FOSTERING BELONGING IN GREEN SPACES

A guidance

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

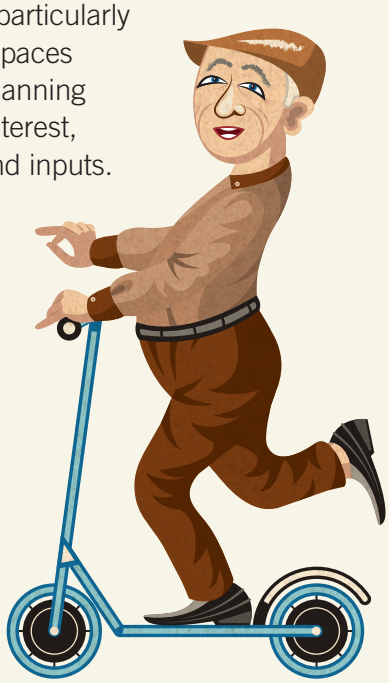
Contents

Foreword

This guidance is the fruit of a collaboration between Leeds City Council Planning Department and an interdisciplinary team at the University of Leeds.

Funded through the Research England Policy Support Fund, this document marks the first step in exploring the potential for the concept of 'belonging' to inform planning policies in relation to green spaces. It is one of the outcomes of a research project entitled "Integrating Intercultural Cities through Belonging in Green Spaces" which started in November 2022 and concluded in July 2023. This project was created in direct response to two documents published by Leeds City Council (LCC): the Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 and the Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Strategy 2022-32. Both of these reports place green spaces at the core of a vision for a city that offers social cohesion and wellbeing to its residents.

The team at the University of Leeds would like to express their gratitude to their colleagues at Leeds City Council, particularly the Parks and Green Spaces Department and the Planning Department for their interest, investment, support and inputs.



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Executive Summary

This guidance is one of the outcomes of a research project entitled "Integrating Intercultural Cities through Belonging in Green Spaces" which started in November 2022 and concluded in July 2023.

This project was created in direct response to two documents published by Leeds City Council (LCC): the Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 and the Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Strategy 2022-32. Both of these reports place green spaces at the core of a vision for a city that offers social cohesion and wellbeing to its residents.

In order to make an innovative contribution to the policy, governance and design of green spaces, this guidance investigates how some of the barriers can be overcome that prevent people from feeling as though they belong in greenspaces. In both the guidance and the case study, using belonging as a focal point allows us to explore collective and individual mechanisms around belonging, including attraction, emotional connection, and space-making in green spaces. In part 2.4 of this guidance, we deliver the key findings of the research, synthetising the ways in which our participants talked about their sense of belonging in green spaces, and used these as a foundation for the development of this guidance. In doing so, we show how "belonging" offers considerable potential for supporting the transformation of existing green spaces and informing the design of emerging green spaces.

This research was conducted with the objective to produce a policy guidance that could be used to address some of these issues. However, instead of exploring how Leeds residents are being excluded from green spaces, we have investigated what makes people feel like they belong in green spaces? This question resonates with the idea of "space-making", a concept which, in planning policies, translates the complex process of creating an emotional connection with a space.

We know from previous research that public parks and green spaces are landmarks of communality, a form of publicly owned, inclusive space which has been largely stripped back in urban areas under late capitalism (Colding et al., 2020). In addition, evidence shows that the convivial nature of parks has great potential for intercultural mixing, not necessarily fostering relations between communities, but normalising difference through "openness to otherness" (Barker et al., 2019, p.495). In addition, research on community gardens shows that community-focused models of green spaces have the potential to unlock new forms of civic participation, particularly amongst marginalised groups who may be otherwise excluded from civic participation (Crossan et al., 2018; please also refer to the Case Study document).

This guidance sets out an agenda as to how "belonging" can be used to respond to the challenge, which planners, designers and policy makers are facing in relation to the design and sustainable management of inherited, established and emerging green spaces.

This guidance is built around three priorities:

1. Identify how green spaces are being, and could be, used

2. Identify the challenges in planning and sustainably managing green spaces

3. Set out an agenda for future research around embedding belonging in green paces that could support evidence-based decision-making

This guidance has been developed in conjunction with a separate case study, which brings together a series of examples of community-focused green space initiatives. The guidance sets out the main findings of the research whilst the case study illustrates best practices.

The Best Practice covers nine case studies of intercultural community gardens: three of these case studies are Leeds-based, three are UK-wide and three in continental Europe with the idea of exploring how these green spaces integrate communities. In this document, we explore alternatives to the traditional model of public park where users cohabit and difference is accepted, but where there is no explicit agenda for engaging with difference. We selected these case studies because these spaces were intentionally designed to create opportunities for intercultural inclusion and community cohesion.

Introduction

The crucial role of parks and green spaces in supporting people's mental and physical health is now well established scientifically, a fact that has become indisputable over recent years as the Covid-19 pandemic swept through.

Less known are the ways within which green spaces have the potential to operate as social binders across class, gender and diverse identities.

At the core of this guidance sits the concept of *belonging*, which has not only guided the research objectives, methods and tools, but has also offered innovative perspectives to respond to the current challenges that public bodies face regarding policy making, design, governance and maintenance of green spaces. Whilst parks and green spaces acted as a case study for this collaboration between the University of Leeds and LCC, the research has also highlighted the potential for belonging as an interesting planning tool beyond this realm to inform other community-centred planning policies.

The Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 published by LCC in 2017 states that culture is one of the major drives for space-making and that cultural practices have the potential to both facilitate inclusion or exclude some vulnerable groups. In addition, in 2020, LCC published a report based on a significant consultation that led to the formation of the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces strategy. This document acknowledged the substantial popularity of green spaces in Leeds, but it also highlighted how nearly 10% of Leeds residents had yet to visit a green space that year. The document itself, sets 'Quality', 'Access for all' and 'Culture' in its top four priorities, alongside 'Climate and biodiversity'. With this guidance, we bring voices of local residents together to show how *belonging* has the potential to enhance the quality of green spaces, making them more attractive, welcoming and responding better to the needs of diverse communities.

Subsequently, the research was conducted with the objective to produce a policy guidance that could be used to address the role of belonging in facilitating the effectiveness of green spaces. While we acknowledge that some Leeds residents are excluded from green spaces, we have focused on what makes diverse people feel like they belong in green spaces. This question resonates with the idea of space-making, a concept which, in planning policies, translates the complex process of creating an emotional connection with a space.

Green spaces act as social facilitators, offering environments where exposure to others, difference and potential encounter is accepted. Green spaces also materialise positively the presence of public authorities. Recognising that it would be naïve to view green spaces as a panacea for community cohesion, this guidance explores them as having connotations with positive experiences, both individual and collective, where the potential lies with the residents of a multicultural city like Leeds to build a sense of belonging. In doing so, we examine how belonging could inform the development of policies to mitigate some of the barriers to belonging and improve the lived experiences of Leeds residents through their local green spaces.

Key Findings

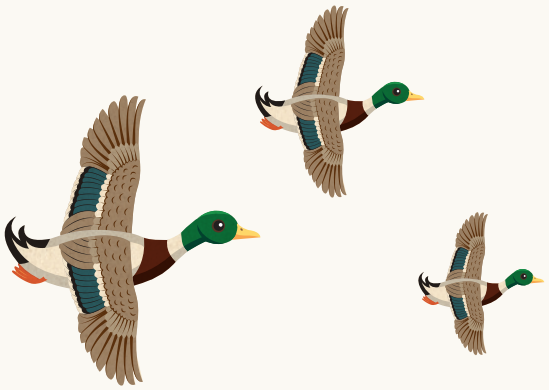
Key finding 1:
The construction of *belonging in green spaces*

Belonging in green spaces was built around three themes: participants' sensual experiences, their agency in space, and their exposure to others. As developed in part 2.4, these three themes often crossed over.

Sensual experience	Agency in space	Exposure to others
Sensorial: pleasurable smells, touch, views	Growing	Acceptance of the presence of others
Mindfulness	Picking, foraging	Socialisation: a space where to nurture social connections: gather, celebrate
Exposure to others: vulnerability (positive and safety)	Being heard, making choices	Community binding space
Playfulness, active moving	Reclaiming space	
Exposure to non-humans (animals, plants, insects)	Reclaiming responsibility over space	
Break in the repetitive texture of the urban environment		

Figure 1: Thematic analysis of belonging in green spaces

Key finding 2:
Belonging in planning



Cities are increasingly market dominated: local authorities have limited resources to invest in public infrastructure, and real estate developers are major players in urban development. In Leeds, new green spaces are predominantly created by private actors. In this context, green spaces constitute oasis of individual well-being and community cohesion.

Belonging shows potential to inform two strands of policies related to green spaces:

- Quantitative policies: by advocating for the importance of green spaces to local residents, *belonging* encourages public authorities to meet with the green infrastructure national target

- Qualitative policies: evidencing the way users feel welcome in green spaces, *belonging* has the potential to inform better planning and design practices

1

Framework of the guidance

This guidance sets out an agenda for how “belonging” can be used to respond to the challenge, which planners, designers and policy makers are facing in relation to the design and sustainable management of inherited, established and emerging green spaces.

This guidance is built around three priorities:

1. Identify how green spaces are being, and could be, used to support multiculturalism and social integration;
2. Identify the challenges in planning and sustainably managing green spaces;
3. Set out an agenda for future research around embedding belonging in green spaces that could support evidence-based decision-making.

This guidance has been developed in conjunction with a separate case study document which brings together a series of examples of community-focused green space initiatives. These two documents inform each other; the guidance sets out the main findings of the research, whilst the case study illustrates best practices.

