

PPP Special Issue Editorial: Part I

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As academics researching within this field, we were prompted to embark on curating a special issue of PPP in order to bring together, and shine a light on, the sheer range of studies taking place across a range of greenspace contexts.

We know from existing research the vital role that greenspaces play in areas such as environmental quality and health and well-being (Gore et al, 2013; Medford, 2012; Wolch et al, 2014) as well as being sites of community organising and action. Greenspaces make an important contribution to urban life as – at their best – democratic spaces open to use by all urban citizens. Yet they are also subject to continual contestation, with the history of public parks marked by struggle, contest and cycles of underfunding and relative decline. As places where the interests of multiple urban stakeholders often converge in terms of working practices and values, the future funding and management of such greenspaces is coming under particular pressure within the context of fiscal contraction, resultant shrinking public sector budgets and development pressures. This Special Issue therefore comes at an important moment, when new management structures and approaches are being considered, and decisions are being taken about the future of many green spaces.

This Special Issue prompted an impressive level of engagement from academics and practitioners across a number of countries, and we therefore decided to present this issue across two parts. The selection of papers within Part I of this Special Issue broadens out, and extends our understanding in a number of important ways. As well as considering greenspaces from a range of perspectives, including environmental justice and homelessness, the papers in this Issue also present an impressive range of methodological approaches to research within this field.

Crowe presents a rich policy overview spanning the history of the context through which the management of green spaces has been evolving, casting ahead to consider what the future holds for green spaces.

Dobson then extends the critical gaze in the current policy context in England by asking what value policy makers put on the wellbeing effects of green spaces. Reflecting on research in Sheffield, Dobson reflects on the challenges posed by 'urban austerity' in terms of the wellbeing narrative being reframed within a narrative of public service cost control.

Neild and Rose build on this consideration of green spaces and wellbeing, inviting us to focus on the specific context of homelessness within a US green space context. Considering the broad wellbeing benefits that we know come from urban green spaces, Neild and Rose shine a light on the challenges posed by both unsheltered homelessness, but also importantly the mitigation strategies engaged by those managing these spaces.

From a US context, we then invite you to move your gaze back Europe, to Copenhagen, where the contested history of Folkets Park is detailed by Rutt and Loveless. Rutt and Loveless use environmental justice and urban managerialism concepts to highlight the interaction of urban politics and the shifting nature of urban (in)justice over time. Retaining environmental justice as a frame for considering urban greenspace, Brooks and Davoudi – through a case study of Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK – consider how an environmental justice approach can help us to better understand how the characteristics of green spaces relate to the characteristics of the communities they serve.

Finally, Mell reopens debates on the value of green space, this time asking how greenspace custodians can capture that value in a way that generates funding for their long-term sustainability. Mell explores a range of financing options being tested across England, arguing that austerity has led to:

more reflective assessment ... of the costs of service provision, where cuts and modifications to management can be made, and importantly, how non-traditional stakeholders can be identified (p. 149)

Nonetheless, Mell remains alive to the fact that none of the alternative funding arrangements being explored have yet proven to effectively overcome the challenges created by imposition of stringent cuts on local authority greenspace management budgets.

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