Joint management of parks in Johannesburg?
The case of James and Ethel Gray Park

Fortunate Ratau,
Linda Phakati,
Omphemetse Masilo
& Claire Bénit-Gbaffou

Research report for the course ARPL 3023 – Politics, Governance and the City,
School of Architecture and Planning, Wits 2015

08 March 2018
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by
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Report finalized on 08 March 2018
Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Councillor of Ward 74, Jack Cooper; the James and Ethel Gray park manager, Raymond Makananise; and the chairpersons of local organisations: Peter Campbell, from the Birdhaven Ratepayers Association, John Brick from the Melrose North Association, and Markus Scheuermaier from iHlathi Conservancy, as well as the other Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo officials who accepted to answer our question.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of CUBES, the Planning Programme and the School of Architecture at Wits, as well as the NRF project “Practices of the State in Urban Governance”.
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Introduction

“This is my dream park!” This is what we thought when we first set foot in James and Ethel Gray park during our class site visit. We had never been to James and Ethel Grey and never imagined there was such beauty in our city. Our lecturer could not resist our enthusiasm and allocated the study of the park to our team. What made it unique, was the conjunction of nature and the City. Set up on a hill, overlooking Johannesburg CBD, and providing a profusion of trees and natural green spaces, it really looked like a space where one can breathe, reflect, pause from hectic city life and embrace life.

Locating the park

The park occupies 36 hectares, which makes it a medium sized park in Johannesburg – it is earmarked by Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo as an “events facility” able to host events of medium size (500 to 1000 people) – comparable to Joubert or Rhodes Park.

The park is bordered by the affluent suburbs of Melrose North, Birdhaven and Abbotsford. The main entrance to the park is on Edgewood Avenue, and can be accessed through the M1. As much as this may enhance metropolitan accessibility, it is also a liability for the park, as it actually cuts the park in two sections, and creates a ‘border vacuum’ effect (Jacobs 2061) – cul-de-sacs in the park limiting its potential uses and the natural ‘social control’ through multiple uses that social activities surrounding a park would provide (see figure 1).

Figure 1 - Locating James and Ethel Gray: surrounding suburbs

Authors: Ratau, Masilo & Phakathi 2015
Actually the whole M1 highway is bordered by a string of open spaces (golf courses, parks), as well as a river (spruit) that limits possibilities for land development. But what this means for these parks is that a very strong impermeable border is created by the immediate vicinity of the highway.

The park is popular in the neighbourhood, welcoming for dog walkers, children, joggers, cyclists. It is also hosting medium-sized events for which the natural beauty and accessibility of the site provide enjoyable amenities.

**Figure 2 - Different spaces within James and Ethel Gray Park (N)**

Source: After Googlemap, 2017.

In the northern section of the park, one can distinguish between different sections, often ringed by see-through metal fences (**Figure 2**). The bulk of the public park is constituted by a hill, rising from the spruit to the suburbs of Birdhaven and Melrose. This topography gives the park its identity, as it grants an overview over the city.

At the centre of the park one finds a bird sanctuary (which pre-existed the park), crossed by the spruit and nesting a small lake (the Melrose Dam), that is home to an assortment of local birds. A registered conservancy, Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy (iHlathi), plays an active role in its protection and management.
Another enclave is the commercial activity of Acrobranch, a set of outdoor activities recently developed in the park along the M1.

A third enclave in the Pikitup depot (Figure 3), located south of the park border along Melrose Street. Pikitup is Johannesburg’s waste management service provider, with a responsibility of keeping the city clean. The Pikitup depot in James and Ethel Gray Park, also called “the garden site”, concerns itself with the collection of waste materials such as paper, glass, cans and plastics and garden waste. The depot is separated from the park by a concrete fence.

Figure 3 - The Melrose Garden Pikitup depot
© Ratau, Melrose, 2015
The Southern/Eastern part of the park could not be studied systematically due to time constraints: we did not have time to fully investigate the several sections that make the park, also crossed by a river. Different enclaves also mark its landscape – offices of municipal entities such as Johannesburg City parks and Zoo, and Joburg Water; as well as the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee.

This section of the park (Figure 4) is bordered in the North/East by the highway, in the North by an electric generator in its southern parts by these various office enclaves, and on its Eastern portion by the suburb of Abbotsford. Although possibly an asset for this suburb, the park’s configuration already makes it less amenable to livery and diverse community uses.

Figure 4 - James and Ethel Gray South

Source: After Google maps 2017.

Research question and methodology

The objective of this report is to analyse the interaction between different stakeholders of the park and the implication of this interaction on park management, in the case of the James and Ethel Gray Park. It does so by looking in particular at challenges of the commercialization of the park through events, upkeep and maintenance, issues of homelessness and ‘illegal’ recycling and the broader concern of the safety of the everyday park user. This is achieved by unpacking the contextual background and a narrative of events and the role played by different stakeholders in shaping park management.

One initial element that intrigued us was the absence of a Friends of the Park (FoP) structure, bringing all residents and park users together to manage the park and engage with the City, and we were curious to analyse the kinds of the interactions that exist between stakeholders as a result of this absence.
The report is based on a number of data collection techniques. This includes the analysis of documents and literature, interviews with key informants, as well as direct observation through field visits, attendance to meetings held by various stakeholders, and participation in events held on the site. Documents included policy documentation, newspaper reports, minutes from resident’s association meeting and residents associations’ website analysis. Five stakeholders were interviewed this included chairpersons’ of residents associations, non-profit organizations, a ward councillor and City parks officials. We were also lucky to be invited by the ward councillor to attend a meeting between the ward councillor and City Parks’ officials, on the 14 August 2015, at the Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo offices, to discuss the organisation of an event in the park. In attendance at this meeting were representatives from the Central Gauteng Association, the Ward 74 councillor and a City Parks official. This provided important insights into the relationship between park user groups and the City, in practice.

Six interviews were conducted. The interviewee’s included: Jack Cooper, who is the ward council elect; Peter Campbell and John Brick, chairs of the two main residents associations involved in the park management: Birdhaven Rate Payers Association and Melrose North Association respectively; Markus Sheuermaier, the founder of a NGO associated to the park iHlathi Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy; Richard Makananise who is the park manager for this park, and a City park official who was part of the events organisation team.

**Figure 5 - Reflections on fieldwork – conducting interviews**

On the 25 August 2015, our group had a meeting set up with John Brick (Melrose North Ratepayers Association representative), Peter Campbell (Birdhaven Resident Association representative), together with our lecturer Claire Benit-Gbaffou. This meeting was organized for us by Claire and transport to it was organized, which to a large extend misrepresented what fieldwork was. On this day I believed that fieldwork was as easy as setting an appointment and pitching, I was in for a big surprise, in terms of the interviews that followed after this! The meeting was generally not what I expected. We interviewed two elderly men well beyond the age of seventy.

This to me initially meant interviewing males who grew up in apartheid South Africa, so I was a bit scared and doubtful we would be able to communicate. To my surprise the interview went well, and was very insightful. The atmosphere was also very relaxed with a few jokes being cracked. Although one of them tended to ramble, it was expected of men their age, and we learnt a great deal from their experience that they seemed to be eager to transmit. “As an old man, I am in the wrong generation to facilitate change; and as a white man I am the race in the wrong time to make a change, but you are the perfect person to move our country forward”, one of them said. I genuinely felt that he was interested with our research and our learning, and this was a great life lesson to me.

**Figure 6 – What we learnt though this research**

**Fortunate:**

I had always viewed parks from a design perspective: whether it complies with the Town Planning Scheme, does it create that “sense of place”? Can people safely go to the park? Etc etc. To an extend I understood that the Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo had that responsibility. Never had I considered that these green patches within the City would interest their surrounding areas to a point where committees such as the friends of the parks would be formed. I have discovered that these urban parks
have a hierarchy; some are considered the flagships of the city and therefore get more attention than others.

Now when I see a park, am immediately challenged with the question why. I question everything from, why does the park have a fence and where? The fence for protection against whom? What caused these concerns, this need to be realized? When and by whom was the solution initiated? Now I am more interrogative and at the back of mind I know that there is no one straight correct response to these questions.

To explain the experience I learnt from James and Ethel Gray Park, I will use the Jazz on the Lake festival as an analogy. When I arrived at the jazz festival on the day, the park had transformed: it was different from what I knew, it was made much prettier and involved a lot of happy people singing and dancing. But as I looked at the people enjoying themselves, all I could think of was the politics it took for this day to actually be realized, the meetings and the arguments that went into making this day a reality. And I told myself: all the people who are here have no idea; for all they know this park has festivals every weekend. Just as I felt the first time I saw this park: the perfect place in the city. I have learnt that politics are everywhere. I learnt that politics are not exclusive to the obvious: to the beauty of the park and its enjoyment. This study has, however, ruined my park experiences, because I will forever be at school, doing research, when I walk into a park!!

Linda:

Research is not as easy as it seems. When you research, you need to have the ability to extract information very well, guided by your research objectives and aims; you need to have a critical mind and ask questions that will make it easy for your interviewee to provide the information. This may seem easy to do, but believe me, it’s not easy, especially if you are interviewing a community member who is frustrated and has a lot to say about the government and about South Africa. Sometimes it needs you to be straightforward with the person you are interviewing, sometimes you need to remain humble and silent: it is not always easy to find the right balance. The great thing about research is that you always find new information from different stakeholders, that sometimes conflicts with what you thought you knew. That will require you to go back to the drawing board and restructure some elements of your research so as to accommodate the thickness of your information. In our research we were exposed to lots of information – residents associations were keen to share their knowledge and views, and we also had blogs and interviews as our sources of information. This made our group struggle a bit, but we ended up pulling through.

Research is very important tool for learning I even feel that it supersedes all the methods of learning because unlike reading a book in research you engage with theory practically. You get to meet different people and hear their views directly. In this way you learn a lot more and this becomes information that you will own in your mind, something that you will never forget. I feel that all students in various study disciplines must be exposed to research from early years of tertiary that would make education more fun. I used to see things in life with the lens of my own eyes, and I really did not acknowledge the fact that there are always two sides to the story. I used to be biased. Through this research, I have really understood the importance of looking at more than one perspective, because this gives you a proper standpoint: it makes you to be able to select your options wisely. This research allowed me to know how it feels like to be in someone else’s shoes. I was also inspired by some of the people I met, especially Markus Scheuermaier, who works a very good job but still takes time to get involved in community activities. I was not only inspired about the ideas that he had for the community and the conservancy, but I was also inspired by his deep interest of wanting to make a difference in a society that he lives in.

The students’ report was then edited and complemented by the course facilitator, Prof Claire Benit-Gbaffou. She circulated the edited report to relevant stakeholders, to give them opportunities to give feedback and suggest additions and amendments.

During this process, the current chairperson of the Birdhaven Ratepayers Association, Mr Brad Serebro, raised concerns, which were taken into account in the final version of this report. Unfortunately, due to his lack of availability for a full interview to complement aspects of this report he thought were incomplete, some of these concerns could not be fully addressed here. Ongoing research on this park carried by CUBES might assist in complementing this first report.

