

# Sustainable Urban Landscapes: Making the Case for the Development of an Improved Management System

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## Abstract

*In order to achieve high quality urban landscapes it is essential to engage an appropriate management system. Such a system needs to be flexible enough to allow consideration of both urban change and the changing needs and demands of landscape users. Based on an investigation of the literature, this paper makes the case for the development of an effective management system and concludes that changes in urban landscape management have not kept up with urban expansion. Moreover as the trend in the objectives for urban development in Malaysia and around the world is towards achieving more sustainable development, the paper highlights the importance of establishing more appropriate landscape management systems as fundamental to the achievement of sustainability objectives.*

**Keywords:** Urban Landscape, Sustainability, Landscape Management, Sustainable Management System

## 1. Introduction

Recent research indicates that there is an increasing concern by ordinary people about issues related to their quality of life and to the quality of the environment. For example, the percentage of urban green space in nearby living environments has been shown to have a positive association with the perceived general health of the community (Maas et al., 2006). The planners and policy-makers are now more concerned on the urban environment and the value of urban landscapes (Plummer and Shewan, 1992; Woudstra and Fieldhouse, 2000; Osman, 2002; Chiesura, 2004; Countryside Agency, 2005). Concern is not based on simple issues of health and amenity but reflects more complex topics. In addition, many local landscapes are increasingly significant to urban dwellers

as they provide tangible evidence of continuity and sense of place in the rapidly changing urban environment (Cranz, 1980; McInroy, 2000).

In spite of the many values attributed to urban landscapes, the changes in urban development have also resulted in great changes in the landscapes of cities. It has been observed by Antrop (2004) that these changes can be devastating, with irreversible loss of a variety of natural and cultural resources. The speed, the frequency and the magnitude of change increased in an unprecedented manner during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Antrop 2000). The changes also include shifting perceptions, values and behaviour of the users of the landscape. The conflicts that arise as a result of all these issues have created new challenges for those who manage urban landscapes.

## 2. Study Context

This paper identifies that a new, more effective landscape management system is badly needed for urban areas in Malaysia. In order to make the case for this, the following section provides an overview of the context of urban landscape development and management based on a literature review of the subject. The place of landscape management in the development process is discussed and the weaknesses of present systems are revealed. The more important roles and functions of urban landscape and the changing user needs and demands are also examined. Furthermore, this section highlights the potential of urban landscape management in the context of the need to achieve more sustainable environments in cities.



## 2.1 The Scope of Urban Landscape

As landscape issues have been identified as an important aspect of our daily life there is increasing interest in landscape generally in both policy and practice, as demonstrated for example in Europe by the development of the European Landscape Convention and its adoption by many EU countries (Council of Europe, 2000). Landscape research has also been expanding, as evidenced by the emergence of a number of new publications covering the area (e.g. the Journal of Landscape Architecture (JoLA) and Alam Cipta) and the increasing numbers of international papers submitted to well-established journals<sup>1</sup>. Benson and Roe (2000) summarised this interest by asserting that “landscape is an evolving cross disciplinary area, which draws contributions from art, literature, ecology, geography and much more” (Benson and Roe, 2000:1).

Urban landscape in particular is a growing area of consideration, but one which has an identifiable history. In England the importance of urban landscape dates back to the early nineteenth century when it was seen as an antidote to the harshness of city life (the first major public park was established in 1843 at Birkenhead) and as important in providing a setting for housing (e.g. Regent’s Park, London, 1838). In the United States of America, Olmsted pioneered the idea of urban landscape systems with his ‘emerald necklace’ of parks around the city of Boston. In terms of theory, Larkham and Jones (1991:78) saw urban landscape simply as “the visual appearance of a town”. Conzen (1969) described urban landscape as being a combination of three complex systematic forms which include town plan, building fabric and land use. More recent commentators have taken an increasingly wide view, developing holistic concepts of the need to establish ecologically sound approaches to urban space (Gordon, 1990) and to develop urban ‘green infrastructure’ that includes parks, green corridors, open green spaces and other space between and within urban areas (Benedict and McMahon, 2002; Roe, et al., in prep.). Green infrastructure thinking has also emerged in both North America and Europe as an important framework for the planning and delivery of a range of environmental functions and services particularly related to quality of life and the livability of cities for urban dwellers (MacFarlane, forthcoming; Handley, et al., forthcoming). Such developments in thinking, closely related to the global sustainability agenda, are important considerations for policy-makers concerned with urban development.

## 2.2 The Urban Landscape Development Processes

The typical process of urban landscape development starts at a planning stage, passes through a design stage and culminates in implementation (see Figure 1). Following the development and implementation period, there will usually be a maintenance period undertaken by contractors. The duration of this will depend on the agreement in the contract and the size of the scheme, but is often short in landscape development terms - from a few months to a few years. In normal circumstances, after this maintenance period the landscape project will be handed over to the local authority for long-term maintenance and management. This system, whereby local government has been the custodian of the urban landscape, has been in place for some considerable time in the UK and a number of other countries (Greenhalgh and Worpole, 1996; Morgan, 1996).

However, the range of different types of parks and landscape areas for which local authorities are responsible has expanded over the years and varied according to the uses, functions and roles. The management of these areas has been affected by changes in the structure of cities and in the patterns of urban living (Greenhalgh and Worpole, 1996; Morgan, 1996). Managers have found themselves embroiled in debates over how urban landscape - especially areas of public space - should be used, whilst at the same time being engaged in protecting the spirit of public parks as places embodying significant public values, such as place of freedom and places of historic importance.

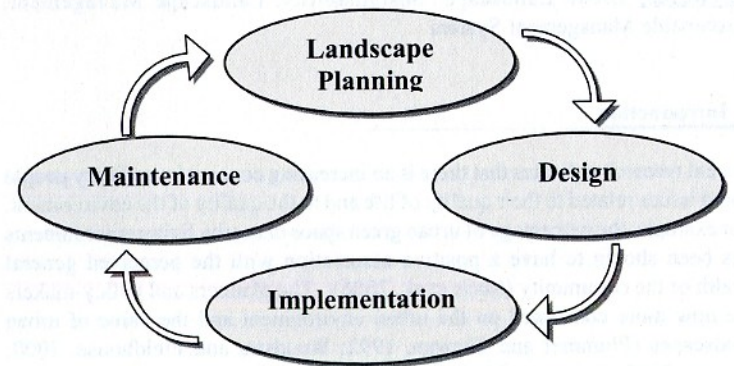


Figure 1. Typical landscape development process.

