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Since this definition neatly excludes completely man-made landscapes, even the most advanced examples of habitat creation, and excludes land which may have important influences on urban wildlife and the urban environment even if not accessible, some other terminology is needed.

The origins of the term urban countryside are not clear, although early in the 1970s Richard Mabey coined the term the 'unofficial countryside' to describe those wild spaces in town that were often appreciated more by local people than by professionals (Mabey, 1973). Decades on it is certainly untrue to suggest that professionals are still neglecting this resource. In this text the term **urban countryside** is therefore used as an all encompassing term which is nevertheless a convenient means of separating out those areas of urban landscape which have:

- semi-natural origins *or* appearance;
- where maintaining wildlife interest is one of the objectives of the management;
- where the ecosystem is made up of complex and changing communities that need to be managed (where management is required) with an understanding of their dynamics and of the interactions between plants and between plants and animals.

The use of the term 'countryside' allows for interesting parallels with the rural landscape. It allows a focus on land which is not **natural** (since it is dominated by human intervention in terms of which species are found there) but which because of the setting or visual characteristics may appear to the public as if it has not been deliberately created. Part of the value that such sites have lies in the extent to which they are perceived as relatively natural or uncontrolled areas, reminiscent of more natural environments but surviving in an urban setting. This perception is important even if at times it is superficial and inaccurate.

A related term that has sometimes been used is **ecological landscapes** (see for example Ruff and Tregay, 1982) and this will also be used here, particularly to describe man-made designs that are intended to appear natural. However as an umbrella term the phrase is perhaps best avoided since it seems to invite confusion with **landscape ecology** which has been adopted by geographers for a specific field of study (see Chapter 5).

Technical challenges

On the technical level urban countryside sites can present new challenges for the landscape managers. Because of their specific complexes of plant and animal species or because of the objectives and goals of the managers and users, these areas often need to be looked after through the application of ecological rather than horticultural techniques.

For much of its history landscape design and management has been based on horticultural principles which rely upon study of how individual plants

grow and the factors which encourage them to grow better. Monocultures or very simple mixtures have been created, where weeding is often the most important management tool, to reduce competition, and where human organization of the vegetation structure and patterns is paramount.

We are being asked increasingly to produce or conserve for society complex populations and mixtures of different species living in intricate communities where weeding in the traditional sense becomes a meaningless task. In these settings we can not possibly dictate the fate of most individual plants but must attempt broader and more subtle management operations that re-direct community dynamics to get the desired results. It is essential therefore to learn a new set of tools, based on ecology, that influence the competitive balance rather than directly manipulate populations and species mixtures. There is a focus on processes of plant interaction as much as on the pattern of the finished effect.

Challenges to policy formulation

The issues involved in the urban countryside go far beyond that of maintenance procedures. The re-introduction of wild areas to the urban environment is, for many people, a means to compensate in part for the disappearance of nature from everyday experience. The interest in ecological landscapes reflects concern for the loss of the aesthetic, spiritual and recreational values characterizing the natural environment. They represent an opportunity to explore and address some of the most fundamental concerns about environmental protection and social philosophy. In many cases ecological designs, therefore, provide one of the most effective (but of course not the only) means of exploring the development of stronger relationships between human beings and nature. Again this can be achieved often by focusing on the **processes** of community involvement in landscape projects instead of having an over-riding concern for the product.

This focus on human values adds another layer of complexity to the management issues. The urban countryside is also characterized by the complex diversity of goals and objectives that may need to be reconciled. In contrast to the objectives within traditional amenity landscapes in parks, it is not enough, or sometimes not even particularly high priority, that these landscapes are attractive or functional. Often they need to be managed to promote wildlife or to meet other needs, and unlike some rural areas conflicting land uses can not be easily accommodated by zoning. Everything that happens in urban areas may be exposed to the scrutiny of large numbers of interest groups, and developing a clear perspective on what should be done is often the hardest task facing the manager.

The presumption of much nature conservation policy is, and has to be, that attempts are made to protect biodiversity **regardless** of whether that protection is acceptable to the majority of politicians, business people or even the public. But anyone who has worked in nature conservation usually quickly realizes that the subject area is not in any sense an objective science.