Environmental Science and Policy 169 (2025) 104078

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Environmental Science and Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/envsci

The rationales of managing public space: Changing values in a developing discipline☆

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Public space
Managing Public Space
Urban transitions
Values
Hierarchy of values
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Public space managers are facing multiple transitions and increasingly complex challenges, prompting the emergence of new approaches that address diverse aims and involve a broader range of actors. As a result, the rationale behind management of public space is gradually changing. Gaining insight into the values that drive management of public space is essential. This research shows that, from the managers' perspective, the rationale behind management of public space is largely implicit, with a non-hierarchical relationship between means and ends. Where common approaches emphasised technical and economic values, a clear shift towards the integration of soft values, such as social inclusion and sustainability, is becoming apparent. This transition parallels historical paradigm shifts in spatial planning and underlines the dynamic nature of management of public space. This study examined the values pursued in the Netherlands based on a qualitative study consisting of narrative interviews and focus groups. The results offer insights into the values pursued and highlight the importance of an explicit and systematic approach, as well as research into the values that actually shape management of public space in current practice.

1. Introduction

Public space fulfils many important economic, social-cultural, and ecological functions (UN-Habitat, 2016; Van Melik, 2008). It also serves technical functions through roads, sewage systems, parks, energy grids, and telecommunication networks (Van Melik, 2008). Hence, a high-quality public space contributes to health, economy, social cohesion, well-being, and biodiversity (Jansson and Randrup, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2016). This introduction explains what is meant by management of public space in this study, discusses the impact of the current challenges faced by management of public space, and highlights the growing importance of understanding values within this context.

In most countries management of public space is the responsibility of municipal and regional levels of government (Carmona, 2010; Dempsey et al., 2014; Jansson and Randrup, 2020; Knuth, Randrup, and Gauthier, 2008). The task is often assigned to specific departments, yet with different names and specifications. These departments do not operate independently, there are links with related departments such as land use planning. Management of public space thus is not defined conclusively, but it describes all activities of maintaining and renewing public spaces, ensuring that public spaces perform their intended legal functions effectively.

Departments of regional and local government bodies responsible for managing public space – in the following referred to as the managers of public space – are increasingly confronted with a growing number of tasks to be fulfilled in scarce public spaces. In addition to maintaining and renewing the existing, managers have to deal with major transitional challenges that require substantial adjustments of above- and underground public spaces in existing urban areas (Duivenvoorden et al., 2021; Maring and Blauw, 2018). While the developed world has experienced an international trend of poorly managed public spaces (Dempsey and Burton, 2012), the Netherlands seems to be an exception

☆ Using the hierarchy of values model in this study made it possible to position the terms mentioned at different levels of abstraction. It should be noted though that the different levels of the model are rather a gradient on which the terms can be placed than fixed separate levels. What is more, the explored values are pluralistic and the definition of values varies widely between actors. This means that the values mentioned are highly context-specific.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2025.104078
Received 13 October 2023; Received in revised form 14 April 2025; Accepted 21 April 2025
Available online 2 May 2025

to this trend (Carmona et al., 2008) even though it is one of the most urbanised countries in Europe and has a comparatively high proportion of public space, including infrastructure (PBL, 2016). However, Dutch practitioners indicate that they too are increasingly struggling to ensure the quality of public space in the future, due to the multitude of challenges that put pressure on scarce public space.

In response to these challenges, which are multiple and often unpredictable, a shift from a sectoral approach to an integrated approach is taking place (Duivenvoorden et al., 2021). This shift is driven by the managers' aim to try to maintain and renew existing public spaces by preserving and improving their quality and guaranteeing them for now and the future (Said and Tempels, 2023; Carmona et al., 2008; Duivenvoorden et al., 2021). It means that more actors are involved in the management of public space and that they try to operate in a more integrated manner. Each of these actors has its own interests, ideas and objectives (Koppenjan et al., 2004) of what constitutes high quality public space and what is needed in terms of management. In this study we refer to these underlying objectives as *values*, a concept that will be explored more in detail later. For example, some actors consider economic values to be important, while others prioritise ecological values. Actors, each pursuing their own values, are integrating, leading to a redefinition of the values that shape the management of public space (Koppenjan et al., 2004). The shift to integrated management is accompanied by the emergence of a new set of values pursued with managing public space. Meanwhile, understanding the different values being pursued can support an integrated approach by enabling consultation between different actors.