Figure 7 – On privilege, biases and positions

The current chairperson of the residents association raised concerns that the report was biased against the residents’ associations, and that it could therefore potentially damage their reputation and fundraising activities. We looked together carefully at the phrasing, spotted one occurrence where a term characterising the position of the residents association had indeed a pejorative connotation, and I agreed to replace it by a more neutral term. But the chairperson still felt aggrieved by the report, and this made me reflect on my own position, and attempt to make it more explicit.

My position in facilitating this collective research with students, presenting this research to City Parks officials, circulating the report to residents associations (and offering to workshop the findings with them), is one of creating a space for engagement. I believe, based on researching this topic for several years in a multiplicity of sites, that there are many misconceptions and prejudice on both sides of the relationship (amongst officials and amongst middle-class residents), that are only partly dissipated through on the ground, everyday work. These misconceptions, grounded in a broader history of class and race division, structural distrust between state and society, and overarching incapacity for the state to sufficiently invest in parks, become destructive in the absence of sufficient resource and institutions to set up and maintain spaces of engagement and partnerships. The reports attempt to identify these misconceptions, prejudice and miscommunications, to make the engagement progress. Its point is not to point fingers at individuals or groups nor to make accusations, but rather to show each party what their own objective position, interests, and assumptions are, and how they possibly are read by the other side. I believe it is as useful as it may be upsetting. Perhaps it may only be useful to the extent it is a bit upsetting.

One of the topics that emerged in the conversation with the chairperson, was the question of privilege. “How dare you depict us as a privileged community?”, he asked. “And how could students be frightened to meet with us, what did they expect?”. I was surprised by his surprise. I tried to explain, “of course you are privileged, so am I! Of course Black students not familiar with your suburb would be intimidated and expecting rejection and racism. But they were genuine, in talking to their own prejudice, and how it evolved through interaction.” I then re-told the story of their awe and marvel when coming to the park for the first time (as narrated in introduction) – both a saddening and a beautiful story, demonstrating that the city’s resources and assets are still not enjoyed by a majority. I hope this story makes the readers reflect both on existing inequalities and privilege, and on possibilities for the future.

Source: Claire Benit-Gbaffou, fieldwork diary, December 2017.
Chapter 1 - Who Manages the Park?

As most parks in Johannesburg, James and Ethel Gray park is not solely managed by the municipality through its agency, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo. A number of local associations are involved, in various capacity, in the everyday management of the park. Our key initial question was – why is there not a dedicated park user group structure, as might be the case elsewhere? To answer this question we looked for which organisations existed around the park and tried to unpack how they were involved in the park management. We also looked for the local state officials involved in the management of the park and their relationship with these organisations, as far as the park management was concerned.

1.1. The park’s management in historical perspective: from private to private management?

The park before 2007 was just a piece of land, having grass and trees along with a bird sanctuary with no landscape. It was named, in April 1965, James and Ethel Gray park, in honour of the Mayor at the time, James Gray and his wife Ethel, a prestigious writer who wrote on the discovery of gold and the history of Johannesburg (MNRA, 2015).

The development of James and Ethel Gray was helped by the construction of Melrose Arch in the year 2007, as the promoter used the left over material and off cast dirt, to develop the park (Campbell, 2015).

“The developers of Melrose Arch Amdec, a privately-owned property development and Investment Company, used to dump rubbles in the northern western edge of the park which later shaped the landscape of the park. They injected 5 million to upgrade the park, build fences around the main parking lot, bird sanctuary and to rejuvenate the spruit.” (Peter Campbell, Melrose North Residents Association Chair, 2015)

The management of the park was handled by Amdec: they used to hire people to clean the park, cut or trim trees and cut the grass, and they were assisted by Birdhaven Rate payers association and Melrose Residents association to identify maintenance issues around the park (Campbell, 2015).

According to Campbell, when the resources and funds of the developers, Amdec, were exhausted, it was then decided that the management of the park be handed over to the City Parks, this was in the year 2008. Since then, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo deals with the parks management – cut grass and trim trees, and to approve or disapprove events may be held on park grounds. Nonetheless, residents associations continually complain about the lack of capacity of the City to manage the park:

“Since the park was given to City parks they have not done anything dramatic, they just cut the grass that all they do [...] There haven’t been any attempts to maintain the bird sanctuary, an important element of the James and Ethel Gray Park, and its water is extremely polluted, it not been properly drained and flushed out. The trees are not cut properly all the things that happen around normal maintenance of parks around the world do not happen here. Because the
councillors earn too much money and they do not have money to pay maintenance things” (Residents association chair, 2015).

Hence, since 2008, neighbouring residents associations decided to participate in the management of the parks by constantly reporting maintenance issues immediately and by taking other matters in their own hands and attempting to engage with the City regularly.

“We took it upon ourselves to assist where we possibly can, to keep the park in a good state by reporting all maintenance issues by writing letters immediately to City Parks but the problem with that is that they respond to these maintenance issues when it suits them. […] We get involved in the management when there are major problems. For instance we have recently put in speed humps in the road. If Council say they do not have money and they cannot do it, we need things to speed up, we pay for it. We even planted a lot of trees in the park.” (Campbell 2015)

Although expressed in a bitter and disillusioned way, these quotes seem to indicate the realisation that City Parks have limited resources and the need for residents to take part in the management, maintenance and development of the park.

In this section of the report, we look at the involvement of the main surrounding civil society organisations in the management of the park: two residents associations – Birdhaven Rate Payers Association (BRA), Melrose North Residence Association (MNRA), and one NGO, the iHlathi Melrose-Birdhaven conservancy –.

1.2. One major actor involved in the park - Birdhaven Ratepayers Association (BRA)

BRA is a community organization formed by Birdhaven residents who come together to address issues of the area and act as a voice for their community. The BRA has a committee of 10 members, including the ward 74 DA Councillor Jack Cooper (at the time of the research). Each member covers a specific task from maintenance to fundraising, security and community mobilisation (Figure 8).
BRA association uses its website page: http://birdhavenrpa.co.za to communicate with the residents. The website usually shows latest community news, upcoming events in the area, latest committee meeting minutes and instructions on how to join the association. This on-line presentation of the committee members, with their full names, functions and contact details, is seldom so complete, and indicates a great accessibility of the association’s members. Similarly, the availability of meeting minutes (from end 2013 to end 2014\(^1\)), displayed an openness and transparency that is not common amongst residents’ associations.

Below is the portion of the minutes taken from the committee meeting held on the 14 of October 2015. Point 9 of their agenda touched on James and Ethel Gray and this is what they had to say:

**Figure 9 - Extract from BRA minutes, 14.10.2015**

9.1 James & Ethel Gray Park [Melrose Arch]

- Lucy Graham to have flyers printed requesting patrons to clean up their dog waste. Lucy Graham also to purchase rolls of plastic bags to distribute to dog walkers to place dog waste into

- Vagrants / Recyclers. David Molokela [Chairman of Facilities] not responding to Peter Campbell mails. Have moved for now.

- Events in the Park and suburb: Too many events in the park. Whip Pro event on 20 Sept not according to promises. Sound started at 06h30. Unacceptable.

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\(^1\) Unfortunately this effort does not seem to have been sustained in the last three years, as the recent minutes of meetings are not available online (to the disappointment of the researcher!). The Association however publishes newsletters and blogs (http://birdhavenrpa.co.za/, accessed January 2018).
Have a contract / form for events stipulating what Birdhaven’s conditions are

- Mike Kletz – commercial development of Park. Peter Campbell distributed map of the proposed development.
  Meeting with Peter Campbell, Mike Kletz and Brad Serebro on 14 October

Source: Communicated by BRPA chairperson, October 2015.

These minutes highlight some of the functions of the BRA with respect to the park: proactive educators of the community (flyers and distribution of plastic bags to dog-walkers); watchdogs over commercial developments and public events that might affect the nature and quality of the park; and (more or less efficient) brokers with the municipality in terms of reporting issues affecting the park (with here the complex issue, not elaborated upon in the minutes, of the homeless users of the park – see below). It is also interesting that the BRA suggested to frame a contract or a set of rules or agreed norms for the organisation of public events in the park – an issue that is central in the tension between City Parks and residents association, but where limited formal negotiations have taken place.

The association started to get involved on the management of the park around 2007, where they worked with developers of Melrose Arch, Amdec, to galvanize support to manage the park. When the park was handed over to the City, in 2008, the association increased its involvement in the management of the park.

“Our association’s involvement in park management has been to directly report issues of maintenance to City Parks and to help wherever we can in maintaining the spirit of the park” (Campbell, 2015).

Any issue that they encounter in the park they make sure that they report it immediately to the park manager, Raymond Makanise. This is what the park manager had to say about the association

“Unlike in other parks, the community of Birdhaven understands that the maintenance of the park is not for the City alone but for everyone. What I like about them is that they take ownership of the park and that helps me a lot as a park manager since I handle 16 parks in total […]. The BRA has been very helpful to us as City Parks, whenever there is a problem around the park they help us address it very quick, they even go to the extent of taking money out of their pockets to assist us where resources are needed – for instance the cutting grass equipment was broken and the association helped us get new equipment ” (Park manager, 2015)

The BRA association gets its funding through Birdhaven residents. Residents pay the annual subscription fee for the year. This fee consists of R550 for houses and R55 for flats and apartment. The subscription fee is said to help BRA to address challenges on behalf of the residents such as by-law enforcement, encroachment and improvement and improvement to the suburb (www.birdhavenrpa.co.za). The members’ contributions, and fundraising efforts of BRA, have meant they were able to invest significant amounts every year in the maintenance and repair of the park:

“I use my own time to raise money. Do you want to know how much we have in the bank, is that what you want to know? [...] This year [2017] we have R154,000 in the bank. This year, we spent, er…, at least R45000-R49000 for repair of pathway, fence, tree cutter damages the fence, repairing
damaged bollards, things like that. In 2015, obviously I can’t remember precisely, I think we at least spent R25,000–30,000 in the park maintenance”.

“We are able to fundraise, besides members’ individual contributions. Corporates are about to give a large sum of money, and with this major funding, we will be able to do a major revamp of the park, including fencing the whole park, you know there is such a security issue there.”

This important contribution tends to be invisible, although it represents a huge resource for the park and mobilisation efforts of residents. Communicating about money and finance is always a difficult issue (beyond this specific park and association) – from residents associations as well as from public institutions. One could argue that a specific structure to manage the park, where both city officials and park user groups could share existing resources and strategise collectively around their uses and fundraising efforts, would lead both to a better recognition of residents’ and users’ contribution and effort, and better coordination and publicity around the use of these resources.

1.3. Melrose North Residents Association

According to the Chairman’s report issued at Melrose Newsletter to All residents of Melrose North on the 28th of October 2015, Melrose North Residents Association (MNRA) is an organization consisting of volunteering community members who are the “voice of the suburb” when the City makes decision affecting the residents (Figure 10).

Figure 10 – Self-portrait of Melrose North Residents Association

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why a Melrose North Residents’ Association?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a nutshell:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. To be a voice for the suburb when City Council makes decisions affecting us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. To ensure that our suburb remains primarily residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. To deal with municipal issues, such as traffic congestion, potholes, street lights and traffic lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. To object to rezoning and any other serious issues affecting our suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an example, it was with the help of MNRA that MBCap was started in our area and security has improved significantly.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.mnra.co.za

Its manifesto depicts an association mostly interested in preserving the neighbourhood as it is, preventing densification and fixing and maintaining the area’s services and assets. The creation of
a dedicated security company for the area (MBCap) shows a level of organisation, commitment and financial resources for the organisation.

