

The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies

Established by the Charles H. Revson Foundation

Metropolitan Parks and Recreation Areas in Israel

*Basic Principles, Recommendations for Implementation,
and Planning Manual*

Edited by Iris Hann

2011

The JIIS Studies Series no. 416

Metropolitan Parks and Recreation Areas in Israel
Basic Principles, Recommendations for Implementation, and Planning Manual

Edited by Iris Hann

© 2011, The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies
The Hay Elyachar House
20 Radak St., 92186 Jerusalem

<http://www.jiis.org>
E-mail: machon@jiis.org.il

This research was made possible through funding by the Charles H. Revson Foundation, New York, Green Environment Fund, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Jewish National Fund, Ministry of Construction and Housing, and Jerusalem Development Authority.

The statements made and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.



A. Metropolitan Parks and Recreation Areas: Characteristics, Objectives, and Basic Planning Principles

A.1. Parks and Recreation Areas: Characteristics

Several basic characteristics of metropolitan parks and recreation areas distinguish them from other open spaces:

- ❖ Parks cover large tracts of land, on the order of magnitude of thousands of dunam (1 dunam = 1,000 square meters);
- ❖ Parks are primarily intended to address leisure and recreational needs;
- ❖ Parks serve densely populated areas on a metropolitan order of magnitude, typically a city and its surrounding suburbs or townships;
- ❖ Parks have at least one border that is adjacent to an urban area.

A.2 Parks and Recreation Areas: Objectives

- ❖ Addressing the leisure and recreational needs of residents living near the park at the metropolitan and local levels;
- ❖ Contributing to a systematic framework for open spaces at the urban and metropolitan levels;
- ❖ Addressing the human need for open space in the center and margins of a built-up metropolitan area;
- ❖ Providing for disturbing forms of recreation within open spaces, which cannot take place near residential areas;
- ❖ Contributing to the clarification of land use and avoiding ambiguity concerning space by distinguishing clearly between built-up and open areas and by demarcating separate urban areas within metropolitan and urban “order”;

- ❖ Enhancing the image and urban design of the city and its surroundings, including harnessing the potential of built areas that border parks;
- ❖ Creating space for social activities and the strengthening of local and regional communities;
- ❖ Creating space with high educational value in the environmental, agricultural, and physical education sectors;
- ❖ Preserving and restoring species and habitats as well as natural and landscape values; preserving Eco-corridors for the growth of vegetation and wildlife;
- ❖ Ensuring continued existence of natural areas immediately adjacent to cities and to centers of population;
- ❖ Enabling the infiltration of surface run-off water;
- ❖ Enabling agricultural activity near urban areas.

A.3. General Planning Principles and Points of Emphasis

1. Planning According to *Genius Loci*

Enhancing the *genius loci* of a place is a core principle in the planning of metropolitan parks and recreation areas. *Genius loci* (“spirit of place”) is a concept with Roman roots: every place has a “spirit” of its own, which reflects its image, qualities, and characteristics. Following this perspective, metropolitan parks will be planned and built on the basis of distinctive local qualities and potential, which will be used to enhance the park and shape its scenery and panorama. Upon conclusion, it will be possible – from a national perspective – to identify distinct metropolitan parks throughout the country, each distinguishable from the others, which will serve as the best expression of the *genius loci* of each region and collectively reflect the variety and richness of Israel. This claim has two interrelated aspects:

- ❖ At the national level, the national network of parks will reflect the variety that characterizes Israel.

- ❖ At the local level, the metropolitan park will reflect, express, and enhance two values: the *genius loci* of the open space and the *genius loci* of the city and the community adjacent to it.

Planning on the basis of *genius loci* requires intimate familiarity with the area involved. This familiarity entails, first and foremost, its physical conditions (landscape, vegetation, climate, and water system), cultural aspects (agriculture, process of settlement, history, and local archeology), and modern culture (social fabric, centers of activity and interest, and the like). Alongside these details, planning requires *holistic understanding* and appreciation of the various systems linking its elements, in the sense of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Amidst this whole, which is comprised of natural and man-made circumstances, planners must identify the core motifs and the salient and defining elements of the *genius loci* in a way that makes visitors to the park aware of the spirit of the place.

