Understanding place-keeping of open space

Nicola Dempsey and Harry Smith

Introduction

This chapter presents and defines the concept of place-keeping as *long-term and responsive management which* ensures that the social, environmental and economic quality and benefits a place brings can be enjoyed by present and future generations. As outlined in Chapter 1, we discuss place-keeping in relation to place-making — the creation of places which people want to visit, experience and enjoy — and explore their interrelationships.

We examine place-keeping in a theoretical and institutional context, first by charting the shift in responsibility for public space management from public administration, via new public management to (public) governance. We then contextualise place-keeping within the theoretical framework of new institutionalism which allows the concept to be understood as a process involving a range of stakeholders in different roles with different motivations, underlying principles and ideas. The chapter provides an exploration of the concept of place-keeping, underpinned by a definition to show how it is made up of a number of closely related dimensions. These are discussed in detail here and throughout the book to illustrate the complexity and overlapping nature of the interrelated dimensions.

Public open space: whose responsibility?

The responsibility for place-keeping of urban open spaces traditionally lies with the public sector in most countries around the world. Public administration (PA) has developed since the nineteenth century as the traditional mode of public service organisation in many countries, with a central role for policy formulation and implementation, a reliance on service delivery and incremental budgeting based on tax revenues (Osborne, 2010). The delivery and management of open space fall within this system mainly because it is characterised as being a 'public good' requiring a collective mechanism for regulation, management, and investment which has historically been administered by the public administration.

A public good is 'classified as such on the basis of its consumption characteristics — being jointly consumed, capacious (in infinite supply and undiminished by any one person's consumption) and non-excludable' (Webster, 2007, p. 85). This is in contrast to a private good, which is characterised by its individual use or consumption and a degree of feasibility of establishing exclusive use or consumption rights. There is a long history of public goods being privately supplied, particularly in the case of urban

parks originally in private ownership and left, in perpetuity, in the stewardship of public authorities to ensure they remain available for the continuous use and benefit of the general public. Considering their public *value* focuses attention on broader potential and benefits of open spaces, transcending the traditional view of public authorities having a dominant role in open space management — this is explored later in the book.

Perceived failures of the public administration model (which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) led to a shift towards two models, the first of which is *new public management*. This is underpinned by ideas of market liberalisation to help improve quality and delivery of public services. With this shift, which has been adopted in many countries worldwide, have come changes in policy and legal frameworks to facilitate increased competition in the delivery process (Lindholst, 2008).

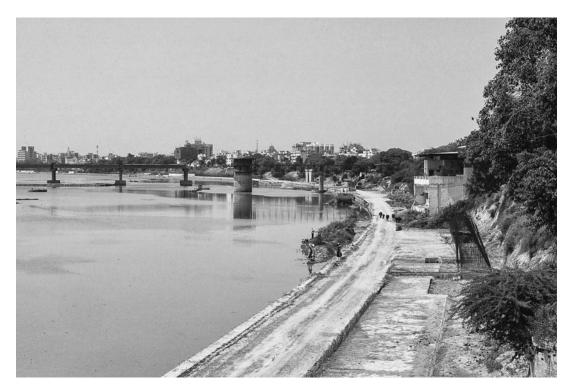
However, new public management can only address some of the weaknesses of the public administration model, but cannot adequately tackle social policy issues (Bovaird, 2004) or those that are outside the remit of the market. This has led to a further shift towards *governance* that involves a wider range of stakeholders alongside the public and private sectors, to include the third sector, community groups and volunteers. This is in recognition of the important part that such stakeholders can play in public service decision-making and delivery. As the rest of the book will outline, the shift away from public administration does not mean that the state is not involved in place-keeping — in fact, the state continues to be very important, if not the most important stakeholder involved. What has changed is the need to work alongside other stakeholders in order to carry out place-keeping in practice.