**Figure 11 - MNRA executive committee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meet your MNRA committee:</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairman: John Brick</td>
<td><a href="mailto:john@mnra.co.za">john@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretariat: Lou Abrams</td>
<td><a href="mailto:louis@mnra.co.za">louis@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer: Bruce Bernstein</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bruce@mnra.co.za">bruce@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Members: Selwyn Gershmann</td>
<td><a href="mailto:selwyn@mnra.co.za">selwyn@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee member: Nat Blumberg</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nat@mnra.co.za">nat@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee member: Seymour Chertkow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:seymour@mnra.co.za">seymour@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee member: Anne Dunn</td>
<td><a href="mailto:anne@mnra.co.za">anne@mnra.co.za</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [www.mnra.co.za](http://www.mnra.co.za)

The structure shows a smaller executive committee than Birdhaven association’s, with less specialised functions; but an equivalent commitment to accessibility of its members.

MNRA is financially supported by its residents. To become a member, the annual contribution is at R100 per person in complexes of 30 or more; and R200 per household in freestanding homes.

“The funds are used for communication costs, such as maintaining the web site, and professional costs, such as town planners, traffic engineers etc., and general administration costs. We have not at this stage had to spend any funds on services which are really the responsibility of municipality, such as road repairs/improvements, park maintenance.”

It is not clear whether the organisation contributes to MBCap, or has only participated in its setting up (and then it is paid directly by individual households).

Melrose North borders directly onto the park - and Birdhaven does the same, although across the road, on another boundary. Traffic problems are similar, but roads leading to the park, such as Kernick Avenue and Westwood Avenue, go through Melrose North whereas Edgewood Avenue runs alongside the park. Noise problems are similar but the area of Melrose North which shares a common boundary with the park is perhaps more directly affected.

**Figure 12 – Street networks around James and Ethel Gray Park**
Hence, according to John Bricks, the chairperson of Melrose North Residents Association, the association takes part in the decision making that may affect the park in any way.

“The management of the park is done by the Council and neither Birdhaven nor Melrose North has the right to instruct people who work in the park. […] In the earlier days after the park was altered by Melrose Arch, we had a committee with equal representation but now Birdhaven has taken the lead. As far as the relationship between Birdhaven and MNRA is concerned, we are two separate organizations who work together on common interests.” (Bricks 2015)

MNRA seems to somehow take a back seat in the community management of the park, trusting in Birdhaven Ratepayers Association to fight for the two neighbourhood's common interests. This would tend to show that as far as the two residents associations are concerned, there are limited differences of views as far as the park is concerned – unlike other areas where different user groups may have diverging or different interests, necessitating the development of a common platform (Friends of the Park or Forum) where these differences are debates and compromises are sought.
1.4. The iHlathi Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy

iHlathi\(^2\) Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy is a voluntary association which is interested in the environmental management of the Birdhaven and Melrose areas. It is registered with the National Association of Conservancies, and is aimed at developing “a green corridor between the urban nodes of Rosebank and Melrose Arch”\(^3\).

The conservancy began in December 2014 and was founded by Markus Scheuermaier, a resident from Birdhaven, an economist at World Bank by profession, and he is also part of the Birdhaven Rate Payers association.

“As you may know there are lot of development pressures in the area, coming from Melrose Arch and Rosebank especially since the development of the Gautrain station, and I thought that the environmental aspect is not taken into account. After a few years in the residents association, I came up with the idea of a conservancy” (Scheuermaier, 2015)

Scheuermaier added that a lot of trees are cut down when there is a development and the developers don’t even bother planting these trees back. One of the aims of the conservancy, according to Scheuermaier, is to bring back environmental awareness in the Melrose area and to a large extent Johannesburg at large, since there are a lot of developments.

According to Scheuermaier, iHlathi conservancy is like a residents’ association focused on the preservation of the environment, aimed at preserving the trees and enhancing the Birdhaven and Melrose North areas. This is what Markus had to say when we asked him to tell us what iHlathi Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy is:

“It is not an entity which manages anything in itself, but it represents the interest of the residents, and in this case its four different suburbs that are covered by the conservancy: Melrose; Melrose estate; Melrose North; and Birdhaven and of course James and Ethel Gray Park” (Scheuermaier, 2015)

\(^2\) iHlathi meaning “the bush/ the forest” in isiZulu.

\(^3\) Rosebank Killarney Gazette, “Urban conservancy to be established”, 5 June 2015.
The steering committee reflect that broad ranging ambition, with a mix of residents associations and other representatives (such as the ward councillor, and the Community Policing Forum), and environmental experts (including representatives of the Endangered wildlife trust). It is a way of mobilising the resource of environmental experts joint with a networking and fundraising capacity and grounding in the local community.

**Figure 14 – iHlathi steering committee members, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steering Committee - elected members:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Markus Scheuermaier, Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Seoras Graham, Vice-Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Michael Inglesby, Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emily Taylor, representing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endangered Wildlife Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Brett McDougall, representing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannesburg Heritage Foundation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steering Committee - ex-officio members:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Lewis Neuburger, Melrose Residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Jack Cooper, Ward Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Greg Rooom, Birdhaven Ratepayers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Duncan Barker, Norwood Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- John Brick, Melrose North Residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Paul Fairall and Marian Laserson, two environmental experts, have confirmed their interest in providing technical advice.

Source: Document provided by Scheuermaier 2015.
One of its broader aims is to develop a greener corridor between the urban nodes of Rosebank and Melrose Arch (Scheuermaier, 2015). Suggested areas of focus include the RH Henderson Park, the James and Ethel Gray Park, the Sandspruit Stream and the Wetland association. The conservancy has been involved initiatives that deal with planting of trees and maintaining the parking by picking up litter.

“The whole idea of the conservancy was to make sure to preserve the tree canopy we have and obviously to enhance the area – this means working towards maintaining the public area by planting trees. From planting trees it has fairly been successful since we planted something like 450 trees in the park including on opposite roads”. (Scheuermaier, 2015)

The iHlathi Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy assists the park by developing environmental initiatives and approach sponsors to assist in any way they can. According to Scheuermaier, this has proven to be a success and has bought about a sense of community participation in the Birdhaven and Melrose area.

“All the parks in Johannesburg suffer from some form of neglect, and this maybe because Johannesburg is a large area and there are just too many parks to manage. Public institutions are not able to maintain the parks by themselves hence they needs some form of partnership with the residents associations or private entities to make sure the park are well managed.” (Scheuermaier, 2015)

“The whole idea is not for us, the conservancy, to do it ourselves but to galvanize support. For instance on Oxford road we got trees through the Gautrain, the Rosebank Management District payed for the planting. So the role of the conservancy is to galvanize support more”. (Scheuermaier, 2015)

This initiative, a green corridor between the urban nodes of Rosebank and Melrose Arch, is also fully supported by Ward 74 DA councillor Jack Cooper:

“The establishment of the Conservancy is very much in the interests of the residents, and is an assurance to future generations that there will always be green spaces in a fast developing concrete environment. Likewise, the same applies to the Gardens Conservancy in Norwood, which is also in the process of formation” (Cooper, 2015)

Some of the main initiatives were the planting of 25 indigenous trees close to the Rosebank urban node, to replace those cut by the Gautrain construction works. This entailed engaging with City Parks (Business Management Unit and Regional Manager), who

“express[ed] [their] gratitude and highlight[ed] the importance of such partnership initiatives that promote and assist us to bridge the gaps that we are unable to address due to budget constraints” (extract, letter from City Parks to iHlathi, 17 Sept 2014).

The greening of the corridor is still ongoing, with iHlathi approaching Melrose Arch and Gautrain to fund and support the initiative.
Another initiative was the organisation of a cleaning and planting event in the James and Ethel Gray Park. On the 20\textsuperscript{th} of September 2015, the Conservancy motivated Skin, Body & Health Renewal, a private company, to sponsor an event around tree planting and litter and illegal dumping in the James and Ethel Gray Park. With the support of Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, the ward 74 DA councillor Jack Cooper, Pikitup, Birdhaven Rate Payers Association, Melrose Birdhaven Community Active Protection (MBcap) and iHlathi, the Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy. This initiative managed to pick up more than 200 bags of litter and to plant approximately 55 trees in different areas of the park.

Figure 15 – James and Ethel Gray Spring Clean-up Day September 2015
© Source: www.skinrenewal.co.za/

This form of mobilisation seems quite exceptional, bringing together environmental experts, fundraisers, community members and representatives of the state.

1.5. Dedicated and grounded local state representatives

We were able to meet two local officials (the ward councillor and the park manager) who seemed quite involved in the management of the park and the mediation between the residents associations mentioned above, and City institutions. For both, we were struck by the grounded and pragmatic nature of their work.

\textit{Ward 74 councillor – a committed spokesperson for the community}

“Maintenance is a problem in that the park is not adequately maintained, this is rather upsetting to the residents because they pay their rates and taxes and therefore expect worthy services.”

(Cooper, 2015)

The councillor, a DA representative who used to work as a lawyer, introduced himself as a humanist who believed in solving issues more than dealing with party politics. Whilst critical of the (ANC led) City, echoing the complaints of his constituencies, he was also deeply understanding of the municipal and urban challenges that Johannesburg was faced with, in a post-apartheid context. He has been involved in politics since university, where he conducted legal studies, and was part of the National Union of Students. Opposed to the apartheid regime, he joined the Democratic Party so as to be part of the movement that opposed the regime at the time (Mcetywa 2016).

As a councillor, he viewed his role as a problem-solver, and being an intermediary between residents and the City Council, that he himself found difficult to navigate. For instance, we he
got very involved in the issue of events organisation in the park, a key point of contention between the residents associations and City parks. Councillors are supposed to be invited to the JOC (Joint Operation Committee) meetings that grant authorisation for events organising – but few councillors actually attend those meetings. Not only did Councillor Cooper attend the JOC meetings, but he would sit together with City parks events management and the events’ organiser, to prepare for the JOC meeting, bring up residents’ concerns and find mitigation measures to respond to these concerns. In this way, he acted both as the spokesperson for the community, and as an insider in the City apparatus, bringing his knowledge of procedures and legislation to shape a way forward.

A second example of his intervention as far as park management is concerned, is around the issue of the management of homelessness in the park (see below, chapter 3). Whilst he duly echoed and represented residents’ calls for eviction of the homeless by the JMPD, he also was pragmatic and experienced enough to understand that eviction does not work, even if repeated. He attempted to look for alternative solutions (engaging with homeless people and Pikitup to mitigate the littering and develop forms of management and coexistence in the park). In this case he was neither following the DA or the City or City Parks’ official line, nor strictly reflecting his constituencies’ preferred or usual approaches, but as trying to develop an innovative solution to fix an issue locally – this was quite impressive to us (even though he did not succeed, and did not stand again for elections in 2016).

**JCPZ parks manager – acknowledging the contribution of residents associations**

Raymond Makananise is a park manager from City Parks who manages 16 parks in the region, James and Ethel Gray included, from Killarney up until Alexandra. He has been managing James and Ethel Gray Park for about 7 years now he has been working in City Parks since 2002.

