with a specific  
199 interest in the overall management of the parks could be consulted (for more detail about each park,  
200 see Nam and Dempsey, 2018). We therefore did not collect data from all community groups involved  
201 in parks (e.g. activity-led (football) groups) because they are not necessarily focused on the parks'  
202 management.

203

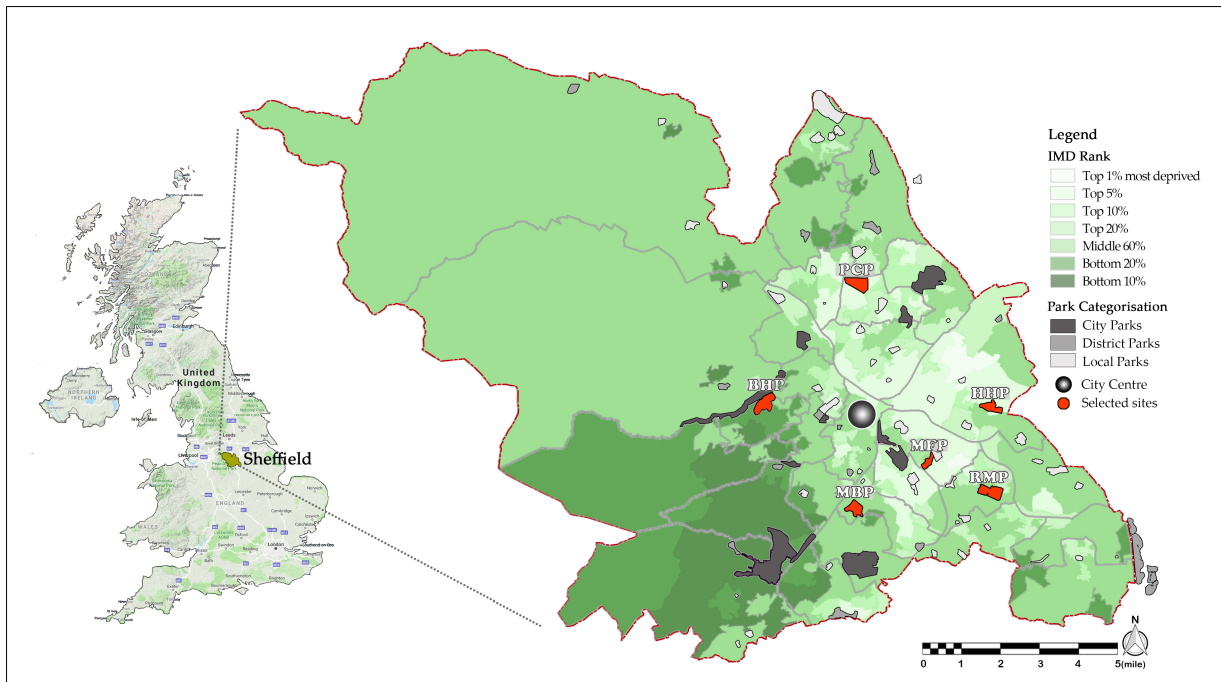
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<sup>1</sup> The Indices of Deprivation provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small areas across England, based on the domains of deprivation regarding income; employment; education; skills and training; health and disability; crime; barriers to housing and other services; living environment (DCLG, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Friends groups are groups of users who volunteer their time and support to their local green spaces including parks.



206  
 207 Fig.1. The six district parks mapped according to deprivation across the city of Sheffield.  
 208

209 **4.2 Measuring stakeholders' perceptions**

210 There has been increasing interest in parks stakeholders such as visitors, non-governmental sector  
 211 managers (Ives and Kendal, 2014) as well as community groups who are often involved in decision-  
 212 making around park management. This is particularly acute, for example, where local governments  
 213 are handing over some park management responsibilities to community groups when faced with  
 214 budget cuts (Dempsey et al., 2016b), and when non-governmental stakeholders can gain access to  
 215 funds not available to the state (Dempsey et al., 2014).

216  
 217 **4.3 Measuring acceptability and feasibility**

218 We adapted definitions of acceptability and feasibility as conceptualised by Johnson et al. (2016).  
 219 They define acceptability as the expectations of stakeholders comprising positiveness and  
 220 negativeness, public concern, benefits to stakeholders and reaction to a proposed strategy (here, an  
 221 income generation practice). Their feasibility indicators call on people's skills and knowledge,  
 222 financial resources and overall management resources to ascertain whether a strategy would work in  
 223 practice (Johnson et al., 2016). We designed our questions to stakeholders around these concepts  
 224 within a local context (here, specific parks) to consider the feasibility of financial (budget and funding)  
 225 and human (stakeholder involvement, skills and knowledge) resources. We asked open questions  
 226 about the range of potential income generation models which may or may not apply to community  
 227 groups'/ professionals' specific park and how acceptable these might be for park users. The literature  
 228 reviewed highlights a broader range of funding alternatives than those discussed with participants –

229 for example, we did not explicitly mention selling off the local park – because we were evaluating  
 230 perceptions of *viable* options in the Sheffield context.

