Governance Factors Shaping Greenspace Provision: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract

There is now a very substantial corpus of literature on urban greenspace, especially studies examining users' needs. Few studies have considered greenspace acquisition from a local government perspective. Through a conceptually led and empirically grounded study, this paper identifies and applies previously overlooked insights from urban planning and social research, to examine how greenspace provision is configured by governance factors: governance tools, organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership. The case study presented draws upon qualitative data to investigate the key question: how do governance factors influence the provision of greenspace in cities? Findings reveal the tensions between a need for certainty and a desire for flexibility, highlighting inconsistencies between planning theory and practice. Importantly, the interaction of governance factors appear to strongly affect provision. Better understanding the interplay of these enablers and constraints can inform policy-making to ensure that rapidly growing cities can respond to their residents' needs using available resources.

Key words: urban park planning policy; organisational leadership and culture; political leadership; municipal government; Australia
Introduction

Urban greenspace is recognised as a vital component of healthy (Groenewegen et al., 2006; Maas et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2012), sustainable (Wolch et al., 2014) and liveable cities (Wolff & Haase, 2019; Zérah, 2007). As urban populations swell globally, requirements for accessible urban greenspace to support city-dwellers’ diverse physical and mental health needs are increasing (Holbrook, 2009; Liu et al., 2020; Whitten, 2020). These greenspace dependencies were highlighted recently by disjunctures created by lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lakhani et al., 2020; Mell, 2020). Residents across many cities worldwide missed spending time outdoors and interacting with other people (Ugolini et al., 2020), and experienced anxiety and depression, declining mental health, and loneliness when deprived of greenspace (Soga et al., 2020). Residents’ ability to use greenspace is thus “vitaly important for the health and well-being of individuals, and it will lead to healthier populations” (Slater et al., 2020, p.4). This is especially so for rapidly growing cities. As England (2010, p.65) has observed, in such cities, population growth “places increasing strain on infrastructure services including health, water, transport, education and community services”. Unsurprisingly, many city governments find themselves struggling to balance greenspace provision against other compelling needs, including affordable housing, transport and infrastructure provision (Caspersen, Konijnendijk, & Olafsson, 2006; Jim & Chen, 2006). For some local governments in the United Kingdom – London specifically – this pressure has led to decentralised governance arrangements for greenspace management,
and the growing use of ‘friends of …’ groups (Whitten, 2019). Increasingly greenspace is tasked with meeting multiple functions, including stormwater attenuation, temperature modulation, and habitat provision, creating potential conflicts as these functions are traded-off (Lo and Jim, 2012). Better greenspace governance is essential for ensuring that greenspace supply can meet both the diverse demands of urban residents (Liu et al., 2020; Wolff & Haase, 2019; Xing et al., 2018) and the ecological, economic, and institutional functions with which many greenspaces are now tasked. In many countries local government is responsible for greenspace supply and maintenance. While there is a growing literature on urban greenspace generally, comparatively less attention has been given to the practices of how local governments make greenspace provision decisions, presenting a knowledge gap.

Our focus here is on urban greenspace, a term referring to vegetated public land (including parks, cemeteries, natural areas, roadside vegetation and riparian corridors) maintained by local government (Boulton, Dedekorkut-Howes & Byrne, 2018). Greenspace governance is conceptualised here, consistent with Lawrence et al. (2013, p.464), as the "processes, interactions, organisations and decisions" regarding greenspace provision and management. Specifically, the term refers to: governance structure; governance tools (the suite of planning instruments, legislation, policy, strategies and guidelines); organisational leadership and culture; and political leadership (providing advocacy and decision-making). Efficacious greenspace provision requires managing the tensions and trade-offs that occur along a certainty-flexibility continuum. By ‘efficacious’ urban greenspace provision, we mean agile, flexible, coordinated, and sufficiently resourced systems of greenspace delivery and management.
In theory, regulatory systems provide *certainty* through “an emphasis on speed, efficiency, accountability, and transparency” (Steele and Ruming, 2012, p.156), whereas discretionary or performance-based systems offer *flexibility* to enable rapid responses to changing conditions (Ericksen, Berke, Crawford & Dixon, 2004). In greenspace governance practice, significant tensions emerge as there is a need for both *certainty* and a desire for *flexibility* to enable rapid responses to changing conditions (Ericksen et al., 2004). Observing changes to land-use planning systems in Britain, USA, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand, some commentators have suggested that a stronger desire for certainty (favouring developers in many cases) comes at the cost of reduced flexibility (Baker, Sipe & Gleeson, 2006; England, 2010; Tewdwr-Jones, 1999; Yu & Hui, 2019). But, performance-based approaches to development can also create problems; “greater flexibility can give rise to disputes between applicants, planning professionals, decision makers and the community about what is or is not acceptable” (King-Cullen, 2015, p.21). To understand the interplay between theory and practice, it is necessary to consider the efficacy of greenspace governance in the local context, including the trade-off between certainty and flexibility, a task we take up in this paper. Our research delves deeply into the situated experiences of greenspace planners and managers - those concerned with, and responsible for, urban greenspace provision in a municipal context. It reveals how planning approaches to greenspace provision that are informed by theory are usually detached from the practical realities of service provision ‘on the ground’.