> “Out of all the parks I am managing James and Ethel Gray is the biggest, busiest and most demanding park, that’s why I am always stationed here. Unlike many parks we maintain James and Ethel Gray five days a week, Monday to Friday. There is a team of three guys who are always stationed in this park full time, 20 days a month. These other parks I maintain them 3 days a week - Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays. I have to make sure that the staff is there in the park on a daily basis. We cut grass, trim trees and pick up litter, including dog poo, around the park. We have to make sure that the park is clean all the time. I sometimes put my overall’s and go do field work myself because we are really short staffed and especially in peak season like summer were grass is growing fast and people are always using the park” (Makananise, 2015)

One of the biggest challenges in City Parks is that they are understaffed and this contributes to inefficiency when it comes to maintaining the park.

> “We are short staffed at City Parks: I have 19 staff members assisting me in all 16 parks I manage, in that 19 only 3 are stationed full time at James and Ethel Gray. A park that is about 32 hectares and I only have three guys who are permanently stationed here. […] The park is 100% well managed, I try my level best to make sure that this park is top. But we might be incompetent due to budget constraints.” (Makananise, 2015)
The local park manager unambiguously acknowledges that City Parks services are not adequate to the park, but is realistic about the resource constraints City Parks works under – that do not seem to be about to change soon.

In this respect, the working relationship with residents association is not always easy. As we could witness ourselves, associations tend to complain a lot about what ‘the City’ does not do, whilst at the same time developing innovative responses to its resource shortage. Although the park manager did not complain about the organisations, we could feel it was not always desirable to be in the position of representing the City (and City parks) when interacting with residents organisation – the target of complaints on which he has little scope for action; the bearer of bad news when the City is not acting on maintenance issues reported to him by the residents. How many times did we not hear things like, “I reported the water leaks a week ago, I am still waiting for the City [to react / to intervene / to respond].” The Park manager only remarked humbly, “sometimes it is tough to work with these people, because they want results now”.

However, what dominated his interview with us was the expression of appreciation towards the residents associations and the assistance they provide in the management of the park:

“Birdhaven Ratepayers Association helps us a lot; Brad Serebro [from the BRA] is playing a big part. Last time we experienced a problem whereby a tree fell over the fence and he assisted by raising funds to fix the fence. Now we busy trying to fix all goods that were damaged in the Jazz on the Lake event and the association is helping a lot. Even if some of our playground equipment is broken and we have ran out of funds, they make sure they raise the money and help us fix or get new equipment.” (Makananise, 2015).

It is interesting to see that the park manager appears on the same side as the residents’ associations when it comes to the local damage public events might generate in parks – contrasting some of City Parks’ official discourses on public events (see below). This is testimony to the grounded and practical nature of the park manager’s work – and a degree of unity of City parks grounded official and local associations towards the maintenance of the local park.

1.6. Conclusion

Our interviews started with stakeholders bitterly complaining about the state, councillors and City parks. The remarks that lack of funding for parks maintenance derived from officials earning too big salaries surprised us in this respect – rather than framing City Parks’ lack of budget in the light of the city’s inequalities and the marginality of parks in urban developmental challenges that Johannesburg is facing. This statement might come from a degree of exasperation in the relationship with officials. James and Ethel Gray is situated in a fairly well-off suburb and one can argue that City Parks fails to meet the standard that residents seek.

However, it was interesting in contrast, and after a while, to see residents association assisting the park manager where they possibly can for the betterment of James and Ethel Gray Park. Speaking to Markus Scheuermiaer made highlighted how other citizens do not merely seat and blame the city but they stand up and do things themselves. It was inspiring to us to see Markus Scheuermiaer galvanizing support to start initiative such as the spring clean-up with Skin, Body
and Health; Pikitup. It was also encouraging to see BRA and MNRA mobilise to address issues like litter and illegal dumping in the park. This reflects taking initiative for the greater good because people often blame government but they themselves do not do anything.

**Figure 16 – Who manages the park? Emerging stakeholders map**

![Stakeholder Map](image)

Why do these organisations not feel the need to establish a dedicated, park user group structure (otherwise known as Friends of the Park)? It seems the existence of strong and organised residents associations would make such a park user group superfluous. The fact that visions seem fairly consistent between the three groups, that both residents associations participate in the Conservancy, shows a level of existing trust and regular social links. Perhaps having strong residents associations able to fund raise on broader issues than the park facilitates fundraising that indirectly benefit the park (more than a dedicated Friends of the park structure could do); the Conservancy being broader than the community park can also leverage corporate support on a broader scale than if it was solely focusing on the park.

Moreover, we hypothesise at this stage that having relatively strong and committed local leadership in the person of the ward councillor, and a pragmatic park manager appreciating the contribution that residents associations make, help this loose structure being functional. It could be hypothethised that the local councillor takes up leadership when it comes to engaging and negotiating with City Parks officials, not requiring a specific champion from civil society to emerge to fight and follow up on specific park related issues.
Chapter 2 - Everyday management of the park – main challenges and ways of overcoming them

As previously addressed in the section of who manages the park, each stakeholder has a role to play in the everyday management of the park. Although some not on a day to day basis they are indirectly involved only in discussion through asking city parks to do certain things. City Park manager Makananise is the full time hands on person who coordinates the management of the park. However, the issues of cleaning the park are not restricted to the city. This chapter analyses the level of maintenance within the park and the extent to which it is cleaned.

2.1. Fixing the park’s infrastructure

“After a R5 million upgrade organized by Melrose Arch this park does look the part, however, consistency and regular maintenance checks are necessary in order to keep the park in excellent condition” (Brick, 2015)

The park, although beautifully looking as we experienced first-hand, presents a number of maintenance challenges, in particular due to its topography and its soil condition. Issues mentioned by BRA and MNRA are as follows: there are weeds growing between pavements, trees that have fallen over in the park, and there are holes in the ground in the middle of the pathways.

![Figure 17 - Brick paved paths destroyed by storm water damage](image)

© Ratau, 2015
Particular challenges relate to the history and the making of the hills in the park: rubble material are not particularly stable or consistent, and tend to be marked by the development of sinkholes.

“As can be imagined, the re-contouring was basically a dumping of excavated material, including rocks of all sizes, and uneven settlement and sinkholes happened. This was not attended to with any degree of urgency or expertise. In fact in one area, a sinkhole developed about 1,5m x 1,5m x 1,5m in size and the brick paved path over it disappeared in the hole. It took taken many months to get it filled in, and the results were to say the least, unsatisfactory.

No effort was made to maintain the brick paved paths and they have deteriorated. When trees died, they were allowed to stand until they fell, and even then, unless they fell on fences or over paths, roads etc. they were not attended to. When fences were damaged, it took months before they were repaired. There was an instance where there was a wash away due to storm water damage, which destroyed brick paved paths, and up to fairly recently, I saw no effort to rectify the situation or even restore the paths. In short, there is no maintenance apart from a lick and a promise, and this has been exacerbated by the Council’s policy to let out the park for rental to various functions which can introduce all sorts of undesirable results, for instance broken glass and bottles, which are not immediately attended to” (Brick, email to Claire Benit-Gbaffou, 2015).

Park users and their associations regularly walking and inspecting the park allow for tracking such issues, with a level of frustrations as the maintenance issues reported often cannot be fixed by City Parks. It is this frustration that is expressed in the above mentioned quote – particularly around the vexed issue of public events organization by higher level officials in City Parks (see below), which do not seem to take into account the park (and the hill)’s specific fragility.

To these challenges one may add the presence of homeless people groups in sections of the park (mainly around the Pikitup depot along Melrose street), contributing to litter and a sense of decay of the park, as alluded to by iHlathi Conservancy director:

“Some areas in the park are in a fairly dire state - Beata took us to the spruit at the lower end (by Atholl-Oaklands), where the recyclers seem to now has settled. The whole area is covered in litter, and seems to be getting worse by the week, according to Beata. City Parks continues to damage all the trees with their brush-cutters - according to James, who prunes some of the trees out of his own accord, even mature ones are in danger of toppling over in due course.

Regarding the park’s upkeep, two main solutions may be possible: one is to fence off the entire park, with specific entrances - one would, however, need to take into account the pedestrian
traffic flows, the park being a thoroughfare from Birnam into our areas. And the other would be
to have dedicated ‘park rangers’ to help with vagrants, litter, maintenance, etc.” (Scheuermaier,
email to BRA, following a meeting on park issues, 2015)

Notwithstanding the dissatisfaction expressed in this quote, Scheuermaier is moving from
complaints to solutions.

This is also what transpires in the BRA leadership’s position:

“We [in BRA] certainly understand City’s budgetary constraints. Parks should be privatised, quite
honestly. They are lower down on the priority list, as there are no books in school, and many
more pressing things we are facing. It is an immature approach to complain about City parks
when you look at the bigger picture. We fully understand the resource allocation issue. Raymond
Makananise, did you talk to him? He is managing 19 guys for 6-7 parks, with no budget. We
would not be supporting this park if we did not think that, if we weren’t realistic to the city’s
budgetary constraints. We understand their constraints, and on this basis we work very well with
Raymond, we’ve established a working relationship with several officials in City Parks.” (Serebro,
personal conversation, December 2017)

In practice, civil society organisations contribute a lot (through their time, attention and fund-
raising) to the actual management of the park: keeping an eye, patrolling, reporting, following up
and contributing funding to solve the issues. This contribution is often not fully recognised by
the municipality, beyond the park manager who has direct exposure to these efforts. Perhaps
such a contribution is also not visible enough (presented, accounted, recorded in an archive, etc).
In parallel, it is also surprising that this contribution is still sometimes made with a resentful tone
against the municipality (“no efforts were made”) – as if not taking stock of the municipality’s
financial inability to keep the park to the desired standard. Such frustration crystallises in
particular around the organisation of public events by City Parks – seeming to contribute to
damaging the park but not to its maintenance. This will be the object of chapter 3 below.

2.2. Cleaning the park

Cleaning refers to the cleanly upkeep of the park, the removal of litter, and emptying of the trash
cans. JCPZ has a service cycle for all parks in the city, which indicates that flagship parks are to
be serviced once a week. These services include the cutting of the grass, maintaining trees,
removing litter and the likes. However, the Park manager seemed to indicate that J&E Gray had
an everyday service (except on weekends), with 3 City parks staff present on site every day.

“There are people employed by the City to pick up this litter and to empty the trash cans on a daily
basis, except on weekends. Pikitup also assists in removing some of this litter.” (Makananise, 2015).

Might this increased level of service be the consequence of the strong and committed
involvement of residents associations? In our experience, at the James and Ethel Gray Park, it
was clean and had no dirt or litter lying around, except for the section behind the Pikitup depot
and the area next to the ablutions where we spotted a few homeless men sleeping.

Residents also occasionally contribute on a voluntary and ad hoc basis to the clean-up of the
park. Besides organised clean-up campaigns, some take the initiative of collecting litter during
their daily walk. One resident for instance walks through the park daily with her dog, and explains that many times she would leave the park with a full bag of litter.

