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## **COMMONS-BASED GOVERNANCE IN PUBLIC SPACE: USER PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION**

**PETER PARKER AND STAFFAN SCHMIDT**

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### **Abstract**

Participatory forms of park governance have been seen as means of empowering users, improving adaptation to local needs and harnessing local resources. Participatory governance has however also been critiqued for benefiting only select groups. The situation is ambiguous with participation held to be both empowering in the sense of developing use-values in locally relevant ways and exclusionary in representing select interests.

This research addresses the question of if and how a particular form of participatory governance, park commons, may be compatible with inclusive public space. To do so the research explores boundary work of user groups and public sector enabling in two park commons using a multiple case study approach.

We find that park commons may be understood to contain a mix of different types of shared resources. The specific mix explains different expressions of user-generated boundaries and particularly the extent that these boundaries are permeable. The research also identifies several forms of public sector intervention that influence the ways boundaries are constructed. The findings indicate a potential for public managers to strategically enable commons as a means to increase civic engagement and potentially increase rather than diminish inclusiveness of parks.

Keywords:  
urban commons, park governance, public space, inclusive space, exclusion, boundaries, network effect

## Participation in park governance

Participation in public park maintenance and development by individuals and organized civil society groups is fairly well documented historically, at least in some parts of the world (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992; Lawson, 2005). Recognition of this as a significant element of park governance is however much more recent (Lehavi, 2004; Delshammar, 2005; Foster, 2011; Molin and Van den Bosch, 2014; Buizer, et al., 2015). The concept of commons has been employed in some parts of this research as a theoretical perspective seeking to understand the conditions under which an element of collective management by users is feasible, and as means of recognizing the collective work already conducted by groups of users in developing and sustaining certain kinds of values.

Interest in commons as an element of park governance has been driven in part by material circumstances of decreasing public sector funding for parks. Underfunding of parks, it is argued, exposes a painful discrepancy between initial intentions and actual regulation (Lehavi, 2004; Foster, 2011; Carmona, 2014). This regulatory slippage creates a situation where users may organize in order to avoid a downward spiral of neglect (Foster, 2011; Garnett, 2011). Recognizing civic and collective work in sustaining shared values in park commons has been argued to have important implications for public policies of re-developing parks (Lehavi, 2004) but also as providing a viable alternative to privatization in lieu of public funding (Foster, 2011). Commons are held to be advantageous in certain respects to different forms of privatization because governance builds on the knowledge and interests of users. In contrast, increasing private interest in the regulation of parks and public space is understood to lead to risks of exclusion for uses and users that do not contribute to creating values for the owners (Mitchell, 2003; More, 2005; Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005; 2006; Low and Smith, 2006; Carmona, 2010a; 2010b).

Interest in park commons may also be understood in a positive sense. If values of a park are in some part created through forms of use then it follows that public funding, even if adequate, is insufficient to create a well-functioning park. This relates to Jane Jacob's argument that parks should be understood as inherently deprived spaces needing the boon of life and appreciation conferred on them (Jacobs, 1961) but with a more positive twist. Parks can, through forms of collective management, draw on local knowledge and resources to create values that would not otherwise have been possible. In this light commons, as an element of governance, is not simply a grass-roots response to lack of public funding but may also be considered as a deliberate policy to develop certain kind of uses and certain kinds of qualities and values.

The organization of collective management in commons is however fraught with practical challenges and for some normatively dubious. The idea that commons are inclusive can certainly be questioned. It is unlikely

that different users of a park will be equally disposed and able to take part in its development. This implies risks that organized and influential groups will strengthen their position to the detriment of others. Marit Rosol in particular has highlighted how the enabling of park commons can be seen as the public sector offloading of what should be public services. Since citizens have unequal opportunities to create their own spaces this generates inequality (Rosol, 2010; 2012). Similar concerns have been raised in related research (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992; Foster, 2011).

The situation is thus ambiguous with commons held to be both empowering in the sense of developing use-values in locally relevant ways and potentially exclusionary in representing select interests. While commons seem to have the potential to be both empowering and exclusionary it does not follow that they are necessarily one or the other. In order to clarify this issue it is necessary both to understand how collective management of shared resources creates boundaries and the different ways that public management can influence this.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to an understanding of boundary work in urban park commons and to explore under which circumstances commons in parks may be compatible with inclusive public space. This leads to the following questions: Can theory on commons provide a means of understanding variations in user-generated boundaries with respect to forms and extent of exclusion? If so, how can this approach be applied to understand how boundaries are shaped in participatory park development?

### Commons and urban public space

The recognition that groups of users can under certain circumstances collectively manage and sustain valuable shared resources owes much to the work of Elinor Ostrom (1999). Her research demonstrated that collective management of shared resources may, under certain circumstances, allow for a better grounding in user knowledge and allow thus for more effective regulation. There is also an aspect of civic empowerment in collective management in that, users, rather than owners or a more distant public sector shape developments. More recent work on urban commons including community gardens, green spaces and parks has sought to establish legal recognition for the collective work that users already conduct as well as address relations between commons and the public sector (Ostrom, 2000; Lehavi, 2004; Garnett, 2011; Foster, 2011).

