



in association with the Institute of Environment and Recreation Management

People and Green Space – A Celebration of Diversity

Communique from the 2nd World Urban Parks Congress
26 to 28 September 2016, Cape Town, South Africa

Synopsis

This communique was developed during the 2nd World Urban Parks Congress held in Cape Town, South Africa from 26 to 28 September 2016. The theme for the Congress was “People and Green Space – A Celebration of Diversity” and there were numerous presentations, workshops and discussions on the diverse landscapes, experiences, visitors and benefits of urban parks.

During the Congress, World Urban Parks committed to strongly advocating the importance protecting and developing urban parks, and to provide tools and support to members to assist with problems we face as a sector and the opportunities for innovation. Delegates were inspired to apply the key learnings from the Congress into their practice, ensuring strong engagement with citizens and equitable access to open space.

Introduction

World Urban Parks is the new international representative body for urban parks, open space and recreation. It is dedicated to liveable, healthy and sustainable communities.

The 2nd World Urban Parks Congress, held in Cape Town from 26 to 28 September, attracted approximately 180 delegates from across the globe. The Congress was held in association with the Institute of Environment and Recreation Management (IERM), which is a leading public sector organisation promoting sustainable and integrated environmental and recreation management practices in South Africa.

More than half the world population currently lives in cities. Urbanisation has created economic, trade and employment opportunities, as well as more convenient access to medical services, education and cultural activities. Conversely, urbanisation brings with it immense challenges such as environmental degradation, air and water pollution, high-density traffic, crime, violence, over-crowding and physical inactivity. Large urban parks and open green space are critical to addressing these challenges.

Urban parks are more than just green space. They play an important role in creating a sense of place and cultural identity. They provide opportunities for sport and recreation, health and well-being, community meeting places, social cohesion, biodiversity, environment and ecosystem services, active transportation (cycling and walking), and tourism and economic development.

According to United Nations projections, the world population is expected to grow from 7.5 billion currently to 9.7 billion in 2050. Most of this growth will occur in the cities. Africa is expected to account

for more than half of the growth, with the populations of 28 African countries expected to double over this time.

It was fitting that the 2nd World Urban Parks Congress was held in Cape Town, the seat of Parliament for South Africa. Set against the World Heritage Listed Table Mountain National Park, one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature, Cape Town has many urban parks, including the Company's Gardens, Green Point Urban Park, Khayitesha Wetlands Park and a number of "smart parks", providing green open space and recreation opportunities to the city's diverse population.

Congress Theme and Main Topics

The theme for the Congress has been "People and Green Space – A Celebration of Diversity". Presentations showcased the diverse landscapes, experiences, visitors and benefits of urban parks and centred around the following six topic areas.

1. *Advocacy for urban parks, heritage precincts and green open spaces* – The importance of championing the benefits of sport and recreation, heritage protection, environmental awareness and ecosystem services.
2. *Community engagement and involvement* – The importance of understanding and responding to community needs and involving citizens in park design, decision making and management.
3. *Parks as safe and egalitarian places* – The Importance of providing urban park experiences for families, children, youth, women, LGBTI people, seniors, people with disabilities and multicultural and ethnic groups.
4. *Equity and social inclusion* – The importance of providing equitable access to parks and open space to the creation of social cohesion and vibrant, liveable cities, as well as helping to address social disadvantage, crime and violence.
5. *Re-thinking green open space* – The importance of re-imagining, re-visioning and re-thinking urban parks and creating ecologically and economically productive urban landscapes, through land re-use, re-purposing, restoration, rehabilitation and conservation (biodiversity and culture). This includes integrating with and utilising school grounds, city streets, side-walks and private gardens.
6. *Taking a long term, strategic view* – The importance of creating "smart", flexible, responsive, sustainable and resilient urban parks and park networks.

The Cape Town Commitments

At the conclusion of the Congress, World Urban Parks members and Congress delegates committed to applying key learnings and recommendations arising from the various presentations, workshops and discussions.

World Urban Parks committed to:

1. Engage with elected officials in member jurisdictions to shape public policy, legislation and regulations pertaining to urban planning and development. In particular, this should address social disadvantage, participation in sport and active recreation, urban ecosystems, climate change and long term sustainability. All green space should be enhanced and protected regardless of land tenure, ownership and/or reservation status to help address climate change, heat affects and biodiversity conservation.

2. Develop a “Red Book” to help World Urban Parks members and affiliates to advocate for the protection and development of a diverse range of urban parks and green open spaces. This is particularly important for the protection of large urban parks and park networks, which are most at risk of fragmentation and urban development encroachment. The Red Book will consist of research and case studies outlining the wide-ranging benefits of valuing and investing in urban parks, including physical fitness, mental health and spiritual wellbeing. Ways to encourage community activism and political support will also be a key focus.
3. Facilitate regional alliances to share research, knowledge and insights to urban park planning, design, maintenance, management and future activation through targeted working groups and sub-committees. This may include fostering mentoring arrangements between different countries across the world, with particular support for developing countries, to help with advocacy and the application of contemporary good practice.
4. Develop a tool for use by different countries to quantify, measure, assess and evaluate the value of green infrastructure for cities. This should include consideration of avoided costs to governments of managing urban parks, costs of environmental degradation, benefits of adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change and the protection of built infrastructure from natural disasters. This will assist decision makers to consider the true costs of developments and appropriate responses such as stopping projects, minimising/reducing the scope of projects or providing compensation.
5. As part of its broad advocacy role, implement a public relations and marketing campaign to encourage people around the world to use and value urban parks.

Delegates committed to:

6. Place citizens at the centre of planning and decision making for urban parks and involve Traditional Owners and first nations people as real partners in management and governance structures.
7. Ensure adequate access to urban parks and open space for the vulnerable, the poor and the disadvantaged.
8. Work with partners to increase the diversity of park users by facilitating research into why some people do not visit, use or value urban parks and reserves.
9. Develop and promote activity programs to encourage the use of urban parks by diverse groups, to make parks safe, make them inclusive and foster social cohesion. This should include programs for children, youth, women, LGBTI people, seniors, people with disability, social disadvantaged, multicultural and ethnic groups.
10. Provide multi-purpose urban parks and flexible facilities to enable increased and diverse participation in sport and recreation to increase social connections, stable neighbourhoods, community identity and a sense of place. This should include opportunities to interact and socialise, as well as appreciate and connect with nature.
11. Explain to decision makers the importance of green urban spaces for climate change mitigation and adaptation.