1.1
Why belonging and green spaces?

Belonging is a fundamental human need that extends beyond social and cultural contexts and encompasses individuals' connections to physical spaces. Academic research has explored the concept of belonging in different spaces, including the role of green spaces in promoting individuals' well-being and sense of belonging.

Benefits of green spaces

- Access to green spaces has a positive impact on mental health and overall quality of life (Bowler et al., 2010; Keniger et al., 2013).

- Individuals who have regular exposure to green environments experience reduced stress, improved cognitive functioning, and increased feelings of belonging and connectedness (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Roe & Aspinall, 2011).

Barriers

- Public parks and green spaces in cities are landmarks of communality, most of them are publicly owned; with public resources dwindling they are under pressure (Colding et al., 2020).

- There are substantial inequalities in terms of access to green spaces across the United Kingdom, a complex reality which reproduces social as well as spatial inequalities (De Zylva et al. 2020; Sharp et al. 2020).

- Most urban area in the UK fail at meeting the targets for green spaces supply (REF).

Intercultural mixing in green spaces

- Green spaces play an important role in fostering a sense of community and belonging among residents (Coley et al., 1997).

- The convivial nature of parks has great potential for intercultural mixing, not necessarily fostering relations between communities, but normalising difference through "openness to otherness" (Barker et al., 2019, p.495).

- Research on community gardens shows that community-focused models of green spaces have the potential to unlock new forms of civic participation, particularly amongst marginalised groups who may be otherwise excluded from civic participation (Crossan et al., 2018; please also refer to the Case Study document).

While there is research on what hinders access to green spaces, the mechanisms that foster a sense of belonging in such spaces, on the contrary, have received far less attention.

We aim to make an innovative contribution to the policy and governance by examining how to overcome barriers that prevent people from feeling as though they belong in greenspaces.

In both the guidance and the case study, using belonging as a focal point allows us to explore collective and individual mechanisms around belonging, including attraction, emotional connection, and space-making in green spaces.

This guidance provides a supporting framework for responding to the urgency of transforming green spaces in Leeds in a context of major urban transformations (austerity agenda, climate emergency, and globalisation). Green spaces also offer an interesting case study for exploring the broader potential of belonging in guiding planning practices (in Leeds and beyond) towards developing individual well-being and a sense of inclusion and community.

1.2
Leeds as a context

The Consultation Document (Towards a Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2020-2030) published by LCC in 2019 states that:

There are approximately 45 million adult visits to Leeds parks per year. 91% of Leeds residents visited a park in the preceding year. 77% of visitors to Leeds parks describe their visits as 'very pleasant' (p.4).

Provision and access to green spaces

According to a conducted for Friends of the Earth (Zylva et al., 2020), which rated neighbourhood according to an index of green space deprivation, 1108 neighbourhoods in England are rated E, the lowest rate accounting for the areas most deprived of green space. The same study states that "9.6 million people live within these neighbourhoods, which is roughly 1 in 5 of the population of England" (p.38). Leeds has 15 neighbourhoods rated E oout of a total of 107, which is high, although below Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. In addition, Yorkshire and the Humber offers an average of 26sqm of green space per capita, the lowest rate of green space provision in England and way below the 30sqm target (Fields in Trust, 2023). This is combined with social and geographical disparities in access to, and use of, green spaces. The charity Fields in Trust "which protects and campaigns for public green spaces, found that just four out of the 11 regions in Great Britain met its "six-acre standard" for green space provision" with the most socially deprived communities being the worst affected (Gayle, 2022).

Diversity in green spaces

Like other areas of public space such as streets, squares and public art, parks have recently become contested representational spaces. When urban areas have been drastically transformed by globalisation, it worth questioning whether the design of heritage green spaces in Britain plays a role in discouraging ethnically diverse users.

The public participation study conducted by LCC in 2019 exposes the percentage of non-users and deficit of diversity. The document states that:

Parks are very popular with 91% of Leeds residents having visited a park in the preceding year and 50% visiting a park at least once a week in the summer months. It is estimated that Leeds parks host around 45 million adult visits a year (p.4).

In relation to the social profile of participants, the document adds that:

Gender:
52% were female and 42% were male, and the remainder described themselves as 'other' (4%) or preferred not to say (2%).

Ethnicity:
The majority of respondents reported being of white ethnicity (87%) with 5% reporting being from a black and minority ethnic (BAME) background.

Age:
The majority of respondents (87%) were aged 30 or over (p.10).

Whilst this data stresses the overwhelming popularity and importance of green spaces in Leeds, it also demonstrates that not all residents are equal in terms of access and belonging to green spaces and that more can be done to overcome the factors hindering some residents use of such spaces.

Green spaces under pressure

Despite their popularity, green spaces are under considerable pressure. In the UK (except Scotland), the provision of parks and green spaces is a non-statutory service which means that, despite their social and environmental benefits, they tend to be deprioritised as facilities (Dickinson et al., 2019; Dickinson and Marson, 2019). Despite their popularity, parks and green spaces in Leeds have therefore been dramatically affected by the austerity agenda. LCC's budget has shrunk dramatically under the pressure of funding cuts since 2008. In December 2022, Leader of LCC Councillor James Lewis, said that "core government funding for Leeds (were) reduced by approximately £263million for each year between 2011 and 2023" (LCC website, 2022). LCC's Parks and Green Spaces Strategic Document (2022) states that: "This decline in core funding is reflected in Leeds where, as a result of central government budget cuts, our core funding has reduced by over 50% in the last 10 years. Clearly, it is a challenge to continue to manage green spaces to a high standard given such financial setbacks."

Key principles in planning

The provision of green space is recognised for its importance in healthy and safe communities that enable and support healthy lifestyles through provision of and access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity. National Policy recognises and seeks Local Planning Authorities to make provisions for open space, reflecting that open space is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.

Planning Policy for Leeds also sits alongside three strategies adopted by the council. These 'three pillars' are:

- Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy
- Leeds Health & Well Being Strategy
- Leeds Climate Emergency Declaration

The Inclusive Growth Strategy (2018-2023) sets out twelve big ideas that will create the underlying conditions for inclusive growth. To fulfil Leeds's economic potential and to make a high growth scenario a reality the strategy sets out the need to take action to enhance the city's competitiveness and to tackle poverty. This will mean investing in people, their health and wellbeing, improving education and skills, putting children at the heart of the growth strategy. It will mean developing and regenerating places, supporting neighbourhoods, communities.

The Health and Well Being Strategy (2016-2021) also set out 12 priorities in a strategy that aims to be healthy and caring for all ages and where people who are of the poorest health improve their health the fastest. The priorities include a child friendly city and the best start in life; an age friendly city where people age well; strong engaged and well-connected communities and where more people can get more physically active, more often.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Leeds Core Strategy; Spatial Vision and Objectives

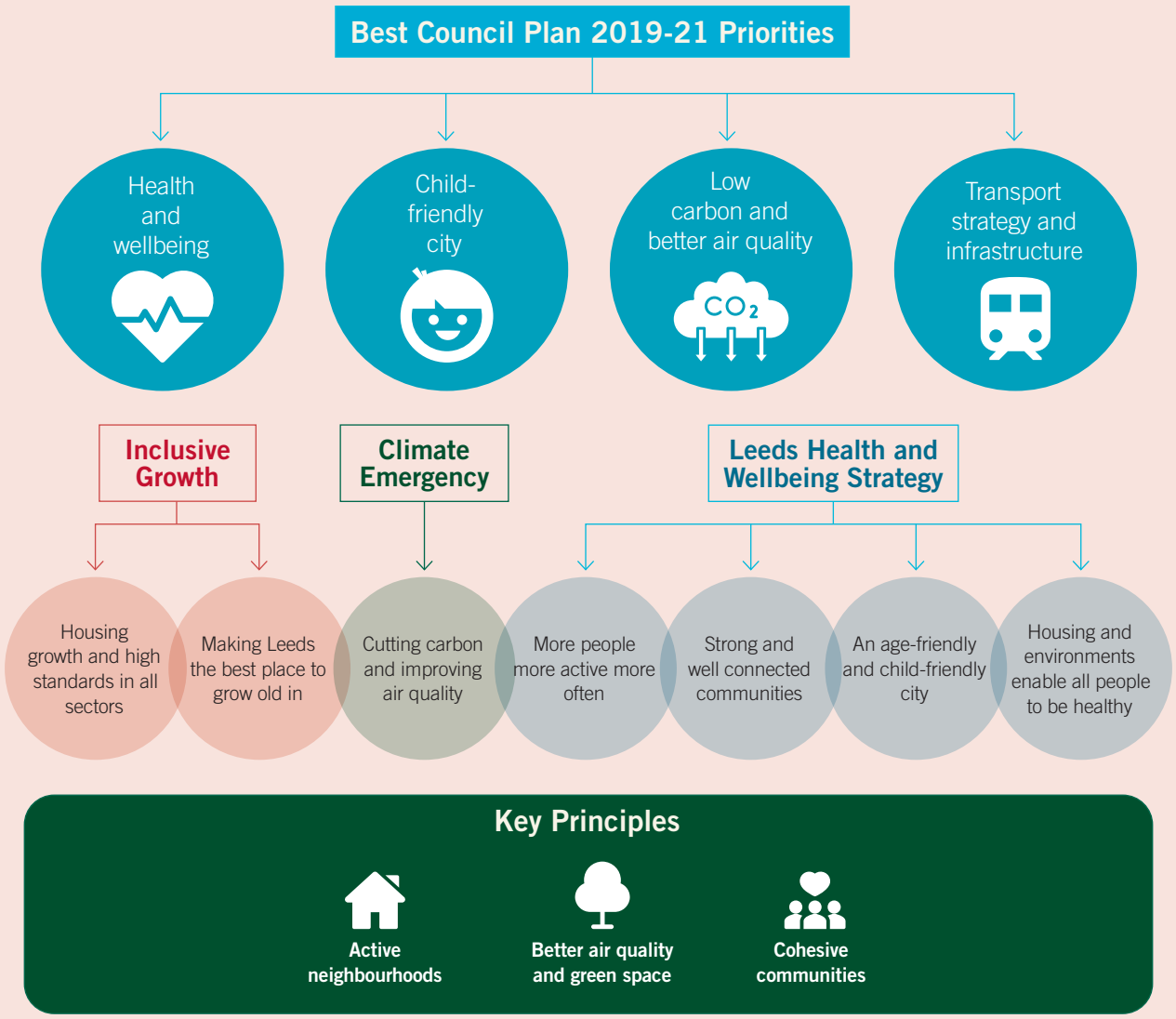


Figure 2: Leeds City Council Planning and Design for Healthy Places: Key Principles

The diagram above, produced by LCC, illustrates the **key principles** that are underpinned in national and local planning policy and meet strategic priorities for the city:

Active neighbourhoods – promoting cycling and walking, reducing car usage and improving children's opportunities for independent mobility.