The commons perspective foregrounds users, shared resources and their interrelation in collective management while being attentive to material aspects of interactions. The commons perspective may therefore provide a useful complement to theory that tends to foreground spatial design but that also extends toward issues of management and use to understand how places are shaped (Kärholm, 2004; 2007; Carmona, 2014).



In order to see how commons are relevant to park governance and issues of inclusion it may be helpful to briefly rehearse a typology of goods that underpins economic theory on the commons. There are two basic dimensions of this typology, namely excludability and subtractability (Ostrom, 2003). A commons is a resource that it is difficult or undesirable to exclude others from using; it is in this sense shared. Parks as public space will fall into this category, as do many types of natural resources that form core for much of commons research. A second characteristic of shared resources concerns the extent that they are subtractable, that is, the extent that one person's use negatively impinges on another person's use (Ostrom, 2003). Issues related to subtractability may for instance concern congestion, deterioration or depletion of a resource by sheer number of users. Subtractability may also be related to different claims on using the same space but in incompatible ways (Lehavi, 2004). As impacts of subtractability become significant the value of the shared resource is jeopardized and this will therefore create a pressure for regulation. Overuse may for instance create pressures for restricting access or drives for greater provision a shared resource.<sup>1</sup>

Not all shared resources exhibit subtractability, use of a pure public good is perceived to have no negative impact on other users (Ostrom, 2003). There would not therefore be pressure from users either to limit access or increase provision.

Finally, there are also cases of where *network effects* are important, that is, where one person's use has a positive impact on another person's use. Examples may include interest groups, online discussion groups, telephones, forums with user-generated content, open source software development (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006), but also certain kinds of public space. In these cases, one person's use may be understood as generative, adding value to other users. The concept of network effects, though not referred to as such, underpins familiar research on cities and public space. Approaches to promoting lively urban spaces build on the idea that a space becomes more congenial or valuable when people already use it (Jacobs, 1961). The term network effect, although perhaps somewhat clumsy, helps to indicate how positive effects of use may accrue only to a specific community or network<sup>2</sup> although spill over effects are certainly possible. Shared resources exhibiting network effects may, just as subtractable resources, give rise to pressures for regulation. This is because positive effects may require regulation of *how* a resource is used in order for values to be generated. For instance, positive values of being part of some form of community will probably depend on having certain agreed on rules, a shared interest and forms of internal communication. This would likely be the case when the community lobbies for further resources, when it vies for influence or when it develops values generated from its specific practice.

1 Lehavi argues that a significant part of collective, and often unrecognized, user efforts in governing urban public parks concerns balancing different interests that exert negative effects on other uses (Lehavi, 2004).

2 Several alternate terms may have been used instead of network effects. These include anti-rival goods, negative subtractability and positive externalities of production and consumption. The term network effect seems preferable because it signals effects in a particular network rather than assuming a general positive effect.

Urban park commons may contain a mix of different but related resources with different economic characteristics. For instance, an active park may be attractive in part because it is already an attractive place for others to be, a network effect between users. However, having many visitors may also entail high costs of maintenance, a subtractable aspect of use. The different types of resources that a park affords; subtractable, pure public good or with network effects, therefore create different kinds of pressures for regulating its use. This in turn will have implications for whether the park is more or less inclusive with respect to different uses and users and is therefore an important element in understanding issues of inclusion. Research in this tradition has however primarily been concerned with establishing recognition of user influence in governance. Less attention has been paid to understanding how user participation affects relations between different groups of users and changes in socio-spatial relations.

### Politics of public space

Research on the politics of public space has highlighted issues of unequal access and also aspects of recognition (Mitchell, 2003; Low, 2006; Madanipour, 2013). Much of this work has been informed by an ideal of inclusive public space, that is a public space in which all users are recognized and afforded equitable opportunities. Research specifically exploring how user influence in the governance of green spaces and parks affects inclusion has demonstrated a good deal of variability. Perspectives vary for instance on how urban gardening should be understood. One stream of research sees participation in community gardens as empowering and strengthening use values (Schmelzkopf, 2002; Staeheli, Mitchell and Gibson, 2002; Stone, 2009) but there are also critical perspectives on urban gardening and participation in green space development. These perspectives highlight how traditional state functions such as the care of public space are offloaded onto civil society organizations with unequal opportunities (Rosol, 2010; 2012). This has implications for quality and form of public space in different areas of the city. Similar kinds of arguments are also evident in the literature on other kinds of urban parks (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992; Vivoni 2009) and public spaces (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2006). Thus, critics have seen in civic participation a potential means of furthering the interests of already influential groups. However there also seems to be a realization of the ambiguity in many participatory efforts that display elements of both being empowering and unequal (Rosol, 2010; 2012; McClintock, 2014).