Current academic debates on values in the physical domain are characterised by various approaches and address different urban and ecological issues. De Groot et al. (2012), (2010), (2002) posit the sustainable management and conservation of natural resources as inherent values that can be achieved through ecosystem services and economic valuation. Jappe (2017) and Hall (1998) argue for urban vitality, sustainability, human emancipation or freedom as key values. This shows how different scholars combine values and means to approach and theoretically solve multiple and unpredictable societal issues. An integrated approach in spatial planning and urban design, the added value of public space for the economy, environment, and social and human health are the subject of lively academic debate. However, the values pursued in management of public space remain largely undiscussed. This is in line with the claims of authors who observe a blind spot in urban planning and design for the existing urban realm and the lack of interest in management of public space among politicians and academics (Dempsey and Burton, 2012; Duivenvoorden et al., 2021; Mattijssen et al., 2017; UN-Habitat, 2016).

This study aims to better understand how managers of public space pursue different and competing values on different abstraction levels in local and regional governing bodies. Based on narrative interviews and focus groups, this exploratory and qualitative research seeks to reveal the rationales of management of public space, concerning both the physical object and the process of managing. This contribution considers not only which values public space managers pursue and how they define them, it also gives insight into which values play a major role in their daily practice. Our aim is not to examine whether these pursued values are actually realized. In the following sections, we will introduce the hierarchy of value model, detail our methodology, present the results, and discuss their implications.

2. Definitions and hierarchy of values

To understand how values play a role in the management of public space, the concept of values needs to be conceptualized. The concept of 'value' is diverse, both in practice and in theory. In daily speech, value is often used to defend or emphasise a certain point of view. In philosophy, value is seen as something that refers to something good. Von Wright (1963) describes it as the 'varieties of goodness'. Mooij (1987) defines values as the ideals or norms that play a role in the appreciation of facts. Some academics define values as 'what a person or a group of people consider important in life' (Friedman et al., 2006). Additionally,

"Values are concepts or beliefs, about desirable end states or behaviours, that transcend specific situations, guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and are ordered by relative importance" (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987).

Other scholars focus on defining the concept in terms of the functions it serves. A criticism of the philosophical approach is that not everything one considers valuable in life is a value (Van de Poel, 2018). Values are a belief in something important and are an objective or criterion by which we can determine whether an action or motive is desirable (Langford, 2004). In this definition, values are one's judgment of what is important in life. As such, values help us to make judgements about our environment and its management. Value can refer to both procedural and substantive beliefs as well as preferences, (moral) duties, and likes and dislikes (Langford, 2004; Van der Wal and Yang, 2015). Widespread acceptance of a given value ensures the legitimacy of policies and actions based on it. To conclude, there are multiple understandings of value in academic literature, from which this study adopts the following definition: Values are a belief in something important regarding the desirable state of a physical object and/or process, and they transcend specific situations and guide selection or evaluation of the physical object and/or process.

In addition to different definitions of values, values can be abstract or very specific. This paper adopts a model on the hierarchy of values (Van de Poel, 2013) that distinguishes different levels of values, ranging from more abstract inherent values and operational values, to more specific norms and design requirements (see Fig. 1). Inherent values – sometimes also referred to as substantive values – are highly abstract values on a meta-level (Van de Poel, 2009). The pursuit of an inherent value is ensured by the operational value(s). Operational values are more instrumental in nature and form a bridge between abstract inherent values and more concrete norms and design requirements. Norms can be defined as goals that specify a tangible target and/or constraint that sets boundaries or minimum conditions. A norm can either be procedural, relating to the process, or be an end norm that the design must meet (Van de Poel, 2013) as a state or a capability (e.g. being able to generate energy). Subsequently, the norms can be translated into design requirements. Like norms, design requirements too can relate to the physical object or the process.

To better understand actions in practice, this contribution studies which inherent values and operational values play a role in management of public space. The value hierarchy model builds on the idea that lower levels support higher levels of values. The highest value or inherent value exists for its own sake, while operational values, norms, and

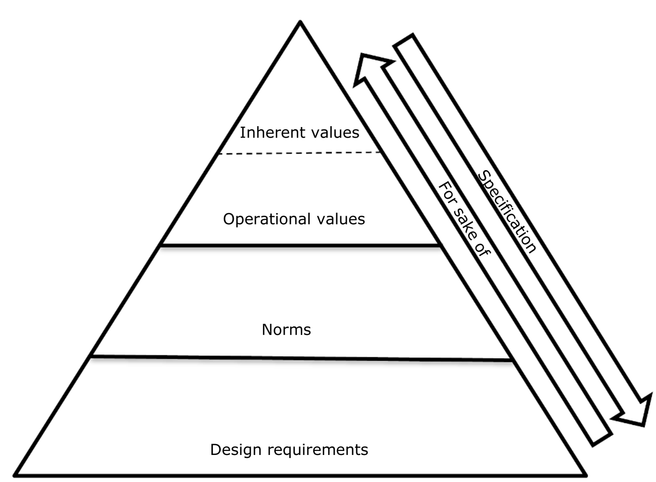

Fig. 1. Hierarchy of values model (Elsinga et al., 2020).