In what follows, we discuss insights from the personal experiences of greenspace managers, planners, and decision-makers in a fast-growing Australian city, where greenspace governance is a largely centralised arrangement. These practitioners’ experiences reflect the tensions inherent in greenspace planning and delivery within a complex physical, social,
economic, and policy landscape. Our focus on the governance factors here reveals that park provision challenges appear to occur at the interface of theory and practice. We report our observations of the challenges “at the coalface” for greenspace practitioners and decision-makers in a municipal setting and discuss how the difficulties of converting theoretical aspirations into practical outcomes are resolved. Employing elements of a grounded theory approach (Bryman, 2015), we examine the issue of local greenspace provision through the lens of an insider (the lead author is a former local government officer in a park management role) as well as outsiders (as a research team), answering a key question: how do governance factors influence the provision of municipal greenspace in cities?

We begin this task by reviewing the key findings from the scholarly literature about governance factors and their role in shaping the practice of municipal urban greenspace provision. Next, we explain the research methods used, and present a synopsis of the case study area, followed by our findings. The paper concludes with a discussion on the ongoing tensions practitioners face in attempting to satisfy the need for certainty while enabling flexibility in urban greenspace provision. We also suggest some priorities for further research based on the insights and limitations of this case.

1. Governance Factors Shaping Local Urban Greenspace Provision

A complex array of factors either help or hinder the provision of urban greenspace – sometimes they do both simultaneously, depending on place and time. In our systematic quantitative literature review (Boulton et al., 2018) we identified factors affecting greenspace provision (Fig. 1); most prominent among these were governance and resources. Similarly, Buijs et al. (2016) have proposed that key factors shaping greenspace provision include: resources (financial and cultural), strong leadership, a well-established organisational
structure, and flexibility in governance arrangements enabling responses to local change. Other commentators have highlighted the importance of governance factors in shaping greenspace provision, especially under decentralised arrangements in the UK (Dempsey, Burton & Duncan, 2016; Mathers, Dempsey & Molin, 2015; Whitten, 2019), Sweden (Randrup, Ostberg & Wistrom, 2017), and the Netherlands (Mattijssen et al., 2018). From a practice perspective, securing and allocating resources for urban greenspace typically occurs through the interplay of different factors, including those related to governance such as the available tools, organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership.

Hoch (2002, p.64) has remarked that “planning practice … favour[s planners] … who demonstrate political savvy, moral sensitivity and active learning”. But there are tensions in juggling the demands of providing professional advice with the goal of serving the broader public good (Hoch, 1994, p.7). It is somewhat surprising then that the voices of practitioners are less salient in the literature.

1.1 Perspectives of municipal greenspace practitioners

The relative scarcity of practitioner perspectives in the literature may arise partly because access to key informants about urban greenspace provision is challenging, especially when individuals are reluctant to participate or share perspectives that could compromise their job security or future funding. An unwillingness of staff and/or officials to openly share and/or reflect upon personal or organisational failure may also present barriers in settings where the act of sharing poses conflicts with cultural/social expectations. Nonetheless, there are some city-scale case studies, mostly from North and Central America (Canada, USA, and Mexico), Europe (Germany and Sweden) and Australia, that illuminate the perspectives of professional
planners, land managers, and policymakers who are embedded within municipal government, albeit often as secondary elements to studies with a different focus. For instance, Cohen et al. (2013) examined park use and park-based physical activity in four American cities and – as a means of triangulation, interviewed park administrators to confirm scope of programmes and services provided, and estimated number of participants. The research revealed that programmed activities and facilities were strongly correlated with park use. Similarly, Heckert & Kondo (2018) considered non-profits’ governance of greened vacant lots in Philadelphia using interviews with staff and residents to supplement site surveys, spatial analysis, and resident focus groups. Results revealed potential direct recreational use benefits of greened lots to neighbours.