The issue of cleaning arises in two ways: around areas occupied by groups of homeless people, and after some public events. After an event, the event holder is supposed to be held responsible for the cleanliness of the area. For instance after the jazz festival, the organizers had to make sure they leave the park spotless. This is however, not always the case; as the citations below stipulate:

“The City 2 City event was a disaster, it was not like the other years… They left this park filthy, they parked everywhere people where in their cars playing loud music while barbequing and that is against park regulations. This event was too big and took over the park with people driving in among the trees” (Campbell, 2015).

“Before an event takes place I make sure that the park is clean and after you hold the event I come back to check if it is clean. If it is not, we don’t refund the people because we cleaned for you. That was the case with the city 2 city event. They did not get their refund” (Makananise, 2015).

“I think it [Jazz on the Lake] was a big failure because they mostly have 5000-8000 people at Zoo Lake, but only 2000 people came this year due to poor planning. The parking and security was done properly and the park was left spotless after the event” (Campbell, 2015).

“The Jazz on the Lake organizers made it a point to leave the park clean after the event. I did not have to clean after them when the event was done, so they received their deposit back” (Makananise, 2015).

“After the event, the Jazz festival people left the park neat and tidy, although the big vehicles that carried the equipment or the stage drove through the park and damaged the grass” (Brick, 2015).

It is very ironic that the one event that followed what could be described as protocol for events organisation (City 2 city race) did not follow through on issues of cleanliness. The one that raised eyebrows (Jazz on the Lake) was at the end the one to leave satisfactory results. This might have been as the result of residents’ very vocal mobilisation against the event being imposed without them being consulted. It is interesting to observe that whether City Parks consult on time or not, not everyone will adhere to the regulations and not all planned results will be achieved; when residents are mobilised and play a watchdog role, sometimes even aggressive, events’ organisers might feel more pressure to clean up after the event. But it might also solely depend on events’ organisers and their degree of organisation and consciousness - take down after the event seems to depend mostly on the event organisers, not City Parks.

2.3. **Building a safe park**

Overall we had a good sense of safety in James and Ethel Gray park. Compared to other parks under study in our group, there were not a high level of security incidents reported, and safety issues did not feature prominently in resident groups’ mobilisation and concern. This might be due to the fact that the park is extremely well used by surrounding middle class communities, exerting forms of natural surveillance (Jacobs 1961) at least on the northern and eastern fringes of the park.
On the southern boundary, to some extent the privatization of the park through Acrobranch secures a section of it. But where the park was less safe and gave a sense of decay and lack of maintenance is in the “border vacuum” mentioned earlier – along the M1 and the depot that are constituting “dead space” in terms of social interaction.

Beyond the social uses of the park providing natural surveillance, we looked at two elements for managing safety in the park: security services provision, and the use of fencing in the park. The issue of homelessness, that contributes to residents perceptions of insecurity (perhaps more than to actual crime) will be presented in the next section.

**Public and Private Security Provision**

In theory security services are offered by the state through a number of agencies: in the form of park rangers employed by City parks (whose mandate is theoretically to check park uses); of the metro police, JMPD (whose mandate is to prevent by-law infringements in particular); and of SAPS (the national police focusing on combatting and preventing crime). In practice, park rangers and JMPD patrols have a crime deterring effect. Park rangers often work in conjunction with the metro police. Their number however is extremely limited for the whole metropolitan area.

“There are limited park rangers from the City that need to patrol all the Parks within the City Parks jurisdiction and they are not nearly enough. [But] the park is safe; we also have private security from the residents associations that often patrols the park. […] We try to do a good job, but we are really lacking in capacity. The residents associations really are helpful as they help us fill these gaps such as security. For me, I really do not see this as a problem. They show ownership and initiative, which makes working with them less difficulty. You scratch my back, I scratch yours, you see.” (Makananise, 2015)
“In Birdhaven for instance the residence pay a fee towards the upkeep of the suburbs, that includes an amount for private security which we have asked to patrol the park. [However,], the City never wanted to formalize the private security provision in the park, because there are dedicated park rangers allocated to the parks by the City” (Campbell, 2015)

Here, residents association’s contribution is direct, and through their contributions they have tasked their neighbourhood private security company to include the park in their security rounds. This arrangement however fails to be recognised officially by the City, although unofficially integrated into the daily management of the park by park officials. It was not possible in this research to clarify the reasons why this security partnership could not be officially acknowledged: perhaps here the absence of a Friends of the Park type of structure, with a clear and formal partnership agreement with the City, leads to the persistence of informal arrangements and limits possibilities of recognition.

**Various types of fences around the park**

James and Ethel Gray Park is generally a quite accessible park: fencing around the park is generally discrete and symbolic, creating porous rather than impermeable boundaries and allowing people to get in and out the park from a variety of points. We have created a typology to this effect:

**Figure 20 - Fences around James and Ethel Gray Park.**
Permeable or porous boundaries can be found in the South western part of the park, close to Birdhaven.

**Figure 21 - Typology of fences around the park: visuals**

![Typology of fences around the park: visuals](image)

a) Permeable border

b) Semi-permeable border

c) Impermeable border

Source: Googlemap accessed 2015.

The Bird Sanctuary however is fenced off by an impermeable border, except towards the South and the Pikitup depot, where homeless people are gathering.

The presence of homeless people in the park is perceived by many residents as both causing environmental damage (through littering in particular), and as a security threat, as manifest in this letter addressed to the councillor by one resident:

“One only has to walk through the park to see the dirty state it is in. […] There are countless litter dumps hidden in-between long grass and littered into the stream running across the park by those..."
claiming to be re-cyclists [sic]. Many homeless people stay here; one even threatened me with a
brick. Some of the homeless people attack people, you can't go there alone.” (Resident’s email to
the ward councillor, 2013)

The presence of homeless people in parks (and especially in sections of the park that are “border
vacuum”, that are less used and crossed by pedestrian) is not unique to James and Ethel Gray
park. A structural social problem that goes beyond parks, and talks more broadly to the absence
of affordable housing in Johannesburg in general and in suburban contexts in particular,
homelessness raises for us issues that are less of crime and safety than of collective management
of the park.

2.4. The issue of homelessness in James and Ethel Gray Park

“There are full time homeless people based next to the ablutions. Some even see that part of the
park be considered as a security hazard for the residents.” (Makananise, 2015).

“The issue of homelessness raises many concerns of safety and cleanliness of the park. Throughout
the years several attempts have been made by JMPD in collaboration with the SAPS and Metro
Police to remove the homeless from the park; however they seem to find their way back to the
park, this has been a problem since I was elected in 2011” (Ward councillor’s blog, 2015)

During our site visit with park Manager Raymond Makananise, he explained that there were in
fact two groups of homeless people, located in various sections of the park. One group was
located in the section of the park south of the M1. These were a regular group of people
employed in various petty jobs (car guard, car wash) in the neighbouring suburbs. The second
group was located north of the M1, next to the Pikitup depot, and were living from recycling
waste. They were living in the Bird sanctuary where some had even built make shift shelters.

Figure 22 - The impact of recyclers living around Pikitup depot

© Bénit-Gbaffou, James and Ethel Gray Park, 2015
Councillor Jack Cooper recalls the history of the settling of the recyclers in the bird sanctuary. He explained\(^4\) that a group of recyclers were staying on the pavement along Melrose street, next to the Pikitup depot as the core of their livelihoods. Attempts to evict them through the metro police failed and an irate resident finally resorted to dump bricks on the pavement so as to physically prevent recyclers to remain there. This drove the recyclers to move into the park and the bird sanctuary rather than remaining on the park border. This led to even greater concerns as the recyclers’ presence then directly caused damage to the environment (some residents reported that they had started hunting and eating birds).

“This was so counter-productive. It is a lose-lose situation. You can’t just do things because you are annoyed, and take the law into your own hands!” (Clr Cooper, 2015)

During the course of our fieldwork, various initiatives to deal with the homelessness issue in the park were mentioned by different stakeholders.

**Fencing, a counter-productive strategy?**

For the groups committed to protect the environment, this development is clearly threatening the concept of a “sanctuary” – and the idea of fencing as a form of protection is discussed:

“Regarding the park's upkeep, two main solutions may be possible: (i) one is to fence off the entire park, with specific entrances - one would, however, need to take into account the pedestrian traffic flows, the park being a thoroughfare from Birnam into our areas.' (ii) The other one would be to have dedicated 'park rangers' to help with vagrants, litter, maintenance, etc.” (Scheuermaier, email to stakeholders, 2015)

Fencing has however many limitations – the first one being its contradiction with the general principle of a public park, and the pragmatic idea of developing a variety of pedestrian thoroughfares throughout the park to increase social natural surveillance. The notion of access control in a park such as James and Ethel Gray (with its numerous porous boundaries that make it such a community asset and a welcoming public space), might also be limited practically. And fencing has also proved its limits, as stated by the same local activist:

“The fence that borders the conservancy instead of being a source of protection for the residents, is now protecting the homeless who now reside in there” (Scheuermeir, 2015).

During our fieldwork it was mentioned that stakeholders considered using environmental legislation to compel the City to take measures to permanently evict the homeless from the sanctuary. However, eviction strategies have been attempted for many years and in many parks without much success.

**Repeated and failed attempts at eviction**

Calling the metro police to evict the homeless was done on a regular basis, by residents associations, councillor and park manager alike. However, these “blitzes” were notoriously inefficient, besides being a rather brutal way of dealing with the issue. Homeless people evicted

\(^4\) We were unable to double check this information but found the councillor’s narrative compelling and worth reporting nevertheless.
on one day were back a short period after the intervention – testimony to the structural nature of the issue of homelessness (the need to be close to livelihoods present in the suburbs, the absence of affordable accommodation, the issue of transport costs for the working poor).

The councillor’s blog testifies to this inefficiency:

![Councillor’s Blog](image)

**Figure 23 - Councillor’s blog on “Vagrants”**

Like in many other parts and issues of by-law infringements in the city, relying on by-law enforcements to regulate deep structural social issues as serious limitations. Residents’ call for more regular and permanent blitzes are somehow unrealistic given the resource constraints of the City, but also impractical as one cannot rely on police repression to deal with deep social issues that are obviously going to re-emerge constantly.

The park manager echoes this feeling, where he advised us that not only was this intervention absolutely inefficient, but he was also feeling it was inhumane. How can one just take the people from the park and “dump them in Alex, like human waste”, he said, referring in particular to the homeless people staying south of the M1.

“Some time back we used to take them and throw them in Soweto, or in the Vaal. Yes, we used to do that. You take them there, they are back tomorrow. Now the City has said no, even JMPD don’t have the right to arrest them. We don’t want to chase them. Where are you going to take them? We don’t know how they are going to survive. We leave them as long as they keep the place where they stay, clean.”

He was keenly aware that most of them were poor workers not earning sufficiently to pay the transport back home:
“One guy is staying next to the Depot. He’s got a family, kids and wife in Tembisa. He stays from Monday to Thursday, goes back home on Fridays. He is working here, as a recycler.”

Engaging with the homeless and accommodating their activities – pragmatic responses

It was illuminating to hear the initiatives developed by the park manager on the one hand, and the ward councillor on the other, to try and find practical responses to such structural and permanent issues.