Defining place-keeping

The concept of 'place-keeping' was coined by Wild *et al.* (2008) and relates to what happens after high-quality places have been created. This means maintaining and enhancing the qualities and benefits of places through long-term management (Dempsey and Burton, 2012). Many aspects of place take time to develop and mature: trees which grow to maturity bring increased benefits for biodiversity (e.g. habitats/food/shelter); a sense of community and place attachment can strengthen over time when a place is used regularly in a day-to-day capacity and for special events. In this way, place-keeping is described as long-term and responsive management which retains and enhances the social, environmental and economic quality and benefits which a place brings now and in the future.

The specific *context* within which place-keeping occurs can vary dramatically. This can be seen first and foremost in the variety of physical contexts illustrated throughout this book. Such variety in context means that places will have different uses and users which will demand different requirements, for example a children's playground, riverside walk and amenity green space will all have different characteristics, uses and users. And as Figures 2.1–2.3 show (see also Colour Plate 2), there is considerable variation in similar spaces, depending on the contexts.

Furthermore, as Figure 2.4 illustrates, this context (in terms of both the place and residents/users) will differ socially, economically and environmentally, and will have an impact on the nature of place-keeping that occurs (or not as the case may be). For example, a riverside walk may be in an inner city location polluted by contamination due to previous industrial use that is now an area of post-industrial decline. This will involve a different place-keeping focus to a run-down children's playground which







Figures 2.1-2.3 Urban river corridors in three different contexts (clockwise from top): Sabarmati River, Ahmedabad, India (photo courtesy of Dan Saunders), River Elbe, Hamburg, Germany, and River Thames, London, England.

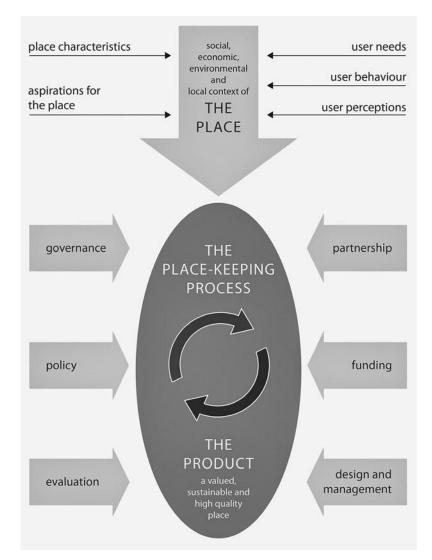


Figure 2.4
The conceptualisation of place-keeping.
Dempsey and Burton (2012); after Wild et al. (2008) and Carmona et al. (2004b).

might be set within an established park that is also in need of renewal. The significance of local context for place-keeping is therefore clear and unsurprisingly emerges as an important theme throughout the book.

The context of the place also incorporates notions of scale, which can directly influence the nature of the place-keeping. For example, a high-profile place such as Edinburgh's Princes Street Gardens or the Jardin des Tuileries, Paris, will be managed and maintained to a consistently high standard, whereas places which are significant at a local scale and valued accordingly by residents, may not necessarily enjoy the

same level of attention, maintenance and management (and funding). Place-keeping in practice will therefore involve adaptation to the local context in relation to the scale and location of the site.

Figure 2.4 shows the different factors or influences on place-keeping, which we refer to from this point onwards as the *dimensions of place-keeping*. Place-keeping encompasses dimensions which relate to the management of a place right from its conception — policy; governance; partnerships; finance; design, management and maintenance; and evaluation — which have not been considered before as part of a holistic concept. These dimensions are interrelated and can be applied at a number of different scales including site, neighbourhood, city and region, and the following chapters provide a number of examples at these various scales.

Place-keeping: process or product?

In conceptualising place-keeping, it is helpful to consider it alongside place-making as part of a dynamic and continuous process: the ongoing *process* of place-keeping maintains and enhances the *product* of place-making as a valued, sustainable and high-quality place within a particular local context. In developing this definition, we are not suggesting that place-making ends when place-keeping begins, but rather that they are overlapping and fluid concepts. In this way, we can illustrate the difficulty of divorcing the process from the product when considering the dimensions of place-keeping. For example, maintenance can be described as both a process (e.g. an ongoing cleaning service provided by a stakeholder) and a product (e.g. a wall cleaned of graffiti or the repair of vandalised play equipment) (Carmona *et al.*, 2008). Community engagement can likewise be considered an ongoing process of involvement in a range of programmes and events, or leading to a tangible outcome such as the decision not to erect a mobile phone mast (Dempsey *et al.*, 2012; Bovaird and Löffler, 2002).