The critical perspective on enabled commons implies that previous research has focused too much on collective action problems and effectiveness of governance, while underplaying how users relate to or impinge on others. The urban commons perspective may also underplay the role of government in deliberately creating shared urban resources and in selecting and enabling particular groups. However, an overly

oppositional and dichotomizing stance may miss the rich set of alternatives that are created in interaction between various groups of users and the public sector, and thereby miss the potential for combining empowering aspects of commons with inclusive space.

In this paper, we use a concept of commons-based park governance. The term is introduced here simply to highlight how user influence in park governance is negotiated within an overarching public sector responsibility and thus relates to wider aspects of urban governance.<sup>3</sup> The term serves as a reminder of how both a commons perspective and a perspective drawing on politics of public space are intertwined. We will explore commons-based governance as a process of intertwined negotiations between user groups and public administration in phases of design, development, management and use of a park.

3 This is in line with Sheila Foster's arguments on urban commons (Foster, 2011). The concept of urban commons may however tend to underplay the role of government. The term commons-based governance seeks to capture more explicitly the interrelations of users and the public sector.

## Method

The research has been conducted using a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2013). Two parks, a skate park, Stapelbäddsparken, and an urban farming initiative, Plantparken, provide the empirical starting point for exploring dynamics of participatory park governance and issues of inclusion. An in-depth exploration of how the parks developed over time in aspects of design, management and use has been essential in order to explore questions of how commons based park governance may or may not contribute to inclusive public space.

Both parks are fairly recent developments located in the Western Harbour area of Malmö, Sweden. The parks are publicly enabled as commons in the sense that they have enjoyed public support throughout their development and there has been significant influence of users in each phase of development. The high level of user participation in park development makes these cases extreme, at least within a Swedish context. Both cases are also successful in the sense of creating well-used spaces in the previously undeveloped space of the Western Harbour.

The parks differ starkly in their process of development. Stapelbäddsparken was developed with a specified and organized group of users in mind. Extensive efforts were put into collaborative design of this park and significant resources are channelled into activating the park. Development of the park was also significantly linked to neighbourhood and city marketing efforts. The other case, Plantparken, did not have a pre-defined set of users, there was minimal municipal effort in design. Significant facilitation was however provided by Malmö University and the development as a whole can be seen as having an alternate or critical direction. From a politics of public space perspective we expected these differences to be significant. The similarities and contrasts between the parks thus provided an excellent starting point to explore how boundaries are shaped in park development.

The materials underpinning descriptions of the cases are varied and span several years of developments. The development Stapelbäddsparken has been extensively documented as an experimental effort and the park has also been the topic of numerous studies, research and writings in newspapers, popular and skate press. This rich secondary material forms a basis for description of park development. This material has been supplemented with six interviews of approximately two hours each with municipal public managers and key persons in the skateboarding organization Bryggeriet. These materials encapsulate perspectives of key actors in the development of the park over an extended period of time. The perspectives of everyday users have been captured sporadically in secondary materials and when particular conflicts arise.

The second case, Plantparken, has been studied using interactive and participatory action research as well as participatory design methods (Badham and Ehn, 2002; Jégou and Manzini, 2008; Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010). One of the authors has been involved in facilitating park development between 2010 and 2014 and there is a rich but diverse material consisting of extensive mail exchanges, and records of telephone calls, on site interactions with public managers, park users and residents. Students have also been engaged to work on a recurring basis with participants in the park collecting primary data through interviews, conducting surveys with neighbours and also workshops with the users concerning further spatial and organizational development. The interactive research material and material collected by students provides extensive documentation of the developments in Plantparken. This material is supplemented with a qualitative oriented questionnaire that was sent to ten longstanding and active users of the park in order to document aspects related to motivations, barriers of entry, and aspects of the park development process. Seven of the users responded in full.

The materials have allowed us to identify valued resources in these commons, based on how users have reacted to different challenges in the development of the parks. User construction of boundaries has been explored using tensions that have arisen in design, development, management and use of the parks.

We use the cases simply to provide a starting point for exploring issues of commons in parks and inclusion. The findings of this research are not necessarily generalizable and must therefore be tested for relevance in other contexts. Some further contextual factors of the cases therefore warrant mention. First, the cases are in a still developing part of Malmö, and their establishment did not entail changing existing use patterns or the appropriation or partition of existing park areas. Second, the cases described here are in a reasonably affluent area not marked by significant social conflicts. We expect that this has eased issues of co-ordinat-

ing different interests in the parks. Third, the municipality is fairly active and well funded. We expect therefore that arguments based on the cases in Malmö will be most relevant to the development of parks where there is a fairly strong means public regulation and a relative absence of conflict in park development.