- ❖ In the physical sense: What are the distinct physical elements?
- ❖ In the substantive sense: What are the principal qualities and ideas that have emerged from this area? What are the foci of interest and the issues that deserve emphasis and attention? What are the cultural values and heritage that the park embodies?

2. Comprehensive Planning of the Entire Park / Recreation Area

Comprehensive planning of the park is very important in two respects:

- Park planning as part of metropolitan planning:* The planning of the park accords with the overall system of open spaces in the area and is linked to the network of public open spaces of the adjacent city. In this way the following benefits are realized:
 - Qualitative continuity in order to increase the variety of human uses and leisure and recreational options;

- Improving the access and links between the park and residents of the adjacent city;
- Environmental benefits: ensuring ecological corridors and landscape continuity.

B. Planning the park itself as a whole organic entity: Comprehensive planning enables appropriate conditionality among the various stages of development, using the resources that result from development of areas allocated for development within the metropolis and/or park for the benefit of areas allocated for preservation and enhancement as recreational areas.

It should be emphasized that comprehensive planning for the entire park area is required by the guidelines of the regional plans. In the context of comprehensive planning, *it is possible and desirable to allocate spaces for future planning* for the purpose of serving needs and objectives that arise in the future.

3. The Social Aspect of Planning Metropolitan Parks

The social aspect of metropolitan-park planning takes into account those who use the park (visitors, residents of nearby neighborhoods, local business owners) and those who are affected in any way by its existence. Moreover, this aspect of planning takes into account the relations between the future park and surrounding communities. In this way the social aspect complements and enriches physical and functional planning.

At the individual level, the social aspect of planning addresses modes of recreation within the park, the nature of local residents' engagement in planning and management, and the effects of physical planning on the quality of visits to the park. The goal is to create a place that visitors will enjoy and to which they will want to return, a place to which local residents will feel connected and in whose development they will feel involved, and a place whose influence on their lives will be positive even if they do not actually visit it but are still affected by its very existence within their surroundings.

The metropolitan park is surrounded by a number of communities – typically a large city with adjacent, smaller communities, some of which are agricultural and some of which are suburban. The park as well as various planning decisions regarding the park are likely to affect entire communities. For example, good access to the park could lead to a flourishing culture of sports, walking, or bicycle riding. Events that take place in the park with sponsorship of local business groups are likely to serve as leverage for the business and social development of the nearby community.

A first and essential step is the creation of a clear identity for the planned park in order to turn the open spaces (some of which are agricultural) on which the park will be built into a distinct entity. This identity will enable nearby residents to relate to the park (for example, through surveys on needs and preferences) and to take action on behalf of its establishment (in the framework of engaging residents in planning the park). In other words, before or simultaneous to the planning of the park, it is important to promote a change in perspective from mere open space to a clearly delineated and well defined space.

4. Identifying Leisure and Recreational Needs at the Metropolitan Level

As noted, the main purpose of parks and recreation areas is to address the leisure and recreational needs of residents of the entire metropolitan area, with special attention to immediate neighbors. Plans for the park or recreation area should be grounded in a program for recreational needs. The various uses of the park should be determined on the basis of a *survey of needs* among all the target audiences of the park in both the metropolitan area as a whole and among the communities adjacent to the park, as detailed above. The plan should avoid potential conflict between the needs of visitors from the entire metropolitan area and the wishes of the adjacent communities through a process of public engagement and regional planning that takes into account various relevant factors. In addition, the program should set aside spaces for future leisure and recreational planning to address future requests beyond the foreseeable.

5. Planning That Preserves Natural Systems

Israel's small size in combination with its biological and landscape diversity creates a situation in which every single planning unit contains unique regional, national, and occasionally even international natural systems. This situation – alongside accelerated development activities – requires multi-dimensional planning that preserves the assets of nature, heritage, and the environment. Areas allocated for metropolitan parks and recreation areas form part of the fabric of inter-city open areas, and the preservation and rehabilitation of their natural and landscape assets, as well as their incorporation into plans for national ecological corridors, is very important. Natural areas, existing or rehabilitated, that accommodate extensive leisure and recreational activity for metropolitan residents in an immediate and accessible way provide an inexpensive and convenient form of public activity and serve a key role in defining and distinguishing the parks and their adjacent cities.