Figures 2.5a—c show how this dynamic relationship might be considered conceptually in different ways, to capture the variety of approaches, as:

- a) place-making which leads to place-keeping as distinct activities;
- b) place-making which is influenced by place-keeping. This can be manifested in different ways, for example the use of high-quality materials to help reduce maintenance over time; and
- c) ideally a two-way inter-dependent relationship between the two where place-keeping is considered from the outset as integral to place-making; this would arguably be the case when place-keeping is the driver behind changes.

Figure 2.5a can describe the approach taken when place-making (i.e. capital-funded changes) is the driver of the process while Figure 2.5b shows, for example, the approach when designers work alongside managers when embarking on the place-making stage to take into account place-keeping. Figure 2.5c is the approach taken when place-keeping, or the long-term and responsive management, is the driver behind the process.

The interrelatedness of the concepts means that one could consider place-making as encompassing place-keeping, because management should form an integral part of the creation or making of a place. However, this book takes the position that it is place-keeping, rather than place-making, which focuses



Figure 2.5a A process leads to a product.

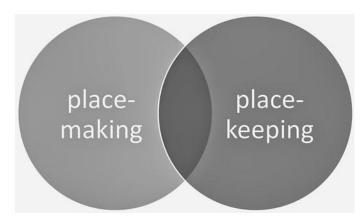


Figure 2.5b
A process is influenced by the type of product required.



Figure 2.5c A process and product where place-keeping is considered at the beginning.

Figures 2.5a-c Place-making and place-keeping: different ways of conceptualising the relationship.

on the long term when considering place: place-making can therefore be considered as the creation, or re-creation, renewal or regeneration of place which occurs within the longer-term process of place-keeping. The dimensions of place-keeping are outlined briefly below as introductory discussions to be explored in more detail in the following chapters. The chapters discuss a range of approaches to place-making and place-keeping and the associated implications, exploring the extent to which the ideal (Figure 2.5c), where place-keeping is considered from the outset, is achieved in practice. The following sections explore the different dimensions of place-keeping in more detail.

Policy and place-keeping

Place-keeping of urban parks and other urban open space is not generally well addressed in policy, as it is not a legally binding statutory requirement in any country to provide and manage urban public open space. The political context can have a profound influence on place-keeping, how it is manifested, who is involved and how it is funded. Sustainability is the overriding paradigm which increasingly underpins policy, research and practice, which has clear resonance with place-keeping in its aim of ensuring social, economic and environmental benefits, although conflicts do emerge in light of the extent to which this is based on economic development and growth.

Overarching plans and strategies, such as city (master)plans, green space strategies and biodiversity action plans are examples which public (and also private and third) sector organisations create and ratify, underpinned by national policies and international conventions such as the European Landscape Convention. The way in which top-level policy is interpreted at the local scale can have an important influence on the nature of place-keeping activities on the ground. For example, area-based approaches (including neighbourhood regeneration based on large-scale, high residential density development (Figure 2.6) and Business Improvement Districts (Figure 2.7)) have been adopted by political decision-makers and supported by legal and political tools and processes (outlined in Chapter 3). The extent to which such approaches and service delivery models are successful in the long term remain to be seen.

Governance in place-keeping

It is generally considered that achieving place-keeping necessitates effective governance and decision-making. While there is a range of interpretations of what governance actually means (Smith, 2004), as Chapter 4 outlines, there is some consensus that the concept reflects a shift in decision-making from government/local authority where the state acts as the primary governing body (Smith et al., 2009), to the relationship between the full range of stakeholders, based on devolved responsibility from the state. There are three models of decision-making which have been identified (de Magalhães and Carmona, 2009). The state-centred model is the typical starting point where a local authority plans, delivers and maintains the place in question with minimal external input. The market-centred model is a well-established one which involves private sector stakeholders, and continues to be popular: a typical example is the public—private partnership (PPP) which involves a private, profit-driven organisation employed by the public sector. Finally, there is the user-centred model where user-based organisations such as local interest and community groups, charities and other non-governmental organisations are involved in place-keeping (Jones, 2002).