## Stapelbädden Skate Park

Stapelbäddsparken is a substantial urban park that comprises a large outdoor concrete skate park, installations for bouldering and an indoor space under an old slipway that houses a diverse set of cultural and experimental makers' space activities. An important impetus for the development of the park lay in conservation of the only remaining slipway of the now re-developed shipyard. A further important background factor was an on-going effort to develop recreational spaces for youth in the city (Göransson, et al. 2006, Hansen and Lagergren 2010). Imagery also played a role as developments were linked with issues of neighbourhood and city branding (Göransson, Lieberg and Lieberg, 2006; Book, 2008; Azzam, 2011). A further important impetus shaping the development of Stapelbäddsparken was a conception among public managers that specialization might provide a means to maintain park quality and openness despite diminishing funds. Specialization was understood to entail user participation in park development, in activating the park once it was built and collaboration in management (Göransson, Lieberg and Lieberg, 2006).

The decision to develop a skate park seems to have been the product of municipal search for a group that might be interested and able to take on a long-term collaborative effort in developing a space and that provided the municipality with an active youthful imagery. The skateboarding association Bryggeriet came into focus because they had demonstrated an ability to work with the municipality in developing and running a large indoor skateboard arena. Bryggeriet thus provided an organizational means to link the municipality with the interest of the skateboarding community in developing an urban space (Göransson, Lieberg and Lieberg, 2006; Svensson, 2011).

Designing and developing the park involved extensive volunteer work by skateboarders over several years (Göransson, Lieberg and Lieberg, 2006; Svensson, 2011). The resulting skate park makes up a substantial part of the outdoor area of Stapelbäddsparken and contains features that are demanding and with a high visibility, areas that are less demanding and open to different kinds of use, as well as adjacent and indeterminate areas. The design thus both signals that this is place for skateboarding but beyond this has relatively low physical barriers of entry. Since the park was opened in 2005 there has been further collaborative development including a new concrete ramp, new wooden constructions in the "street" area and a new "flow" area.

The normal activities of Bryggeriet move outdoors to Stapelbäddsparken during the summer months which includes dedicated times for different groups of skaters – “old bastards” for those over 30, the skateboarding school “skate goats” and the girls group “tösabidarna”, a beginners group, and different forms of get-togethers. Since the opening of the park, the organization Bryggeriet has been responsible for maintenance, running a small café and organizing a major annual skateboarding event in collaboration with the municipality. The importance of the event is somewhat toned down by a representative of Bryggeriet:

*It is important for the municipality to market itself. They put a fair amount of resources into this annual event. We try to make sure that these resources are put to the best possible use not only in the event but also in supporting skateboarding by extending the event in time and organizing adjacent happenings. But the contest is also important for skateboarders in that it gets us noticed and perhaps recognized (John Magnusson, Bryggeriet, 19 November 2014).*

Taken together elements of design, management and use provide a considerable input into shaping perceptions and use of the park.



Figure 1  
Stapelbädden skate park during an organized event.

PHOTO BY OSKAR FALCK

## Shared resources and user generated boundaries in Stapelbäddsparken

From a skateboarding perspective, the design of the park may be understood to drastically lessen subtractable aspects that would arise from alternate uses, simply because the design excludes many alternatives. The design also affords features that are particularly valued by the skating community.

In terms of the existing skate park, some degree of subtractability also exists because high levels of use may cause congestion or deterioration of park facilities. However, this seems to be less salient than network effects with respect to other skateboarders. To understand these network effects requires understanding what the space affords the community of skateboarders. The interrelated aspects of physical space and community are brought out by an active member in an article on the significance of the indoor park at Bryggeriet:

*Malmö's skaters have been provided with the opportunity to skate in all kinds of weather, on well-made ramps with obstacles, the opportunity of seeing some of the world's best skateboarders when they visit Bryggeriet, opportunities to compete with the European and Swedish elite, opportunities to skate on unique ramps not available elsewhere in the world, opportunities to meet like-minded people who care about the same things you do, the opportunity to take part in building ramps and learning almost anything that has to do with skateboarding, to have a cup of coffee and to watch the latest skate movie. Yes, Bryggeriet is a place of opportunities, at least if you are a skateboarder (Bryggeriet, 2005).*

In this description, the physical park provides important values but these are only a part of the broader picture of what this space affords. Essential values are linked to use and particularly opportunities for participating and learning within specific domain of interest.

A similar point is made in a small study in which Stapelbäddsparken is seen as a focal point in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Azzam, 2011). By providing access to high quality resources and forms of legitimate participation people come and both learn the practice and are socialized in skating culture. The park, *and other users*, provide opportunities for learning, for developing identity and status within the community, and for pursuing and expressing a vaguely defined overarching interest. This common interest was formulated by a representative of Bryggeriet simply as a sense of freedom from constraint.<sup>4</sup> The skate park may thereby be seen to allow important elements of youth culture in urban settings, namely being able to establish a zone of relative freedom from the adult world and a certain territoriality in asserting one's own values (Lieberg, 1992; Alvarson, 2008).

