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EXPLORING SOCIAL EQUITY IN THE PARK

Design and Management of New City-Centre Spaces in Sheffield, UK and Ahmedabad, India

Nicola Dempsey

Introduction

This chapter explores design approaches to new and high-profile parks in two cities. It examines the design and the implications of design for the use and long-term management of both sites. This chapter focuses on one of the underlying dimensions of social cohesion – social equity. Social equity refers to the fair distribution of resources – here, green urban spaces – which means paying attention to how accessible they are for all users. Social cohesion as a wider concept has been described as encompassing dimensions of safety, community stability, social interaction, participation in groups/networks as well as a sense of place attachment (Bramley *et al.*, 2009). As it is not possible in this chapter to explore social cohesion holistically, it will explore the notions of 'public' and 'equitable access' when designing and managing high-profile green urban spaces.

This chapter focuses on two recently created parks: South Street Park, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK and Sabarmati Riverfront Park (Subhash Bridge), Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. The creation of these parks has been a ~~catalyst for~~ the ongoing urban regeneration in ~~these~~ two cities, and the implications for social equity will be discussed. There are of course cultural and contextual differences between India and the UK in relation to design, management and social equity. However, it is useful to evaluate these new urban spaces over time to explore how their design and management support and/or hinder social equity in two different contexts. This chapter calls on a wide body of research and student projects conducted in both sites over a number of years. The chapter also considers the long-term management implications for both sites to reflect on how they will continue as high-profile and popular city destinations for residents and visitors.

Green Space in the Urbanising Context

The importance of green space in cities is well-cited and many cities are connecting up previously fragmented urban nature in the pursuit of a network of green infrastructure across the city. Such green spaces contribute positively to mental health (Burton, 2015; Douglas *et al.*, 2017), can provide opportunities for socialising and rest (Peschardt *et al.*, 2012) and the setting for physical health activities (Barton and Pretty, 2010; Jennings *et al.*, 2017). But such benefits are not currently enjoyed by all urban residents, as access to green space is not provided equitably across urban areas, particularly in highly urbanised areas. For this reason, this chapter focuses on the concept of social equity. It is an underlying concept of social cohesion, along with sustainability of community which includes the dimensions of civic pride, sense of belonging and social interaction among others (Dempsey *et al.*, 2012). The need for equitable access to good quality urban parks and open spaces across all neighbourhoods in a city, regardless of socio-economic status (Xiao *et al.*, 2017) is an important theme in geography and environmental justice literature (Byrne and Wolch, 2009) and the growing body of evidence of the health and wellbeing benefits of urban green space (WHO, 2017).

To shed light on what 'good quality' means in this context, this chapter will explore how design and management can contribute to equitably accessible green spaces. This is significant when exploring policy interpretations of equitable access – described loosely as all citizens having access to urban parks – within the context of ongoing pressure on our urban green spaces as cities urbanise, in both the Global North and South. In the former, this is pressure through intensification, where the economic viability of open space is increasingly called into question because the non-financial benefits of parks and green spaces (e.g. for social cohesion) are not taken into account. This is further manifested when austerity measures imposed at national government level means that some local authorities have little choice but to reduce resources for non-statutory services, including parks and green spaces (Heritage Lottery Fund, 2016). The implications of this are underexplored in the UK but this has already led to some park land being sold off for development (e.g. housing) and the transfer of park management responsibilities to the non-governmental sector. In rapidly urbanising cities in the Global South, the pressure of solving infrastructural shortages (e.g. housing, transport) means that parks and green spaces are not prioritised, often seen as superfluous when compared to the 'more pressing' needs related to sanitation, health and poverty. This may mean that where green spaces are provided, they are spatially distributed in higher-income neighbourhoods (Xiao *et al.*, 2017) making it difficult for poorer residents to access public parks and green spaces.

Across most cities, the positive contribution that urban green spaces make to human health, air quality, flood mitigation and the urban heat island effect, while also providing settings for positive social interaction, is not fully understood. It is not enough for there simply to be a green space there – it needs to have a

variety of characteristics for the ecological, social, cultural and economic benefits to emerge. For example, if a green space does not feel safe, users are not going to visit and any health benefits may therefore be negated. Where green spaces are being created in our urban centres, we need to examine not only their quantity and ease of access, but also their quality. This necessarily brings an opportunity to discuss park design.