Figure 2.6 Area-based approaches such as neighbourhood regeneration are often underpinned by policy at various scales (here in Copenhagen, Denmark, based on large-scale, high residential density development).

Considering these models helps us understand decision-making processes and who takes part and their underlying ideas and motivations. It also permits an exploration of the extent to which different decision-making processes lead to effective implementation of place-keeping on the ground, which is provided in Chapter 4.

Partnerships in place-keeping

As this chapter has already highlighted, there has been a shift in responsibility for open-space management which involves multiple stakeholders in place-keeping. To ensure this is achieved effectively, *partnerships* are widely advocated as a delivery mechanism (Moskell *et al.*, 2010; Carnwell and Carson, 2008). The term *partnership* describes an association of two or more partners who have agreed to share responsibility for place-keeping. Achieving place-keeping is increasingly seen as depending on strong partnerships. There



Figure 2.7 Different governance models involve different stakeholders, including the private sector, as in this Business Improvement District in Langthwaite Grange, Yorkshire, England.

is no one ideal partnership type: they can be formal with agreements and contracts or informal, based on verbal, mutual understanding, or somewhere between the two. The nature of the partnerships will depend on the underpinning decision-making model, and hence they are very closely related to governance (Figure 2.8). The particular combination of stakeholders involved (and who and what they represent) will bring partnership-specific challenges. But a key challenge affecting all partnerships is the long-term character of place-keeping. Partnerships can emerge when a place-making project is on the horizon, and they can fade away once it is implemented. What is less easy is establishing a place-keeping partnership which has longevity and can withstand changes in personnel, funding and political context. This necessarily involves a consideration of factors, particularly relating to the capacity of the partnership, which is discussed in Chapter 5 alongside other challenges for partnerships in place-keeping.



Figure 2.8 Partnerships between different stakeholders are common in place-making and place-keeping.

Funding and place-keeping

Funding is considered to be an important dimension of place-keeping because, as we have already highlighted, place-keeping is not a statutory requirement. Generally speaking, funding for place-keeping mainly comes from the public sector and is delivered at the local authority scale: as a non-statutory service, such funding is often not ring-fenced, meaning that place-keeping can be a precarious activity. Where it exists, public sector funding will be allocated to be spent on services that are a public responsibility for the public good; other public sector funding may be associated with planning agreements. It might also include rental income as well as revenue from parking and organised events (Carmona *et al.*, 2004b). Other public sector funding streams may be available at different scales (e.g. national urban regeneration initiatives such as the Big Cities regeneration programme in the Netherlands — Dekker and van Kempen, 2004). However, they tend to focus on *place-making* rather than place-keeping per se.

The shift from public administration to new public management has led to increasing involvement of the private sector more directly towards the funding of open space and place-keeping activities (above and beyond those services provided by the public sector, in the case of Business Improvement Districts

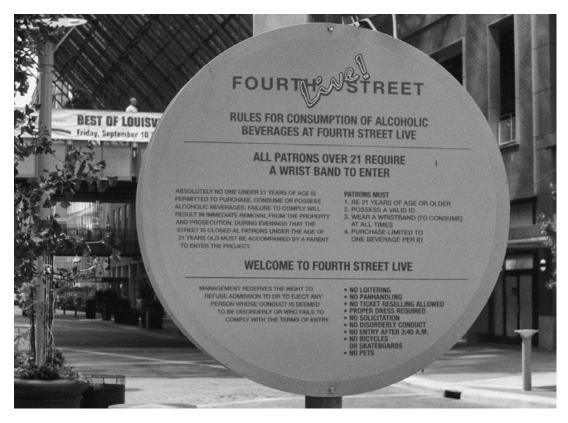


Figure 2.9 Business Improvement Districts, such as this one in Louisville, Kentucky, US, are an example of financial models involving the private sector in place-keeping.