4 Interview with Nils Svensson, Bryggeriet 13 November 2014.

Network effects may help to explain why physical and other barriers of use are kept low since including new users appears, on the balance, positive. This is also expressed in a casual but including relation with other skateboarders. For instance, in response to a direct question about the sense of community in the park one skateboarder explained:

*It is like when you asked how to do something, I think, if a person knows how to do something they also enjoy teaching it to others. That way you get to think a little. Since we share an interest it is not a problem to ask or talk (Azzam, 2011, p. 42).*

Network effects may also create pressures to regulate how a resource is used, that is, forms of normative control. A recent controversy concerning the use of kick-bikes is illustrative in this respect. The kick-bikers are generally much younger than the skateboarders are and their use of the park does not follow the same rules. This hampers use of the space for skateboarding and thus undercuts the community values infusing design and management and it became a significant point of contention. A representative of Bryggeriet explains:

*We are interested in skateboarding; I do not want to support these kids so that they can use the space for something else. They (the kick-bike riders) say: the skaters think they own the place. Well of course, we have some kind of right to it! We have put our lives into developing it. It is not ok just to come gliding in and do something else [...] If we cannot solve this then skaters will not be interested in coming to Stapelbäddsparken and we will not be interested in maintaining it. I think both the skating community and the municipality will lose what has been built up over the years (John Magnusson, 19 November, 2014).*

The issue is now regulated and perhaps resolved. Signs in the park, bearing both the municipal logo and Bryggeriet's, indicate that skateboarding and in-lines are the only activities allowed in roughly half the park. Kick-bikes are allowed in the other parts. This conflict illustrates the significance of norms of use in the park but also how the park becomes to some extent a resource for different groups, and a place for negotiation of norms. There is at least to a small extent a process of layering and overlapping of different groups of users.

The previous discussion on relations between space and community are not intended to invoke rosy images of community as inherently good. The particular norms associated with skateboarding have, in other studies, been found to be significantly gendered, and perhaps also positioned in terms of ethnicity, class and age (Beal, 1996; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Alvarson, 2008; Donnelly, 2008) with significant effects on inclusion. To an extent, the existence of different times for groups such as the "old bastards", "tösabidarna" etc. can be understood to reflect an awareness



of this positioned nature of the community and attempts to ameliorate the exclusionary aspects. With deliberate public enabling in parks, however, such exclusionary norms take on increased significance.

### **Public sector intervention and inclusion in Stapelbäddsparken**

Perhaps most significantly public sector influence is evident in designating a substantial space and investment in collaborative development of the skate park. The design itself enables skateboarding and excludes many alternate uses. This selection could be argued to be in accordance with creating a diverse space to the extent that it caters to youth in the city and complements the surroundings. The park may be seen to create an attractive non-commercial space with low barriers of entry, yet of high quality. This is a space for non-demanding interaction where youth can experiment in finding their own values in taking part and in creating certain kinds of use-values. However, it is also possible to see, following Rosol, the development of the park as a strategy of co-opting a particular group to serve the interests of marketing the area and using what should be public space for this end (Rosol, 2012). Furthermore, this process imposes a particular set of norms on a public space that are clearly exclusive in certain respects. The situation is thus ambiguous. However, in light of the previous discussion, we can see how both the perspectives of empowering or excluding should be made more nuanced. The key is that enabling one group does not necessarily lead to the exclusion of others. To the extent that network effects are important, we would expect spatially permeable boundaries and therefore possibilities of layered and overlapping uses, allowing for a diversity of uses and users. From this perspective, the critical issue is the extent to which the public sector has enabled network effects rather than subtractive aspects, and the extent that it has enabled overlapping and layered use by different groups (Kärholm, 2007).

The planning of the Stapelbäddsparken as a whole envisioned several different kinds of activities to take place there, both indoors and outdoors. Thus the idea was that the park could be active and diverse, accommodating different groups of users. The plan also contained indeterminate spaces where there could be meeting of diverse groups. However, no other group is similarly enabled in the outdoor space either by design or in collaborative management leaving skateboarding dominant. As a consequence, indeterminate spaces in the park lose some of their potential for creating diverse interaction, or for people to simply be there without actively relating to a particular user group.

### **Plantparken**

Plantparken is located in Western Harbour of Malmö, a sustainability-branded area, still very much under construction in 2010. The park and urban farm Plantparken was conceived of as a four-year design experi-

ment and artistic intervention. As a practice related to artistic research: the project sought to provoke an owner- and consumer-oriented neighbourhood to reflect on lifestyle choices by offering a place where they could grow food for free. Second, the project was informed by sustainability concerns and offered a place to consider issues of food security but also an effort to raise awareness of how growing on a common might reconnect people with the ecological fundamentals. The project was made manifest in a four-year lease contract between the City of Malmö and The School of Arts and Communication, K3, Malmö University [MU]. The annual fee for leasing the area was nominal.