Better air quality and green space – using green and blue infrastructure to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and promote mental wellbeing.

Cohesive communities – encouraging co-located services and high-quality neighbourhood spaces to encourage social interaction and combat isolation.

Leeds Climate Emergency Declaration was passed at a full Council meeting on 27th March 2019. In passing the Motion, the Council resolved not only to declare a climate emergency, but to sign up to a science-based carbon reduction target consistent with achieving the Paris Agreement of no more than 1.5°C global temperature increase. The resolution included working to make Leeds carbon neutral by 2030 and calling on central government to provide the funding and powers to make this possible.

1.3
Objectives of the guidance

This guidance aims to show the perspective of using belonging to inform planning policies. In the context of new developments, green spaces can act as community catalysts if well designed; in inherited green spaces, community driven practices have the potential to increase a sense of agency over space and a broader sense of belonging in the city. There are two strands of policies, quantitative and qualitative, influencing the planning of green spaces, in which belonging can have a positive impact.

Quantitative policies

We know that the vast majority of British cities fails to meet the standards of provision of green spaces; in a context where green spaces are deprioritised, belonging supports argument for increase of provision as it improves overall quality of living.

Qualitative policies

Cities are now overwhelmingly market dominated. Green spaces are “non-profitable” spaces. We know that green spaces are instrumental in place-making process. We know that some groups reclaim their relationship with green spaces. We have reasons to think that mechanisms of exclusion in green spaces are no different than in the rest of society.

In part 2.4 our key findings model the way that people develop their connection with green spaces. Drawing from this model, this guidance gives perspectives as to how the barriers for belonging could be mitigated through planning.

2

Why Belonging matters

Belonging, the feeling of being welcome in a space, will determine how likely people are to access a space.

Belonging also can be used to talk about relationships between people. When people belong to a community, and perceive a space as being of that community, they are more likely to engage both in the spaces and in the community. Additionally, communities themselves are engendered by the places they form in.

As we discuss in the next section, research into belonging has largely focused on inclusion and social relationships. However, an alternative perception of belonging has also highlighted the importance of physical spaces in the way we feel like we belong. Physical places are not only containers for being social, but can promote and/or hinder experiences belonging in how they are designed. In this regard, belonging has proved to be a promising concept to guide a planning- and policy-focused research process.

2.1
Research on Belonging

- **In psychology**, belonging is referred to as a fundamental human need (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister and Leary, 1995). The psychology of social belonging is often connected to the idea of inclusion, which brings together the unique nature and collectiveness of the experience of belonging: the feeling of belonging is individual, but we need others to help us to realise it.

- **Geography** considers belonging from the perspective of space-making. Place belonging is often theorised in relation to globalisation, with the intention to highlight the importance of community and place attachment beyond the modern definition the nation state (citizenship, identity, and immigration status to name a few). Underpinning the concept of place belonging is the idea that, with increased mobility and diverse identities, our attachment to particular spaces, and their role in binding the communities in which we live have gained in importance (Antonish, 2010).

As we discuss in part 2.4 of this guidance, belonging is an inherently positive feeling, which brings together three levels of experience: the individual experience, the individual experience in relation to others and the experience of space. In a context in which cities face challenges, belonging presents great potential for putting the wellbeing and inclusion of urban dwellers at the centre of urban transformations.

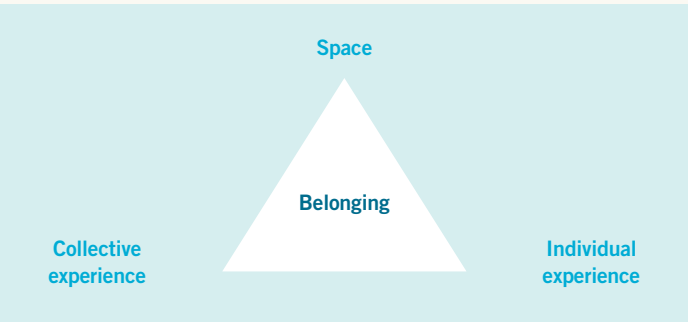
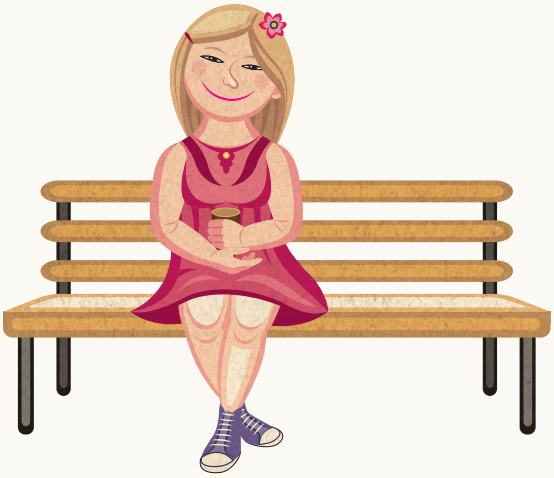


Figure 3: Diagram of the construction of the "sense of belonging"

2.2
Intercultural Integration in Green Spaces

Most public policies define diversity in relation to equality and inclusion (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Amin, 2002), a vision which is still central in shaping intercultural communities' access to green infrastructure (Jay et al, 2012). A growing body of literature (academic and beyond), however, has called for a critique of the way "diversity" is framed around fixed ethnic identities. Whilst the traditional vision of diversity and multi-ethnicity doesn't exclude the existence of a geography of racism and exclusion, it contests the ways within which diversity is framed in space. Instead of seeing ethnicity as a permanent aspect of our identities, **identity should be regarded as something we constantly negotiate in everyday encounters** (Selim, 2015).

Spaces, such as parks and green spaces, where difference is negotiated are instrumental to wellbeing in diverse urban areas (Edge et al., 2023). **Intercultural gardens, for example, are places of respect, a form of active engagement with difference**, beyond passive tolerance (Moulin-Doos, 2013).



2.3 Gathering evidence

In the context of this research that informed the development of this guidance, we asked the following questions:

- When do people successfully feel like they belong in green spaces?
- What fosters this feeling?
- How could this be related to policy?

To answer these questions, we used three methods:

- We joined a collaborative project between LCC and Hyde Park Source, a local organisation based in Leeds, which leads community garden projects. **We took part in the co-design of an intercultural garden led by 15 volunteers, mixing local residents and students. They were interviewed in February 2023, at the start of the co-design process and then again at the end.** These interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. Through these interviews, we were able to research the role that the community garden played in their feeling of belonging .The garden is located in the Hyde
Park area, a highly diverse inner-city neighbourhood of Leeds which is also adjacent to the University of Leeds' campus. This area served as a case-study for our research as it brings together diverse sets of users in green spaces, including a transient student population.

- **We held three community mapping drop-in sessions** in All Hallow Church café space (Rainbow Junktion), an organisation based in Hyde Park which operates as a food bank and a community café twice a week. The sessions brought together a very diverse community of users, ethnically, socially and across generations, with the only under-represented group being young people and children. Maps at different scales, as well as images of green spaces, were used to trigger participants' connections with green spaces across Leeds. They were offered the option to colour, write or use sticky notes to capture their stories. The visual material gathered during the community mapping sessions was analysed thematically and compared with the results from the interviews.

- We held three **panel discussions followed by workshops** involving a variety of stakeholders, including members of the general public, policymakers, sustainable and community gardening experts, community groups, community garden partners (LCC and Hyde Park Source) and academic colleagues from urban, cultural studies, sociology, psychology & law. The discussions held during the workshops were recorded. Some of the workshops also involved visual material-based work. All the data gathered during the workshops was analysed thematically and crossed over with results from the interviews and the mapping sessions.


H
HEADINGLEY
WOODHOUSE MOOR
ROYAL PARK
Brudenell Social Club
CHAPELTOWN
A61
A58
HAREHILLS
University
of Leeds
A65
Leeds
A64(M)
A58
A63
HOLBECK
M621
Elland Road

Case study 1

Community mapping in Hyde Park

Woodhouse Moor and green spaces across Leeds

The neighbourhood of Hyde Park is one of the most deprived areas in Leeds, but has a vibrant culture made up of many different communities of people. There are many diverse families and long-term residence in the area, as well as an increasing number of students due to the growth of the University of Leeds. This dynamic brings its own tensions and challenges into the neighbourhood, which made it an appropriate location to examine community cohesion and place-making. Woodhouse Moor is the largest green space in the Hyde Park area. It is sandwiched between Hyde Park and the University of Leeds' campus. It is used by local residents and students alike, marking a point of contact in the community but also concentrating the tensions which can result from the use of green spaces by diverse groups of users.