Metropolitan parks sustain not only the existing natural systems. It is also possible and important to establish new natural systems on a large scale within these parks as a means of ensuring the existence of natural areas immediately adjacent to cities and population centers, in addition to natural areas currently located a few hours' drive away. Such natural tracts of land have great importance for the public. They also have educational value for current and future generations in the preservation of the landscape and cultural heritage of the country's various regions.

6. Agriculture Within the Parks

In Israel agricultural lands represent a significant portion of the territory of metropolitan parks and recreation areas. In some cases, such as the graded agricultural terraces of the Jerusalem hills in the Soreq Park, the agricultural use is from ancient times, while in other cases, such as the orchards of the Sharon, the agriculture reflects heritage and historical values. Both types of agriculture are an important element of the *genius loci*. Broad tracts of agriculture land within parks are in active use, thereby linking the future of these parks with the future of the agricultural lands.

A salient example of agriculture in European countries is the “peri-urban agriculture”¹ (“peri-urban” indicates the urban periphery) incorporated into metropolitan parks surrounding large cities. Peri-urban agriculture has a multitude of functions and advantages because of its proximity to the city: convenience for consumers who prefer fresh, quality produce; agricultural tourism; environmental education; and leisure and recreational opportunity. Agriculture incorporated into metropolitan parks will have different points of emphasis from “regular” agriculture and will benefit both farmers and park visitors, with subsidization of agricultural activity if necessary.

Agriculture can be incorporated into parks and recreation areas in a number of ways:

- (1) As a landscape to complement recreational activities and hiking trails and to add a pastoral background to entertainment events, picnics, and leisure sites;
- (2) As produce from gardening that reduces the costs of maintenance of large metropolitan parks; agricultural fields will continue to yield harvests, whose value and compensation will now be considered part of the functioning of the metropolitan park;
- (3) As a friendly and unpolluted link between the city and its surrounding environment;
- (4) As a source of agricultural produce with a direct link to the city’s residents, for example via fields whose harvest is offered in city markets, in traditional farmers’ markets, through direct sales to residential homes, at points of sales in the field, and the like;
- (5) As part of an educational program in various contexts: elementary and high schools, demonstration of the change of seasons and traditional and modern forms of agriculture, practical agricultural training made accessible to the general public, and transformation of *agricultural operations* into an attraction and focus of interest in its own right.

¹ For further information, see Moti Kaplan, Nirit Witman, and Anat Horowitz with Menachem Zalutzki, *Integration of Agricultural Lands in Metropolitan Parks and Recreation Areas*, 31 August 2008. This document was prepared for the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

7. The Park as a Publicly Supported Entity

The experience of other countries indicates that a large public park cannot be created and maintained solely on the basis of a “closed economy” approach. An open park, even if it receives millions of visitors per year, cannot sustain itself financially. A park is in its very essence a publicly supported entity, and the planning of its market-oriented lands must, therefore, be based on the benefits for park users rather than purely economic considerations.

8. Roads and Infrastructures

Through-traffic motorways within park territory should be avoided to the extent possible. The park should include a linked network of paths for pedestrians as well as bicycle and horse riders, ensuring separation among the different types of traffic as required for pedestrian safety. Above-ground infrastructures (such as electricity lines) across the park should be avoided to the extent possible. Plans for necessary infrastructures should form part of the overall planning of the park, in accordance with the guiding principles of this document. Since some of the parks already have an approved infrastructure network, it is recommended that park plans impose conditions on the infrastructures’ contractors for the benefit of the public use of the park, such as constructing and maintaining the park’s public areas and landscaping in a way that helps integrate the infrastructure into the park environment.

9. The Borderline Between the City (or Cities) and the Park

By definition the metropolitan park borders and serves a densely populated area. The park and adjacent communities should be planned as a whole entity, with the borderline between the city and the park planned as part of the larger metropolitan network.