Parks were historically created as spaces for healthy recreational use by urban dwellers. In the UK, there was a strong paternalistic tone to the Victorian parks which also helped diffuse social tensions and improve residents' moral condition by providing a wholesome alternative to the public house (i.e. pub) (Dempsey, 2012). In India, historically, there was the *tota* garden – productive with timber trees, fruit orchards and kitchen gardens – and the *devarakadu*, or sacred garden, but they were considered inappropriate by the colonial authorities who mostly absorbed these elements to create the European landscape garden in India which influenced the urban park as 'a place people could commune with nature without danger' (Nagendra, 2016: 131). But parks are not natural landscapes – they are created, closely controlled and extensively managed. This 'pseudo-natural-moral' design code can still be seen today in the design and spatial layout of Indian and UK parks (Nagendra and Gopal, 2011). And these historical influences are not easily or willingly forgotten. For example, there are many historic parks in the UK which have had their 'original' features restored. However, this raises questions around what the twenty-first-century park should look like. There are new uses and demands of urban green spaces which Victorian parks cannot easily provide. This ranges from 'wild' areas and naturalistic planting, food growing, skateboarding, weekly timed runs (parkrun) and online gaming (e.g. Pokemon Go where players navigate public spaces through their digital avatars on smartphones).

All of this has implications on the design of parks and green spaces, particularly in city centres. Slowly, city decision-makers are realising the marketing and branding opportunities that come with urban green space and aspects of nature, physical activity and health. Around the world, there seems to be an ongoing yet unofficial contest for the 'greenest' city in different countries. Edinburgh, Glasgow and London have all made claims to be the greenest UK city (Guardian Cities, 2017; Usborne, 2014). In India, a similar contest occurs with Ahmedabad winning the title of 'Green City of India' ~~with~~ Chandigarh, Nagpur, Bangalore and Delhi all featuring in the lists (Walk Through India, 2013; Ray, 2016). Both the cities under scrutiny here have engaged in some branding around urban greenery. Ahmedabad has recently been consulting citizens on the city's logo for its Smart City brand: six of the 16 options have visual reference to greenery. Sheffield recently launched itself as 'The Outdoor City' with accompanying branding, website, social media and underpinned by a citywide economic strategy (Sheffield City Council, 2016a, 2016b). With all this comes an understanding that twenty-first-century parks go beyond the recreational and the aesthetic and must be social places too which are safe, clean and attractive (Kent, 2016). It is within this context that this chapter

examines two recently created high-profile city parks to explore how design and management influence social equity of access and use of public space.

Methodology

Different datasets and sources collected over a number of years are called upon in this examination of Sheffield's South Street Park and Ahmedabad's Sabarmati Riverfront Park. These two parks were selected because they are located in high-profile locations in the two cities, and were part of urban regeneration efforts. They are examined here because different approaches were taken in socially deprived areas to address the potential social equity of the parks.

In South Street Park, the author has conducted and led a number of small-scale research projects since it opened in 2011. These projects involve user surveys, site visits and non-participant observations. Between 2011 and 2012, a number of interviews were conducted with the Friends of South Street Park community group and representatives from Sheffield City Council to discuss the design and management processes for the park. The Sabarmati Riverfront Park has been the subject of two small-scale research projects in Ahmedabad since it opened in October 2013, which contribute to a longer-term study of the Sabarmati River reported elsewhere (e.g. Dempsey *et al.*, 2017). In a similar vein to the Sheffield studies, this involves user surveys, site visits and observations, which were conducted with university colleagues and local researchers, as well as interviews with the architecture and urban design team involved in the riverfront development project.

South Street Park, Sheffield: Background

South Street Park is a high-profile site in terms of its location, being visible from much of the central Sheffield city area. It is also located in one of the most socially deprived parts of the city (Sheffield City Council, 2016c). The park lies immediately behind the city's train station, and is a steeply sloping site (1:10 gradient) that was created in the 1960s when the Park Hill flats were built to replace extensive slum housing in the area (see Figure 13.1). It is a long, narrow space barely 120 metres at its widest point (east–west) and approx. 800m in length (north–south), tapering sharply at either end. It was not a designated park, and the land was managed at a minimal level by the council, because of its steep slopes and its lack of physical connection between the city centre and surrounding housing. It was also avoided by many local people because anti-social behaviour often occurred (e.g. drug use). It was therefore becoming a blot on the landscape, but one that was easily ignored given it was at the 'back' of the city. The city's Supertram opened in the 1990s with the tram stop located at the back of the train station. So only tram users and those gaining access to Park Hill and the neighbourhoods behind would have needed to encounter the steep-sloping, anti-social green space. However the spotlight focused on the train station and its immediate environs when the station

FIGURE 13.1 Sheffield Midland train station with South Street Park (green area) and Park Hill (top left) in the background.