Woodhouse Moor acted as a starting point to collect participants stories of belonging in green spaces. During the community mapping sessions, a large map of Hyde Park, which featured Woodhouse Moor as the central green space in the ward, was used for colouring, drawing and captioning with sticky notes. This large map (A0) was used alongside individual maps (A4), which allowed participants to talk about green spaces at various scales.

Thanks to the use of maps at various scales, we discovered a geography of belonging in green spaces way beyond the use of residents' local park. Some participants talked about their local park as a space of daily commute or short walks. However, many stakeholders also travelled across Leeds and further to access green spaces of their preference or discover new ones, showing a geography of use way beyond their neighbourhood.

> "WOODHOUSE MOOR ACTED AS A STARTING POINT TO COLLECT PARTICIPANS STORIES OF BELONGING IN GREEN SPACES."

Case study 2

The Royal Park Site

The Royal Park School was a primary school that also functioned as a hub for the local community. It was a landmark for the neighbourhood, because of both its central location and its social importance. Many parents who sent their children to the school had attended themselves, and the community also used the building to celebrate weddings and hold community events. It was a beloved part of the neighbourhood. The school was identified for closure in the mid-1990s, and a campaign was organised by parents and pupils to save the school. Because if this, the site became a site of contestation in the community. The school was ultimately closed in 2004 and was left empty for six years. The community got organised in hope to save the building, and brought together campaigns, protests, fundraising efforts to purchase the site, and an occupation which aimed to repair the damage and protect the building from demolition. The Royal Park Community Consortium submitted a bid to transform the building into a community centre, wanting to foster a sense of local ownership and use the project as a catalyst for social cohesion. Despite these actions, the school was demolished in 2014.

Conversations continued for years between community members, LCC and property developers about what the site would become. Eventually, a decision was made to turn the site into a new park. With the increasing value of green space and the reality that Hyde Park has the lowest green space to grey built environment in the UK, this compromise was deemed acceptable. A consultation with the community on the design of the new green space was facilitated by Hyde Park Source, a community organisation with expertise in engaging local community in the creation

and maintenance of green space for health and wellbeing. The consultation included a survey, an interactive activity to visualise the potential for the park and a display board where community members could provide their opinion. From this consultation, it became clear that the community still felt strongly that this site should be a centre of community activity, with suggestions such as community gardens, after school activities, and educational opportunities to learn gardening, food growing and woodworking skills. In 2020, LCC invested £500,000 into the revitalisation of the space with the hope of addressing the needs of the Hyde Park community.

Methods: The research team partnered with Hyde Park Source to facilitate a community gardening group at the Royal Park site, and was allocated two areas of the new Royal Park by the council for this action research project: a space for an orchard and community garden. The project ran from February to July of 2023, allowing for 23 weekly community gardening group sessions involving 15 student and local resident volunteers. The results presented on p.18 show how volunteers' sense of belonging was affected by their participation to the project.

2.4
Key findings

Does volunteering in a community garden foster a sense of belonging? Key findings from the Royal Park Site.

Increased attachment to place

Through Hyde Park Source's facilitation of the community garden activities, volunteers co-created the design of the garden spaces as a team. This process engendered a sense of ownership for the site among the volunteers, which led to volunteers feeling like they were 'leaving their mark' within the community and contributing to its revitalisation. This feeling was further cemented by volunteers learning about the complex history of the site, feeling like they were a part of the next chapter in the lifespan of the site. Attending weekly sessions created a sense of familiarity with the site for volunteers, who described passing by the site and noticing it now, sharing its history with friends, and feeling rewarded by the effort they've put in to transform it. All these experiences contributed to an increased attachment to the place and the wider neighbourhood.

Increased engagement with community

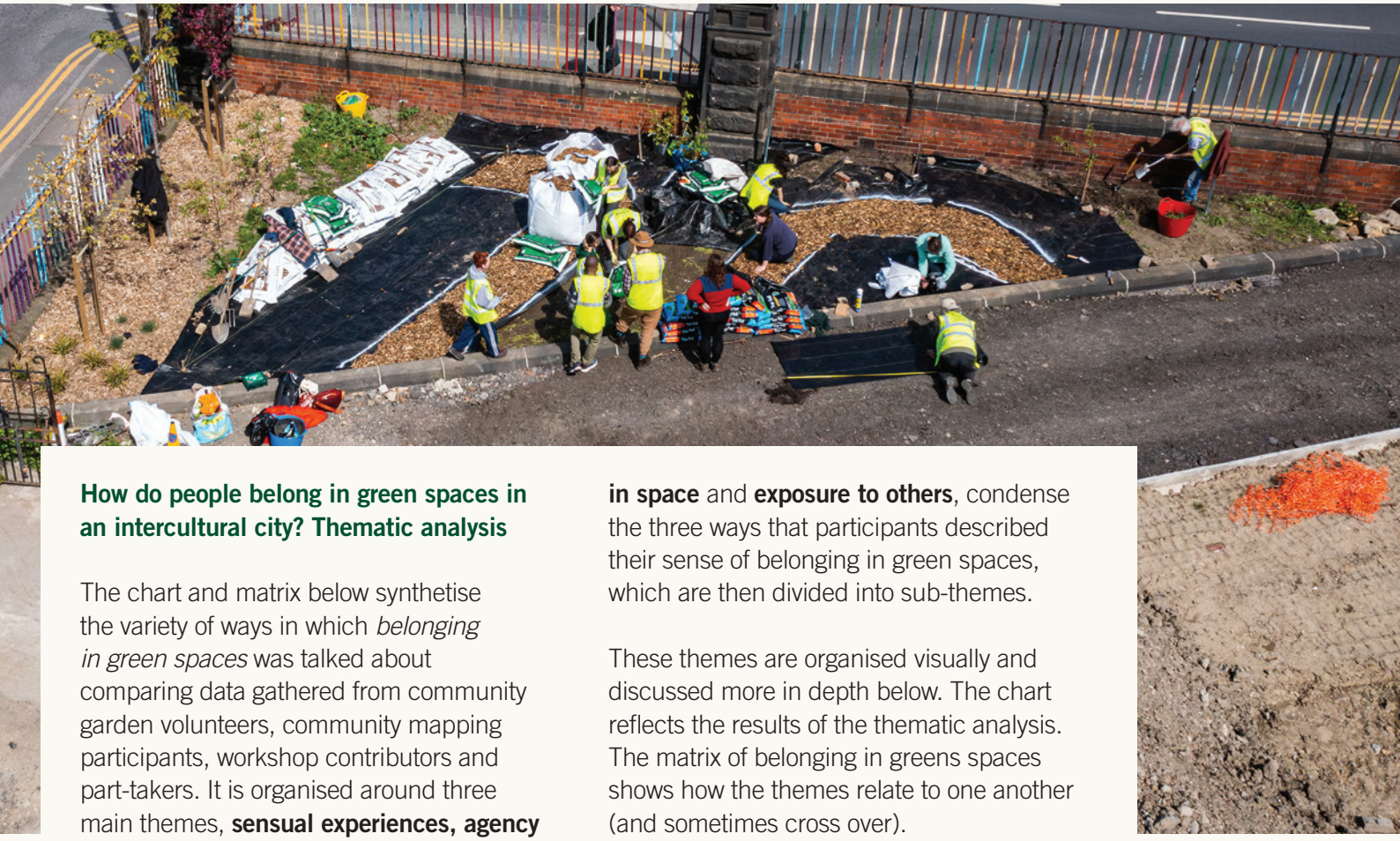
Student volunteers particularly emphasized the value of engaging with people outside the university as part of what had interested them about the project. They expressed that the process of intentionally engaging in community building had exceeded their expectations of being involved in the project. Meeting students from other courses and interacting with long term-residence contributed to the social benefits of participating in the project. Although there were a smaller number of long-term residents attending as volunteers, there were numerous instances of long-term residents visiting the site and volunteers heard from community members during the session on the history of the Royal Park site. This allowed students to 'get out of the student bubble' that many experience as living in Hyde Park, and gave them an increased sense of awareness of the local community. For some volunteers, involvement with the project encouraged them to seek out other community organisations in the area to contribute to, and even motivated them to stay in the area for their industry placement instead of going abroad. When asked, volunteers agreed their sense of belonging to the Hyde Park community had increased through participating in the community garden group.

Experiential education increased environmental skill

Volunteers expressed that they had developed skills through creating a garden from design to implementation. Volunteers learned about soil quality through surveying the site, and developed skills in woodworking by building bug hotels, a bird house and a bench. When asked what the highlight of the project had been for volunteers, many referenced a workshop where they were taught how to prune and graft fruit trees. These activities exposed volunteers to expert knowledge within the community, as well as creating a space for long-term residents and students who were volunteers to also share their knowledge and skills with the group. These reciprocal exchanges helped to upskill the entire group, which made everyone feel that they both had something to give and something new to learn.

Summary

Although the timelines for this project were short to break ground on a community garden and establish a group to examine sense of belonging, the project shows promise around how intentional community activities can benefit intercultural communities, especially within communities of students and local residents. It has demonstrated how these types of activities in green spaces can help to create a sense of attachment to place and a greater sense of belonging for students and strengthen ties with the local community, even within a short period of time.



How do people belong in green spaces in an intercultural city? Thematic analysis

The chart and matrix below synthetise the variety of ways in which *belonging in green spaces* was talked about comparing data gathered from community garden volunteers, community mapping participants, workshop contributors and part-takers. It is organised around three main themes, **sensual experiences, agency in space** and **exposure to others**, condense the three ways that participants described their sense of belonging in green spaces, which are then divided into sub-themes.

These themes are organised visually and discussed more in depth below. The chart reflects the results of the thematic analysis. The matrix of belonging in greens spaces shows how the themes relate to one another (and sometimes cross over).