231

232 **4.4 Questionnaire surveys**

233 Derived from the literature reviewed earlier, the questionnaire survey asked residents a range of  
 234 closed questions about how acceptable and feasible different income generation activities were in  
 235 their local district parks (Table 1).

236

237 **Table 1. Themes of acceptability and feasibility of income generation activities in the questionnaires.**

When respondent is in their park	Park use (e.g. football, tennis)
	Car-parking charges
	Concessions (e.g. kiosk/ café/ shop)
	Commercial events and activities (e.g. fayre/ music festival/ circus)
	Making a voluntary donation to the park every time they used it
In general, as a local resident	Paying an individual subscription to the park
	Local business sponsorship in the park
	Application of a business tax paid by businesses in the local area
	Planning and development taxes requiring a tariff to be paid per home towards park management
	Endowment to ensure that a large sum of money is invested to ensure the ongoing management of the park over time

238

239 We also collected socio-economic/ demographic data on gender, age, length of residence, household  
 240 composition, whether the respondent was a park user/non-user and frequency of park visit. Using a  
 241 drop-off/pick-up method because of expected higher response rates than postal surveys (Steele et al.,  
 242 2001; Riley and Kiger, 2002), we distributed 2,670 questionnaires to residents living within 300m  
 243 walking distance of the entrances to each park, resulting in a final sample of 506 valid questionnaires  
 244 (average response rate of 19%). We conducted data analyses and applied weighting based on national  
 245 Census data (ONS, 2015). We used software SPSS 22 to undertake a range of statistical tests  
 246 including one-way ANOVA, independent samples t-test and correlations.

247

248 **4.5 Interviews with community groups and professionals**

249 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six community groups (coded as C-PCP, C-MFP, C-  
 250 RMP, C-HHP, C-MBP and C-BHP) and eleven professionals all currently involved in management of  
 251 the six parks. They were two local government officers (coded as Council-1 and 2), two University  
 252 academics (Academic-1 and 2), and a third sector social enterprise involved in urban land  
 253 management (NGO-1). A focus group interview was held with six local government park managers  
 254 responsible for the parks and their line manager (Council-Ms). The interview data were transcribed  
 255 and thematic analysis employed to explore the variety of shared and distinct perceptions (Donovan

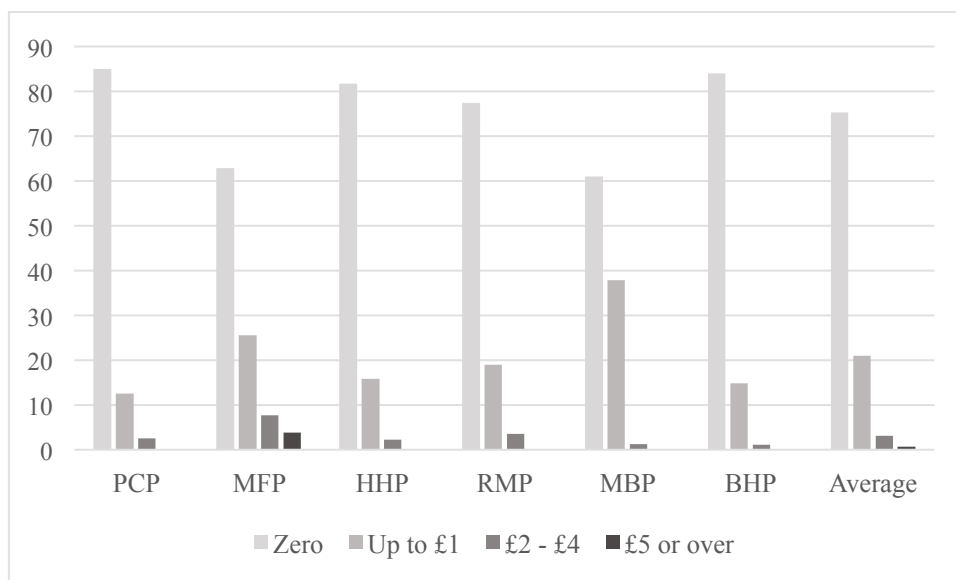
256 and Sanders, 2005, Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data were systematically examined for patterns (e.g.  
 257 by individual park, stakeholder type and income generation practice) to provide a detailed description  
 258 of the phenomena under scrutiny across the sample (Tesch, 1990) – i.e. how acceptable and feasible  
 259 income generation practices were perceived to be in the study sites. In line with the University of  
 260 Sheffield’s Ethics Code of Practice, the project was granted full approval by the Department of  
 261 Landscape Architecture.