Source: Dempsey.

was regenerated between 2004 and 2008. The emphasis was on connecting the front of the train station to the rest of the city as a 'gateway to the city' (Transport Works, 2014: n.p.) along the newly created pedestrian 'Gold Route'.

Once the station front was redesigned, it became clear that there was a need to improve the highly visible green space to the rear. The council led a consultation process where two key aims emerged: a better route for local residents to the station and city centre, and an area for community events (*Sheffield Star*, 2011). Footfall led the development and design of this site with the understanding that if people used the site regularly, this would make the success of the site more likely.

Site development involved extensive earthworks to create a large amphitheatre as the focal point of the site and to shift the gradient to make it shallow enough for steps. Alongside the improved connections, the park was intended as an outdoor event area and has been used for theatre productions, music events and community events (Figure 13.2). At a local scale, South Street Park fits into a larger park – Sheaf Valley Park – which is a 1.25km green corridor of open spaces being improved and better connected across the area. South Street Park lies in a strategic and central location, connecting up Victoria Quays to the west – the historic hub of the city where the medieval castle was once located at the confluence of the Sheaf and Don Rivers – and Norfolk Heritage Park to the east, one of the oldest

FIGURE 13.2 South Street Park.
Source: Saunders.

public parks in the country. The wider Sheaf Valley Park scheme won the Royal Town Planning Institute Placemaking Award for Design Excellence (2015). The judges praised the project for 'incorporating high-quality landscape design that enhances Sheffield city centre … the scheme transcends connection to make sense of places and an interesting journey' (Sheffield City Council, 2015: n.p.).

Concurrent with this green space regeneration has been the renovation of the Grade II-listed Park Hill flats immediately behind the park. Park Hill was originally created in the late 1950s as a social housing development to replace the poor quality back-to-back housing which dominated the area. There were almost 1,200 dwellings constructed with features of the old streets retained, including street names and original cobbles from the demolished streets which were used to pave new pathways. However, by the 1990s, Park Hill was ultimately held up as a failure due to social decay, anti-social behaviour exacerbated by poor building management (Dobraszczyk, 2015). The housing estate was effectively de-populated until it was handed over to property developer Urban Splash in 2004. Park Hill is undergoing ongoing renovation which has moved in fits and spurts over the last decade or so and only Phase 1 of the renovations with housing development of the 300 flats have taken place to date (there will be 1,000 homes overall). Commercial enterprises, including an arts space and café have opened, with more planned, all of which requires accessible (non-stepped) paths connecting Park Hill to the train station. The entire site is open with no gates or restricted access.

Sabarmati Riverfront Park: Background

The 6-hectare Sabarmati Riverfront Park at Subhash Bridge (Figure 13.3) was opened as a brand new park in 2013. The park lies in the area of Shahibaug, which is home to historic buildings (e.g. the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Memorial

FIGURE 13.3 Sabarmati Riverfront Park.
Source: Dempsey.

and Calico Museum of Textiles). It was also home to significant informal slum settlements along the river, forming large pockets of social deprivation. The park was part of a citywide vision for Ahmedabad based on land development and environmental improvement along the 11km of the river which divides the city east–west (Katakam, 2010). The project aims to provide 'an accessible and inclusive waterfront environment along the river banks and to redefine an identity for Ahmedabad around the Sabarmati River' (SRFDCL, 2016: n.d.). The river was originally a monsoon-fed river and so lay dry for most of the year. The riverfront redevelopment involved the creation of a permanent water body and the widening of the riverbed. Significant engineering works were involved to divert untreated sewage and industrial effluents, which had previously flowed directly into the river, to new pumping stations (HCP Design, 2012). To achieve all this, significant land reclamation (185 ha) has occurred and sand has been dredged from the riverbed (AMC and AUDA, 2006). This reclamation involved the forced eviction of over 14,000 families living in informal slum settlements along the river (Desai, 2012). The river redevelopment led to one of the largest urban resettlement programmes in India. This has been highly controversial with the relocation of families to the outskirts of the city, who were settled regardless of the communities that had formed on the river over years (Our Inclusive Ahmedabad, 2010) and in locations

disconnected from public transit networks, people's former livelihoods, with some still awaiting permanent housing (Bengali, 2014).