Sensual experience	Agency in space	Exposure to others
Sensorial: pleasurable smells, touch, views	Landmark of communality (universal marker of public space)	Acceptance of the presence of others, but agency to socialise or not
Mindfulness	Growing	A space where to nurture social connections
Exposure to others: vulnerability (positive) and safety	Picking, foraging	Community binding space
Playfulness, active moving	Being heard, making choices	
Exposure to non-humans (animals, plants, insects)	Positive presence of public authority: nurturing vs. policing	
Break in the repetitive texture of the urban environment	Reclaiming space	
	Reclaiming responsibility over space	

Figure 4: Thematic analysis of belonging in green spaces

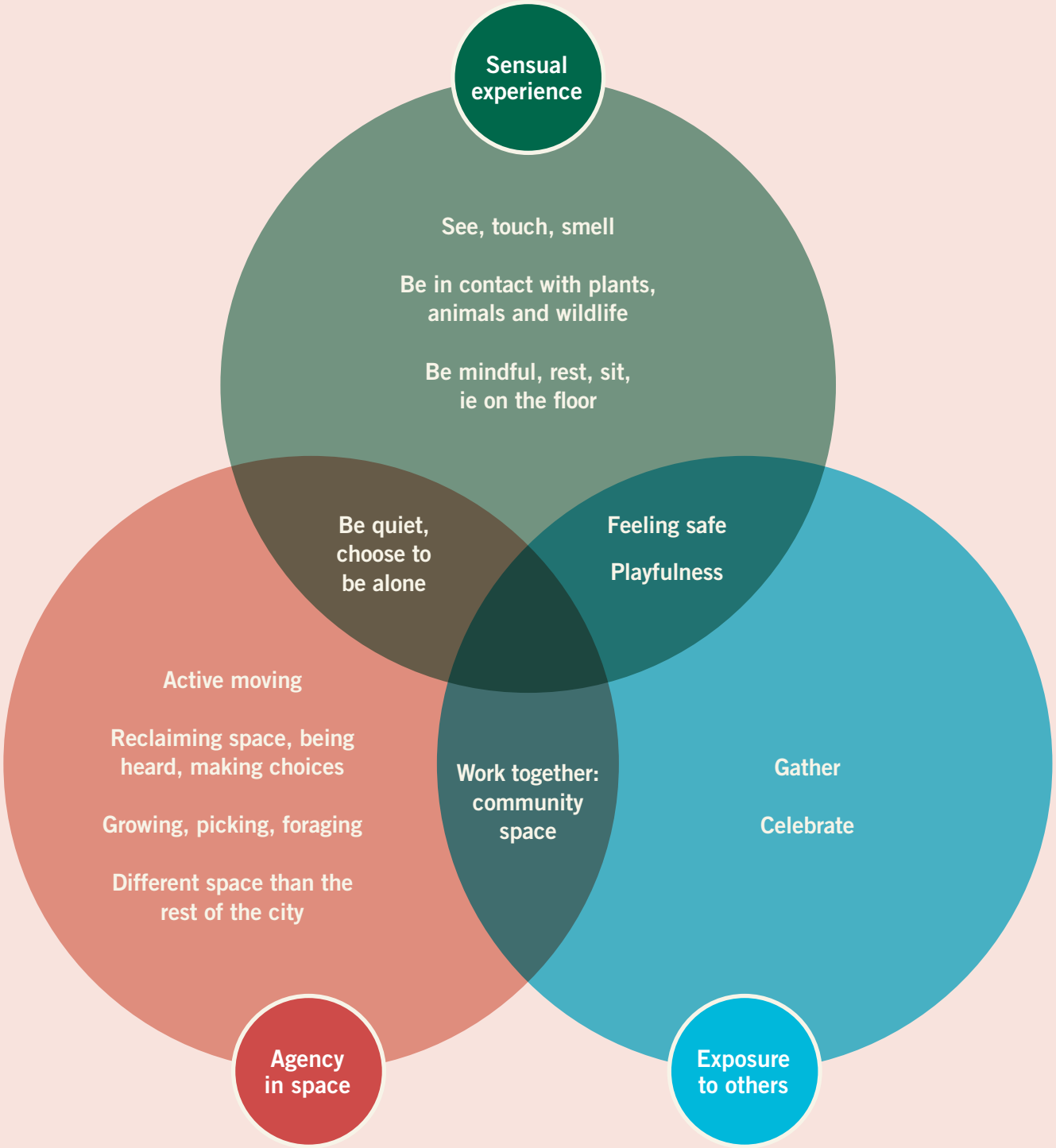


Figure 5: Matrix of belonging in green spaces as disclosed by our participants: Three main themes, sub-themes and how they relate to one another.

BELONGING IN GREEN SPACES
Theme 1: Sensual experience

The matrix above synthetises the variety of ways within which participants talked about belonging in green spaces. It is organised around three main themes, which are then divided into sub-themes. The aim of the matrix is to demonstrate the extent to which these three dimensions of belonging in green spaces overlapped, and the potential for cross-over between sub-themes and main themes in some of our participants' stories.

The sensual dimension of belonging in green spaces often came first in participants' accounts through the way that they recalled the positive experience of being physically present in green spaces. Their descriptions involved pleasurable, sensorial experiences of seeing (beautiful views, landscape, plants), touching (grass, trees), smelling (flowers, soil) and hearing (being in a quiet environment in the city, hearing birds and insects). Often (but not always), such experiences provided participants with a sense of relaxation and mindfulness. Exposure to non-human life (the presence of wildlife, domestic animals such as horses and vegetation) was often described as part of the pleasurable experience of green spaces. More broadly, urban green spaces were often described as breaks in the repetitiveness and hecticness of the urban fabric. They were perceived as more 'humane' in the sense that they are wellbeing- and dwellers-centred.

Furthermore, participants highlighted that green spaces allow bodily expressions that wouldn't otherwise be socially accepted in an urban environment. Postures such as sitting and lying on the floor, sunbathing, eating or gathering in big groups are behaviours which are accepted in green spaces, however highly problematic in other urban public spaces. Such descriptions converged with narratives around playfulness and active moving. Participants extensively described green spaces as places where they could be physically active (running, jumping, etc) and enhance their wellbeing, whether their motivations were led by fitness or pleasure, or both.

In Leeds and particularly in the vicinity of the campus, green spaces (and particularly Woodhouse Moor) have regularly been the theatre of large student gatherings, particularly in the aftermath of periods of examinations, as well as at the end of the academic year. Although these events are highly contentious because of their impact on the community and the park itself, it is important to note that green spaces uniquely provide towns and cities with an environment where groups can get together for drinking, dancing and partying in a self-organised manner and that festive practices can play an important role in the student community and their sense of belonging in Leeds.

Exposure to others was seen as part of being physically present in green spaces and the joy it provided. Participants seemed to strongly connect this with feelings of physical and emotional vulnerability. It is important to note that, in relation to belonging, vulnerability was

referred to as a positive experience, which closely related to successfully and positively negotiating the presence of other people, and processes of socialisation). Vulnerability in green spaces was described by participants as the voluntary decision to be exposed to others without necessarily being social, which is why it must be distinguished from actively seeking socialisation. The acceptance of others' presence without necessarily connecting socially distinguished itself from, perhaps, just walking past strangers on the street, in the sense that it was embedded in a positive feeling which contributed to belonging in green spaces.

Similarly, green spaces were seen as environments for actively seeking social isolation and opportunities for mindfulness, whilst impromptu encounters were accepted as a possibility. Thus, in both cases, the possibility to negotiate social relations harmoniously and successfully were seen as enhancing the sense of belonging.

In both cases, green spaces were seen as adequate environments to 'drop the filters' and being consciously vulnerable and, for this reason, exposure to others was instrumental in participants' feelings of safety, a topic which is developed in Theme 2 below.

2

Theme 2: Agency in space

In participants' descriptions, greens spaces were seen as universal marker of public space and landmarks of communality across the board. This instrumental aspect of the agency that participants developed in relation to green spaces resonated differently depending on the governance of said spaces.

Publicly managed green spaces captured participants' relationship with public authorities. Through their experiences of such spaces, interviewees delivered a vision of their local authority either nurturing or policing the space, and the tension between the two. On the one hand, through their perception of greens spaces, participants were able to deliver an empirical experience of public spending cuts and this experience was related to a sentiment of 'not being looked after'. Restrictions (to certain groups or certain activities) also strongly resonated with a feeling of structural injustice. On the other hand, any improvement grounded a strongly positive vision of local authority's presence.

In relation to the use of green spaces, participants' narratives also conveyed the idea of 'reclaiming space', a theme which connected with the idea of negotiating others' presence developed above. In relation to belonging, the idea of reclaiming space worked along the line of representation and "being visible" in green spaces, particularly for women and girls, people of colour and LGBTQI+ participants. Interviewees saw representation as instrumental to acceptance and belonging. Collectively, 'reclaiming space' translated the feeling of owning a place in green spaces.

Interestingly, 'reclaiming space' was more intimately connected to participants' feeling of safety than exposure to others. The theme exposed the fact than representation sits at the core of the feeling of 'safety' in green spaces. Participants equated the feeling of 'standing out' to a vulnerability. Similarly, the hyper-representation of certain groups was perceived as creating an imbalance and therefore triggering unpleasant feelings.

Participants involved in community gardening (and particularly volunteers at the Royal Park Site) gave the strongest accounts of agency in space. In green spaces, spatial agency was built around being heard and being heard, making choices (of uses for example), a sentiment which was tied up with the demand and the acceptance of a certain responsibility over space. In community garden, this sentiment was more practically grounded in participating in the design and connected to acts of planting, growing, picking, and maintaining.

