



Constructing joint management for Johannesburg nature reserves: City Parks and users' groups engagements in Melville Koppies, Kloofendal and Klipriviersberg nature reserves

Tlholohelo Mokgere

A report prepared for research participants and interested and
affected parties

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Introduction

Continued fiscal challenges in South Africa have affected general public service provision across the country. The management and development of parks can be seen as a lesser public priority in comparison to the myriad of other basic public services needed in post-apartheid cities. Johannesburg City Park's and Zoo (JCPZ) is therefore attempting to form coalitions with community or users' groups across different open green spaces, to find ways of sharing the task of managing parks. Some of these partnerships are more formalised than others. In many cases, these users' groups are longstanding organisations that have historically been the sole groups consistently involved in the management of a particular green space.

The management of nature reserves in Johannesburg

Nature reserves are, in comparison to parks, larger spaces with less variety of uses and users allowing for natural surveillance: they are prone to broader challenges in terms of maintenance and security. In addition, their management entails a strong environmental component: both in terms of alien invasive vegetation, and in terms of protection against forms of development and uses that might be detrimental to environmental conservation. This renders the task of their management perhaps even more daunting than for parks and the need for partnerships with civil society possibly even more crucial – as a way of leveraging additional human resources and funding.

This paper (based on an Honours research report: Mokgere, 2016) considers the joint management of three reserves in Johannesburg namely Melville Koppies, Klipriviersberg and Kloofendal nature reserves, between JCPZ and reserves users' groups.

1. Overview of the reserves

Location and accessibility

Melville Koppies nature reserve (MKNR) is the most accessible of the reserves as it is the closest to the centre of the city and accessible by public transport (Map 1). Kloofendal and Klipriviersberg nature reserves appear more peripheral and difficult to access for non-motorised users beyond their immediate vicinity. Furthermore, the location of tertiary education institutions such as University of Johannesburg and University of the Witwatersrand in the city centre contribute to MKNR's high use, in comparison to the other reserves. On the other hand, its central location may contribute to issues of crime and security that are a particularly serious challenge to its sustained management and use.



Map 1: Context of the reserves in Johannesburg © Sango, 2017

Nature reserves users' groups

They have played a major role in the maintenance and protection of the reserves over the years: fundraising (through donations, organisation of environmental events, guided tours), hiring permanent staff on site (maintenance and security), providing training and skills transfers on environmental issues to junior or temporary staff, maintaining the reserves and their amenities, being the eyes on the ground. They constitute a major asset and resource for the City and JCPZ that needs to be recognised and nurtured.

Melville Koppies Management Committee (MKMC)

It was officially established in 1992 and is a registered Not-for-Profit Organisation. As of October 2016, it consisted of 14 members, including a representative of the African Independent Churches (AIC), the largest group of users in the reserve, predominantly in the west. The committee raises funds through guided tours and donations. It employs three employees in addition to the EPWP workers provided by JCPZ to clean the facilities and maintain the grounds. The committee provides training to its employees, including basic conservation skills for alien vegetation removal. MKMC hires a private security company in response to the longstanding safety challenges in the reserve.

Friends of Kloofendal (FRoK)

It has been in existence since 2002. In November 2016, the committee consisted of 8 members. It signed a formal partnership (Memorandum of Agreement) with JCPZ's Environmental Education Unit in February 2016, which chiefly provided the committee

with free use of the Ecological Centre and other facilities located in the reserve. In exchange, the committee – which has trained guides - provides educational tours of the reserve to school groups for free. The committee also provides training to JCPZ's EPWP workers in alien vegetation removal, and other conservation-based skills.

Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve Forum (KNRF)

The main user's group involved in the daily management of the reserve has historically been Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve Association (KNRA), since the 1970s: fundraising (through environmental events and donations) for various management tasks in the space such as alien vegetation removal, maintenance of hiking trails, employing and training permanent maintenance staff, organising cleaning campaigns, and a general presence on site. In October 2015 a KNR Forum was established to create a broader platform where the multiple stakeholders could engage with JCPZ. The forum extended engagement to smaller users' groups (the Environmental Group, the Garden Club, the Happy Hobbler walking group) and the immediate residential community, as well as other major local stakeholders: Klipriviersberg Sustainability Association (KlipSA) and Thaba Eco Estate (a nearby hotel resort). The forum functioned primarily as a platform for City Parks to communicate the programs and plans that took place in the reserve, and a space for stakeholders to communicate concerns such as the security of residences bordering the reserve. Furthermore, it became the space where much of the debates around the reserve's development and conservation took place. However, it was the site of tensions between JCPZ and user groups, and the Forum was disbanded mid-2017.