262

263 **5. Results and Discussion**

264 **5.1 Residents’ perceptions of acceptability of income generation practices**

265 **The majority of respondents did not accept making individual contributions to parks, but there**  
 266 **did accept some commercial activities in parks.** Most respondents (75%) stated they were not  
 267 willing to pay to use their park (Fig. 3) while just over 20% said they would pay up to £1 and almost 4%  
 268 would pay over £1. More respondents in MFP (25.6%) and MBP (37.8%) were willing to pay a  
 269 voluntary donation of up to £1 compared to respondents for other parks.

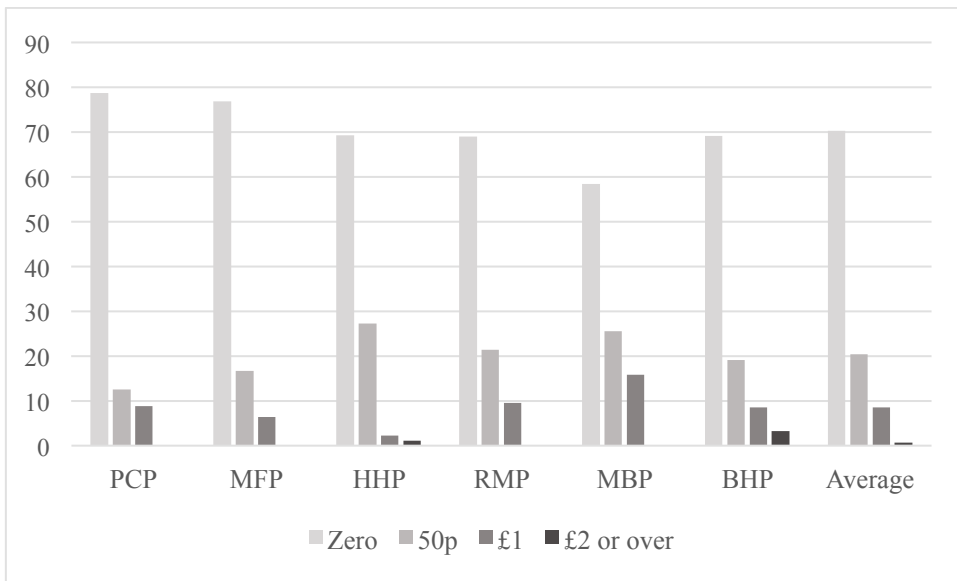


270

271 Fig. 3. Responses to question: “Would you be willing to pay for park use by a voluntary donation per visit? (%)”.

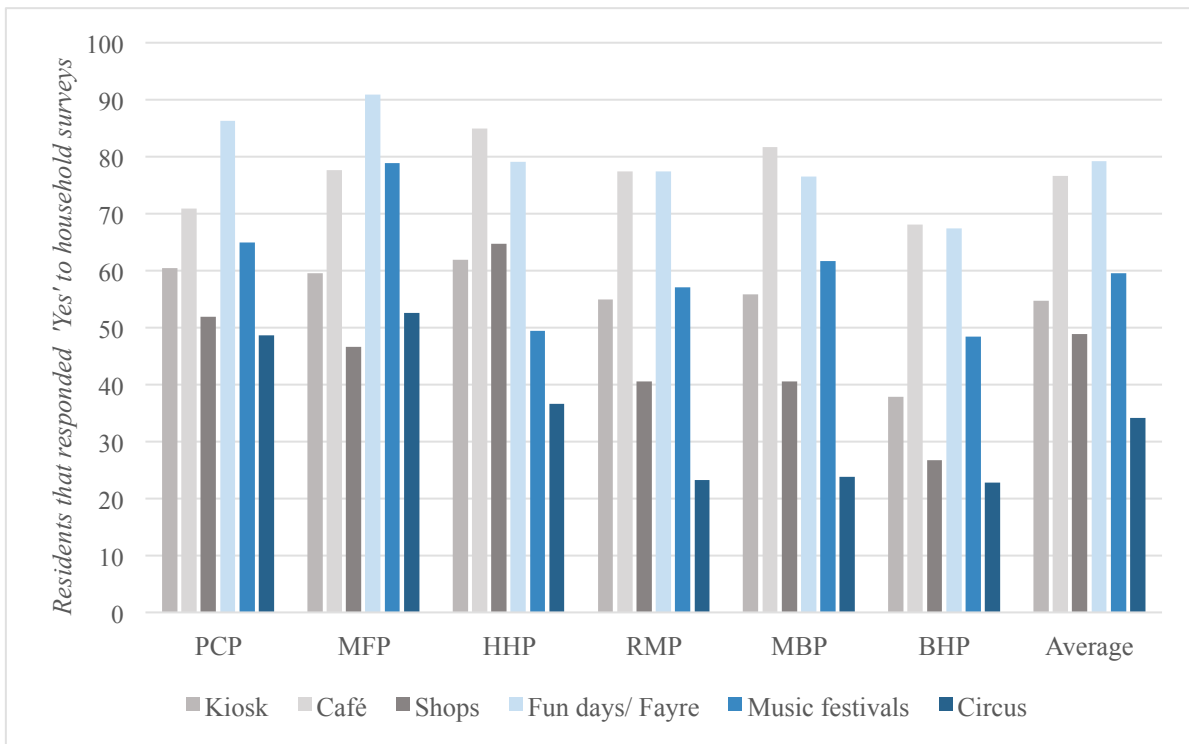
272

273 70% of respondents agreed that car parking parks should be free (Fig. 4). However, 29% of  
 274 respondents were willing to pay 50p (20%) to £1 (9%) for car parking. This is higher in MBP where  
 275 respondents would be willing to pay 50p-£1 for hourly parking (41.5%). In HHP (1.1%) and BHP  
 276 (3.2%), very small proportions of respondents were willing to pay £2 or over whereas respondents for  