Theme 3: Socialisation

Exposure to others came as the first theme in relation to green spaces as social spaces. As it has been developed in Theme 1, this aspect of respondents' experience crossed over with the embodiment in green spaces. However, green spaces were seen as an environment where socialisation was fostered. Social practices such as family gatherings or religious celebrations were for example evoked by participants. In addition, green spaces were described as places where spare time could be spent with focusing on social interactions.

Secondly, green spaces were talked about as spaces to nurture existing and new social connections. By extension, greens spaces were described as environments where a sense of community has the potential to be created. Although this was particularly true for participants engaged in community garden projects, experiences of harmonious cohabitation with 'others' generated similar feelings.

3

Planning green spaces in Leeds

In this part, we look at the policies which rule the planning of green spaces nationally and locally and discuss how belonging has the potential to inform them.

There are two strands of policies related to greens spaces in Leeds:

- **Quantitative policies, which regulate the provision of green spaces**
- **Qualitative policies, which guide the design of green spaces**

As we discuss in the key recommendations (part 4.1), there is great potential for belonging to inform both strands of policies.

3.1 Existing policies

The Leeds Local Plan[1] is the planning policy framework for the district up to 2028 (and for part, 2033). It sets out the planning polices to designate, provide and protect greenspace within the district. There are also a number of made Neighbourhood Plans that have more localised policies on the designation of 'Local green space' (para. 102 of National Policy Planning Framework [NPPF] [2]) and protection policies.

The NPPF criteria for 'Local Green space' is defined in paragraph 102 as:

"a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land."

Together, these local plan documents are consistent with the aims of National Policy as set out in the NPPF, July 2022 to **'seek the achievement of sustainable places'**.

[1] Leeds Core Strategy (as amended, 2019); Leeds Site Allocation Plan, 2019; Aire Valley Area Action Plan, 2016 and Unitary Development Plan Review, 2006 (Saved Policies) - Adopted Local Plan (leeds.gov.uk)

[2] National Planning Framework (NPPF) 2021, Department for Communities and Local Government. www.oss.org.uk/faqs-about-local-green-space-designation

4

Policy implications

The policy implications below are to actors who wants to foster or enhance belonging in green spaces.

Belonging in planning

However, this work represents a first step and we believe that further evidence is needed for belonging to develop to its full potential in green spaces.

***Belonging* is context specific:** planning green spaces with *belonging* as an objective allows us to capture what elements in the history, geography and cultural practices of a community really matter.

***Belonging* is scalable:** *belonging* acts as a magnifier of 'what matters' for members of a community and the community as a whole; for this reason, it is a useful concept to work towards community needs.

***Belonging* is useful:** for modelling green space developement and has great potential for modelling other more enclusive environements.

- From accepting difference to Actively seeking difference .
- Increasing agency in space.

Quantitative policies:

In a context in which green spaces are at threat and no major British city meets the provision criteria, belonging exposes the importance of such spaces.

Belonging brings about more evidence to advocate for an increased provision of green spaces, locally and nationally.

Qualitative policies:

- Belonging is both scalable AND context specific (geography, community, time, etc).
- By designing the research with belonging as a focus, we were able to extract what is important for people when it comes to green space.

1. There is potential for modelling green spaces development .
2. And there are promising perspectives in scaling up belonging-based research for planning beyond green spaces: modelling belonging for other environments to work towards community needs.

4.1
Quantity

The overall aim of the Core Strategy green space policies is to use the development process to strategically deliver the best type and the best quality of green space to where it is most needed in Leeds. Policy G3 sets standards for the quantity, accessibility and quality of green space to be expected in Leeds derived from evidence of Leeds' Open Space and Recreation Assessment. Whilst it is recognised that the existing urban form of Leeds offers limited scope to achieve all of the standards, particularly in the inner areas, the most needs to be made of the development opportunities that do arise to optimise quantity, accessibility and quality as appropriate.

Whilst belonging has more potential to be present in policies guiding the planning of green spaces qualitatively, it can also support the agenda for increasing green spaces provision on the basis that green spaces are instrumental to individual wellbeing and community cohesion.

People moving into an area or general increases in population place a greater burden on existing green space. Therefore it is appropriate that new housing development makes provision to address this burden by:

- Providing green space on-site
- Providing green space off-site
- Providing commuted sums in lieu of on-site provision (sums can be used to provide green space, to enhance existing green space or to improve connections to existing green space) or
- A combination of these options.

The calculation of green space provision is set out in Core Strategy Policy G4 (and at time of writing, G5 for City Centre development) and is based upon a green space requirement for different sizes of dwellings. Where it is agreed that only part of this requirement is provided as new green space (on or off-site) the remainder should normally be provided as a commuted sum.

Provision of new green space needs to be appropriate to the needs of the development and locality. The key consideration will be the surpluses and/or deficiencies of different types of green space in the local area. The standards of Policy G3 including accessibility distances can be used to identify particular deficiencies applicable to each development site and this can help determine what types of green space ought to be provided. It should

be stressed that the Surplus and deficiencies are only one of the many overlapping factors that assist in determining typology as a result of development. Determining the appropriate location of green space within a development will be a matter for discussion depending on the circumstances of the locality, site and development proposed. Aggregated, fragmented spaces, scattered across development sites will not be acceptable due to their limited functionality. However, it is recognised that there is a role for smaller areas of green space like 'pocket parks' in densely developed areas, subject to suitable management arrangements being in place. It is important that any new green space of any typology is planned, situated and designed to make a positive contribution to the overall design concept and character of development.

Any provision of new green space will need to be accompanied by appropriate arrangements to secure the on-going maintenance of the space. Where the City Council is asked to adopt spaces, a financial contribution will be required to cover maintenance. Where independent or private arrangements are to be used the Council will need to be satisfied that these are robust, efficacious and legally enforceable. In particular, the Council will need to be satisfied as to the quality of the maintenance and that any legacy arrangements associated with the private company passing on their obligations or becoming insolvent do not result in the Council accepting the extra maintenance cost burden.

Where new green space is provided it should be openly accessible to the public. Exceptions may be for operational reasons such as security of allotments or membership of sports clubs. Where a need for play facilities is identified careful consideration should be given to safety and security issues. If security cannot be ensured through appropriate siting of play facilities, it may be appropriate to seek a different type of greenspace irrespective of need. Some forms of green space suffer in terms of usability due to poor drainage (for example sports pitches). Any new green space should have acceptable and appropriate levels of sustainable drainage.

Where green space provision is to be accepted off-site it needs to be reasonably related to the development. In most cases this should mean within the accessibility distances specified in Policy G3, but exceptions could include sites connected by high frequency public transport corridors or green space additions to City Parks or strategic facilities that would be used by residents of the development.

4.2
Monitoring

LCC monitors planning policies as a statutory duty to check that these are having their intended effect and to make sure they are working for local communities. If any interventions are needed, these will be identified in the monitoring report.

The current KPI (25) as set out in the Authority Monitoring Report records the 'Amount of green space lost to redevelopment'. Unfortunately, the Council was not able to collect data to comprehensively monitor loss of green space to development over the 2019/20 to 2020/21 period. A new approach to monitoring this indicator is being developed to allow this to be carried out as a desktop exercise to compare open datasets made for open space made available by the Ordnance Survey with the Council's existing green space records and completions data.

As it has been said previously, increasing density increases pressure on existing green spaces. Overwhelmingly, new green spaces are the fact of private property developments and in an urban context which is market dominated, green spaces present no immediate interest for profit-driven developments, which means that it is ultimately public bodies' decision to demand and monitor the provision of green spaces. In this context, there is potential for belonging to inform policy makers on the dynamic of 'space-making', a concept which guides the evaluation of planning applications in Leeds. In the research which led to this document, belonging has shown that it brings together positive individual feelings of attachment to specific spaces and a sense of social inclusion. In that sense, green spaces can be seen as instrumental to the development of a sense of individual wellbeing and community cohesion in newly developed urban spaces. It could therefore support the public agenda for increasing the provision of green spaces.

4.3
Good practice

4.3.1 Design Guidance

Greenspace 'design and management requirements for quality green spaces in new developments' will be a new guidance document prepared by LCC to highlight and further promote the importance of Designing quality green spaces on new development. It focuses on the provision of greenspace being approached in a strategic, comprehensive manner, beginning with retaining existing green infrastructure features (trees and woodlands, hedgerows, meadows and wetlands) in the overall layout, and then enhancing and connecting the existing through public open space, linear routes and private amenity space. As guided by the Core Strategy the total size and types of public open space (provided on site shall meet the requirements of Core Strategy Policy, but it also highlights links to the Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards and Fields in Trust Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Recreation. The guidance tackles issues around location of green space, accessibility, boundary treatments, planting details etc. It further signposts to other relevant policy guidance, such as the Transport SPD.

Our Spaces Strategy

In 2019, the Council launched its Our Spaces strategy focused on the public realm in the City centre. Leeds city centre is changing rapidly and the Our Spaces Strategy is vital to support the Council and stakeholders in transforming the quality and quantity of the city's public realm. Based on seven key principles, and with the ambition for a strong economy and compassionate city, the strategy sets out a 'people first' approach, where the benefits and outcomes of the public space schemes can directly improve the health and wellbeing of Leeds citizens.

The ‘Leeds Our Spaces Strategy’ will be a route map to ensure that the delivery of any new public spaces meet the city’s vision for the creation of world class, inclusive and vibrant spaces that become the city’s greatest culture asset so as to create a city centre that looks as good as it feels.