The park manager explained that he had been able to engage with the group of homeless people residing South of the M1, next to the ablution facilities. This was a relatively stable group, he said. He was able to negotiate with them: they could use the park as a shelter during the night, and even make use of City Parks’ ablution facilities; but they would need to vacate the park during the day and also clean up their waste every morning. For this he even regularly provided waste bags so that homeless people could collect the litter.

“We no longer call them ‘vagrants’, it is homeless people. Actually it is not a real issue. We give them plastic bags, and they clean. Some are cooperative, others are not. The ones who live on this side of the park [south east], I give them jobs to do. I don’t want to see litter in the area, they must look to it. That is also why I’ve decided they must come and use the ablutions facilities at City Parks, otherwise they release themselves in the river, and you’ll find all the things in the park in the morning. I’d rather have them keep everything clean.”

This informal arrangement worked well, but was fragile, and often disrupted by JMPD eviction drives that would not be coordinated with his own efforts.

For the recyclers however, the park manager explained his efforts had not been successful so far. He described the group staying next to Pikitup as more difficult to approach, perhaps more scared, and possibly more divided into rival factions:

“There are 6 to 7 shacks there. Even babies live there. Most of the people living here are recyclers. They collect the refuse from the neighbourhood, go out in the morning, collect, come back in the afternoon. They push their trolley, they walk to Alex and sell the waste. But I can’t get in. People are scared to go there. There are new people all the time, there seems to be two competing groups. We normally do a clean-up every Wednesday. I call JMPD, SAPS, social workers, we clean, but after two days it is a mess again. We are not winning this battle.”

(Makananse, 2015).

The councillor also narrated a few initiatives he had taken in response to the failure of the eviction approach to solve the issue. Describing himself as a “humanist” and a “pragmatist”, he mentioned his attempts to liaise with Pikitup so that they develop a sorting area for the recyclers in or next to the Pikitup depot. This, he believed, would allow for a degree of management of the recycling activities and possibly limit the littering and disorder in the sanctuary. Unfortunately the councillor’s attempts did not succeed: he mentioned the inertia of Pikitup in this respect; that

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5 A local NGO, Skeemsam, chaired by a local resident, has since engaged with the recyclers and is supporting their business activities in exchange for them keeping the park clean and contributing to its management. This initiative is the object of further, current research (2018).
was difficult for him to overcome especially given the reluctance of local residents associations to this type of solution.

“I convinced Pikitup that they should develop a small recycling site next to their depot, and try and formalise the recyclers, or workers, whatever you want to call them. The recyclers will want to stay next to their material and store it. But now people in the Birdhaven Committee were vigorously opposed to it. They wanted to do an environmental expertise to show the recyclers’ presence is affecting the birds’ life. As a councillor I was now in a complex position. It is a mainly a white suburbs, nobody wants ... [these people]. But you have to look at the overall picture. And the issue is not getting solved, year after year.”

Residents associations still hoped to use environmental legislation to solve the homeless issue in the park and in the sanctuary, in spite of the inefficiency of this approach for many years.

What was interesting for us in these narratives was that pragmatic approaches were developed that were alternative to eviction, and trying to find ways to both protect the park as a park, and to deal with homelessness as a deep social issue.
Chapter 3 - Events management as a symptom of miscommunication between City Parks and park users

The organisation of events in the park is a major challenge for the James and Ethel Gray Park local stakeholders. Although it might appear as a petty and minute issue, it is at the core of huge tensions between Johannesburg City parks and Zoo, and residents associations in particular.

“Birdhaven residents and the Birdhaven Residents Association (BRA) have expressed their serious concern to me about the commodification of the James and Ethel Gray Park and that each event results in damage to the park and extensive refuse and waste left behind, including in most cases glass which can cause serious injury, particularly to children who play in the park. I share the concerns of the residents. Functions and events are not recommended as they undermine the use of the park.” (Cooper, 2015).

3.1. An ongoing issue – the case of the 2013 Colour Festival

Events’ management challenges are not a new phenomenon, they have been an ongoing issue. According to councillor Jack Cooper’s blog, challenges dated as far back as 2012 have been logged. The Color Festival for under 18’s was to be held at James and Ethel Gray Park on the 31st August 2013.

Below are the snapshots of the conversations that took place prior to the occurrence of the event (excerpts from Cooper’s blog):

“I have received an announcement that there will be an under 18 event at the Park on Saturday 31st August starting at 12 noon and ending at 22h00. Entrance will be on North Road and exit on Edgewood Avenue. There will be a stage at the parking area and music will be directed towards the motorway. There certainly has been no prior consultation or even notice. This will most certainly impact on Thrushton Place and on Laura Lane as they are adjacent to the area to be used and no doubt bear the brunt of the “Music” played. People in North Avenue, Westwood Avenue and Edgeware place will most certainly experience considerably more traffic, parking etc., than normal” (Brick, 2013)

“I must admit that I am somewhat disturbed at the thought of a festival being held in the James and Ethel Gray Park, in particular as the planning for such a festival has never been discussed with the Birdhaven Ratepayers’ Association Committee, so that our views could be expressed well before the holding of the event. My questions are; who gave the organisers permission to hold the event? Are they paying for the use of the facility? Who is going to ensure that the Park is returned to the residents in a spotlessly clean condition? “(Campbell, 2013)

“Do we think it is possible that they got permission from City Parks, in which case are City Parks not obligated to refer to the affected RPO’s for permission and also to pay something for the use of our streets as parking, our security, which will be required etc. [...] Has anyone called the organizers [...] to ask who gave permission etc If not, Peter could you? What are our rights here?” (Dodo, 2013)
The councillor was quite active in relaying the residents’ concerns to City Parks as well as the events’ organiser’s office. At a certain stage, the councillor was told that the event had been cancelled by City Parks, due to lack of consultation of the community (and the councillor in particular). In this instance City Parks did not follow due process, and the mobilisation of residents (including a threat for litigation) led to them being heard:

“My huge concern is that City Parks gave them permission without even referring it to us, Vava Tulwana [the regional stakeholders liaison officer in City Parks] seems to be a new person on the Parks management”. (Cooper, 2013)

“My concerns need to be addressed, in that there will apparently be no traffic control, and I have had no reply on how the sound direction will be controlled to minimize its effect on residents adjoining the park. I would also like to know how the movement of at least two thousand cars along Kernick Avenue, Westwood Avenue, and North Street between ten and eleven at night would be managed” (Brick, 2013)

“We are also faced with some residents in Edgeware who are lawyers considering an urgent interdict to stop the event. It is amazing how much extra work is created when due process is not followed. Joburg Parks are much to blame.” (Campbell, 2013)

Finally, a direct negotiation between local residents (via the ward councillor) and the events’ organiser, led to workable compromises, to the point the event could take place to the satisfaction of all. Indeed, the events’ organiser acknowledged the residents’ concerns for noise, traffic, damage, and security, and did provide a detailed description of the nature of the event and planning to respond to the issues raised by the residents associations.

**Figure 24 - Correspondence re the Colour Festival for under 18's held at James & Ethel Gray park on 31st August 2013 – Events organiser to Ward 74 Councillor Cooper**

Good Evening councillor and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your time today and the constructive suggestions that you had on offer. It was a breath of fresh air working together instead of only seeing one side of the issue.

As discussed on site, Eyethu will adhere to the following procedures.

- The sound bleed to either side of the stage and behind the stage, will be interrupted by 24mx3m banners acting as wings. Although this wont block or muffle the sound completely, I do think it is the only solution we have at this late stage.
- At 20h00, the sound / music will be turned down as per the Environmental Health Noise Exemption
- At 22h00, the music will be shut off
- Edgewood Street will be a soft closure (road interference). I this afternoon launched the JRA application to have road interference (see attached image indicating the access control points)
- We will have drop off points marked A,B,C,D “where the parents drop off, is were the parents pick up.
- No pass out system, means you cannot leave the events area unless the parents have arrived
- Perimeter checks on the outside of the fence line will be patrolled
- I again will speak to JMPD to ensure sector patrols are being made to assist with traffic flow and illegal parking

I had a lengthy conversation with the organisers today, and last week in Durban they had the same event and by 20h30 the kids were dying down, some had called their parents to come and collect them by then. I’m hoping this is
the same on Saturday and from my lips to God's ears, we'll be done by 21h00..... Here's hoping... Councillor, would it be possible to receive a letter of your support for the event, I will be at JOC on Thursday again, and would like to include the letter in my files. Look forward to hearing from you, and again thank you for your time and considerable help.

Thanks,
Lee

The communication gap around events organisation, between the City and the event’s organiser on the one hand, and local residents on the other, is blatant. More than a principled opposition to events in the park, what transpires here as the key point of frustration and anger, is the lack of consultation with local stakeholders, who indeed have developed a sense of ownership of the park due to their involvement in its management. Consultation here has both a symbolic and practical dimension: it is about acknowledging local residents as an affected party by any event organised in the park; and it is about finding concrete mitigating solutions to the nuisance created by the event in the park.

3.2. Same people, same issue - the case of the 2015 Jazz fest at J&E Gray

One could have thought that this 2013 experience of the concrete conflict resolution – where the events, initially opposed to by residents, was finally accepted provided mitigation measures were put in place- would set up the path for a smoother process of events organisation in the park. However, at the time of our fieldwork, this was a more sensitive and conflict-ridden issue as ever – as if no lessons had been learnt.

On the 6th of September 2015, James and Ethel Gray hosted a jazz festival event. This event was organized by the Johannesburg Arts Alive International Festival, an event presented and managed by an entity of the City of Johannesburg, the Johannesburg City Theatre (JCT). This event hosted approximately 2000 people and had reserved most parts of the Athol Oaklands road connecting the park and Melrose North.

Generally the event is organized in Zoo Lake, as in its previous editions. This time the organizers were late in applying and therefore Zoo Lake had been booked for another event. City Parks apparently earmarked J and E Gray at the last minute, and residents were told also very close to the event, five days prior to the event to be more exact.

“I am also concerned that notice for these events is often not given timeously and that many of these events cause damage to the environment and damage trees and structures in the parks. The BRA would like to meet with you to discuss the process in which permissions are given. The Park cannot become a cheap destination venue and the BRA has advised me that it will take appropriate legal steps to protect the area and the rights of the residents” (Councillor’s email to City Parks, 22.04.2015)
3.3. Different visions of legitimate park uses and purposes?

Markus Scheuermaier, from the Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy (iHlathi), notes in an email to the councillor that:

“The Melrose Residents Association (MRA) objects to the use of RH Henderson Park and James and Ethel Gray Park for commercial purposes, such as events, concerts, parking etc. From past experience, these events not only create waste and noise, but they also tend to damage the parks in the long-term. In this regard, it should be noted that the MRA, along with the BRA, and the Melrose-Birdhaven Conservancy (iHlathi) are undertaking a tree-planting exercise in both James & Ethel Gray Park and RH Henderson Parks, supported by City Parks and Zoo - if events go ahead in either park, these barely-rooted trees would be at significant risk of being irretrievably damaged (Scheuermaier, interview 2015).