The 700 m<sup>2</sup> of arable soil that makes up the park is laid out on a thick and sandy landfill, set apart yet easily accessible and without any perimeter fence. The park was initiated by placing a simple signpost on the grounds, containing a short explanation and contact information:

*Plantparken is a project brought to life in 2011 by the City of Malmö and the School of Arts and Communication, K3, Malmö University. K3 pursues Plantparken as a part of its teaching in the course "Design for Sustainable Development", for research, and as a participant and actor in the Western Harbour.*

The sign also explained some of the background motivations in probing questions of sustainability

*People's relation to cultivated land is one way to understand and influence what a society perceives as a valuable. Plantparken's 700 m<sup>2</sup> of arable soil derives from exploitations inside the municipality – road construction, the building of homes, and malls.*

And its intended use

*Plantparken is not an allotment area; it is a common for residents, students, schools and kindergartens. It is a space for growth, ecology, encounters, projects & studies. Those who plant seeds and attend to its growing in Plantparken are also participating in a search for knowledge (Schmidt, 2012).*

Plantparken was by necessity and by intent under-designed (Brand, 1995; Fischer and Herrmann, 2013). There was no pre-set organization of the space, or even provision of basic needs like water and gardening equipment. There was simply the space, the soil and the signpost. However, there were means of activating the space through student use and urban farming activists were invited during the first season to work with students, bringing vital experience to the project. This activity gradually created an interest in the area. Teachers and students provided information about the area to anyone that expressed an interest. Almost all contacts were informal in character either on site, by telephone or mail. A few rules of conduct that made up an organizational frame were con-

sistently communicated through different forms. The following is an excerpt from an email by a teacher at K3 in early 2012.

*The only condition we set for newcomers is that you clear the land you want to grow on, and that you understand that what is grown may be harvested by others – the process is more important than the produce. And we are talking about a small piece of land...*

*K3 has an agreement with the City of Malmö where we can maintain the ground until we move to our new premises, in 2–4 years time. As a grower, you have no tenure, and Malmö University requires that growers should be ready to participate in interviews etc. which may be relevant from a research perspective.*

*You may contribute to Plantparken in several ways; by clearing more land than you yourself will use, by spreading the word, and / or by donating equipment to the tool chest on site.*

The municipality and Malmö University agreed that Plantparken would become an urban farming test ground for students and interested citizens, and a shared resource. As more people found out about Plantparken and started asking for plots, the focus gradually shifted from students to residents, many living nearby in the Western Harbour area. Most persons engaged in Plantparken came from the immediate vicinity, but other parts of Malmö were also represented. Motivations were mixed, some were already engaged in organizations pursuing sustainability topics, and others were former students and showed an interest in becoming lead-users. Some of the early growers were academics with attractive jobs, and others were coming out of stressful situations. Families with small children figured prominently, and others again were retirees who had sold their houses but missed their kitchen gardens. Roughly two-thirds were women, and about one fifth were born outside Sweden. In April 2015, more than 70 persons are working in 25 plots in Plantparken. An independent association of users has been formed and has a contractual agreement prolonging the existence of the park for another two years.

A key to understanding the development of Plantparken lies in the facilitation provided by the university and K3. This facilitation took several forms. The university provided an institutional counterpart that the municipality could sign a contract with and the park was provided with some legitimacy by association with the university. The university faculty and students also provided important means of lowering barriers of entry for interested users by providing relatively rapid and simple responses to questions about participation. Facilitation also connected users with each other and with people at the municipality but the university specifically did not take on the role of managing the park.

Instead, users were invited and given means of solving issues of collective management and provided with basic but insufficient ground rules. Perhaps the most evident collective problem for Plantparken was that there was no provision for water. Water was not mentioned in the original agreement between City of Malmö and K3 and the investment was resisted by parts of the municipality because it might give a sense of permanence to a temporary installation. However, there was water in adjacent areas. Rather than undermining the efforts at growing in Plantparken this lack of easy access to water seemed to strengthen a sense of challenge and added an element of guerrilla gardening. In the beginning, water was carried in buckets to a barrel. Later a water hose was rolled out from an adjacent open-air depot. When that source was closed, water was provided for a while by a nearby kindergarten. Through various means, growers managed to keep up their activities. It was only in 2014, toward the end of the formal agreement between the university and municipality that access to water was provided on site. Although the exact reasons for this change in policy is unclear, it seems that the municipality by this time had become aware of Plantparken as an active civil initiative they felt obligated to take into consideration.