Play Sufficiency

In 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment 17 on Article 31 of the UNCRC. The purpose of this ‘General Comment’ was to clarify and emphasise the responsibilities of countries within the United Nations in respect of children’s right to play. The General Comment goes on to recommend that government support for children’s play should be based on the principle of sufficiency; an endorsement of the pioneering approach taken in Wales. Leeds is leading the way on this recommendation. Though others are beginning to follow, we will be the first city in England to work through a Play Sufficiency Assessment. The Leeds Play Sufficiency Assessment is being led by Active Leeds through a project funded by Sport England: Get Set Leeds Local (GSLL). The research element has been led by Active Leeds and supported by Fall into Place and Public Health. We have commissioned play consultants Ludicology to guide us on this journey. Ludicology provides advice, research and training to those working with or on behalf of children and their play. It looks at aspects of play at school, street for play, community safety and technology spaces and relationships.

4.4
Quality

In August 2020 the Government published a White Paper Consultation on Planning Reform which introduced discussions on a radical transformation of the planning system including recognition that "there is not enough focus on design, and little incentive for high quality new homes and places: There is insufficient incentive within the process to bring forward proposals that are beautiful and which will enhance the environment, health, and character of local areas". It further identifies that the planning system needs a new focus on design and sustainability, with a greater focus on 'place making' and 'creation of beautiful places'.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have followed this with amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2021. The text has been revised to implement policy changes in response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission "Living with Beauty" report. MHCLG has also published the National Design Guide – Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places in October 2019. This makes clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. The guide illustrates how well designed places that are beautiful, enduring, and successful can be achieved in practice.

Leeds have been looking to strengthen their design and place-making policies alongside policies within Green and Blue Infrastructure to reflect on these national changes. Whilst the existing local plan has strong policies to encourage development in sustainable locations and to support high standards of design these policies pre-date the climate emergency declaration and the wellbeing impacts of Covid-19 and therefore they feel that now is the right time to consider refreshing the Local Plan to ensure it is suitably ambitious and provide stronger policy in order to secure high quality design alongside stronger policy on the importance to health and well-being.

Early consultation took place in Summer 2021, followed by consultation of Draft Policies in October 2022. These draft policies are still in draft format and, at time of writing, have yet to be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

Alongside Policy on design the Council are starting to look at the provisions of a Design Code(s). Aspects of inclusion, safety, community cohesion, safety and security – 'belonging' are integral design elements to such a code and are recognised in the National Model Design Code.

5

Integrating Intercultural Communities through Belonging in Green Spaces: Best practice

Introduction

This document complements and responds to the Guidance produced as part of the same project. In the guidance, we explore the social benefits of green spaces for intercultural communities.

To complement this research, in the following document we look at nine case studies of intercultural community gardens: three of these case studies are Leeds-based, three are UK-wide and three in continental Europe with the idea of exploring how these green spaces integrate communities. In this document we explore alternatives to the traditional model of public park where users cohabit and difference is accepted, but where there is no explicit agenda for engaging with difference. We selected these case studies because these spaces were intentionally designed to create opportunities for intercultural inclusion and community cohesion.

These alternative types of green spaces include predominantly community gardens, but also cultural initiatives related to diversity in green spaces, pocket parks and public-private partnerships. We look at these spaces through the way they have been organised and managed, through public, private or collaborative structures. We also discuss what benefits and challenges these spaces have brought to envision what green spaces serving intercultural communities would look like, in order to enhance belonging.

Name	Location	Owned by	Managed by	Use
Lilac Grove pocket park	**Kirkstall, Leeds**	Lilac Housing Cooperative	Lilac residents	Used by Lilac residents, open to the public in the daytime. Gates closed at night by Lilac residents
Bedford Fields Community Forest Garden	**Woodhouse, Leeds**	Leeds City Council	Bedford Fields Community Forest Garden	Public use, open access 24/7
Dark Skyes initiative	**Based in Leeds, operates across Yorkshire**	N/A	Joint partneship between Black Health Initiative, the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the child entertainment company Boomchickaboom	Public with priority areas
Free2beme	**Bradford (UK)**	Bradford Council	Free2beme	Open at restricted hours?
Dig In Community Garden	**Nottingham (UK)**	Stapleford Town Council	Local volunteer bureau, with support from the Primary Care Trust (PCT)	Open at restricted hours
Lochend Secret Community Garden	**Edinburgh, (Scotland)**	-	-	-
Community gardens in post-communist	**Prague, (Czech Republic)**	-	-	-
Rosa Rose Community Garden	**Berlin, (Germany)**	Various private land owners	Volunteers and activists	Public use, open access 24/7
Krakow's pocket parks	**Krakow, (Poland)**	Municipality of Krakow	Municipality of Krakow	Public use, open access 24/7

Leeds-based case studies

Lilac Grove pocket park, Kirkstall

Summary:

Lilac is a low impact housing cooperative which comprises 20 eco-build households. The housing coop occupies a site of 1.5 acres and the park area covers about 0.10 acre. The pocket park was maintained with the aim to preserve the mature trees and provide a space for residents and the public to enjoy.

With red iron railings all-round, the park has a gate from the street that is locked at night (Lilac residents take a rota to lock and unlock it). Another gate leads to the allotments and the gardens, houses and flats that form the Lilac Grove housing cooperative.

The park has mature Silver birch, oak, sycamore, hawthorn, hazel and dark leaved prunus trees, as well as shrubs, a broom and more recently planted plum and apple trees. Lilac residents built a fence and hedge to separate the allotments from the park.

Consultations were held with the neighbours and the Lilac residents settled on keeping the site as natural as possible as a haven for plants, birds and animals and a resource for local people.

Benefits and limitations:

Lilac Grove has a landscape team of residents who look after the park. The park maintenance has been a ground for knowledge exchange and skills building. The park is also a point of contact, directly or indirectly, between Lilac residents and their neighbours. It is used regularly to host public events and constitutes a grey zone, privately owned but for public use, maintained collaboratively following an inclusive ethos. In this sense, this pocket park contributes to the integration of a newly built community and more generally to the feeling of belonging in the neighbourhood.

On occasions, when there have been trees broken or serious dog fouling, the park gate has been locked and a notice put up to say why. When local children cause damage, the Lilac members try to talk to them about the park and sharing the care. By keeping it simple it's a successfully shared wild area, which sets a good example of how private developments can feed into the supply of public green spaces.

The funding, maintenance, however, relies on Lilac Housing Cooperative and its values. A change of values in the organisation could compromise the future of the park. In addition, the preservation of skills and will to maintain the park within the organisation might fluctuate depending on residents, which could make the well-functioning of the space more fragile in the future.

Bedford Fields Community Forest Garden

Summary:

Bedford Field Community Forest Garden is an open-access garden that serves the communities of Woodhouse and Hyde Park and all who happen to visit this part of Leeds. It was taken over by a group of volunteers to transform a Council-owned plot of land that had become a dump site over the years. Despite the nearby parkland (Woodhouse Moor), the Hyde Park area has one of the lowest ratios of greenspace to grey built-up environment in the UK, so the Forest Garden is a precious community resource. It is open to visit and enjoy at all hours and every day. Community members who are interested can contact the garden team if they'd like to join any of the workshops or events or if they want to volunteer.

Bedford Fields has been designed and planted along permaculture principles and demonstrates a variety of forest gardening techniques, making it an educational resource for children and experienced gardeners alike. In this way vertical space is used more to get more yield, reduce maintenance time, build a more resilient and diverse garden and prioritise a healthy soil.

Permaculture is not just about making a great garden, it's also about 'people care' and so extra care is taken to make the garden a welcoming, safe space where anyone can contribute and immerse themselves in the space at any time.

Benefits and limitations:

Participation and openness are crucial in the way belonging is defined in this green space. The experimental approach of forest gardening is a powerful of raising awareness around environmental challenges, skill building but also building a sense of agency of those who engage over this space. Forest gardening also offers a much more verdant, wild- or even overgrown-looking environment than what is achieved through conventional green space management. Whilst this alternative model of growing can be challenging for green spaces users, it contributes to the normalisation of more climate resilient green spaces.

On the downside, as a publicly-owned but privately managed green space, Belford Fields remains off the map of public spaces and remains a space which is known and used by those who are actively engaged in it. The organisation behind Bedforld Field has transformed a plot of disused land into a cutting edge social and environmental experiment. However, the backdrop of public sector financial limitations, which has caused the existence of a large amount of disused land in the first place, makes this model vulnerable to future funding as well as future volunteer engagement. Finally, the 24/7 access of Bedford Field makes it a space which is highly exposed to anti-social behaviour and depredation, a reality which has the potential to increase the feeling of insecurity and undermine sense of belonging.

Leeds-based case studies

Dark Skyes initiative

Summary:

Dark Skies is a joint initiative between the charity Black Health Initiative (BHI), the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the child entertainment company Boomchickaboom.

BHI is a community engagement-focused organisation working towards equality of access to health and social care within Leeds and the surrounding areas for disadvantaged communities. Their work centres around exposing the structural inequalities in access to health care and wellbeing experienced by minority ethnic groups.

Dark Skyes offers days out in the Dales to groups of BAME Leeds residents with the idea to help them familiarise themselves with the surrounding natural areas, develop their outdoor culture and access the physical and mental benefits of spending time in the wilderness.

Together with the Yorkshire Dales National park, they have identified areas in the Inner East and North East of the city as priority areas to engage with, as have they have lowest provision of green spaces in the city (wards of Chapeltown; Burmantofts and Richmond Hill; Gipton and Harehills and Killingbeck and Seacroft). All wards contain high proportions of the under-represented groups with which the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority seek to engage.

Benefits and limitations:

Dark Skyes is one of the many initiatives, which have recently emerged across the UK as expressions of the underrepresentation of diverse communities in green and wild spaces. If the barriers to the diversification of outdoor culture are numerous and complex, urban areas in the UK that are the most diversly populated are also the most likely to have poor provision of green spaces. Initiatives such as Dark Skyes attempt to remedy to this situation.