design requirements sustain the inherent value (Zimmerman, 2002). In addition to this bottom-up reasoning of for the sake of, in which B exists for the sake of A or contributes to A, values can also be specified through top-down reasoning. This is called specification and adds context-specific content. Specification can refer to the translation from values to norms, and to the translation of norms into design requirements (Van de Poel, 2013). Specification can be understood as the operationalisation of values.

Specification of values can be divergent. The value of safety for instance requires a different type of translation depending on the context. The safety risk of a bridge usually means technical safety, whereas the safety of a plaza usually refers to personal safety. So safety can be specified into different norms and design requirements. Note that the specification of values is different from the conceptualisation of values. Conceptualisation of values is the definition and description of a value. For example, the conceptualisation of sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987)”. A specification of sustainable development could be CO2-reduction.

3. Methods

To explore the pursued values of the management of public space, an in-depth study of public space managers has been conducted. Values can relate to both the physical object of public space and the process of managing it. In addition to mapping out pursued values, the research tries to determine if managers are aware of the values they pursue, the role they play in their daily practice, and the relation of their values to the bigger picture. Empirically, this research is based on qualitative research in the form of narrative interviews and focus group sessions, see Fig. 2. Below, we will discuss the different methods used to collect the empirical material, being interviews and focus groups. Then, we will discuss the methods used to analyse the data.

This study primarily focused on the managers at the local administrative level of municipalities and the regional administrative level of provinces and water boards. However, the analysis also touches other disciplines and other institutions in the field of management, design and spatial planning that are directly related to the managers’ practices on the local and regional administrative levels. Examples are landscape architects within the managers’ organisations and applied researchers of knowledge institutes. Incorporating both the managers’ perspective and those of their adjacent disciplines gives a broader picture of the values pursued within management of public space.

To explore the values pursued by managers of public space, eighteen narrative interviews were conducted; thirteen with public space managers at local and regional level and five with people interacting directly with managers of public space. Participants were approached and selected using convenience sampling. All interviewees were selected for their expertise in the field and/or knowledge of management of public space as well as their overarching awareness of the situation through organisations responsible for management of public space. Therefore, in addition to the managers of public space, some interviewees were selected with knowledge institutes and executive agencies. During the interviews, we asked whether participants from adjacent disciplines could be approached from the participant’s network. Public space managers, designers and public space researchers were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted on-site and digitally through video calls, lasting between one and two hours. In the introduction, participants were asked about the values managers of public space currently pursue and those they aspire. Values were defined as the highest principles they aim to accomplish as public space managers. The narrative interviews allowed participants to use a story to illustrate their individual experiences and those of managers in general. This shed light on what explicit values are pursued and in what way values play a role in their daily practice. By interviewing managers as well as people from adjacent disciplines, the extent to which managers reflect on their role within the larger whole of the physical domain became apparent. It revealed how designers and public space researchers think about the values management of public space do pursue, and the values they proclaim to pursue.

The results of the interviews showed that the managers seemed to lack reflective capacity and struggled to proclaim the values they pursue. To supplement the knowledge gained from the narrative interviews, two focus groups were held. The focus groups enabled the researchers to map the entirety of the values pursued and the interviewees’ self-reflexive capacity. In the focus groups, the opinions, attitudes and perceptions of the pursued values of management of public space were explored through an open discussion between the participants and the researcher. Whereas in a narrative interview a participant only mentions explicit knowledge, a focus group also brings implicit knowledge to light; internalised knowledge that is difficult to transfer because it is taken for granted (Polanyi, 1966). A focus group setting brings out more values that are taken for granted by using a real-life case study brought in by one of the participants, joint discussion and in-depth questions. The focus groups provided more insight into the explicit values pursued, managers’ relationship to the big picture and their awareness of the values they pursue. In addition, it also provided insight into implicit values and into possible fixed patterns of behaviour or conscious choices.