Photo courtesy of Dan Saunders.

(BIDs)) (Figure 2.9). These funding mechanisms are unsurprisingly based on public-private partnerships, such as the BID, Town Centre Management and Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which are all well established. This can reduce the pressure on the public sector to finance large-scale projects alone, although it does bring challenges for all stakeholders involved, as Chapter 6 outlines. Still more funding streams are made available for place-keeping that involves third sector and community organisations, which are more prevalent where the governance model has been adopted in place-keeping. These include endowments, donations, charitable organisation funding and, to a great extent, the contribution made by volunteers. Ideally, secured long-term funding ought to be in place for place-keeping from the outset of a project (i.e. at the place-making stage). In practice, however, this is often not the case and there are many examples where significant funding cuts in public space management detrimentally affected the quality of open spaces (CABE Space, 2006b; Banerjee, 2001) (Figure 2.10 / Colour Plate 3). Chapter 6 examines these issues in more detail.



Figure 2.10
The result of budget cuts in public space can have a detrimental effect on maintenance, and a knock-on effect on levels of use and care, as seen in this heavily littered pond in Sheffield, England.

Design, management and maintenance activities in place-keeping

Where the design of a place relates to the making of high-quality places for people, its management is about maintaining and enhancing its quality to maximise the benefits for users. These activities are highly interrelated and can demonstrate (when considered perhaps somewhat simplistically) the place-making of design and the place-keeping of management. The decisions that a designer makes can have a significant impact on the long-term management processes and subsequent day-to-day maintenance activities. For example, specific features and landscaping may require particular maintenance equipment and expertise – high-pressure water cleaning for natural stone, a range of mowing equipment for grassed amphitheatres, or specialist knowledge for particular planting. A higher level of maintenance may be expected of a civic square with clipped hedges and rows of annual bedding plants than of urban woodland where grass is allowed to grow long and shrubs grow into their natural shape. Where a two-way dialogue takes place between the designer and manager, we suggest that places can be very successful, when considering a long-term approach that is responsive to the original design, and to dynamic change in the landscape (Figure 2.11 / Colour Plate 4). Where this does not occur, standardised management processes may prevail (e.g. gang mowing and high canopy trees) which do not correspond to the original aims of the design but which simplify maintenance activities. Such standard management practices aim to maintain landscape elements of an open space such as grass and shrubs in the same condition (CABE Space, 2006a) and do not reflect how a place may change over time reflecting seasonal use and plant growth (Figure 2.12), which may then change how people use the place. Alternatively, where the design has not



Figure 2.11 When design and management are closely aligned, dynamic change in the landscape can be addressed, demonstrated here in a natural playground in the residential area of Emmen, the Netherlands.



Figure 2.12 When design and management are not aligned, standardised maintenance prevails with little acknowledgement of how the landscape naturally changes, illustrated here in the over-simplified management of vegetation in this supermarket car park.

Photo courtesy of Andrew Burton.

adequately considered long-term management, some elements (e.g. bins, play equipment, seating, water features) may not be fit enough for purpose in terms of robustness, which may be too costly to maintain. Chapter 7 considers the relationship between design, management and how different approaches have impacts for the nature of place-keeping in practice.

Evaluating place-keeping

There are many existing awards, competitions and measures of quality in open, green and public spaces, including the international 'Nations in Bloom' award, the Entente Florale, the international Blue Flag Award for good-quality beaches and marinas and the Nordic Green Space Award for good-quality parks, public and natural spaces. Such award schemes represent good practice in maintaining and managing public space. Other indicators include the measurement of attitudes and satisfaction, the actual provision of services and facilities, community involvement (Carmona *et al.*, 2004b), surveys of public space use, staff retention and skills development (CABE Space, 2010) and evaluation of procurement and contracting-out processes (Barber, 2005). Such evaluation focuses on aspects and factors associated with place-making and place-keeping but does not necessarily measure place-keeping as a holistic and long-term concept per se. As Figure 2.4 highlights, this points to a need for evaluation of both the process and the product of place-keeping.