The idea of redesigning the riverfront was not new: French architect Bernard Kohn proposed changes in the early 1960s. His vision was for an ecological river valley, with tree planting and farming which involved local people (Katakam, 2010). However, this idea was not adopted by the Municipal Authority, nor was any connection with the river incorporated into the park design. The Riverfront development project gathered momentum during the 1990s–2000s with work starting on the ground in 2005 and continues along the riverfront to date. It is a completely flat site with two entrances and is walled and fenced off on the east roadside and walled and guarded at the west riverside. To enter the Riverfront Park users must pay an entry fee to cover ongoing management costs. This issue will be returned to later after aspects of the parks' site designs are examined in more detail.

South Street Park: Design Details

Starting from the lowest point in the site opposite the train station back entrance, there is a very clear entry point to the park with a sign announcing the park leading to a staircase of over 150 steps ('The Steel Steps' (Figure 13.4)) which

FIGURE 13.4 South Street Park: the Steel Steps.
Source: Dempsey.

run alongside the amphitheatre. There is another path connecting to a bridge over the railway lines at the south of the site, however this bridge is much less used. Observations suggest this is because the bridge is a narrow, enclosed roofed thoroughfare, unpleasant, poorly lit, has no escape routes and does not connect directly to the Steel Steps.

The Steel Steps take the pedestrian up in a sweeping gesture up to and alongside the amphitheatre to the top of the site. The grassed amphitheatre can seat 1,000 people and is the main feature of the park, improving the site's profile in the local area. Existing footpaths were improved and new footpaths were created to improve pedestrian and disabled access. The Steel Steps were also greatly improved to enhance the site's connection to the city centre with improved and increased lighting and slip-resistant surfaces. The amphitheatre was originally envisioned as an informal events space but this was revised when its potential as an important site for city-wide events was recognised. With that recognition came more arduous design specifications, e.g. ground reinforcements and hand-rails (not part of the original design) were installed on the amphitheatre steps after consultation with a Council-led Safety Advisory Group.

Sabarmati Riverfront Park: Design Details

The park is a linear site running parallel (north–south) along the east bank of the river. According to SRFDCL (2016: n.p.), the park was 'envisaged as an extension of [Mahatma Gandhi's] Sabarmati Ashram, across the river, providing a serene and contemplative backdrop to the Ashram and maximising this vista'. The park is divided into different areas including a Thought Garden, a Sundial, a Lotus Pond, an amphitheatre (with capacity for 300+ people) as well as a playground area. The north entrance gate leads the user into a circular sundial space which has a combination of paving of different colours, textures and patterns with shaped grass strips, surrounded by shoulder-height hedges. This is an example of space designed for enclosure but with ample space for large numbers of people to move through. To the north of the entrance gate, the Thought Garden has enclosed seating areas and intensive planting in raised beds. This is contrasted with the large open areas which feature further south, providing lawns for families to picnic although ball games are not allowed (Figure 13.5).

The visual and physical connection with the river is poor (Figure 12.6) but there are stepped entry points for users to descend to the lower promenade riverfront walk. The lower promenade is not part of the park, but forms an important part of the infrastructure changes to connect the city, with the river as the axis. The entry points on the lower promenade are monitored by a guard because of the park's entry fee. There is one exception to the entry fee, which is waived for users entering before 8am. The park is also closed every day between 8 and 9am, all day on Mondays (for maintenance) and no entry is permitted after 9pm.

FIGURE 13.5 Lawns in Sabarmati Riverfront Park.
Source: Dempsey.

FIGURE 13.6 The Riverfront Park (upper level) is visually disconnected from the river (lower level), and physical access is made at few entry points.
Source: Dempsey.