The first focus group consisted of four participants under the guidance of two researchers, one of whom was the moderator and the other a note-taker. The four participants were selected from the group of interviewees based on their role in an average-sized or large municipality and their ability to discuss the values pursued in management of public space. The participants operated usually on tactical and strategic level. Based on a case introduced by one of the participants, the researchers asked questions to discuss the issue of interest. The participants of the first focus group discussed the values they pursue and how these values play a role in practice. This focus group addressed the degree of conscious choices or fixed patterns of behaviour and the influence of these on the determination of values. They also discussed their perceptions of their role within the larger picture of the physical domain.

The second focus group was a group of forty participants. In contrast

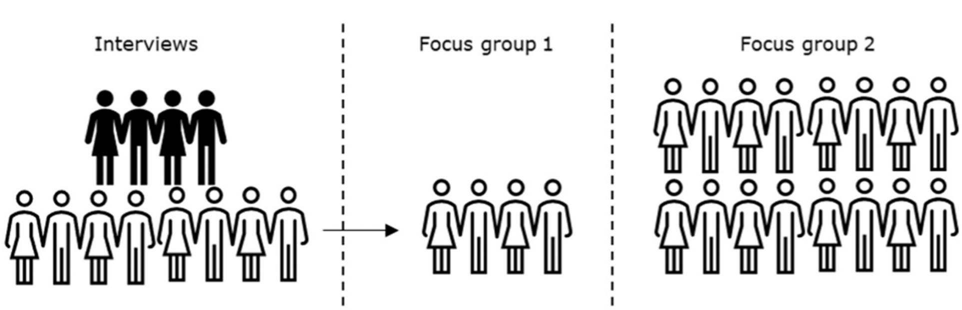

Fig. 2. The composition of the interview group, the focus groups and their interrelations.

to the first focus group, most of the participants were public space managers working at a tactical and operational level. By involving participants at all levels, this study provides a representative picture of the values pursued within management of public space. During the second focus group, the managers were asked about the values they pursue, and to classify them in the hierarchy of values model. The participants did not perform any part of the analysis themselves but showed whether they are aware of the varying levels of abstraction among the terms they themselves mention. In addition to providing insight into the values pursued, this classification gave the researchers insight into the managers' ability to specify values and define them within the 'for the sake of' relationship.

The empirical data was transcribed and coded in three phases. The transcripts of the interviews and the first focus group were coded based on the hierarchy of values model, with each level forming a code. First, the various terms mentioned were identified and linked to the levels of the hierarchy of value model. Second, the terms were conceptualised. When the participants had only given an explicit conceptualisation but no term, a corresponding term was added for the data analysis. Next, the researchers examined mentions of 'for the sake of' relationships and specifications and order the data according to the different levels of value.

The second focus group discussion was transcribed and coded based on the hierarchy of values model, with a code for each level. The managers were asked to place the values at the appropriate level of the hierarchy of values model and to consider how they relate to other values. In contrast to the earlier coding, 'for the sake of' and 'specification' functioned here as separate codes because the aim was to highlight the manager's ability to translate values, norms and design requirements both top-down and bottom-up.

4. Results

The empirical research results revealed that public space managers agreed that three terms form the basis of management of public space: 'clean, intact, and safe'. 'Clean' implies that the object public space should be free from waste and dirt. "Intact" means that an asset is technically in order and functions as it should. 'Safe' refers to actual safety and technical norms (e.g., a bridge should not collapse or low levels of criminality) as well as users' perceived safety in a public space (e.g. no sense of fear of accidents). Managers tend to focus on compliance with technical guidelines and legislation for spaces to be considered safe, and to lose sight of perceived safety. The trilogy of terms was used by different types of public space managers, including asset managers of municipalities, water boards, provinces and private consultancy companies involved in management of public space.

Clean, intact, and safe can be positioned at different levels in the 'hierarchy of values model'. Clean and intact can be classified at the level of operational values and norms. Safe can be assigned to the level of operational values. Even though clean, intact, and safe are seen as the basis of management of public space, the study revealed that public space managers identified additional inherent values.

Participants mentioned that it was difficult to identify clear inherent values for the management of public space. Managers agreed that clean, intact and safe are the basis of management, but naming other values was initially often delayed. Some of the participants acknowledged the problem of having difficulty naming more values than clean, safe and intact, which they often describe as 'the basics in order':

"Perhaps the most essential question is: why do we do what we do? [...] I have no idea" (Personal communication, February 2022).