Another benefit of such initiatives is to articulate belonging in green spaces beyond the provision of urban green infrastructure. By bringing diverse users to a national park, Dark Skyes contributes to the normalisation of more diverse of users in an area of natural interest. In that sense, it is not an initiative that aims to create a space serving a specific community but rather develops of a sense of familiarity with nature and its benefits. This can be seen as contributing to a broader sense of belonging “in nature” regionally and nationally, rooted in the representation of diverse groups in the outdoors. This can also be seen as a limitation in the sense that an activity-based initiative is obviously restricted to a small number of participants and limited in time. It will also be more directly vulnerable to human and financial resources and will fluctuate with availability in public funding.

Finally, Dark Skyes shows that access to and culture of green spaces can be enhanced through initiatives targeting under-represented groups. These groups should therefore be more present in the decision/policy making/design of green spaces to broaden the impact

Free2beme, Bradford

Summary:

Free2beme is a volunteer run organization founded by Wendy and Robin Lewis, two queer women of colour. Their vision of a fair, equal and diverse society informs the way they create safe spaces for everyone to socialise, with a strong emphasis on Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC), and more generally marginalised groups and their allies. During Covid, the two co-founders, took over a large plot of disused allotments owned by Bradford Council.

Growing their network with extremely limited resources, they have cleared the site after it was for flight tipping for years. They have grown a garden which acts as both a resource for groups who have limited to no access to green spaces and as a safe space for marginalised groups who don't feel safe in green spaces which are not framed around inclusivity.

Benefits and limitations:

Free2beme created a space specifically for marginalised people to come together with a shared ethos of safe access to green space for them. To achieve this, they collaboratively co-produced design elements that make people feel safer and this dynamic facilitated the coming together of a community around the garden.

The land ownership by the Council meant that the land was available. But the Council's active decision to support the project facilitated a transition of use within the community after the allotments fell into disuse. This transition model can also be seen as a safety net for council land, making community allotments more accessible and more suitable for community needs.

The Free2beme garden being organised around a community of interest rather than a neighbourhood, there is a risk that local residents don't feel included, although this is balanced by the fact that the garden suits the needs of the most excluded groups. Such a model requires stewardship agreement with community groups. It also requires time, resources (time, financial) and political support.

UK-based case studies

Dig In Community Garden, Nottingham

Summary:

Dig In is a community allotment in Stapleford, a post-industrial town located near Nottingham that concentrates pockets of deprivation. The initiative started in 2005 on a Council-owned piece of allotment land. Since then, the initiative has developed with the support from the Primary Care Trust (PCT). For this reason, the project is run with an objective of improving health in the area and specifically targets groups whose health can benefit the most from spending time in green spaces.

Benefits and limitations:

With a strong emphasis on access to green spaces as a way of enhancing health and wellbeing amongst local residents, the garden offers facilities such as raised beds for those who struggle to get to the ground. Their composting outdoor toilets are also equipped with ramps. Because of the health focus, the community that formed around the garden is based on a common interest for health improvement. This community also includes a variety of individuals and organisation (most of which driven by health improvement objectives), which do not necessarily connect beyond the benefits that the receive from using the garden. In that sense, the health focus can be seen as a limitation. Finally, the perpetuation of the garden is more dependent on organisations and charities managing the site and therefore relying on their resources and management. The garden has, however, a tighter link with the local Council and has acted as a proactive actor to inform and influence policies locally and regionally.

Lochend Secret Community Garden, Edinburgh

From McVey, D., Nash, R., & Stansbie, P. (2018). The motivations and experiences of community garden participants in Edinburgh, Scotland. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 5(1), 40-56. https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2017.1409650

Summary:

The Lochend Secret Community Garden is the first project initiated by the charity Lochend Community Growing Project, which operates in the centre of Edinburgh. LSCG was created during the winter 2011/2012 transforming a derelict piece of wasteland into a thriving community space. The garden is always open and hosts regular get together and events.

LSCG is situated in an urban landscape dominated by housing, most of which still operates as social tenancy although it has diversified over the years. McVey et al. note that, although the area of Lochend is a relatively diverse inner-city neighbourhood of Edinburgh, the community that emerged around the garden is predominantly white Scottish and fails to be representative of the ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood.

Benefits and limitations:

The paper notes that several community garden emerged in Edinburgh around the same time as LSCG, in a period when the latest land reform in Scotland was strongly present in the political debate (the Land Reform Act was finally passed in 2016 after 10 years of conversation). Although the Scottish Land Reform is unusual in its emphasis on community land ownership grant a collective right-to-buy to entire communities, the bill has been criticised for its lack of definition and the debate surrounding it created a feeling of threat over land and an impression of loss of community in cities where access to land was becoming scarce.

Health and wellbeing, food-growing and community growing were at the centre of the motivations that led to the creation of LSCG, which is similar to many community gardening initiatives. However, due to the political and urban context in which it emerged, the practice of reclaiming land collectively sits at the heart of LSCG, a dynamic that McVey et al. see as part of a broader vision of the "right to land" developed by stakeholders: "retaking control of public land was seen as a way to alleviate some of the related anxieties of land ownership and land reform, which are presently under review in Scotland." (p.54). The predominance of white participants in the initiative shows that the dynamic of community gardening ties with the discussion around who belongs to the community and feels entitled to reclaim the land and, in this instance, the conversation around Scottish identity.

International case studies

Community gardens in post-communist Prague

From Spilková, J. (2017). Producing space, cultivating community: the story of Prague's new community gardens. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 34(4), 887-897.

Summary:

The paper highlights the recent spread of community gardens in postcommunist Prague. The author notes that that community gardens in Prague existed under the communist regime in the form of State subsidised allotments, but that, since the early 2000, a new form of urban community-led initiatives have emerged, particularly centred around occupations of plots of disused plots of land.

Benefits and limitations:

The author situates the conversation around community gardens in Prague as an element of the reconstruction of urban democracy in the city. They note that all participants who took part in the study emphasised the importance of place making as motivation for their involvement in community gardening and the gardens as socially bonding spaces. In the author's views, land occupations in the form of gardens in Prague was part of a response to the disengagement of the State, on the one hand. On the other hand, it also revealed the desire of local residents to regain agency over the management of their city, a need that bottom-up initiatives such as community garden fulfilled.

Rosa Rose Community Garden, Berlin

From Bendt, P., Barthel, S., & Colding, J. (2013). Civic greening and environmental learning in public-access community gardens in Berlin. *Landscape and Urban planning*, 109(1), 18-30. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2012.10.003

Summary:

This paper focuses on environmental learning in public-access community gardens ('PAC-gardens') in Berlin, representing public green spaces that are collectively managed by civil society groups. The paper exposes the creation of "material and social resources" in PAC-gardens, resources which embrace, according to Bendt et al., "norms of conduct, phrases/sayings and artefacts like shared websites, or physical features such as flowerbeds, trees and composts". Because, in the authors' view, community gardens become communities of practice beyond the material resource that they have to offer, the process of creation and management of a community garden will define who belongs and who doesn't.

One example of PAC-gardens in the paper is Rosa Rose, a community garden born in 2004 after a group of local residents in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, an inner city diverse and deprived area of Berlin, started occupying a disused plot of land, which belonged to a real estate company. In 2008, half the plot was redeveloped and the other half in 2009, forcing the gardeners to relocate. The garden now has a five-year renewable contract with the local Council on another plot of land.

Benefits and limitations:

Rosa Rose and PAC-gardens in general distinguish themselves from more closed forms of urban gardening such as allotment gardens, fenced community gardens and gated community gardens by their ethos of openness (they are physically open 24/7) and inclusion. At Rosa Rose, the practice of gardening is intertwined with social, political and economic practices that can create broader and more heterogeneous learning about social–ecological conditions, and help develop sense-of-place in a degraded neighbourhood.

In Berlin, such spaces represent public green spaces that are collectively managed by civil society groups but clearly distinguish themselves from more closed forms of urban gardening such as allotment gardens and gated community gardens. Rosa Rose typically intertwines gardening with social, political and economic practices can create broader and more heterogeneous learning about social–ecological conditions, and help develop sense-of-place in degraded neighbourhoods.

The garden is subject to a constant renegotiation of values and its existence depends on the time, resources and will of participants. It also depends on access to land and, in this instance, negotiations with private land owners which makes it vulnerable to market fluctuations.

Krakow's pocket parks

Summary:

In the early 2000s, the municipality of Krakow was faced with the post-industrial state of the city and the challenge of having to deal with urban decay. Their approach involved policies and programmes aiming at "regreening the city". Land acquisition and creation of pocket parks notably by the transformation of grey land, was instrumental to post-industrial transition of the city. The Municipality's green budget (i.e., the budget dedicated to creating and maintaining green spaces and for land acquisition) increased by five times between 2014 and 2021 and 32 pocket parks were constructed since 2016.

Benefits and limitations:

This example highlights that one of the benefits of publicly managed pocket parks is that neighbourhoods and local residents directly benefit from public investment (in this instance Krakow's Municipal Green Space Authority). The transformation of grey land into green spaces constitute a very tangible improvement at the scale of the neighbourhoods where the developments happened, as well as city-wide, fostering a stronger sense of urban belonging. This also fosters a positive presence of the public authority.

This top-down approach, however, has the potential to result in green spaces which feel very manicured, and as such may not feel welcoming to everyone. The ready-made design might exclude some practices and uses and therefore more vulnerable groups. In addition, the large investments that the creation of pocket parks have necessitated will make them more vulnerable to public funding cuts.

The design of pocket parks gives them an open and inviting feeling, and there scale makes them inviting for anyone with safety concerns. Their small size, however, undermines the sense of privacy and presence of wilderness.

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FOSTERING BELONGING IN GREEN SPACES

A guidance

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