	Melville Koppies	Kloofendal	Klipriviersberg
Size of reserve (ha)	141.6	125.5	713
Location/ accessibility	Accessible by taxi (Beyers Naudé road)	Limited public transport access	Limited public transport access
Master/concept plan	Outdated (date unknown)	Outdated (date unknown)	2016 concept plans rejected
Type of agreement between users group and JCPZ	Joint venture agreement - undocumented	MoA signed February 2016 involving environmental education	Undocumented for KNRA, Stakeholders forum (KNRF) started in 2015 and suspended mid 2017
Meetings with City Parks officials	Scarce	Occasional	Monthly KNR Forum
Entrance fee	R50 per adult, R20 per child into central MK (guided walks).	Free	Free

	Free in western and eastern parts of MK		
Main focus of engagement	Conservation, general maintenance, security, environmental education and sustainable recreation	Conservation and environmental education	Conservation and development
Nature/ size of users group	MKMC (14 members), AIC - specially in western part of MK	FRoK (8 main members)	KNRF (over 5 stakeholder groups)
User groups' fundraising – nature and use	Donations and paid guided hikes and tours - allow for hiring of permanent conservation staff	Guided tours (diverse environmental themes) and donations	Events (environmental conferences) and donations – allows for some maintenance expenditure and occasional hiring of staff

While MKNR is the easiest of the reserves to get to, access is limited by the entrance fee charged in order to gain entry into the central part of the reserve, where facilities such as toilets, benches and taps are located, and where there are heritage plaques and artefacts to view. However, in comparison, the MKMC is the only users' group that has sourced a private security company for the reserve in addition to arrangements made by JCPZ.

The presence of a MoA between FRoK and JCPZ has made for slightly better definitions of roles and more visible trade-offs for both parties in the partnership as opposed to the other two reserves. On the other hand, the KNR Forum, with its regular meetings, has made it easier for stakeholders to communicate with each other. Regular meetings between JCPZ and users' groups are useful in potentially providing a platform for discussion, knowledge sharing and problem solving.

2. Developing partnerships – using Master Planning processes as key instruments?

An important part of forming and maintaining partnerships is transforming the ways in which City Parks officials view, perceive and practice community engagement, beyond a tedious and time consuming exercise; and simultaneously shifting park users' attitude and expectations from complaints and accusations to a logic of co-production (Jones, 2002). In the engagements in all three nature reserves, there is an apparent difficulty for both partners to move towards a constructive phase.

Example – the Master planning process in KNR: a missed opportunity

The consultation process was originally initiated with community members in January 2006 around the development of a master plan. This plan was rejected, revived in 2015 in a public meeting (Baloyi *et al*, 2015) and rejected once more due to a lack of community engagement. There was also contestation by some park users' groups on the content of the plan - aimed at proposing recreation and touristic developments in the reserve (extreme sports facilities), that they felt would damage the environment.

In April 2016 another consultation process was begun and facilitators commissioned by JCPZ did engage the community through a design workshop. However, the use of prior proposed developments as a starting point limited initial discussions to mostly vetoing. A second team of consultants was hired and the process restarted from scratch in 2017, where the KNR Forum was consulted on a draft prior to the draft plan being presented to the broader public. However, City Parks officials were hardly involved in this process. The sessions allowed a variety of users' groups to talk and imagine possible visions, but without agreeing on a joint vision, and without entering in conversation with City Parks, its objectives and its capacity – and building the necessary compromises, trade-offs and action plans to make this Master plan a working and efficient document.



Figure 1: Community consultation meeting on the KNR master plan © Mokgere, KNR Recreation Centre, 2016

The master plan process could have been used as an opportunity to deepen engagement, and identify the (many) objective areas of convergence in City Parks and users' groups visions, which were themselves not uniform. The level of conflict, built over the years, did not seem to allow for a robust conversation to take place – and the public meeting possibly could only consolidate misunderstanding and misguided expectations from the users' groups. At the time of writing the research report, the master plan was still not finalised.

3. City Parks' mandate: transforming access to nature reserves

One of City Parks' explicit mandates is to address the "green divide" (JCPZ, 2013) – and, beyond developing parks in former townships, to also open up existing parks, that were often historically reserved for white users, to a broader variety of users' groups. This post-apartheid mandate converges with a more classic imperative in park management across the world: increase park and nature reserves' uses, not only for this asset to contribute to the broader good rather than being the preserve of a minority, but also for practical reasons of social control, natural surveillance and protection against crime, and more generally park's success (Jacobs, 1961).