Follow-up questions and focus groups resulted in the identification of six additional values that are treated separately from the trilogy that the managers see as the basis: efficiency, functionality, well-being, effectiveness, sustainability, and inclusiveness.

While the interviews helped in understanding the relationship of the values in terms of priority, tracing the specification and links between values was more difficult. In the paragraphs below, the results are discussed more in detail, structured according to the inherent values. It is also discussed how the managers of public space specified inherent values into operational values, norms and design requirements; and/or identified in sake of-relations.

5. Efficiency

Public space managers refer to efficiency as a 'thread' that runs through everything; it is a means that must be pursued at all times.

"Everything must always be as efficient as possible. That is what you have to strive for as a civil servant. You just have to do your work as efficiently as possible, but the goals are the guide" (Personal communication, February 2022).

From this quotation, it can be deduced that public space managers conceptualise efficiency as the minimisation of costs in the form of time and resources with maximum delivery of assets and retention of quality. This conceptualisation is often described as procedural efficiency (Francis and Riddlesperger, 1982). As reflected in the quotation above, efficiency was mentioned as a means of achieving the value of effectiveness, both in the narrative interviews and in the focus groups. Achieving goals is only possible if the entire exercise of management remains affordable. In addition to mentioning efficiency as a means for achievement, some managers argued that it has also become an end in itself, and herewith an inherent value.

"Everything (in the process) is designed to be as efficient as possible" (Personal communication, February 2022).

At all levels of the values hierarchy model, managers implicitly and explicitly contributed specification relationships for the inherent value efficiency. Integrated management of public space and sectoral management of public space values can be considered as operational values. In addition to integrated management being considered as a principle in life due to today's complexity, some managers also saw efficiency as a reason for integration. However, there was also disagreement on whether integration leads to efficiency or not. Some managers of public space argue that an integrated approach may lead to endless meetings and prolonged decision-making processes, making a sectoral approach ultimately more efficient in practice. Apparently there are two opposing camps: one that strongly advocates for integration as essential for efficiently addressing complex spatial challenges, and another that criticises integrative approaches as inefficient and cumbersome. These camps actively question the assumptions and outcomes of each other.

The discussion about efficiency was further expressed on more concrete levels. According to the participants, the entire organisational structure and process should be designed to be as efficiently as possible. One of the managers pointed out that there is a great danger in making efficiency an end rather than a means.

"With the advent of the contractors, everything has become much cheaper, but the goals we are aiming for with management of public space have been driven further away" (Personal communication, February 2022).

Participants indicated that processes are emerging that focus on other values than efficiency, but one researcher at a knowledge institute believed that most managers of public space still act from cost-saving perspective and therefore questioned the sincerity of the intention to include other values.

6. Functionality

In the empirical research, managers interpreted functionality in terms of accessibility, flow, and maintenance; they related these terms to the principles of clean, intact, and safe which are considered as the basis or foundation of management.

"All the basic facilities function, and I think that is the foundation of management. The foundation of management is the functioning of sewers, water, and energy" (Personal communication, February 2022).

This manager described functionality as the safety and availability of an asset. However, this technical approach to functionality was criticised by others. An asset manager and a senior management consultant argued that functional management from a technical angle may not be the future.

"Functional management is starting to lose its value. We are entering a world where emotional values are also becoming important" (Personal communication, February 2022).

The technical approach to the term of functionality means that it was not always seen as an inherent value but also as a means. Some participants argued that functionality serves the operational values of mobility and user satisfaction. Different specifications were put forward both for functionality as an inherent value of management and functionality as a means. Process-oriented terms such as asset management, self-management, coordinating municipality, and risk-driven were interpreted as norms. Finally, differentiation was mentioned as a design requirement, meaning the design of the process and not the object.

7. Well-being

Well-being was put forward as an operational value by the managers, but researchers considered it as an inherent value. During the second focus group, one of the managers who suggested well-being as an important value was asked to define it. She stated that the following was the definition broadly supported by the Dutch government, without specifying it:

"Well-being in the Netherlands is currently described based on eight themes: subjective well-being, material prosperity, health, labour and leisure, housing, society, safety, and the environment" (CBS, 2022).

In other words, well-being is considered as the whole of economic factors, health, living environment, and personal relationships that determine well-being. Public space managers defined affordability as a specification of well-being because affordability ensures that money is left for other purposes. Participants indicated that well-being has only played a role in the management of public space in recent years, as is the case for inclusiveness and sustainability.