 277 all other parks would not consider paying over £1.



278  
 279 Fig. 4. Responses to question: “Would you be willing to pay for park-use via a car parking charge per hour?  
 280 (%)”.

281  
 282 Fig. 5 shows the perceptions of respondents when asked if they would like to see different  
 283 concessions in their park. On average, most respondents (77%) would like to see a café in their parks  
 284 particularly respondents in HHP (85%) and MBP (82%), followed by a kiosk (55%) and a shop (45%).

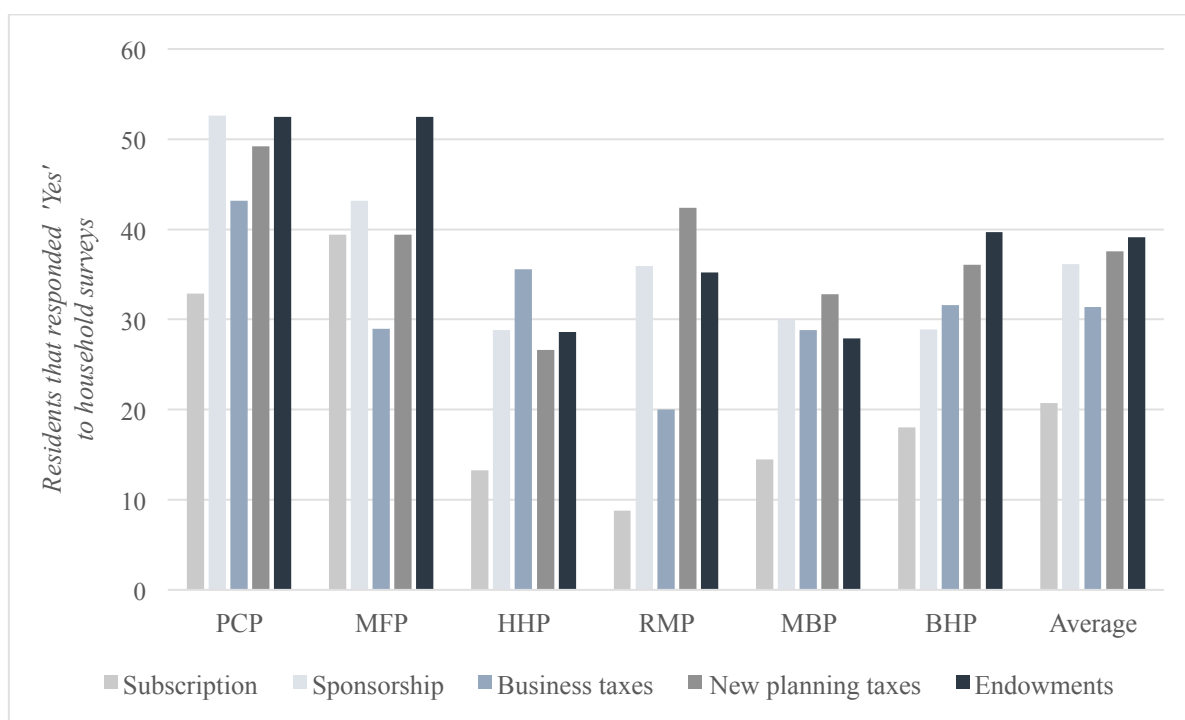


285  
 286 Fig. 5. Responses to question: “Would you like to see these facilities and events/activities in your park? (%)”.

287  
 288 There was more variation in preferences regarding commercial events/ activities (Fig. 5). Overall,  
 289 respondents were most positive about the ‘Fun day/Fayre’ (79%) – particularly in PCP (86%) and

290 MFP (91%) – followed by ‘music festival’ (60%), and ‘circus’ (34%). Fewer respondents in BHP  
 291 preferred these events/activities (Fun day/Fayre 67%, Music festival 48% and Circus 23%) compared  
 292 to other sites while respondents of MFP reported the highest preference.

