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

Abstract

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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

2. A brief history of funding parks in England

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.1 Planning and housing

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

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

3.2 Endowments

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

3.3 Businesses and residents paying for parks

Parks budgets have long been covered by taxes levied on individuals. However, given the discretionary nature of parks, this means they are susceptible to cuts when savings need to be found (Lambert, 2015). Sponsorship is also used to generate income in city parks around the world, as a form of advertising and can lend itself well to sponsored events in parks rather than covering ongoing maintenance costs (Harnik and Martin, 2015). Potters Fields Park in London is run by a charitable trust and raises large sums for the temporary use of its prominent location along the Thames (e.g. for filming and product promotion). The trust uses this steady income to manage other parks in the neighbourhood (Dempsey, 2018) making it a unique example which generates significant revenue.

Other models, such as the Business Improvement District (BID) have been explored in relation to parks. BIDs are found worldwide based on businesses contributing to the upkeep of the public realm that they rely on for their consumers (The Means, 2014). As legally and geographically defined partnerships (Sandford, 2018), BIDs supplement services additional to those provided by local government (CABE Space, 2006b), tending to focus on activities around cleanliness, safety, marketing and increasingly, urban greening (Shared Intelligence and ATCM, 2013). The BID's applicability to parks is limited. Parks often do not fall within BID areas as they often cover retail/ commercial parts of towns and cities. A recent project piloted a "Parks Improvement District" in Bloomsbury, central London, based on the example of Bryant Park (USA). However, there was little interest from Bloomsbury's local businesses given the perception that they already paid for parks 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

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

4. Methodology

4.1 Site and sample selection

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

[1] 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).

[2] Friends groups are groups of users who volunteer their time and support to their local green spaces including parks.

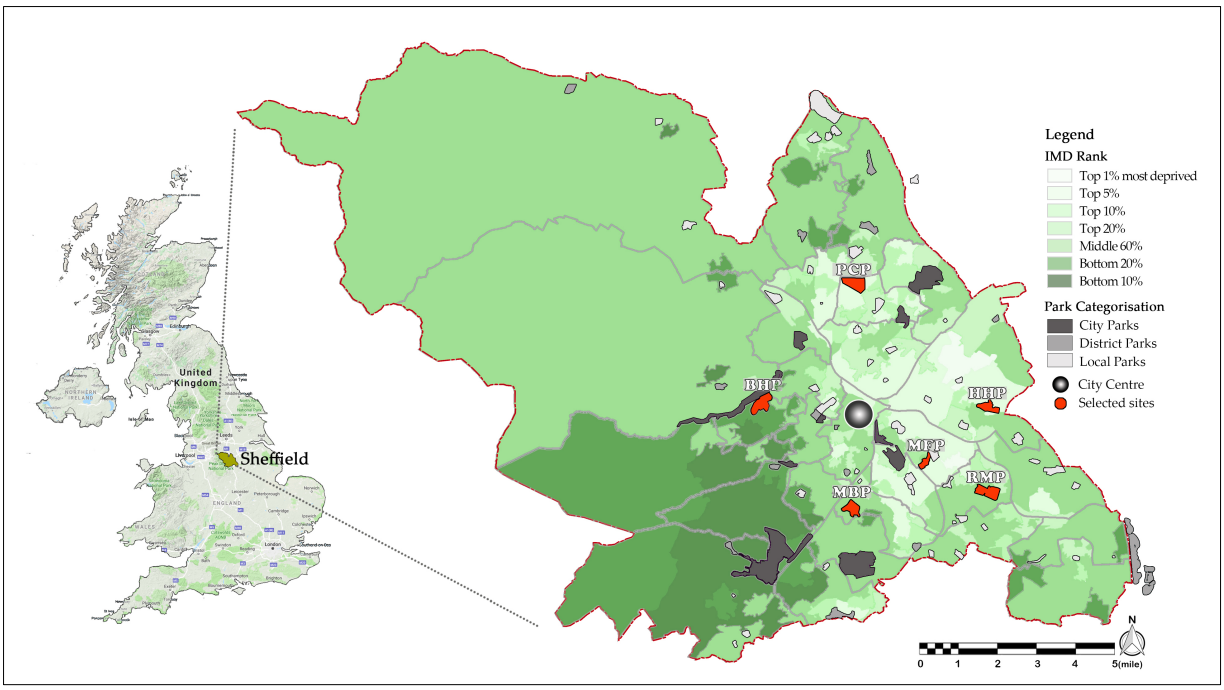

Fig.1. The six district parks mapped according to deprivation across the city of Sheffield.