8. Effectiveness

Public space managers defined effectiveness as the achievement of predefined goals. This includes both policy goals and the laws and norms set by governments or knowledge institutes. This inherent value was specified as the integrated management of public space, benchmarking, participation, co-creation, and risk-driven and was placed under the levels of operational values, norms, and design requirements by the managers of public space.

What is considered effective in the management of public space is ambiguous. Perceptions of effectiveness differ significantly among the managers of public space, reflecting a diversity of professional backgrounds, organizational roles, and normative orientations. There is no single, shared understanding of what contributes to effectiveness. Rather, views are fragmented, and what one participant may regard as a successful intervention, another may perceive as insufficient or even counterproductive. The way participants perceive participatory processes is an illustration of this division.

The specification of effectiveness in the norm 'participation' was mentioned in every data collection round by various participants. Although a management project was mostly considered effective if participation is present, participation is often also seen as a means to achieve other values. Legitimacy is one of the values pursued by participation in the management of public space. By allowing users to participate, the process is considered democratic, which justifies the choices of the administrative body. This also satisfies citizens' need to have a say and improves the image of the administrative body. Although managers do consider participation as a means to achieve effectiveness or an end to consider management expression as effective, managers are not keen on it. They feel obliged to allow citizens to participate because the public requests it and because it is imposed by politicians and policymakers (i.e. through the Environment and Planning Act).

"Managers of public space here would prefer to do away with self-management and participation. It is mainly something that comes from the policymakers" (Personal communication, February 2022).

"Asking me as a manager, we give citizens far too much space in participation. But if you ask the local policymakers, it's not nearly enough" (Personal communication, February 2022).

9. Sustainability

Sustainability was often mentioned in the narrative interviews and focus groups, but managers rarely defined it. The conceptualisation of sustainability was mainly approached from a technical perspective.

"The word sustainable then has to be added so that you also have it (technically) preserved for the longer term" (Personal communication, February 2022).

The common, broader academic definition of a balance between economic, social, and environmental values was not mentioned. The managers used a narrow definition of sustainability and sustainable development. The term sustainability was mainly mentioned in enumerations together with biodiversity and participation; with liveability, useability, and integrated management of public space; or with climate adaptation, without specifically referring to an interrelation. When sustainability was mentioned separately or when examples were given during the interviews, economic and environmental aspects were mentioned. Here, ideas such as long technical lifespan and climate adaptation came up. Actual specifications included the norm of asset management and the design requirement of limiting the urban heat island effect.

10. Inclusiveness

The empirical data also included perceived social and physical feelings of being welcome. Inclusiveness was also often related to accessibility, in terms of access to all. In addition to the relationship between inclusiveness and the physical object public space, a relationship between inclusiveness and the process of management was mentioned.

"There should be no difference in management budget between different parts of the city. You want the city to be even. It is all for the same citizens" (Personal communication, February 2022).

The interviewee didn't point at involving citizens in the process, but at designing the process to ensure inclusiveness at the individual and community levels in public space. Although creating a physical living environment for everyone is usually not labelled as inclusive but rather as accessible, the interviewee used this latter conceptualisation.

Inclusiveness was specified by the managers as the operational value of accessibility and the norms challenge-driven, prevent colonisation, uniformity, the user feels at ease, and usable for all. However, inclusiveness was not always seen as an inherent value. It was also referred to as a means of achieving social interaction, which researchers using the hierarchy of value model deem as a norm. This phenomenon indicates ambiguity between means and end.

Identifying relations between values, norms and design requirements, public space managers did not relate many of the terms that were mentioned in a hierarchical way. Most participants simply indicated relationships, without indicating at which level of the hierarchy of values model the terms should be positioned. The participants considered some relationships the opposite way as the researchers would do it. A participant indicated for example inclusiveness as a specification of social interaction, whereas for the researcher, inclusiveness is an inherent value. This is also supported by other studies using this Hierarchy of values model. The number of relationships mentioned varied among inherent values. More relations were mentioned for longer standing values than for recently added values. It suggests that the most recently added values have not yet been internalised as much as values that have existed for decades.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of clean, intact and safe in management of public space. Although public space managers consider these as the most important, six other inherent value they would like to pursue emerge from the study. Clean, intact and safe still form the basis for their sense but can, from our perspective as researches based on the stories and conceptualisations of the managers, be placed under the six inherent values at lower levels of the hierarchy or value model. Thus, clean, intact and safe fall under functionality; and in addition, safe could also fall under well-being. In general, two main groups of values can be distinguished: efficiency, functionality and effectiveness as asset-centred values that are highly technical in nature; and well-being, sustainability and inclusiveness as user-centred and context-centred values.