Access and Use: Challenges in South Street Park

A short research project in summer 2013 examined how the site was used by 100+ users. It found that while most people used the park as a through route (58 per cent), a significant proportion (42 per cent) used it to (among other reasons) meet friends, relax and enjoy the view over the city. This was significantly more than those people observed using the park in the summer 2012 when a similar study showed that the vast majority of people were walking through the site. In both studies, most users visited on foot (around 80 per cent) with very few cyclists observed on site. Both studies and subsequent observations confirm that the majority of users use the Steel Steps to descend, making use of the amphitheatre seats and the 'stage' area as common stopping points. Much smaller numbers of people are observed ascending the steps. Feelings of safety are overwhelmingly high on site due to cleared sight lines and the open nature of the site. The only recorded negative comments about safety relate to the tread of the steps. Users who knew the site beforehand described it as (before) 'horrible … I would avoid it … was derelict … messy and unpleasant to be around' and (after) 'it's inviting, looks natural … I like [the] flowers'. Questionnaire respondents reported that the design of the site had led them to use it more.

There have been problems with putting on events in South Street Park. When events were first staged in the amphitheatre, including theatrical productions, the Steel Steps were closed off to commuters and the non-paying public. Local residents were not informed about one major event which led to complaints to the council about restricting access to the main pedestrian route. A member of the council's city regeneration team (interviewed in 2012) expressed a need for more choice of good access routes when the steps are closed/unavailable. Subsequent discussions with events organisers show that restricting access no longer happens, meaning that commuters can still access the Steel Steps while performances run (enclosed by high fences for the paying patrons which restricts visibility for non-payers) in the amphitheatre. However, the issue of power – i.e. electricity – and water within the site is an unresolved issue. One council interviewee commented that in hindsight a permanent power supply should have been put in, but advice had been taken from the city centre events team who said that many events come with their own generators and power supply. For events such as theatre productions, this can be very costly and has resulted in outdoor events organisers sometimes choosing other sites with power and water elsewhere in the city.

A low-cost, low-maintenance approach was taken to vegetation in South Street Park, which has a significant number of trees in the site: a number of mature horse chestnut trees were removed for the amphitheatre (described as 'diseased' by the council). Other tree species have been planted on the amphitheatre's periphery, retaining clear swathes of grass in its immediate vicinity to maximise the view of the city (Figure 13.2). Strips of mown grass were included on both sides of the steps, which is a slight change to the original design. Originally, there were

wildflower meadows planted up to the (north flank of the) steps but this was replaced later on with a strip of grass (presumably to reduce costs), reducing the extent of wildflower meadow planting, but without detrimentally affecting the overall effect.

South Street Park provides an excellent vantage point overlooking the city centre, and one which users were proud to have in Sheffield. The amphitheatre is a well-used picnic spot at lunchtimes and evenings during the summer and is used as a backdrop for televised events in the city (e.g. World Snooker Championships). Visual access to the city is unimpeded and free for all to use. However, physical access between the park and the city is problematic, and while outside the scope of the park's design, it is worth mentioning the train station because of its potential impact on user access. The Steel Steps lead directly to the train station's back entrance, which many people use as a cut-through to the rest of the city. However, this may not be possible in the future due to a move towards ticketed access to the train station via secure entry points (which has been introduced in many UK train stations). The unpleasant, poorly lit and rarely used bridge referred to earlier could therefore be the only way that people walking through the park access the city centre easily. The Steel Steps were designed to connect directly with the back entrance of the train station so this is an issue which will rear its head in the future. Changes to the train station design and/or an effective waiver system will be required to permit commuters to use the park and train station to access the city centre, and also make it easy for people changing trains at Sheffield to use the park given its close proximity and attraction for visitors.

Challenges in Reality: Sabarmati Riverfront Park

There was no park on this site before the riverfront regeneration project. However, some users we interviewed remembered the specific site for the slums and as a location for significant fly-tipping. They recall 'a stench' which deterred them from passing by this stretch of the river. Others described how there was nothing on this site in the past, indicating no good reason to visit. Elsewhere along the riverbanks, in the past people used to swim, and an important use of the river itself by Hindu residents is to make puja offerings of flowers into the flowing water. Accessing the river is therefore something that Indian urban residents require for a range of different reasons. The physical access to the river has been significantly changed along the park boundary as the riverbank has been channelised using extensive concrete. Park users interviewed reported being very happy with the new park and the wider changes to the river. Users come from different parts of the city and beyond with some regular visitors travelling from neighbouring Gandhinagar city (over 16 miles away). Users come to the park because they 'like the atmosphere', take evening strolls and morning walks for fresh air and exercise. Users reported feeling safer here than in other public spaces in the city and bringing their children to play in the cooler evenings. However, gaining physical access to the water is no

longer possible as barriers along the concrete channel restrict access, meaning that puja offerings are now thrown into the river from the bridges, often in plastic bags.