4.2 Measuring stakeholders' perceptions

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

4.3 Measuring acceptability and feasibility

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

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

4.4 Questionnaire surveys

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

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

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

4.5 Interviews with community groups and professionals

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

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

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Residents' perceptions of acceptability of income generation practices

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

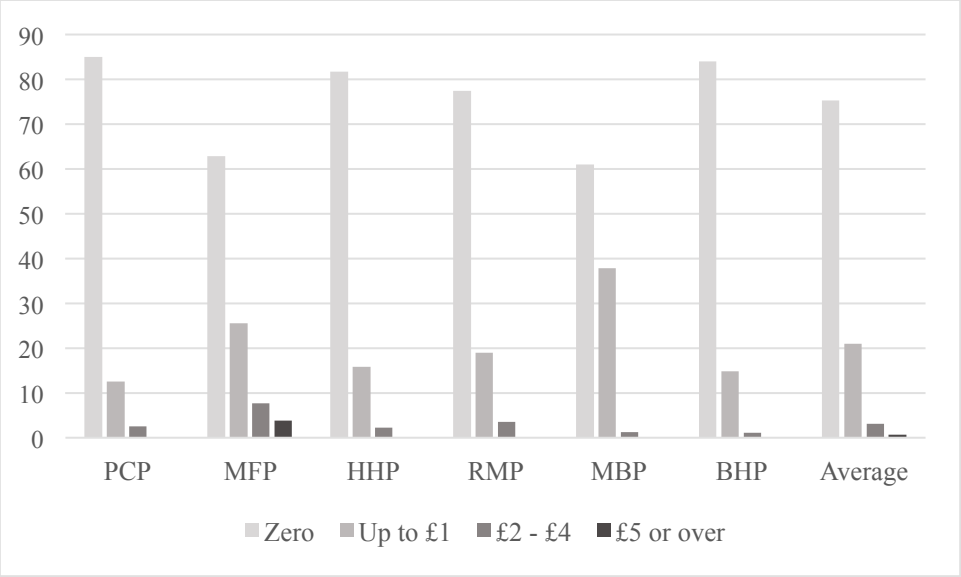

Fig. 3. Responses to question: "Would you be willing to pay for park use by a voluntary donation per visit? (%)".

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

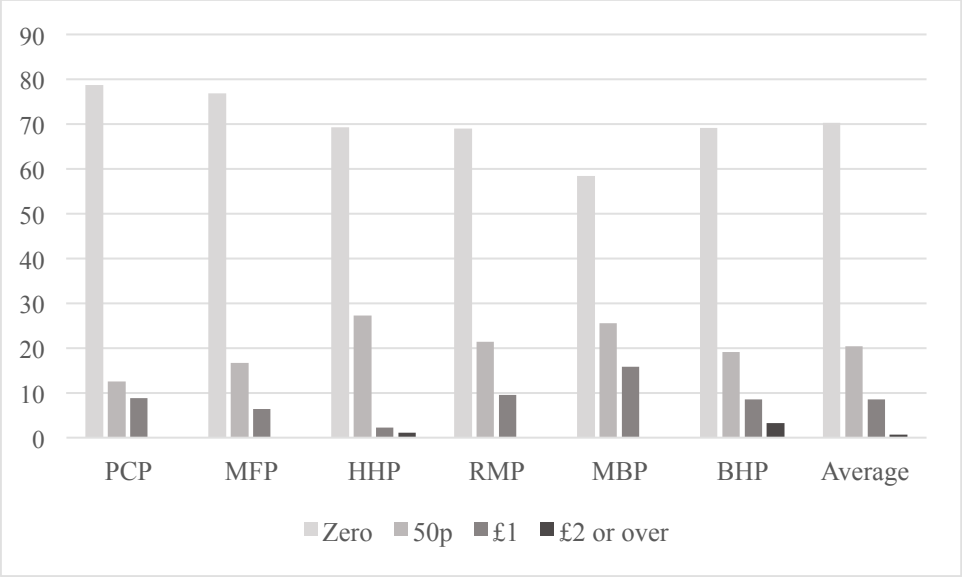

Fig. 4. Responses to question: "Would you be willing to pay for park-use via a car parking charge per hour? (%)".