11. Discussion

The empirical findings show that within management of public space, there is no clear shared vision of the values that are being pursued. That leads to uncertainties in daily practice when assigning certain values and relating values to each other. While participants agree on 'clean, intact, and safe' as an essential basis of management of public space, a variety of terms at different levels of abstraction were mentioned in the interviews and focus groups. The following topics that emerge from the results will be discussed below: new values and their level of abstraction in daily practice, a tentative shifting rationale, similarities to a paradigm shift in spatial planning, a pioneering phase of a possible paradigm shift in the management of public space, method and implications for the future of management of public space due to changing rationale.

Most of the terms mentioned by the participants can be assigned to the level of norms in the model of hierarchy of values. One explanation for this could be that in guidelines for the management of public space, norms and manuals often guide daily practice; another explanation could be that commonly pursued inherent values within the spectrum change as new values emerge. In addition to the traditional economic and technical values pursued by managers of public space, managers declare that many values have been added in recent years. Although these new values are mentioned, there is a clear struggle in how to handle and assign meaning to them. Values are conceptualised in different ways and are often categorised at a higher level of abstraction than is typically done in academic literature. For example, functionality, as defined by managers, is often specified as asset safety and availability. However, scholars usually define functionality as the extent to which the user's activities can take place in a decent way (Goodwin, 1987; Kisnarini, van Egmond, and Mohammadi, 2012). An example for difference in level of abstraction: accessibility and the integrated management of public space are considered as an inherent value for functionality while from an academic perspective they are operational values (Elsinga et al., 2020; Van de Poel, 2013). At the level of inherent values, the values of sustainability, inclusiveness, and well-being have been added to managers' agenda by politics and society. At the same time, the conceptualisation and specification of functionality and efficiency have changed. These findings are in line with research on perception of quality in the management of urban green spaces, where values related to the use of space and technical values coexist (Randrup, Svännel, Sunding, Jansson, and Sang, 2021). Values are no longer just technical and economic in nature, soft values are making their appearance and exist side-by-side.

A correlation seems to exist between the changing values and a changing nature of the discipline. Participants in the study ascertain that the major aim of managing is to maintain the functions of the current area. The participants interpret this as one-to-one replacement of assets in public space. However, this study also observes emerging dissenting voices. One-to-one replacement seems to be making its turn towards alternative renewal where the users' needs are leading. A new aim of managers is to manage public space in service of the needs of citizens, entrepreneurs, and visitors. Thus a shift from object-centred or asset-centred to user-centred management of public space seems to take place.

A renewed approach to management of public space has been the subject of discussion and research for some time (Suomalainen et al., 2022; Jansson et al., 2020; Spijker and Parra, 2018). Previous academic research in green space management also suggests a shift from an asset-centred approach to one that focuses more on meeting users' needs. Jansson et al. (2020) describe the rise of a user-centered way of working, as in giving space to participation in the management of green space and how this can contribute to supporting different user groups (Jansson et al., 2020). Said and Tempels (2023) and Fors et al. (2018) rightly draw attention to the challenges posed by this new way of working, including the need for knowledge and interest from managers on users, and on the use of public space. However, the results of this study indicate a wider change in thinking. The managers tend to shift from putting finances and assets at the centre of their values towards prioritising the context and needs of the users. For example, participation is one of the design requirements that can be used to serve these values. The empirical findings don't reveal new, already established ways of working yet but rather indications of a pioneer-driven process of changing the rationale of managers, as in changing the managers' principles. Therefore, the observed rise of participatory practices does not appear to be isolated but reflects a broader change in the social and political landscape, with a growing recognition of the value of inclusiveness, sustainability, and well-being.

This perceived shift in the management of public space shows similarities with the theoretical debate on paradigm shifts in spatial planning. Object-centred and asset-centred planning in the 1950s also had a focus on technical and economic values (Hartmann and Geertman, 2016). This object-centred perspective gradually changed into a social constructivist perspective (Lindblom, 1959; Smelser and Baltes, 2001). The changes perceived in the values pursued by managers suggest that the field of managing public space is currently on the verge of a paradigm shift from asset-centred to user- and context-centred management of public space. The similarities with the paradigm shift spatial planning provide an interesting opportunity for a comparison of the two disciplines on a theoretical level. The novelty of the apparent shift in values and the absence of recognition of these values in the past result in a lack of competences and strategies, and, as a result, a lack of structural change in daily practice. Management of public space requires awareness of the values pursued and a critical reflection on the relationship between these values, conflicting or not.