While many aspects of place-keeping can be measured directly, others are intangible and difficult to evaluate. The quality of landscape, for example, is difficult to measure, partly because of its dynamic nature and close relationship with temporal seasons (Burton and Rymsa-Fitschen, 2008). This is also because such aspects are subjectively assessed on the part of the person experiencing the space (Dempsey, 2008). Benefits experienced in a space as well as user needs may change over time given the changing nature of the space itself, which adds further complexity to evaluating place-keeping (Mielke, 2008). When evaluation takes place, who does the evaluating (Figure 2.13 / Colour Plate 5) and what is the evaluation used for? These are examples of important aspects of the place-keeping process which are discussed in Chapter 8.

Coordinating the dimensions of place-keeping

The preceding sections, and Chapters 3–8, highlight the complexities and the interdependency of the dimensions of place-keeping. It is not possible to look at one dimension without it involving some overlap with others. It therefore is clear that there is a real need to *coordinate* the overlapping dimensions of place-keeping. For example, the day-to-day maintenance of the space will involve various land management techniques, a range of stakeholders and varying levels of available resources; there will also be a need to follow specific regulations and undertake ongoing evaluation. All of these require coordination, which may manifest itself in a long-term public space strategy document or management plan.

The need for a coordinated approach becomes particularly acute as the ownership and management of places become increasingly divorced (Westling et al., 2009; Carmona et al., 2004a). Such coordination should have the underlying aim of ensuring that high-quality place-keeping is delivered by skilled service providers competitively to a high standard that is evaluated regularly.



Figure 2.13 Different users will use and assess the same space differently: the amphitheatre in South Street Park, Sheffield, England, is used for activities such as sitting, chatting, drinking, as well as more active exercise.

It has already been pointed out that public, private and third sectors should be involved in placekeeping to make the most of a wide range of necessary skills, knowledge and resources which would otherwise be missing in a unilateral or bilateral partnership. With this in mind, our discussion throughout the book suggests that effective place-keeping coordination can be achieved when collectively stakeholders have both a strategic and a local focus on long-term quality and efficiency, underpinned by reliable resources with a monitoring process in place. There is also a need for knowledge transfer among and between stakeholders which can help raise the profile of place-keeping. In this way, it is hoped that such an approach to place-keeping can bring about political commitment and real policy change.

Coordinating place-keeping in practice can, however, be difficult. For example, stakeholders often have different underlying interests, varying time commitments and funding streams (Adair et al., 2000). This may undermine the long-term approach required for place-keeping because in practice, there will be an over-emphasis on the capital funds that often accompany place-making which, for accounting reasons,

cannot be allocated against long-term management. These and other challenges for coordinating place-keeping are discussed and explored within the new institutionalist framework in Chapter 9. This framework is introduced below.

An analytical framework for the study and practice of place-keeping

Before we launch into analysing the dimensions in more detail, we suggest that to fully understand placekeeping, it should be examined within a new institutionalist framework. Though this approach emerged in different fields simultaneously and with slightly different perspectives (Hall and Taylor, 1996), these hold in common a focus on the importance of institutions in any social process or phenomenon. Jenkins and Smith (2001) conceptualise institutions as both 'mental models' which underpin the structure of society, economics and politics, and 'organisational forms' which enact such mental models. Based on this focus, new institutionalism promotes partnerships and alliances as forms of local governance with 'government at a distance' (Murdoch and Abram, 1998, p. 41). This provides a view of place-keeping which focuses on the institutions, or structures and mechanisms, which govern the ensuing relationships, process and interactions (Smith et al., 2009; Cohn, 2008; Healey, 1998). It permits a wider understanding of the urban environment by focusing on the physical and non-physical dimensions of space (economic, social, cultural and organisational) and the interrelationships therein (Smith et al., 2009; Carley et al., 2001). In this way, place-making and place-keeping can be described as ongoing processes which comprise physical and non-physical dimensions within a local context (after Madanipour, 1996). It permits consideration of the type of public space, who is involved in place-making and place-keeping processes, and the resources available to them, the ideas underpinning not only the space but the roles, responsibilities and organisational structures of the stakeholders, and the overall process of change occurring concurrently to all this (Smith et al., 2009). There are three kinds of relations that the new institutionalist approach adopts as the basis for analysis, which Smith and Garcia Ferrari (2012) outline drawing on Giddens' (1984) theory of 'structuration' and Healey's (2007) application of this to the analysis of urban planning and development processes, and which we apply to a worked example below.