293 Fig. 6 shows residents’ perceptions of other income generation practices. Around a third of the sample  
 294 would like to see private business-led funding including business taxes (31%), sponsorship (36%),  
 295 endowments (39%) and new planning taxes (38%), while green space subscription (21%) was less  
 296 popular. However, the standard deviation of the results between the study sites is broad. For example,  
 297 39% of the respondents in MFP would like to see green space subscription, compared to only 9% in  
 298 RMP.



299  
 300 Fig. 6. Responses to question: “Would you like to see these income generation models in your park? (%)”.

301

302 **5.2 Residents’ perceptions and socio-economic/ demographic characteristics**

303 **Respondents’ perceptions regarding entry fees, car park charges, endowments, business and**  
 304 **new planning taxes did not vary according to socio-demographic characteristics.** Table 2 shows  
 305 the significant correlations according to users & non-users, gender, age, length of residence,  
 306 frequency of park visits, household composition, tenure and IMD, with residents’ perceptions of  
 307 income generation practices.

308

309 **Table 2.**Residents’ perceptions of income generation practices according to socio-economic/ demographic  
 310 characteristics.

Income generation practices	Socio-economic/ demographic characteristics							
	Users& non-users (t)	Gender (t)	Age (F)	Length of residence (F)	Frequency of park visit (F)	Household composition (F)	Tenure (t)	IMD (r)

Income generation practices	Socio-economic/ demographic characteristics							
	Users& non-users (t)	Gender (t)	Age (F)	Length of residence (F)	Frequency of park visit (F)	Household composition (F)	Tenure (t)	IMD (r)
Entry fees								
Car park charges								
Kiosk		-2.173 <sub>S</sub> *				4.058 <sub>S</sub> *		-0.131 <sub>S</sub> **
Café		-2.208 <sub>S</sub> *						
Shops	3.045 <sub>L</sub> **							-0.162 <sub>S</sub> **
Fun-days		-3.009 <sub>S</sub> **		2.328 <sub>S</sub> *				-0.180 <sub>S</sub> **
Festivals		-3.256 <sub>M</sub> **	4.485 <sub>S</sub> ***	3.645 <sub>S</sub> **	4.808 <sub>S</sub> **	7.974 <sub>S</sub> ***	-3.125 <sub>S</sub> **	-0.130 <sub>S</sub> **
Circuses		-2.934 <sub>S</sub> **	7.791 <sub>M</sub> ***	4.865 <sub>S</sub> ***		9.433 <sub>S</sub> ***	-4.787 <sub>S</sub> ***	-0.250 <sub>S</sub> **
Subscription			11.489 <sub>L</sub> ***	6.696 <sub>M</sub> ***			-2.890 <sub>S</sub> **	-0.132 <sub>S</sub> **
Sponsorship								-0.203 <sub>S</sub> **
Business taxes								
New planning taxes								
Endowments								

311 \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 and effect sizes: <sub>S</sub> (small), <sub>M</sub> (Medium) and <sub>L</sub> (Large).

312

313 An independent samples *t-test* revealed that **non-users** were more likely to accept shops in parks than  
314 **users**. One-way ANOVA tests showed significant differences in attitudes towards income generation  
315 practices, where festivals only were accepted by **regular park visitors** (at least once a week). *T-tests*  
316 showed that **women** have a stronger tendency to accept kiosks, cafés, fun-days and fayres, festivals  
317 and circuses in parks than **men**. Statistically significant differences were found where the **over 65s**  
318 reported a tendency to accept festivals, circuses and green space subscription compared to other age  
319 groups.

320 **Long-term residents** (30 years+) were less likely to accept festivals, circuses and green space  
321 subscriptions than **shorter-term residents** (<10 years). Evidence also suggests that **household**  
322 **composition** is significant: **households with children** were significantly more likely to want to see  
323 kiosks and festivals in parks compared to households without children. An independent samples *t-test*  
324 revealed that **home-owners** were more likely to pay for festivals, circuses and green spaces  
325 subscription, than **renters**. For most income generation practices, we found that respondents living in  
326 **more deprived** areas had a stronger tendency to accept income generation practices than respondents  
327 living in **less deprived** areas.

328

329 **5.3 Community groups' and professionals' perceptions of acceptability**

330 Analyses of interviews with **community groups** and **professionals** revealed that **they were generally**  
 331 **unlikely to accept the full range of income generation practices**. This was attributed to their  
 332 perceptions of residents’/ users’ willingness to pay, which they state depends on where they live and  
 333 residents’/ users’ failure to understand that park management is currently under threat (Table 3).