Specific uses in the park itself are controlled. For example, ball games are not allowed in the park – which seems incongruous given the extensive grassed, relatively flat areas, and how similar grassed areas in other city parks are used (for cricket and football). Users mostly walk and/or sit, picnic and chat on the lawns, with children's play focused around the playground area. Picnicking is allowed at the moment but may not be permitted in the future as food outlets are planned in the park. This is similar to Kankaria Lake, the other public space in Ahmedabad which is also subject to an entry fee. Kankaria Lake has cafés and other concessions leading the site manager (municipal authority) to stop people bringing in their own food to the site (via bag searches). A similar course of action may be taken in the park.

The early morning entry fee waiver is an interesting development both in this park and at Kankaria Lake. The entry fee is applied to all users but is waived for early morning users (before 8am). This is when middle-class users do their early morning exercise. This has been argued to keep vocal voters at bay who demanded the time-specific waiver while keeping out the 'undesirables' overall. This is done by charging what some professionals interviewed described as a 'nominal' amount to ensure it is kept clean and tidy. But 'nominal' may still be unaffordable for some depending on income, proximity to the site as well as the size of the family (Dempsey, 2014).

Like all open and exposed spaces in the city, the park is empty during the hottest times of the day, attracting people in the early morning and late evening. The extensive use of lawns in the park means significant amounts of unsheltered space are exposed to the sun: it is a missed opportunity that more trees have not been planted. Furthermore, the choice of trees on the lower river promenade provide very little shade for users (Figure 13.6). Tree growth seems to be severely limited, which landscape architect interviewees attribute to insufficient space for tree roots to develop and inappropriate watering. Trees in the park are healthier than those on the Riverfront promenades but it is unclear how much shade they provide as no trees studies have yet been conducted.

The lawns become scorched in the spring and summer and require a lot of maintenance and water. For the smaller strips of lawn, the grass dies and the turf is easily uprooted by continued footfall, causing trips. This lead to questions about why so much lawn was included in the design in the first place. In interviews, professionals expressed frustration at the impact of continued use of lawns as part of the colonial legacy instead of planting native grasses and trees which, according to horticulturalists interviewed, would be more robust in comparison.

The vision that the Riverfront Park is an extension of Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram is mostly symbolic because there is little visual connection across the river, particularly given the high walls which now dominate both sides of the river. There is also no signage in the park to direct the user to look out of the

park across the Sabarmati towards the Ashram. While one would agree that parts of the park, particularly the Thought Garden, provide a serene and contemplative backdrop, it is of course one that is only open to those who pay the entry fee.

According to the SRFDCL (2016: n.p.), the park 'will serve as a much needed park for Shahibaug-Dudheshwar neighbourhoods'. The controversial way in which thousands of slum dwellers were forcibly evicted has led some people to choose not to use the park in protest. But more critically, there are those people who cannot afford to choose to use the park or not. Thousands of slum dwellers were forced to moved several kilometres away from Shahibaug, away from their livelihoods, customers, children's schools and local places of worship. They have clearly fared worst in terms of access to the river and their potential use of the park is unlikely given the 'double whammy' of distant location and the entry fee.

Interviews with users show that this is considered to be a city park, forming part of the city's identity, and one of which they are proud. However, it is clear that many people do not know about the Riverfront Park. In March 2016 the author co-hosted an event with CEPT University (in Ahmedabad), and the majority of attendees did not know where the park was, never having visited it. The park is still considered to be a new addition to the riverfront. More development will come to change the river's skyline, and the park's southern neighbours will include a sports complex and amusement park. In light of how Kankaria Lake has been developed – a once public space including amusements which is now gated with an entry fee – the park entry fee may well extend to include the forthcoming amusements, given that there is a food court and planned bazaar street at the southern end of the park.