9.1 The Link Between the Park and Network of Open Space in the City

Comprehensive planning conceives of the park and network of public open spaces as a continuous whole, with the park accommodating those activities that require wide open spaces.

9.2 Accessibility and Means of Access

In planning the borderline between the park and adjacent city, emphasis should be placed on accessibility through public transportation as well as pedestrian and bicycle paths that connect with existing pathways.

9.3 The Park's Edges

The park shares at least one of its edges with an adjacent population center. Planning for this borderline between the city and the park is very important:

“Green Fingers” – The borderline between the park and the city can be expanded by enabling the park’s “green fingers” to reach into the city and connect to municipal open spaces. This approach will allow a greater number of residents to benefit from direct contact with the open space, in terms of both quality of life and real estate value.

Building Along the Park Border – There are several basic approaches, each one of which has advantages and disadvantages. Construction adjacent to the park could be extensive (buildings of limited height), thereby creating a type of buffer between the intensive urban area and the park. The building line adjacent to the park could also be intensive and composed of tall buildings (similar to Central Park in New York). Alternatively, the area adjacent to the park can be used for a combination of purposes: a mix of residential, business, and public buildings. The borderline itself can likewise include a cross-section of various types of construction.

In planning the park’s borderline, the following aspects, among others, must be taken into consideration: creating a positive relationship between the park and its surroundings; the effect of the built-up area on the landscape of the open park and on the perceptions of park visitors; generating traffic and accessibility to and from the park; and ensuring the quality of buildings’ in the area adjacent to the park.²

² See, for example, the planning principles for construction of areas adjacent to the Yarkon River region, prepared by the Tel Aviv Regional Council for Planning and Construction, 4 December 2005.

Operational Recommendations

- ❖ This document – *Planning Manual* – serves as a basis for preparation and evaluation of plans for metropolitan parks and recreation areas in Israel.
- ❖ In order to complete the existing information base for planning and establishing parks and recreation areas, ongoing work that addresses integration of agriculture, organizational management, and funding for large parks must be completed as a matter of priority.
- ❖ Pilot projects should be promoted in a number of parks and recreation areas, undertaken in cooperation with regional authorities and local communities. This process requires appointing a project director for each park.
- ❖ Given the long-term nature of land allocation for parks and recreation areas – decades into the future – protecting these lands against irreversible activities that would harm them is a priority of the highest order. Planning policy for lands allocated as metropolitan recreation areas should ensure comprehensive oversight of these lands. Granting permits for inconsistent uses should be prohibited, and rigorous enforcement to prevent planning and construction violations is required, in order to maintain maximum flexibility in planning the recreation area and to preserve its unique nature in preparation for planning and implementation. In addition, ensuring the park's status is recommended, for example by planting shady groves and creating pedestrian pathways where logistically and physically feasible. Special attention should be placed on making the park conveniently accessible for nearby residents.
- ❖ In order to ensure that parks maintain their quality in the long term, planning institutions should refrain from approving plans that allocate substantial commercial zones within lands allocated as parks or recreation areas. Plans should maintain a long-term, broad, and comprehensive outlook, taking into account the gradual stages of development and ensuring that future generations have ample flexibility in their course of action.

- ❖ The government should acknowledge its duty to support metropolitan parks in Israel, as it did when budgeting for and constructing the Ariel Sharon Park. It would be a positive step for the government to recognize parks as a social service and as a necessary public infrastructure. Likewise, it would be a positive step for other state authorities – national and local – to recognize the importance of parks and recreation areas for social welfare.
- ❖ Fundraising and identification of external funding sources for the purpose of establishing parks and recreation areas is a matter of priority.
- ❖ The Ministry of Tourism should increase its involvement in the planning and management of metropolitan parks and recreation areas in light of their excellent tourist potential.
- ❖ The Ministry of Agriculture should be engaged in ongoing research and development to integrate agriculture with metropolitan parks and recreation areas. In this context, economic tools for implementation and integration of agricultural activity within parks should be developed.
- ❖ The government should acknowledge its responsibility to support environmentally friendly agriculture within park boundaries, in a way similar to that in developed countries.