334

335 **Table 3. Stakeholders’ perceptions of the acceptability of income-generating practices.**

	Residents	Community groups	Professionals
Donation	✓	X	X
Car parking	✓	X	X
Kiosk	✓✓	?	?
Café	✓✓✓	X	✓
Shop	✓✓	?	?
Fun day etc.	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Festival	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Circus	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Subscription	✓	?	?
Sponsorship	✓✓	✓	✓
Business tax	✓	✓	?
Planning tax	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Endowment	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓

336 X: Unacceptable, ✓: low, ✓✓: medium, ✓✓✓: high acceptability and ?: insufficient information

337

338 Most community groups (except C-MBP) would not accept entry fees and car park charges because  
 339 the park is managed through taxation, holding the overriding perception that this should permit free  
 340 use by the public. This was echoed by professionals: *“it [green space] belongs to*  
 341 *everybody.....because they are open to everybody”-Council-2*. This ‘public good’ was weighed up by  
 342 another local government parks manager: *“If we could charge for entry, every visitor walks through*  
 343 *the gate and [that would] pay for manag[ement], but it is public open space. So, it is difficult... that is*  
 344 *[the] limitation.”-Council-1*. In addition, the acceptability of entry fees and car parking were  
 345 considered equally unacceptable across the city, according to one professional: *Here, our main goal is*  
 346 *for people to use the space. So, it [entry fee] will be counterproductive to actually make them pay*  
 347 *[sic.]”-NGO-1*. In relation to car parking, one professional noted: *“What happens at Millhouses Park*  
 348 *[a wealthy area where car parking charges have been introduced] most people now just park on the*  
 349 *road instead”-Council-2*. However, as Table 3 shows, these perceptions are not fully shared by the  
 350 residents we surveyed where over a quarter would be prepared to pay to use the park or for parking.  
 351 When discussing cafés in parks, the community groups stated that many local people cannot afford to  
 352 use cafés. *“The café prices have gone up, It's linked to the posh people now. Now it's not for local*  
 353 *people”-C-MFP*. Professional interviewees expressed similar sentiments when discussing deprived  
 354 neighbourhoods: *Cafés and restaurants are good income generators... [but] people have got no*

355 *disposable income...it will be very difficult to make additional bits of money in poor*  
356 *neighbourhoods*”-NGO-1. However, the majority of residents (75%) would like to see café regardless  
357 of how deprived is their neighbourhood.

358 Most community groups (except C-PCP) were likely to accept events: “*Events are very high*  
359 *[acceptable], to fund for parks.*”- C-RMP. “*We ask maybe £1 for events [and] last week 600 people*  
360 *came to the walled garden.*”-C-MBP and “*We're always careful about the income bracket that we're*  
361 *working within. It's minimal*” -C-MFP. In this way, low charges for events were deemed to be  
362 acceptable and helpful for fundraising. As we didn’t ask residents how much they would be prepared  
363 to pay at events, we initially conclude that there is consensus across the stakeholders on this income  
364 generation practice.

365 There was equal consensus on the practice of additional costs to the user. The community groups, in  
366 general, concurred with residents: “*A flat-rate tax like that would be prohibitive... that's not*  
367 *something that I would advocate*”-C-MFP. Professionals stated how extra taxes were unacceptable  
368 because people (users) already pay local (Council) tax, which covers the discretionary service of parks.  
369 However, raising money through planning was considered highly acceptable, particularly in relation  
370 to neighbourhood deprivation: “*[There are] deprived areas where people can't afford the extra £5 or*  
371 *don't pay council tax...*” -Academic-1. NGO-1 described how greater use could be made of “*a new*  
372 *form of taxation [Community Infrastructure Levy]*” on housing developers “*to put in new facilities*”.

373

#### 374 **5.4 Feasibility**

375 When discussing the feasibility of income generation practices, community groups referred to  
376 ***volunteers, fundraising and the need for more activities to specifically attract funding for parks.***  
377 ***Collaboration with other stakeholders*** was discussed as a means to achieving this. Professionals  
378 referred to ***community resources*** and ***park management structure***. These stakeholders shared the  
379 perception that ***community involvement is key to addressing the lack of funding*** and that ***different***  
380 ***approaches were required for different types of parks***. However, there were differences of opinion  
381 about what community involvement actually meant in practice.