First, *allocative structures* relate to the way material resources — such as land, funding, human capital and materials — are allocated. Thinking about a regenerated urban river corridor as a worked example, the allocative structures would deal with the river itself, the riverbank, bridges, its value as a source of energy, water, habitat and recreation, and its location in terms of potential urban development. They would also account for the mixed ownership of the land (public and private) in relation to land use, development and the use of the water as well as the potential establishment of new organisations and facilities that emerge as part of the urban regeneration. These resources are generally allocated by the state or the private sector, but as the book will show, in relation to place-keeping, some resources are contingent on meaningful community/third sector involvement in decision-making and action on the ground.

Second, *authoritative structures* are those related to norms, values and other procedures that are relevant at different scales. In relation to regenerated urban river corridors, this may involve working in partnerships with a national governmental body responsible for waterways, regional scale organisations

(e.g. where the river continues to other urban areas downstream and a strategic approach to, say, flooding, is taken). In addition, it will involve city-scale public sector (e.g. with an economically driven vision for regeneration) and private sector developers with their shared norms of long-term investment in infrastructure, which may, for example, be supported by the public sector via policy and legislation changes (e.g. through the adoption of a Business Improvement Model as was the case at Better Bankside along the River Thames, London (Smith *et al.*, 2009)). Authoritative structures have often come under scrutiny for not being inclusive, particularly where economic goals are of primary importance for stakeholders. The book (particularly Chapter 4) will explore how processes of governance are helped and hindered by varying authoritative structures at play across public open space projects.

Finally, systems of meaning, or frames of reference and ideology, are what influence the authoritative and allocative structures and are in turn influenced by them. For urban river corridors, such systems of meaning may relate, for example, to the importance of rivers in city-centre regeneration for locating housing and commercial development. Historically, the dominant system of meaning related to the energy and power generated by rivers, and their role in connecting cities, countries and beyond in terms of trade and industry. For post-industrial cities, where pollution led cities to essentially turn their backs on rivers as other forms of transport and energy were exploited, there are multiple systems of meaning. For example, urban rivers are now not only considered as desirable residential locations, but also as spaces for recreation, reflection and escape from urban life, for humans and non-humans. It relates to connecting people back with urban rivers, for social and ecological reasons as well as the principal driver which is often economic.

In simpler terms, these types of relations can be formulated as resources, norms and ideas (Madanipour, 1996). A similar approach has been developed to analyse policy-making and governance related to forests and other natural resources. Van Tatenhove *et al.*'s (2000) Policy Arrangement Model (PAM) identifies four dimensions: actors and their coalitions, division of resources among actors, rules of the game and current policy discourses (Konijnendijk, 2011).

Place-keeping aligns well with the new institutionalist framework as it accounts for the complexities of change in the urban landscape, the variety in scale where the different dimensions of place-keeping occur (as will become apparent throughout the book) and the importance of local context when considering allocative and authoritative structures alongside systems of meaning. We do not apply the new institutionalist framework in a mechanistic way throughout the book, to avoid repetition and permit a more fluid reading of the chapters which are focused on each different and overlapping dimension of place-keeping. In the concluding chapter, the new institutionalist framework is applied to place-keeping as a holistic concept when considering the coordination of the dimensions, to provide an analysis of its overarching complexity through an examination of the findings presented in Chapters 3–8, starting with policy — which is the subject of the next chapter.