The shift highlighted in this study can be understood as a niche in practice, where pioneers in the field have joined forces to exchange knowledge to realise such ambitions (Kopgroepbeheer, 2024; Stichting managing public space, 2024). Because the shift is still in an early stage, there is no agreement yet on how to specify the new inherent and operational values to norms and design requirements. This blurs the line between ends and means, resulting in means becoming ends – such as for example with the striving for 'efficient management of public space', elaborated in the results chapter. It also indicates that values of managing public space in practice seem to be applied more intuitively than in a systematically operationalised way. As mentioned above, the lack of a dominant shared set of values within management of public space becomes apparent in ambiguity and disagreement on how to proceed, resulting in tension and discussion among public space managers themselves and with others. At the level of operational values, a dichotomy can be observed between integrated and sectoral management of public space. These two mindsets result in different specifications at the level of norms and design requirements. As shown in the results, some participants argue that future management should be integrated, adaptive, flexible, participative, and innovative, others are sceptical about it. They doubt if integration leads to efficiency or effectiveness, and which inherent values should be pursued at all. Besides, managers disagree on which norms and design requirements have an 'in sake of' relation with which inherent value, not knowing yet how to give substance to these abstract values in their daily practice. Comparable value conflicts can be found in many other disciplines. Policy actors employ different strategies to deal with such value conflicts: seeking a balance, alternating emphasis on certain values and assigning the responsibility of value to different institutional structures (Thacher and Rein, 2004). And like value conflicts, a shift in values is not unknown to other disciplines either.

The research was compelled to employ multiple methods. It appeared that public space managers do not have explicit knowledge of the values they pursue. As a result, they struggled to articulate what they aimed to achieve with public space management during the interviews. To address this gap, the method was supplemented with two focus groups. The focus groups forced the managers to collaboratively define what they pursue with management of public space. The combination of interviews and focus groups provided valuable insights, not only into the pursued values but also into how these values manifest in practice. The focus groups demonstrated that, in addition to clean, intact, and safe other identified values are also regarded as relevant. This shows that the pursued values in management of public space are part of a dynamic process. The difficulty in articulating their pursued values raises the question of whether managers critically reflect on values in practice or even discuss them at all.

Conclusion

Whereas academics have mostly discussed the added value of public space from the perspective of spatial planning and urban design, this research provides insight into the values – as in principles - pursued by the management of public space. It provides insight into what values are being pursued and hints at how these values play a role in the day-to-day practice.

Public space managers see clean, intact, and safe as the basis for their work. In addition, the study revealed the following inherent values: efficiency, functionality, well-being, sustainability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness. The commonly shared values of clean, intact, and safe are not clearly linked to the other identified inherent values; they are seen as separate components. There is no dominant shared set of values of management of public space that adequately addresses current and future challenges. The question is whether clean, intact, and safe will remain the foundation for management and other values will be seen as the icing on the cake, or that clean, intact, and safe will be incorporated into a broader system of inherent values.

The study also shows that the values the managers want to pursue seem to be primarily determined by norms and design requirements; values at a higher level of abstraction are not explicitly used. What is more, the values of managing public space seem to be applied more intuitively than in a systematically operationalised way. Also, means and ends are sometimes blurred and conflated. Since the way managers describe the values also says something about their current way of working, it means that in practice groups of managers in the domain work in different directions. The study reveals that reflection on the values of the domain of management of public space and their impact is not common for public space managers. Breaking this pattern could reinforce the development of management of public space, both at a professional and a more theoretical level. To enable this, further research, in particular transdisciplinary research, is needed on the shift of values in relation to current societal challenges, on the relationship between different values, and on the organisation and way of working in the management of public space. Since the effectuation of a paradigm shift involves not only a change of pursued values but also their internalisation, further research is needed to explore the impact of this shift on daily practice. Such transdisciplinary research can contribute to the further development of the management of public space, enabling managers to give substance to the developing field. The question is how this fundamental change in thinking will translate into the organisations. In professional practice, pioneers have already started to dispute clean, safe, and intact as the predominant rationale of managing public space for maintaining and improving the quality of public space in the future. Social constructivist thinking within management of public space will not only have impact on the pursued values of managing public space as such but will raise awareness of the variability of values and the inevitably associated value conflicts as well. Further research can shed light on and contribute to this development.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Duivenvoorden Eva: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Hesselmans Ton:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Brinkhuijsen Marlies:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Investigation. **Hartmann Thomas:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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