In the initial period of Plantparken, when just a few growers were involved, plots were not divided in pre-set sizes. Borders were understood as activity- or use-based, subject to renegotiation among the users. Since there were no individual contracts and no means of cordoning off a plot except by talking to the next grower and to passers-by, and by keeping it neat and tidy. To an individual accustomed to an allotment garden this meant a lack of control but it also meant that use remained the most important criteria for influence. The ways of settling relations between growers was an informal and internal affair facilitated by faculty at K3. This process significantly lowered barriers to entry, at least initially. One later lead user described her experience of getting involved: "I was walking by one day with my son and thought, wow; I wonder how I can get involved? I got in touch and a few days later I had a spot". She goes on to explain, "It is really free, you set your own standards" (lokaltidningen.se, 2014).

As interest in Plantparken grew this informal means of settling issues of boundaries between users became strained. A survey in 2012 indicated that the group of roughly twenty growers were uneasy about overall responsibilities for the place; they deplored the poor communication between growers and that some other growers did not see Plantparken as a shared resource. Although there was an expressed interest in sharing, growers were also afraid of being overwhelmed if Plantparken became too well known. These issues were addressed by an increasing organization of the growers and the development of explicit rules. Formalizing interaction both solved certain problems but also came with an awareness of generating others. In particular formalizing lessened costs of negotia-

tion but also weakens the link between use and influence in the park and potentially raised barriers of entry

*As of today we have no contracts or agreements but we are going to need them for the future. But it must remain easy to join in and leave, to expand or diminish the area on which you grow (Tamara Nurmhauser, December 2014, cited in lokaltidningen.se, 2014).*

The by-laws of the association now stipulate rules for how an untended plot is to be made available for other users and there is a waiting list for those interested in growing. Nonetheless the formalization has not been entirely without some sense of loss to collective efforts. Lately a communal growing plot has been suggested to allow for certain shared interest to be better expressed. As Li Dahlgren explains in an interview:

*There you would not have your own plot, but you would grow together. Many who wish to start growing don't know that much, then it would be good to learn from each other (Sydsvenskan.se, 2015).*

Figure 2  
Plantparken.

PHOTO BY MARTIN TAMKE



### Shared resources and user generated boundaries in Plantparken

The development of Plantparken demonstrates a mix of different types of shared resources and the pressures this creates for regulation. Subtractable aspects are evident particularly in relation to managing increasing number of potential users. Each user has demands on space for a season, in order to grow food. This becomes evident as interest in growing there increases.

Network effects, positive effects of users on other users, are also evident in the use of shared resources in Plantparken. The positive view of increasing the number of users can be seen in the continued efforts to keep barriers of entry low and facilitating learning among the growers. This view seems to be related to a shared general interest of the growers beyond access to individual plots and broadly relates to issues of lifestyle and sustainability. The orientation is instantiated in the by-laws of the association of growers in Plantparken. The first stated purpose of the association is to divide up the land into parcels for members to assume overall responsibility for management of the park, but then there are three points relating to the association's broader interest including the aim "to become a key actor in the Western Harbour concerning environmental issues, and also to promote social development" (By laws of Plantparken). While it may be tempting to dismiss these latter points because their connection with practice in the park is tenuous, it is probably incorrect to do so. The sustained interest of users for the relatively limited physical resources in the park seems to derive at least in part from an interest in collective learning and addressing certain kinds of collective challenges rather than simply individual access to space.

Network effects are also evident in the sense that increased activity in the park provides greater leverage in negotiations with the municipality. This is certainly one factor underlying success in gaining access to water and in obtaining a contract with the municipality for further use of the park.

Plantparken thus displays a complex mix of shared resources. Elements of subtractability with respect to other users are pronounced and there are therefore strong pressures toward closure. At the same time, network effects are important both with respect to securing provision and also in terms of overarching aims that make the park valuable to users.

### Public sector intervention and inclusion in Plantparken

Public sector influence has been important for the development of Plantparken. Initial decisions for allowing a farming activity in the area and transporting soil were clearly critical. Public sector enabling was also significant in allowing external facilitation and imposing a minimum of requirements, thereby making it possible to keep barriers of entry low.

The development of Plantparken has also been shaped by the initial agreement for lease of the land that stipulated that land in Plantparken would not be parcelled up in allotments. The municipality made it clear that it did not want to deal with individual growers under individual contracts further on, since the local development plan had the area intended for housing. This requirement made it necessary for users to organize themselves but also linked up with and supported overarching interests. Under-design, municipal requirements and facilitation combined in such a way as to crowd-in civic engagement (Ostrom, 2000). Similarly, complaints from neighbours about the untidiness of the park provided a challenge for users but also an opportunity for the growers to deal resolve issues with the help of the facilitators so that this gradually developed into a better accountability of the growers to the surrounding area.