382

383 All community groups concurred that “*[In] the ideal world [there] would be extra funding, [there]*  
384 *would be volunteer time...[sic.]*”-C-PCP. Volunteering can contribute positively to park management:  
385 “*How we did it [won funding]? Because of the Friends groups [they] were fundraising for [a] tennis*  
386 *court*”-C-MBP. But actively engaging volunteers can take time and effort: “*We struggle to recruit*  
387 *people to do work. We tried to promote more, by asking for volunteers on Facebook*”-C-MBP. Some  
388 community groups fundraise in collaboration with other stakeholders, for example: “*We can engage*  
389 *some groups...funding together [e.g.] Sheffield health workers...I can count on 8 to 10 people coming*  
390 *to help.*”-C-RMP. Another community group discussed their partnership with the local government:

391 *“The thing is [the] combination of Park and Countryside Department maintaining really well, and*  
392 *community groups together.”-C-MBP.*

393

394 Community engagement contributes directly to park management fundraising, with one professional  
395 indicating that *“there were lots of funding initiatives which involve communities”-Academic-2*. This  
396 was supported by Academic-1 who added that communities can access supplementary funding: *“The*  
397 *council can't get the money, but the friends group can. They worked together”-Academic-1*. However,  
398 caveats were discussed. Professionals considered the restricted effectiveness of community groups to  
399 fundraise on account of their different skills and interests: *“They [community groups] haven't got the*  
400 *skills or they don't actually have [an] interest in doing wider management... Community groups [are]*  
401 *part of the solution to the budget cut problems, but it's only part of the story”-Academic-1*. Another  
402 professional mentioned that *“They're [community groups] getting...frustrated at the moment because*  
403 *they can't find the external funding.....They can help us in...the practical maintenance side. Litter*  
404 *picking, maybe planting flower beds, tree planting, just general maintenance.”-Council-2*.

405 One community group noted, *“...membership. They have people sign up, you know, to pay £10 a*  
406 *year, and then they get a newsletter, and get invited to meetings and groups and things”-C-MFP*. One  
407 community group complained about imbalanced opportunities for fundraising and co-working  
408 between high-profile (city) parks and lower-profile (district/ local) parks: *“Many [university] students*  
409 *work at Millhouses and Botanical Gardens [high profile city parks]. They have got [their] own budget,*  
410 *everything. But we don't have funding and opportunity [sic.]”-C-RMP*. The wider socio-economic  
411 context was also discussed by professionals: *“Some parts [of the city] are able to raise funding.*  
412 *Millhouses probably could be self-sustaining, the café and the boating and events and all that kind of*  
413 *thing...car parking charges. Whereas other parks would lose out”-Academic-1*. Professionals argue  
414 that effective community engagement takes time: *“if it's been developed as a community resource for*  
415 *many years...people are much more likely to contribute to that”-Academic-2*. Other interviewees  
416 reflected on changes to management structures: *“Management could be more cost effective and how*  
417 *we might find different parts of funding to support it...it is an ongoing problem”-NGO-1*.

418 One interviewee stated, *“What we would like to see largely is the development funds from [new*  
419 *housing] being used to act as revenue source.”-NGO-1*. This investment (or endowment) approach  
420 was discussed as a viable funding model between the local government and the private sector where,  
421 for example, a site near a park is developed, increases property prices and developers contribute to  
422 cover ongoing revenue costs.

423

## 424 **6. (Un)acceptable solutions to address the funding of non-statutory parks**

425 The literature has shown that the legacy of park provision being non-statutory and ongoing funding  
426 cuts have contributed significantly to the declining condition of UK parks (HLF, 2016; Layton-Jones,  
427 2016, Dempsey et al., 2016b), and increased interest in managing parks differently (Nesta, 2016a).

428 There was consensus in our findings regarding income generation through planning mechanisms  
429 which chimes with a mantra of ‘we pay our taxes and our parks should be looked after’ indicated in  
430 the literature (Crompton, 2007).

431 Evidence indicates that paid-for usage of park facilities such as car parks, sports pitches and grounds  
432 is on the increase (e.g. Smith, 2018) in many cities. However this does not reflect attitudes reported in  
433 our findings towards charging for facilities. Paying for entry or for car parking was considered  
434 unacceptable by the majority of respondents. This concurs with Walls’s (2013) warning that charging  
435 additional pay can lead to limits in park use. However, the questionnaire respondents were much more  
436 inclined than community groups and professionals to accept other income generation practices,  
437 including cafés and organised events such as fun days/festivals. Interestingly, we found that overall  
438 respondents in more deprived areas were more likely to accept some income generation practices than  
439 respondents in less deprived areas. This might seem counter-intuitive particularly given the  
440 resounding view from community groups and professionals interviewed that they are unacceptable,  
441 however Sickle and Eagles (1998) argue that income generation in deprived areas is possible in  
442 specific contexts. Examining the evidence more closely, our sample respondents from more deprived  
443 areas might have been indicating a desire to simply see more events in their park, chiming with  
444 Citroni and Karrholm’s observation that events can help make public spaces more visible (2019). The  
445 broad acceptance of events in parks was reiterated by community groups, with the caveat that they are  
446 priced appropriately and don’t prohibit local users. We were not able to ask questionnaire respondents  
447 how much they would be prepared to pay for organised events, however, the acceptance by residents  
448 of these income generation practices is somewhat at odds with the dominant discourses in academic  
449 literature that parks should be protected from commodification and commercialisation (Smith, 2019)  
450 and freely accessible at all times (Layton-Jones, 2016). Residents, users, community groups and  
451 professionals managing parks live within a daily reality of neoliberal austerity. Since this empirical  
452 research was conducted, the local government in Sheffield has introduced income-generating  
453 activities in parks, including car parking charges in its city parks (to extend to district parks) and  
454 tennis court leasing to an organisation which charges for hourly use and keeps the courts locked at all  
455 times. If we posed the questions now about car parking, it is likely that managers would describe them  
456 as a feasible, if not acceptable, means of income generation. There is therefore a balance to be struck  
457 between putting potential users off with charges, retaining parks as welcoming, accessible and  
458 democratic spaces, and being able to pay for their upkeep. The introduction of car parking charges has  
459 proved to be controversial leading some users to use green space elsewhere (Curley, 2018). There is  
460 therefore scope to explore further how ‘successful’ these schemes are if they are examined not just in  
461 terms of cost savings. For example, will charging users to play tennis have an adverse effect on the  
462 take-up of tennis by Sheffield’s children?

