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ON THE ISSUE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF CITY PARKS

Abstract. The relevance of this theoretical study stems from the need to ensure the sustainable development of cities and to improve their spatial structure, taking into account factors such as recreational use of natural resources, socio-economic development and contemporary environmental requirements. Intensive urbanisation processes pose new challenges for the harmonious functioning of urban parks, which must meet the health and recreational needs of the population, promote the inclusive development of the urban environment, and ensure the conservation of natural resources and ecological balance.

Research into the issue of sustainable development of urban parks is driven by the objective growth in the importance of the ecosystem services they provide to society, particularly in terms of improving the quality of life of the population, maintaining environmental safety and ensuring the socio-economic well-being of local communities. At the same time, the need to effectively meet the health, cultural and recreational needs of city dwellers is becoming particularly pressing in the context of increasing anthropogenic pressure on urbanised areas.

Keywords: urban parks, sustainable development, natural resources, greening, environment.

The current state of urban green spaces in Ukraine largely fails to meet current social needs and global trends in the development and management of urban parks. Most parks, particularly in small towns, are characterised by a high level of wear and tear on their infrastructure, insufficient funding for their maintenance and development, and the use of outdated approaches to the organisation of park areas. As a result, the potential of urban parks to generate positive social, economic and environmental benefits is not being fully realised. In this regard, the organisational and economic framework for the development of urban parks needs to be improved, and new approaches to their management and operation need to be developed. The most relevant areas of development for green urban management today are the concept of sustainable development and the ecosystem approach. Insufficient attention to comprehensive research into urban parks has significantly weakened their potential to achieve the goals of sustainable urban development, as a result of which the urban environment is losing an important component of socio-economic and environmental well-being.

The official definition of the term ‘park’ in Ukraine is set out in Section 2.1 of the Rules for the Maintenance of Green Spaces in Settlements of Ukraine. According to the regulatory document, a park is regarded as an independent architectural and organisational complex covering an area of more than 2 hectares, which fulfils sanitary and hygienic functions and is intended for the short-term recreation of the public. Depending on their functional purpose, parks are classified as cultural and recreational, district, sports, children’s, arboretum, historical, memorial, ethnographic, exhibition, zoological and other types of parks. Thus, a park is not a haphazard collection of vegetation or a natural area without a defined structure. In addition to its natural component, it necessarily includes infrastructure facilities, united by a single composition and functional purpose [1].

Urban spaces are characterised by a significant number of economic interconnections and the intersection of diverse social interests. It is precisely for this reason that the diversity of urban parks allows them to be used as a tool for addressing social, environmental and economic issues. The issue of sustainable development of urban parks is directly linked to general trends in the sustainable

development of society, in particular the concepts of sustainable urban development, sustainable economic development, human capital development and sustainable use of natural resources. The concept of 'sustainable development' was first introduced in the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, **Our Common Future**, where it is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Thus, the sustainable development of urban parks requires a comprehensive approach to harmonising the interaction between humans and nature, as well as taking into account the challenges of urbanisation and the growing public demand for high-quality green spaces. It is particularly important to study international experience in the effective use of urban parks and the improvement of their management systems.

An analysis of the literature on the development of parks in New York and London indicates the existence of various models for organising urban green spaces; however, both megacities are characterised by a focus on the principles of sustainable development and social orientation. New York, like the US as a whole, is characterised by the integration of urban park management and recreational activities within a single structure. The development of parks in the city is overseen by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks). The very name of this organisation demonstrates the inseparable link between the functioning of parks and the organisation of leisure activities for the public [2].

An analysis of the organisational framework shows that the department implements a range of programmes aimed at both the improvement of parks and the organisation of recreational activities for the public. Broadly speaking, these programmes can be divided into two main areas: educational and improvement, and health and recreation. Educational programmes are designed to foster a responsible attitude towards the city's green spaces, starting from childhood. At the same time, they help improve the understanding of natural science subjects and promote an active lifestyle. Such initiatives lay the foundations for the development of an environmentally responsible society and ensure the long-term sustainable development of urban parks. Another important aspect of park use involves hosting health and recreational activities within their grounds, which help to improve the physical and psychological well-being of the population.