City Parks takes a different stance in this regard. According to a statement by a stakeholder from City Parks:

“James and Ethel Gray Park is a difficult park to deal with because the residents have a sense of ownership towards the park, they don’t seem to understand that the public park is open to all South Africans” (City Park official, 2015)
A sense of ownership of the park by surrounding communities is however also an asset, as expressed by the park manager – it is this sense of ownership that motivates them to actively participate in the upkeep and development of the park:

“James and Ethel Gray Park residents taking ownership of their park is a good thing. In the park in Alexandra for instance you replace something today, it’s gone tomorrow because the people have no form of ownership or entitlement to the park, so they don’t care about it, because it belongs to the city and city parks must come and fix it” (Makananise, 2015).

Peter Campbell, from the Birdhaven Rate Payers Association, reflects both an understanding of the public-ness of the park, and a sense of ownership:

“We are not difficult about it, we understand that these are public parks but this park is actively used by residents every week which makes it impossible for residents to use it if there are constant events within it. We need also to understand that this is a recreational area for people around these suburbs. We don’t want anything that will encroach on the tranquillity of our suburb” (Campbell, 2015)

Brad Serebro, also from the BRA, confirms that events potentially create damage to the park itself but also to the neighbourhood.

“We don’t feel we have dominion over the park, we might have emotional attachment, we know we’ll never stop events. The BRA is not opposed to events but it needs to be balanced with numbers, parking is the biggest issue. Secondly the damage issue. Thirdly the safety issue. Then there is the noise issue. Please interview the new chairman of Melrose North association: he has a hotel opposite to the park, the events affect his business. He just needs that music after 6 pm and the use of alcohol are avoided in the park. (Serebro, personal conversation, December 2017).

The one point that reads vividly is that events, from park user groups’ perspective, are not a welcome practice within the park for three types of reasons. The major issue raised by the users organizations are firstly, noise and disturbance to surrounding communities; secondly litter and damage to the park; thirdly the lack of availability of the park for community uses.

At first sight (and this is City parks’ dominant understanding of the conflict), contestations arise within the park are largely because of differences in understandings on what actually ought to happen within the park. John Brick (2015) proposed that “The way forward from here is to ask what the purpose of this park is.” City Parks’ official discourse is, “it is not for local residents to decide which events can take place in a park: a park is a public space”.

Our own experience gives meaning to the City Parks vision. In spite of being acutely aware of the issues and the politics around the organisation of the Jazz festival, we could not but thoroughly enjoy the event in James and Ethel Gray – as young people, as people not familiar with the park, as a way of discovering this part of the city that we would not have gone to (was it not for the research project, and here the public event). To us these public events are also important in the post-apartheid city, to make urban parks known beyond the neighbourhood level, and expand park experience to social groups that have not enjoyed direct access to these assets.

Figure 26– Our own experience of the Jazz Fest at James & Ethel Gray
Sunday 6 December 2015. This was a beautiful day, the park was transformed into a space completely different from what I know James and Ethel Gray Park to be, the quiet escape from the city bustle.

The park took on an interesting form of the bustle. Firstly the park was unrecognizable, there was a huge dome like stage on the oval and a crowd that surrounded it. There were bouncers directing us into the park, which made me immediately feel like this was a safe area. The people who attended the event were what I could describe as sophisticated because as some enjoyed and danced loudly to the music, some enjoyed their picnicking, and a number of them approached the litter bins to dispose their cups.

This was an event to remember, a day of good music (not unbearably loud we thought), and good company at the James and Ethel Gray Park. Going back home was also easy because we came in a bus; therefore we just went back to our bus and drove home. There were free buses organized by the jazz fest to collect people around Johannesburg, which allowed a variety of people to enjoy the event and the park.

Notes from fieldwork (Ratau 2015)

However, our understanding of the disarray created for surrounding communities opened our eyes to the fact public events in parks do create genuine nuisance for the community – that would need to be acknowledged without jeopardizing the possibility for public events in parks. For the surrounding communities, having an event in the park meant that no dog walking, no jogging, no picnics and no relaxing in the park on that day. To the neighbouring businessman it meant no business for an entire day due to the inaccessible roads. To the house bordering the park, it meant waking up in the early mornings due to loud music. To the City it meant profitable gains.

“Does the park exist for the benefit of the communities or for the commercialization of the city’s parks?” (Campbell, 2015)

“This is not to say that the City has a purely commercial motive, I mean the park needs to generate some income, considering that parks are at the bottom of the list when coming to the distribution of government funding.” (Scheuermaier, 2015).

Given the fact that residents associations are involved in fundraising and spending on the management of the park, and are fully aware of City Parks chronic lack of budget, there is space for understanding that events are a legitimate way of looking for funding for parks management. The issue might lie in the fact that the money generated by the event is not spent directly into the
park, nor even resourcing City Parks to expand its own resources. Events’ organisers are required to leave a deposit to City parks to fix the damage that might possibly occur during the event (or clean up the area if not done by the events’ organiser), but there is no financial contribution to the park beyond this.

More broadly, the issue is not about choosing between different visions (park as community spaces or as public spaces; parks as about the quiet enjoyment of nature or as hosting outdoors cultural events), but understanding that parks are multi-functional and multi-dimensional. They are both inserted within local communities that are direct and key stakeholders, and directly affected by everything that happens in the park (needing to be recognised as such, and all the more they are committed and invested in the park’s management); and public spaces for the enjoyment of a broader public that should be safeguarded and made accessible beyond the neighbourhood.

It is also clear that City Parks does not properly engage residents and park user groups, or their representatives, about events in the park – neither demonstrating an ability to plan, manage and control these events, nor working towards better partnerships with local communities to make sure the events do not damage the park or disproportionately disturb the neighbourhood.

“Sometimes we receive an email, on the Monday, there is an event for Saturday; the Health and Safety report or whatever this is called has already been approved. City parks tells us, let us meet tomorrow at 10.00... Timing is a big issue. We don’t even know! Event organisers misrepresent the nature of the event, even City Parks is surprised. The other day the events’ organisers said they would be games for the kids, face painting and so on, there was nothing of the sort.” (Serebro, personal conversation, December 2017).

3.4. Better Practice? The City to City race 2015

Yet, there are also instances where communication is smoother and compromises can be found between event’s organizers (supported by City parks) and residents association. The City-to-City race organized in 2015 seems to provide such an example, at least in the initial stages we had the opportunity to witness.

The City-to-City race takes place from Pretoria to Johannesburg, a 50km race. This race began in 1903 and in the spirit of maintaining this heritage, it was to be held on heritage day every year. For the year 2015, this event was scheduled to start at the Centurion Gautrain Station and end at James & Ethel Gray Park, Melrose – it was not the first time J&E hosts this event.

It is fair to say that this event, perhaps because of its regularity over the years, had followed the required protocol before it occurred. Meetings were held with the councillor and the involved parties were informed well in advance before its occurrence. In parallel (or perhaps in preparation for) the JOC process (that is not depending on City parks), meetings were organised between the events’ organisers, City Parks official and the councillor as representative of residents associations. The first meeting was held at City Parks’ offices on the 15-10-2015, and a second one at James at Ethel Gray Park on the 24-10-2015, to discuss in detail where and how everything would turn out. During the meeting attended to introduce this project, there seemed to be clear dialogue and participation, with a balance in representation.
Present in the first meeting were representative for the residents Peter Campbell (Birdhaven), Jack Cooper (Councillor), Moses Madlala (City Parks), Mandla Gadebe & Katlego Mabe (Central Gauteng Athletics CGA) and us, the students from Wits doing research. This was a formal meeting setup, which took place in a boardroom at the City Parks offices.

**Figure 27 – Observing a meeting between City Parks and the councillor**

| The meeting started off as very relaxed when the councillor and the CGA both made their claims. It had its moments of slight tension, when the councillor phoned a member of the residents association (Anonymous) who could not be present physically in the meeting, and who initially was disagreeing with the request.  

The councillor’s discourse and behaviour also appeared to us as much more firm and uncompromising as when we had interviewed him, the day before – where he had carefully crafted a balanced view on residents’ claims, City Parks constraints and broader social dynamics in Johannesburg to analyse the park’s management. This made us understand that people play different roles in different settings, and that there were stakes on that day that required the councillor to take such a firm stance and positioning.  

It also made us think that there are certainly many grounds for agreement and understanding between residents associations (and their councillor representative) and City Parks, beyond a façade of opposition and contestation. And indeed, the tension soon evaporated with all participants adopting a constructive, consensus building approach. |

| Source: Notes from fieldwork (Ratau, 15 Oct 2015) |

In this meeting, Mr Gadebe made a request to use James and Ethel Gray Park for three days (25 – 27 September), suggesting that only a section of the park will be used on the 25th and the 26th September. He further went on to describe the setting of the day through the use of a map that he had carefully prepared and was useful as a basis to show residents what would be happening, but also to demonstrate that there was thinking and planning around the event and its impacts in the area. Through the use of scribbling on the map (Figure 28), Gadebe explains the setup of the day saying:

“On the day of the event, the 27th September, there will be a beer garden setup with marques, holding areas, food stalls, a winner’s podium, and the kiddies area will be here and the portable toilets on the other side “(Gadebe, 2015)

Furthermore, with estimate figures Gadebe continued to explain the estimated number of people that will be there at particular times gathered by the marques. Some grievances that were expressed at this meeting by residents associations and the councillor were parking issues. Councillor Cooper and a member of the residents association who joint the meeting over the phone (hereafter, Anonymous), were strongly against having runners park in the park. Anonymous mentions past events and how they have posed a threat to the park, often having damaged gardens and broken fencing due to having people not obeying the parking rules and parking as they please. Secondly, Councillor Cooper raised concerns about giving CGA access to the park for three days, with an emphasis on the use of the park by the public (and the local community) making it problematic to have the park inaccessible for three days. Thirdly, Anonymous mentioned the barricading of streets and residents not having access into their homes: this has been an issue with past events.
Some of the conversations went as follows:

Councillor: Where would the runners park?

Gadebe: They will use the open space around RHN Anderson Park for parking.

[Anonymous]: Due to the fact that the park often experiences difficulties with event organizers, I suggest setting rules for both parties on race day. Where will the people park and who will clean up?

Madlala: Yes I agree, the best thing is for CGA to compile a set plan for the proceedings on race day, which should be strictly adhered to.

[Anonymous]: Ok Please that will be appreciated.

Councillor: If are willing to hold out your end, we do not mind you having this event. But we need to meet on site to discuss this further with the other involved stakeholders”.

There was then a follow up meeting scheduled for the 24 August at the James and Ethel Gray Park. It was suggested that park manager Piet van Heiren, the residents association representative, CGA representatives and Moses Matala from City Parks should attend. This would give an in situ, on the ground concrete dimension to management plan in its responses to residents’ concerns. The meeting ended on a good note with every member present shaking hands.

It can be noted that the tone of the conversation is constructive, with the understanding that both parties need to compromise and agree on rules to minimise disturbance whilst allowing the
event to unfold. This was followed through, and the residents association even went on to post a clear schedule of the event and its clear implications such as the parking, security and clean-up plan for the day online (BRPA, 2015). Compared to the previous experiences with regards to events management within James and Ethel Gray park, this appears an example good practice. Compromises were reached on both sides with the JCPZ as the mediator, and a follow up meeting was set. More meetings similar to this may just be the solution or the bandage to the cracks caused by miscommunication.

3.5. Organizing an event – existing processes

This section analyses the actual process that occurred when booking the aforementioned Jazz on the Lake Festival. This information was obtained from a City Parks official in charge of Hiring Facilities, her duties and responsibilities are to handle bookings, events and functions between JCPZ and the public and all stakeholders.