Figure 2: A group of Muslim users enjoy the river in the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve © Benit-Gbaffou, 2017



Figure 3: Group of school kids on an educational tour learning about the formation of ant hills at Kloofendal Nature Reserve © Mokgere, 2016



Figure 3: Group of hikers walking in the west part and resting on the benches in the central part of Melville Koppies Nature Reserve © Mokgere, 2016



Whilst each user's group agrees on the need to increase the use of the reserves, they each have different ways of promoting the reserve and its events. For the most, this promotion has a very local range reaching mostly residents in the immediate vicinity of the reserve and thus affecting the type of user attracted to the reserve. Klipriviersberg

nature reserve users' groups are keen to put the reserve on Johannesburg touristic maps and dream of attracting international visitors to what they call the "Jewel of the South", including international scholars and researchers. FRoK have a far more explicit practice of integrating other Johannesburg users in the reserve, by providing environmental education programmes in schools from different suburbs and townships across the city – an agreement formalised in a MoA where the JCPZ Environmental Education Unit played a substantial role. MKMC have explicitly engaged and accepted the AIC, acknowledging that church groups use the reserve for their religious practices. The committee has integrated the AIC into the management committee, considering them an asset for safety and conservation, and hiring some of the AIC members as permanent staff. The integration of AIC into the committee has been the result of a process of engagement, based on mutual recognition but also on shared interest – in particular in keeping the reserve safe and clean. It is useful to consider that the two stakeholders have different interests, and that some church members might not be interested in conservation. But the process has led to engagement where stakeholders reached a compromise.

However, the post-apartheid imperative of diversifying park users and broadening access to the environment in the post-apartheid Johannesburg remains implicit if not generally inexistent in users groups' visions – whilst it is central in City Parks strategy and informs some of its attempts to diversify the type of activities and infrastructures offered in the nature reserve. This difference is not explicitly debated between officials and users' groups, but yet is at the core of tensions and misunderstandings that tend to become racialized.

4. Transforming perceptions of legitimacy

Issues of legitimacy and mandate were salient in interactions between JCPZ officials and users' groups – and they were deeply, if implicitly, inscribed in historical and racial divides that characterise the South African society.

von Holdt (2010) has noted that the notion of skills is racially loaded in post-apartheid South Africa. City Parks officials complain that their skills are constantly questioned by users groups' members, sometimes legitimately and sometimes not, in their view. Users' groups seem at times oblivious if not ignorant of municipal constraints (budgetary, process and time), and trapped in negative attitude and accusation mode rather than developing a constructive approach. What is significant is less the reality of skills inequality, than how it emerges to delegitimise City Parks officials' decisions, in ways that make them lose face.

Often users groups' members are retired professionals with skills and interests in conservation or related issues. Their goals for the reserves are thus intersecting but different from those of City Parks. Reserve users can sometimes use their knowledge to

close the debate and limit solutions to those ascribing to their expertise. The manner in which things are said generally in public, and in groups where one isolated official is confronted by a number of irritated and critical users, is often perceived as humiliating and leads to City Park officials sometimes completely ignoring park and reserve users' expertise and advice.

This leads to a chronic lack of recognition by City Parks of the contribution of users' groups to the management of reserves. City Parks then implicitly delegitimises the users' groups' contribution, entertaining a constant suspicion of exclusive appropriation of the reserve and a clear reluctance to share information, power and decision with them. This in turn leads users to legitimately question the transparency of decisions made ultimately by City Parks, their lack of responsiveness and engagement, and the opacity of documents, processes and decisions affecting the reserve they are supposedly jointly managing.

This vicious cycle leads to the reinforcement of racial prejudice, where (white) users' groups are seen as arrogant and trapped in a culture of privilege and exclusivity – without their expertise and commitment being acknowledged; whilst the (black) City officials are trapped in an image of incompetence and unreliability instead of their commitment being recognised and the municipal constraints shaping their intervention acknowledged and worked with.

An acknowledgement of racial and cultural differences is imperative to circumvent falling into a cycle of reinforcing racial prejudice (Westen, 2008). Mutual respect makes a substantial difference in the way that people interact, and its absence is seen in a number of different ways, many of them not necessarily related to racial prejudice. It is in the derisive tones, the lack of basic communication, the publicness of humiliation as a main tool of engagement on the one hand (be it in meetings, through social media or in the press, directly to the official hierarchy, or even through litigation), the sheer ignorance and lack of follow up on promises, on the other hand; and the mutual delegitimising of roles and contributions of each partner. In many ways these exacerbate disagreements, growing them into bigger tensions and leading to growing mutual disrespect.

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