City parks serve as important public spaces for organising leisure activities for the population, promoting public health and encouraging an active lifestyle. At the same time, they fulfil not only recreational but also social functions, helping to create a comfortable and safe urban environment. The inclusive nature of most programmes run in parks deserves special attention, as they are aimed at various social groups, including people with special needs. In this context, city parks contribute to the development of human capital and the foundations of a sustainable society.

It is also important to highlight the accessibility of the sports and health programmes run by the NYC Parks Recreation Centre. The low membership fee for participating in these programmes makes professional sports activities accessible to a wide range of people. This approach to organising activities in city parks creates favourable conditions not only for their sustainable development but also for improving the quality of the urban environment as a whole.

An analysis of the programmes run by New York City's Parks and Recreation Department highlights a number of key features of urban park management that ensure their sustainability and contribute to the conservation of ecosystems:

- actively promoting volunteering and engaging citizens in the improvement of park areas, with appropriate financial and informational support;
- the organisation of educational programmes for young people on the basics of natural science, the functioning of ecosystems and the role of parks within the urban structure;
- the creation of opportunities for schoolchildren to conduct research into the natural environment of parks, undertake work placements under the guidance of specialists and use digital educational platforms;
- implementation of sports, health and leisure programmes aimed at improving the physical and mental well-being of the population;

- operation of parks as centres for social interaction and recreation;
- introducing socialisation and health improvement programmes for vulnerable groups, in particular children from low-income families, older people and people with disabilities;
- tailoring park activities to different age and social groups;
- ensuring that parks are run by qualified specialists, both in terms of maintenance and in organising cultural, sporting and educational events [2, 3].

Another example of successful urban green space management is London, which is renowned worldwide for its large number of landscape parks. Most of these are of historical value and form part of the national heritage. One of the key organisations responsible for managing parkland is The Royal Parks, whose activities are governed by the provisions of the Crown Lands Act 1851. The Royal Parks operates as a charitable organisation and looks after eight parks owned by the Royal Family. Although these parks do not belong to the public, the public has the right to use them for recreation provided that environmental protection regulations are observed.

The organisation runs a significant number of programmes and actively engages partners in funding and supporting the improvement of parkland. London's parks offer a wide range of educational programmes that are integrated into the curricula of schools and higher education institutions. Despite the fee-based nature of such programmes, they are provided by qualified supervisors, specialists and the necessary material and technical resources. The main advantage of these activities is the opportunity for pupils and students to gain practical experience in conducting scientific research, tailored to their age and level of preparation.

Such programmes are in high demand among educational institutions, and the funds raised are channelled into the ongoing maintenance and development of the parks. In this way, public interest and the popularity of educational programmes create additional opportunities for ensuring the sustainable management of parkland, securing financial resources and preserving their ecosystems.

It is worth noting that an individual ten-year development plan is drawn up for each London park, which is reviewed every five years. This demonstrates the predominance of an individualised approach to the organisational and economic support of park development, taking into account the specific features of their ecosystems, existing risks, the needs of the population and prospects for further development.

Among the distinctive features of the regulatory framework governing the operation of parks in London, it is worth highlighting its traditional nature and stability. The main rules governing the operation of parks were enshrined as far back as the 1926 Parks Regulations and, despite the considerable passage of time, remain in force today. At the same time, this stability of the regulatory framework does not prevent parks from adapting to contemporary social needs. On the contrary, park areas actively integrate social initiatives, environmental education activities and modern digital tools into their operations [3].

Despite a predominantly traditional approach to the organisation of park spaces, digital technologies are actively utilised in the management of London's parks. For visitors who prefer to explore on their own, mobile apps have been developed featuring interactive maps, highlights of key locations and historical information. In addition, there are music apps designed to create a comfortable atmosphere for peaceful relaxation in the park environment. This demonstrates a combination of traditional approaches to park management with modern innovative solutions.

An analysis of the experience of New York and London in ensuring the sustainable development of urban parks leads to the conclusion that, despite differences in organisational and economic management mechanisms, both models share common features. First and foremost, these include close ties with the public, a focus on the social needs of the population, and the active involvement of residents in the development of park areas. It is precisely these approaches that are currently under-represented in Ukraine's institutional park management system.