The View from the Park: Some Emerging Themes

This section considers some of the themes around equity of access and use when examining the design, planning and management of South Street and Sabarmati Riverfront Parks.

The connections with the wider context are of real importance for these city parks which both demonstrate improvements to the pedestrian infrastructure within the parks but crucially to and from the parks. It is unsurprising that these two things go together given the need to maximise the use and function of a significant green space located in a densely urbanised area. While good pedestrian access to both parks has been created, the Sabarmati Riverfront Park cannot be described as socially equitable because of the large population who were forcibly evicted to make way for it, and going forward because of the entry fee. The entry fee is not a widely applied device in urban parks across India. The idea that the entry fee contributes directly to effective park management is countered by a well-rehearsed perception held by users that it is a good device to keep out the 'undesirables'. The issue of wider access to South Street Park via Sheffield train station means that equitable access may be called into question

in the future, but solutions should make the most of the well-used and well-connected Steel Steps.

The visual connection of the park to the wider city is achieved to differing degrees in the two parks. In South Street Park, all users can gain access to the amphitheatre via steps and paths for views over the city. However, despite its proximity to the city centre, it is not as well-used as other Sheffield city centre green spaces, indicating that the train station may be restricting the numbers of potential users. Within the train station, there are no signs telling people that there is a park on their doorstep: users already know it is there but potential users in the station have little clue. For the Riverfront Park, the visual connection to Gandhi's Ashram across the river had real potential but from a designer's perspective, was poorly executed. If one sits down on a bench, wall or lawn in the park's amphitheatre, there are no vantage points from which to see the river. The concrete walls are a barrier between the park and the river: to increase visibility, the walls could be replaced by, for example, railings at park level.

Vegetation planting plays a significant part of the design of both these parks. South Street Park has robust vegetation which is easy to maintain. This is within a wider, national political context of austerity where Sheffield and other UK cities are facing intense pressure to 'do more with less' when it comes to the allocation of public funds for parks (Mathers *et al.*, 2015). Some community events are organised by the Friends of SheafValley group who may in time become more involved in the management of the park as funding becomes more limited. In Ahmedabad, intensive maintenance is required for all vegetation in the Riverfront Park, with some (e.g. trees along the waterfront) struggling to survive due to poor access to regular water and inadequate growing space. Landscape architects were particularly critical of the choice of vegetation and extensive lawns in the park which require ongoing resources for maintenance. It is hoped that the expensive and inappropriate planting may be addressed through retrospective design adaptation over time.

Overall perceptions of users in both parks strongly suggest that they are considered to be examples of successful city centre parks, although I remind the reader of the 'non-users' in Ahmedabad who choose not to, or cannot, use the park. The majority of users respond positively to the core functions of both parks, around access through the site, the parks as a social location and an emblem of the city. Users in both cities exhibited opinions of civic pride and a sense of value that the site had for them as individuals, and to the respective city as a whole, arguably contributing to citizens' sense of social cohesion (after Dempsey *et al.*, 2012).

The future aspirations for these parks are high: they are both the result of significant public sector investment in deprived parts of the city which will be home to future housing development. What is unclear is where the future revenue funding will come from to ensure that the parks continue to be managed to the current high standard. For South Street Park, given local authority pressures on funding, potential contributions could come from management fees from

future Park Hill residents and commercial tenants. In Ahmedabad, while income generation is assured through the entry fee, the high-maintenance elements of the park are already looking tired and weathered. When examining the design, wear and tear problems were systemic only three years after opening. A more climatically sensitive approach to the design with less lawn and concrete and more trees would bring benefits not only ecologically, but also for users in terms of shelter and shade.

But for these and all city-centre parks, the high-profile nature of the sites means that, when needed, the decision-makers will doubtless find funding. This could mean that other sites lose out, which does happen when local authorities choose to retain the quality of award-winning parks when funding is reduced. This inequitable act of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' can mean that the South Street and Sabarmati Riverfront Parks in our cities remain robust, safe, attractive, well-used and designed for the long term, but at the expense of other less high-profile spaces. This points to future research needed to examine these parks in their wider geographical context, as well as to explore how their design and management plans respond to seasonal, user and funding changes over time. There are not enough evaluation studies of sites once they have been designed and 'finished': this chapter has contributed in a small way to addressing this gap in knowledge.

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