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

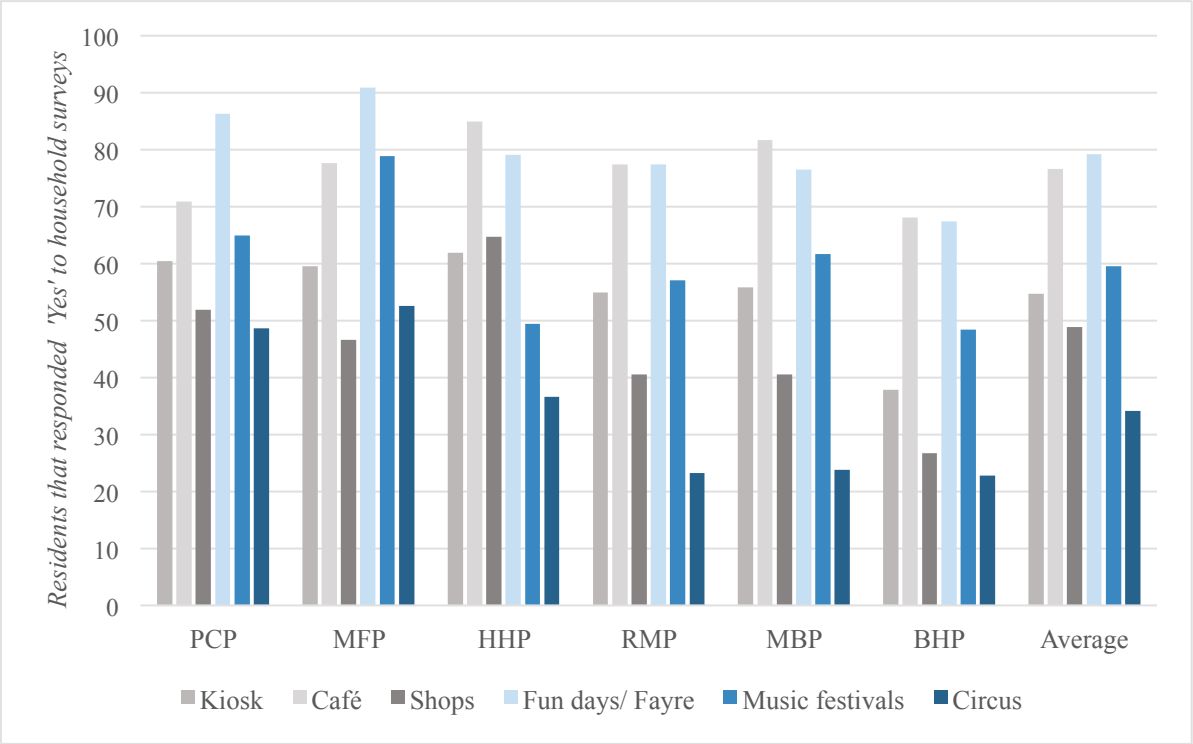

Fig. 5. Responses to question: "Would you like to see these facilities and events/activities in your park? (%)".