“There is a communication and relationship between JCPZ and residents associations and ward councillors. We do inform all stakeholders before an event can take place and post communication after the event. [...] In terms of James and Ethel Gray, the protocol was followed – JOC committee (SAPS, JMPD, EMS, etc.) approved the event and ward councillor was informed in writing. Once JCPZ is satisfied with the booking in terms of availability, number of patrons and being given a go ahead by Regional Manager, JCPZ will make a provisional booking subjected to approval from JOC committee. Ward councillor and residents associations will be informed in writing. This process did apply in the case of James and Ethel Gray”

The official seemed a bit defensive on issue of communication with park users committees and the councillor (denying there were issues of communication, reaffirming that protocol had been followed in this case). However, it is clear that the councillor invited to the JOC meeting was only to be informed, not consulted, about the event and potential arrangements made to mitigate the local disturbances created by the event.

The process is in fact two-fold, with one process within City Parks (the application for organising the event and hiring the park as public facility lies with them), and one at the City level with the Joint Organising Committee, involving many municipal departments and entities.

The by-laws and regulations are quite lax on the issue of engagement with local communities – this is being kept minimum (as the drive for the City is to encourage events organisation, both as an important feature of urban public life and as an income generating initiative). City Parks is tasked with this engagement.

Figure 29 – The place of consultation with affected communities in organising an event in parks

1) The JOC determines the roles and functions of stakeholders.
   In this respect, City Parks is at the forefront of engagement with stakeholders
   “City Parks will assist with information to communities, as well as a list of park facilities, with associated costs if applicable. Park wardens are provided if needed. An application needs to be done if necessary. [...] Parks should be left clean, tidy and undamaged. If not, City Parks will do the cleaning up and send the costs to the event organiser involved.”

2) JOC checklist however only includes one rather vague item on community information
“Notification: were businesses and communities informed of the event-taking place?”

3) JCPZ Application form for use of public parks gives some power to councillors however
“6.6 Did you inform your ward councillor about the event? If YES attached the no objection letter”
Here consultation with local communities occurs through the mediation of their ward councillors. In case of established partnerships with Friends of the park or other user groups, no formal provision is made for engagement with the “partners”.

4) JCPZ Application form for exemption from noise regulation gives residents some consideration, but in vague terms
“1.2 Residents of adjacent residential areas to be notified in advance of the intended event where amplified music will be played and announcements made. Dates, times and extent of the event as well as contact numbers to be provided to offer residents the opportunity to launch objections, if any. Records of objections to be forwarded timeously to this Department in order to be evaluated prior to consideration of the exemption”


Source: Bénit-Gbaffou 2017

In practice, therefore, the councillor always needs to be officially informed, and some notification given to residents for objections to be raised. In practice it may be done at the last minute (as was the case for the Jazz festival for instance); consultation with communities and arrangements around locally relevant mitigating measures are not explicitly required in the process. It therefore mostly depends on the level of commitment and interest of the ward councillor, and the level of organisation of communities, to proactively engage with City parks and request mitigation measures to be negotiated with the events’ organiser.

Figure 30 - Approving an event in a park in Johannesburg: who is involved in the process

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**Private Party**
- Event organiser
- JCPZ New Business Development
- JCPZ Facilities Hire
- Joint Operation Committee (JOC)
- JMPD
- Emergency Services
- SAPS
- Events org
- Disaster mngmt

**City**
- JCPZ marketing and communication
- JCPZ Regional manager

**Community**
- Stakeholders Liaison Officer
- Ward councillor
- FoP or Res assoc?

Who is involved in events management in parks, and who communicates with users communities?

Full lines – required for the events approval (by JCPZ and JOC)
Dashed lines- not compulsory, marginal, ad hoc (not systematic)

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The park manager is also to be informed, and even consulted on whether a planned event fits the park:

“I receive event applications directly from the City and I have to analyse if the event proposed fits the criteria of the park, then I fill in the forms and send them back to the City” (Makananise, 2015).

Because the park manager has no mandate in terms of community engagement (and his work time is packed with quite a lot of management tasks over a too large number of parks in the region), he however cannot use this process to consult with residents associations and discuss with them how to adapt the event and engage with events’ organisers to mitigate the nuisance created locally.

One might extrapolate that if the park manager’s mandate was to engage with a constituted Friends of the park group, and there was a partnership for the joint management of the park, these processes could be discussed and negotiated in such management forum. Currently, the park manager is not mandated to do so; and the absence of a single forum where these issues can be tackled makes it more difficult (time consuming) to consult and engage, possibly. Alternatively, when communities are mobilised and have developed clear guidelines on how event organisers could mitigate the nuisance created by an events, they are potentially assisting City parks in making sure the event is a success for both the City, public at large and local communities.

The main other task that the park manager performs relating to events management, is to assess whether the deposit claimed from the events’ organiser is to be refunded or not. If the park is damaged or not cleaned after the event, the deposit money is used to fix it:

“Before an event takes place, I make sure that the park is clean. After an event the same process applies, I go back to check if it is clean. If it is not clean we do not refund your deposit because we cleaned for you. So, for instance, the City to City race was a disaster, they left the place filthy and I had to clean after them therefore, they did not get their refund.” (Makananise, 2015).

Figure 31 – Extracts from the application form for the use a public park

The applicant must leave the park in a clean, tidy and undamaged state, failing which JCPZ will have the site cleaned/reinstated and the full amount of the refundable deposit or a portion thereof may be forfeited. Should it happen that the cost of cleaning and reinstating of the park exceed the refundable deposit JCPZ will charge the additional amount to the organizer.

Facility users are responsible for removal of possessions immediately on completion of the event. No standby or security staff will be provided by JCPZ.

Arrangements for litter removal shall be made by the organizers. All requirements as stipulated by JCPZ shall be adhered to.

The issue of money gained through the organisation of events in the park is also a crucial one. The misconception that City Parks were making money from organising events in parks was common amongst residents associations (even if the councillor was more aware, this understanding did not seem to have trickled down to residents organisations) – with accusations at time that City Parks were “commercialising” the parks, making money out of it. In practice, it is the City at large that receives income from events’ organisers – not City Parks. Besides, even if City Parks received the money (a legitimate argument to be made, but that would require an administrative reform), there are important legal constraints limiting the ability of City parks to ring-fence income made in the park for the management of this park (through the Municipal Finances Management Act). And yet, if a portion of the money paid by events’ organisers went to the management of the park, it would be a powerful argument to make the events more acceptable to local residents. There could be ways developed through which this happens, although it is generally informal and indirect – a contribution in nature by the events’ organiser (based on long standing relationships and use of a specific park); a voluntary donation to a park user group; a setting where a park user groups “adopts” a park and is granted permission by City parks to organise its own, fund-raising events in the park for the purpose of park management.
Conclusion

This report has shown the amount of resources that middle class communities can garner at the service of public parks maintenance and management – resources that City Parks is unable to mobilise on its own due to budgetary constraints and local government spatial and sectoral priorities. These resources stem from fundraising (at different levels – community and users based but also corporate businesses) to everyday surveillance and monitoring, reporting, and fixing. There is a level of cross-subsidisation of the park management - from membership fees collected by residents associations, to committing the local security companies to extend their patrols to the park. This mobilisation comes both from individuals (such as the dog walker picking up litter on her way), residents associations (in their individual leadership capacity, but also as collectives), and the conservancy acting at a bigger, regional scale within the Rosebank-Melrose economic nodes. Whilst there is no dedicated structure for this mobilisation around the park (through a user group or Friends of the Park type of structure), coordination between these initiatives occurs through tight social relations between the various organisations, based on joint interests and visions (if slightly different, but complementary focus); but also thanks to the championship of the ward councillor, able to raise issues on behalf of residents associations within City Parks and the City at large. The park manager is a second official that is objectively in a position to coordinate the various initiatives in the park – but he yields less power and is not given an official mandate by City parks to engage with park user groups, even though that is what he does in practice in his function of managing the park.

These two officials are playing a key role not only in working with residents associations in practical ways, echoing and amplifying some of their claims, but they also at times overcoming practical challenges and testing innovative solutions that residents associations might not be in a position to see nor imagine. Practical and inclusive approaches to the homelessness issue in the park, after having seen how evictions fail to sustainably solve the issue, have been attempted, in formal and informal ways, by both local officials. These approaches however have not succeeded in being consolidated – this is the limit to working informally around locally working arrangements. They would probably gain in becoming more visible, and celebrated as alternative, more inclusive and more practical ways of dealing with homelessness in parks – building both community support and municipal recognition.

In spite of residents’ active contribution to the management of the park, and local officials’ input and vision (under huge constraints of limited capacity) for problem solving at the local level building on this contribution, what is striking is the rather antagonistic situation existing between residents associations and City Parks, beyond the park manager level. This antagonism is readable in residents associations’ very critical (at time disillusioned) statements against the City – that could perhaps shift towards a more pragmatic acknowledgement of City Parks and municipal budgetary limitations in contemporary Johannesburg. This expressed resentment might contribute partly to City Parks’ reluctance to hear residents’ claims, often boxed as the whims of privileged suburban communities. It is particularly the case when it comes to events management – where the legitimate concern of surrounding communities against events-related
nuisance is interpreted as a parochial appropriation of the public park and a refusal to let other social groups enjoy what remains a metropolitan asset.

A cumbersome and opaque process, events management clearly is not organised at the municipal level in ways that pay attention to local communities. The report has identified that this process is two-fold – the bulk of it depending on JOC (Joint Operation Committee) which sits outside of City Parks, and where communities are not considered main stakeholders even if the process entails informing local councillors. A part of the process depends on City parks, which can chose to proactively consult with community representatives and request the events’ organiser to engage with them in order to mitigate the nuisance public events in park create for local communities. But City parks limited human capacity, their lack of institutional recognition of the contribution of local communities to the management of the park, and the absence of streamlined process of negotiation and consultation between the events’ organisers and local communities (facilitated by City parks), renders that process uncertain – and always dependent on how vocal communities are around events. It might assist if communities such as BRA and MNRA developed their own practical guidelines to work proactively and constructively with City parks around events – accepting the publicness of the park but insisting that mitigation measures be considered to take into consideration the impact it has on surrounding communities. A second issue around events organisation in parks are issues around money and funding; it was not clear in the mind of residents associations that City parks is actually not benefiting from events organisation – as the money goes into the City coffers without City Parks receiving any portion of it (except a deposit to fix the potential damage linked to the event). The idea that organisers should contribute to the actual maintenance of the park, in the absence of municipal operational budget, seems a legitimate one but not currently inscribed in official and legal processes. Here the existence of a dedicated Friends of the Park structure, that could officially partner with City Parks, could potentially assist in streamlining a space where events’ organisers contribution could legitimately be directed.
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This research report forms parts of a series, within a project exploring joint park management models in Johannesburg (between Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, and park user groups). The project is supported by Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo.

The series is part of a NRF research project investigating Practices of the State in Urban Governance (PSUG), coordinated by Professor Claire Benit-Gbaffou, and hosted in the Center for the Built Environment Studies (CUBES) at the Wits School of Architecture and Planning.