Given Ukraine's integration into the European space, there is a particular need to draw on the positive experience of developed countries in the field of green infrastructure and urban park management. In this context, international environmental cooperation plays a key role, facilitating

the exchange of sustainable development practices and the improvement of natural area management systems.

Specialised urban park agencies serve as effective structures for the management of urban parks and green spaces in developed countries. Such organisations have a multidisciplinary scope of activity and act as intermediaries between public authorities, the public, research institutions and the business sector. Their activities combine issues of urban improvement, recreation, the organisation of cultural and sporting events, as well as ensuring the economic efficiency of park operations. For Ukraine, this approach is relatively new, as the integration of urban improvement, recreation and economic development programmes requires proper professional coordination and a clear definition of priorities for each green infrastructure site.

The World Urban Parks organisation plays a key role in supporting the development of urban parks at an international level. Its work focuses on improving the urban environment in the context of rapid urbanisation by supporting parks and public spaces. The organisation participates in the development of global standards for park management, facilitates the search for funding, promotes the benefits of green spaces for cities, organises professional development for park management staff, and supports international cooperation between various stakeholders in this field. The organisation pays particular attention to collaboration with city park agencies, research institutions, civil society organisations, as well as representatives from the health and tourism sectors.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) also makes a significant contribution to the development of park management. It is a non-profit organisation whose activities are aimed at fostering a healthy and cohesive society through the support of parks and recreational spaces. The organisation provides professional development for specialists, offers grant support, facilitates the implementation of programmes and research, and advocates for the interests of the park sector. The NRPA was formed through the merger of several specialist organisations whose work was linked to park management, recreation and the development of public spaces. This enabled the development of a comprehensive approach to the organisation and support of urban parks as a key component of sustainable urban development.

The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) is a national organisation dedicated to maximising the potential of parks and recreational spaces as a key factor in fostering a healthy, active and socially cohesive society. The organisation operates as a non-profit body and, with the support of the Canadian government, implements a range of socially important programmes focused on community development, youth support, environmental initiatives and ensuring equal access to recreational services.

One of the association's key programmes is the CPRA Youth Employment Experience – a strategy to support youth employment. Under this programme, local authorities receive 100% subsidies to cover the wages of young people employed in parks and recreational facilities. Particular attention is paid to developing practical skills, gaining professional experience and familiarising young people with the principles of how the park sector operates. Recruiting new staff not only supports youth employment but also creates additional opportunities for implementing innovative projects and developing park infrastructure.

Another key area of the association's work is the CPRA Green Jobs Initiative, which aims to support Canada's 'green' priorities by engaging young people. Under this initiative, local authorities and organisations are provided with wage subsidies of up to 50%, which funds hundreds of jobs for young people in the fields of nature conservation, recreation and culture. The programme helps tackle environmental and socio-economic challenges simultaneously, combining employment support with the development of nature conservation activities [4].

A key focus of the CPRA's work is the Gender Equity in Recreational Sport programme, which aims to promote gender equality in the field of recreational sport. The programme focuses on expanding opportunities for women to participate in sporting events and improving access to sports facilities for people of all ages. Between 2019 and 2022, the programme provided grant support of between \$2,500 and \$15,000 to women's sports initiatives, which helped to develop local sports projects and boost community participation.

The work of the Canadian Recreation and Parks Association is based on the implementation of a framework programme that sets out the priority areas for the development of the park sector. These priorities include promoting an active lifestyle, ensuring inclusivity, supporting community cohesion, developing recreational activities, and protecting the environment. Thus, parks are viewed not merely as an element of urban landscaping, but as a multifunctional public space that combines environmental, social, cultural and health-promoting functions.

An analysis of the activities of international urban park associations indicates a significantly higher level of utilisation of parkland potential compared to current practice in Ukraine. Current trends in the development of urban parks in developed countries are distinctly socially oriented and involve the active engagement of the public in recreational, educational, environmental and voluntary activities. At the same time, there is a growing focus on the ecosystem role of parks, their nature conservation functions and their importance for ensuring the environmental sustainability of cities. This indicates a transformation in approaches to the organisation of park spaces under the influence of the principles of the ecosystem approach and the concept of sustainable development.

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