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

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

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

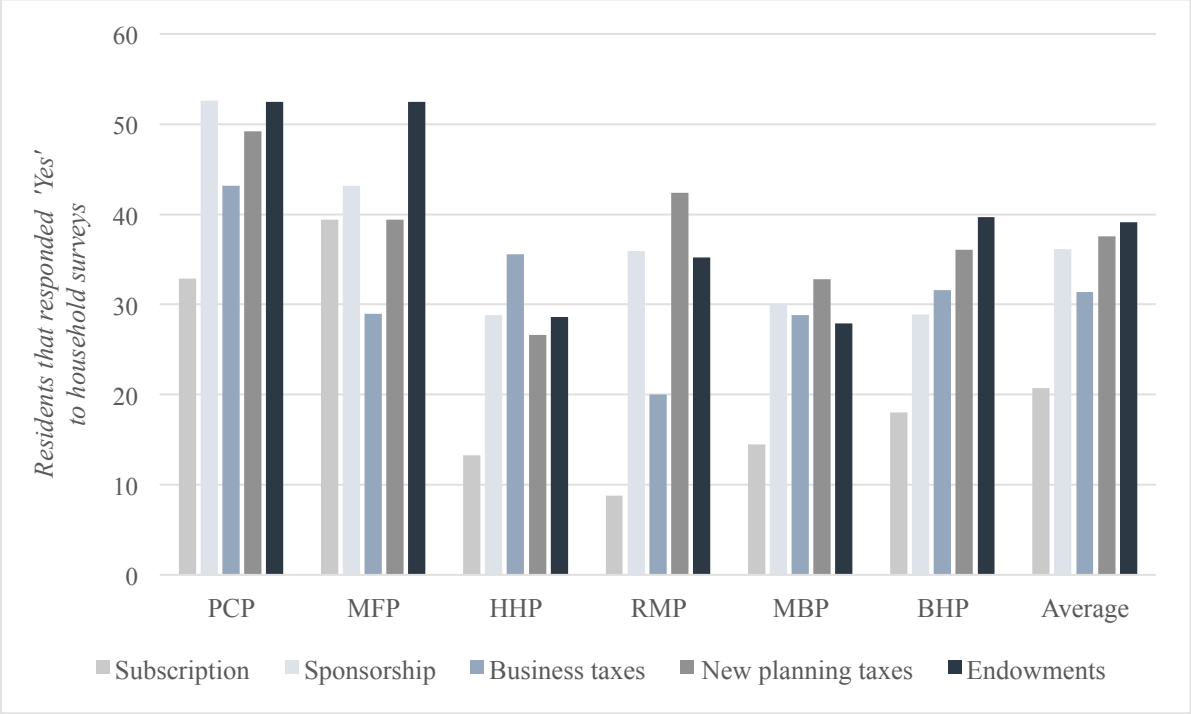

Fig. 6. Responses to question: "Would you like to see these income generation models in your park? (%)".

5.2 Residents' perceptions and socio-economic/ demographic characteristics

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

Table 2. Residents' perceptions of income generation practices according to socio-economic/ demographic 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_{S}^{*}				4.058_{S}^{*}		$-.131_{S}^{**}$
Café		-2.208_{S}^{*}						
Shops	3.045_{L}^{**}							$-.162_{S}^{**}$
Fun-days		-3.009_{S}^{**}		2.328s*				$-.180_{S}^{**}$
Festivals		-3.256_{M}^{**}	4.485_{S}^{***}	3.645s**	4.808_{S}^{**}	7.974_{S}^{***}	-3.125_{S}^{**}	$-.130_{S}^{**}$
Circuses		-2.934_{S}^{**}	7.791_{M}^{***}	4.865s***		9.433_{S}^{***}	-4.787_{S}^{***}	$-.250_{S}^{**}$
Subscription			11.489_{L}^{***}	6.696_{M}^{***}			-2.890_{S}^{**}	$-.132_{S}^{**}$
Sponsorship								$-.203_{S}^{**}$
Business taxes								
New planning taxes								
Endowments								

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 and effect sizes: $_{S}$ (small), $_{M}$ (Medium) and $_{L}$ (Large).

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

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

5.3 Community groups' and professionals' perceptions of acceptability

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

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	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓

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

Most community groups (except C-MBP) would not accept entry fees and car park charges because the park is managed through taxation, holding the overriding perception that this should permit free use by the public. This was echoed by professionals: *"it [green space] belongs to everybody…..because they are open to everybody"-Council-2*. This 'public good' was weighed up by another local government parks manager: *"If we could charge for entry, every visitor walks through the gate and [that would] pay for manag[ement], but it is public open space. So, it is difficult… that is [the] limitation."-Council-1*. In addition, the acceptability of entry fees and car parking were considered equally unacceptable across the city, according to one professional: *Here, our main goal is for people to use the space. So, it [entry fee] will be counterproductive to actually make them pay [sic.]"-NGO-1.* In relation to car parking, one professional noted: *"What happens at Millhouses Park [a wealthy area where car parking charges have been introduced] most people now just park on the road instead"-Council-2.* However, as Table 3 shows, these perceptions are not fully shared by the residents we surveyed where over a quarter would be prepared to pay to use the park or for parking.

When discussing cafés in parks, the community groups stated that many local people cannot afford to use cafés. *"The café prices have gone up, It's linked to the posh people now. Now it's not for local people"-C-MFP.* Professional interviewees expressed similar sentiments when discussing deprived neighbourhoods: *Cafés and restaurants are good income generators… [but] people have got no*

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

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

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

5.4 Feasibility

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

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

"The thing is [the] combination of Park and Countryside Department maintaining really well, and community groups together."-C-MBP.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.1 Does income generation need new partners and governance processes?

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

7. Reflections for the ongoing challenges ahead

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

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.
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