463

464 ***6.1 Does income generation need new partners and governance processes?***

465 With budget cuts have come sustained losses of training, skills and capacity (Randrup et al., 2017).  
466 Our findings suggest that these skills cannot be wholly replaced by non-paid volunteers in community  
467 groups (Dempsey et al., forthcoming). We do not yet fully understand how the changing nature of this  
468 human capital affects long-term green space management processes. This requires studies over long  
469 periods of time, and comparing different parts of a city (e.g. according to deprivation and park type).  
470 In the context of austerity, when costly evaluation activities like park user counts can no longer be  
471 regularly conducted, valuable information about the state of play in a city's parks can be lost (CABE  
472 Space, 2006a). It is likely that, as local government parks budgets continue to decrease, this situation  
473 will not improve any time soon. The move towards commercial activities in parks will bring different  
474 set of stakeholders with potential for the local government to retain the central role as primary  
475 landowner and custodian (Mathers *et al.*, 2015). Dempsey et al. (2016a) note a coordinating or  
476 facilitating role for local government where expertise can be brought in according to the specific  
477 activities. Governance processes are changing to involve more communities (Drayson, 2014; van  
478 Dam et al., 2015) as well as private sector partners (Smith, 2019). The findings in this study show that  
479 some examples of income generation such as events and festivals not only benefit from high levels of  
480 community engagement, but often, rely on them. The overall positive attitude towards income  
481 generation practices in parks held by residents should prompt other stakeholders to question their own  
482 perceptions of what is acceptable and not. This could be achieved by engaging more residents in  
483 community groups or decision-making processes more widely (Dempsey et al., 2016a; Mattijssen et  
484 al., 2017) in attempts to represent better user needs in parks. Our findings suggest an appetite for  
485 groups to collaborate with other stakeholders to access funding streams not available to local  
486 governments. This could potentially extend to partnerships outside the green space sector to, for  
487 example, health given the current worldwide interest in social prescribing as a model for delivering  
488 health benefits in natural settings ('green prescriptions' (Robinson and Breed, 2019)). Such cross-  
489 sector collaboration accessing larger funding streams might ease competition between groups usually  
490 vying for small funding pots. This could also potentially benefit users across different parts of a city/  
491 region to help address those issues of lower capacity and resources reported in relation to lower-  
492 profile parks compared to higher-profile parks.

493

#### 494 ***7. Reflections for the ongoing challenges ahead***

495 The neoliberal policy context, and the lack of accompanying funding, is driving us, somewhat  
496 inevitably, towards increased income generation in parks. Responding to this, Sheffield City Council  
497 is not alone in adopting a strategy which aims to "generate new investment for parks and green spaces"  
498 (SCC, 2018). This brings to mind Whitten's observations (2019) that we remain particularly wedded  
499 to a traditional view of the urban park, and an equally traditional expectation that the local  
500 government should look after it. This standpoint is not limited to the UK, and is found in many cities  
501 around the world. Whitten asks us to raise questions about who and what parks are for in the 21<sup>st</sup>

502 century. As Smith (2019) posits, the contemporary park assumes different forms, going beyond the  
503 Victorian notion of the park solely as a refuge from the city. District parks can be destination parks  
504 and in this way potential sites for events and income generation. Our findings suggest that the  
505 different ‘imaginaries’ of parks need to be further examined within local contexts. Who does it serve  
506 if the parks managers wrongly assume that residents are unwilling to use a café in their local park or  
507 come to events? Practitioners and decision-makers are already “consciously disrupt[ing] the  
508 traditional idea of the park as a refuge” Smith (2019, 181), suggesting the time is ripe for academics  
509 to challenge the traditional park imaginary in the pursuit of less idealism and more pragmatism.

510

511

512

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