Although public management thus seems to take an arm's length relation to developments in Plantparken, this must also be understood to exert an important influence on development in the park. Contrary to what might be expected, municipal influence has accentuated the connection between use and management and thereby supported permeable user-generated boundaries. Municipal influence thus enabled the creation of a park, where activities and organizational forms are seen to extend an invitation for others to join and were barriers of entry are low. Nonetheless, this is a space not open to all but designated for a particular overarching interest and limited with respect to opportunities provided for growing. The development of Plantparken might therefore also be understood to highlight the unequal opportunities for different parks given that most places lack the active facilitation that Plantparken enjoyed and perhaps may not have the same capacity for organizing and lobbying among the users.

The case of Plantparken demonstrates significant aspects of subtractability but also openings in the sense of permeable boundaries, related to network effects of learning and collectively working toward overarching shared interests. The case demonstrates how public intervention may contribute to strengthening network effects of shared resources and potentially contribute to creating a diverse public space.

## Discussion and conclusion

The research began from an understanding of participatory governance arrangements in parks as ambiguous, potentially empowering but also potentially excluding. The research has sought to address the question of if, and under what circumstances, participatory governance might be compatible with inclusive public parks.

Theory on commons has provided a useful starting point for exploring participatory governance in parks. The framework enables us to understand how use, management and design contribute to shaping the parks in ways that link with discussion of territorial productions (Kärrholm, 2007) and place-shaping as a continuum (Carmona, 2014).

Theory on commons suggests that the collective management of shared resources tends to create boundaries and that different types of shared resources will tend to create pressures for different kinds of boundaries. Although theory in this area is well established, most research on park commons has focused solely on subtractable aspects. There has been surprisingly little attention paid to the interrelated forms of shared resources in parks that may include network effects. In this sense, the research has been exploratory in attempting to delineate the mix of different types of shared resources in the parks and the implications of this for user-generated boundaries.

Stapelbäddsparken and Plantparken are apparently quite different when it comes to design, funding, visibility and the degree of organization that users have in the initial phases. Despite these differences, the analysis points toward quite similar dynamics of user-generated boundaries significantly shaping both parks. The case studies revealed both subtractable and network effects of shared resources in parks. The subtractable effects of users on other users were familiar, for instance a larger number of users entails less space for an individual to grow on in Plantparken. The generative (network) effects of shared resources were also evident. An increasing number of users provided greater visibility and improved ability to negotiate with municipality regarding aspects of provision. Network effects were also important with respect to providing opportunities for learning, gaining recognition providing a sense of belonging within a community. In both of the studied cases network effects may be understood to create a situation where expanding the number of users is seen as largely beneficial but also puts pressure for existing users to regulate how the space is used. The findings illustrates how spatial boundaries are significantly produced by factors that lie outside the space itself and also that the character of these boundaries may vary. The existence of network effects may also help explain the general issue of why commons seem to be viable in an urban setting despite pressures from large numbers of people (Garnett, 2011; Harvey, 2011).

The research has evolved in relation to writings on the politics of public space. Work in this stream of research has highlighted how enabling participatory governance, in particular in combination with an underfunded public sector may contribute to unequal access to public parks. This critique is important and relevant to both of the cases studied in that users contribute to creating and delimiting access to shared resources and that these users are a select group. Nonetheless, the analysis also points



to interesting openings both with respect to user-generated boundaries and with respect to the role of the public sector. These openings are largely related to the network effects noted. The critical arguments presented for instance by Rosol (2010; 2012) rest on the assumption that one group's use impacts negatively on others. This is the case if shared resources are predominantly and significantly subtractable. However, when network effects are significant there is at least the potential to have a more diverse and inclusive space, as boundaries will be more permeable.

This research has also highlighted the multiple ways in which public management can exert influence to counteract exclusionary tendencies in user-generated boundaries. In particular, the cases demonstrate how the public sector has a role in shaping shared resources through facilitation or collaborative management. Enabling shared resources that exhibit network rather than subtractable effects, creates a possibility of diverse groups overlapping in complex ways rather than necessarily fixed boundaries between different kinds of use or groups of users. The cases also highlight the significant role that public management can play in creating public accountability of user groups and in finding forms of conflict resolution that can underpin greater inclusiveness.

Neither of the cases can be seen as exemplary with respect to inclusive diversity. In part, this may derive from that the initiatives have taken place in areas very much under development. As such, they do not add or relate to a pre-existing set of uses and users. It would therefore be interesting to explore dynamics of introducing participatory governance in existing parks, where negotiations with existing users are likely to play a more prominent role.

Given the variability of different types of shared resources and the different ways in which the public sector can choose to intervene, it is hardly surprising that effects of participatory governance will vary. Particular cases may either appear as socially empowering or serving select interests, or most probably have elements of both. The research has sought to provide a clearer understanding of how these effects arise and to demonstrate that there is no inherent contradiction of participatory governance and inclusive space. On the contrary, the research indicates a potential for public managers to enable commons as a means to increase civic engagement in park development and to do so in ways that increase rather than diminish inclusiveness.

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