Studies where municipal governance practices and municipal professionals are a central focus of greenspace provision have examined how governance practices are introduced, implemented, or modified. Randrup et al. (2017) in their assessment of issues and challenges for municipal park managers across Sweden examined governance specifically in terms of resources (revenue and staff) and planning instruments. Insights revealed Swedish managers benefit from a strong internal organisation meaning less reliance on external contractors for greenspace maintenance, and an optimistic outlook of the short term, particularly concerning the adequacy of budgets and the quality of their urban green spaces. In their case study of a prominent Australian linear park, Ibrahim et al. (2020) examined the opinions of key informants from municipal and state government agencies, politicians, and community volunteers about the management challenges experienced in governing the greenspace. Using semi-structured interviews, their study exposed the difficulties that arise from an inconsistent and informal management structure.
These studies have improved understanding of the range of stakeholders involved in urban greenspace provision, and how and why different governance approaches are implemented. However, what is missing are the perspectives of local government insiders on the interplay of factors that shape greenspace provision. Case studies of urban greenspace governance drawing on insider experience are notably rare, particularly studies exploring the role of organisational leadership and culture as key factors shaping urban greenspace provision, and rarer still are those from centralised governance structures. Notable exceptions are concentrated in the UK, including Dempsey et al.'s (2016) case study of a cross-sector partnership for greenspace management in Sheffield, UK, which sought to understand why a particular approach to greenspace provision was favoured over others. It found a lack of leadership (evidenced through the absence of a shared vision and explicit responsibilities), was a key governance factor that directly affected greenspace provision outcomes. Similarly, Mathers, Dempsey and Molin (2015) used semi-structured interviews with greenspace managers to examine partnerships through case studies including Sheffield, Hackney, and Stockton-on-Tees, UK; finding that place-keeping partnerships between residents and the public sector rely on sustained resource provision. Drawing upon insights from green infrastructure stakeholder workshops, Calvert et al. (2018, p.570) propose "more certainty and a robust assessment of quality that is both achievable and flexible" when describing new benchmarks for quality green infrastructure in new development. Most recently, Boulton, Dedekorkut-Howes, Holden & Byrne (2020), in their case study of Surrey, Canada, have explored factors shaping urban greenspace, drawing upon interviews with key greenspace stakeholders internal and external to the municipal administration; in this case, economies and property market, governance tools, and resources manifest as the core factors shaping urban greenspace provision.
1.2 Governance tools

Governance tools comprise the planning instruments that ideally shape where, how much, and what type of greenspace is provided in a city (e.g., via policy, strategies, and plans). Priorities for urban greenspace provision are typically established via municipal government planning tools which include planning schemes, community plans, or land use policies and strategies. While these instruments theoretically enable the marshalling of resources for urban greenspace provision (i.e. land, finance, and expertise), in practice they cannot always achieve the desired outcomes; merely having a policy and/or plan for urban greenspace does not necessarily result in delivery as intended. In their review of the ability of built environment assessment systems to evaluate green infrastructure quality, Calvert et al. (2018) suggest that the research to date concerning municipal actors’ experience in planning, designing, and delivering green infrastructure, exposes manifest challenges, including uncertainty, disagreement, and/or lacking guidance, even when policy and plans are developed at international and national levels. Despite the existence of greenspace policies and targets, researchers have reported the under-provision of greenspace in Shanghai, China (Li & Liu, 2016) and Tabriz, Iran (Breuste & Rahimi, 2015). They have attributed this outcome to a type of implementation failure (Talen, 1997) that arises when targets are not delivered in an equitable fashion or sufficiently prescribed and/or measured at the local scale. Such under-provision can entrench socio-economic disadvantage at the city-scale. In a similar fashion, despite the existence of state law and local regulations designed to ensure equitable access to quality greenspace in Hermosillo, Mexico, Lara-Valencia & García-Pérez (2013, p.363) have reported greenspace provision was compromised by “limited local planning capacity” and a “systematic indifference to [residents’] open space needs”. While policies and plans are often the most critical implementation tools, their existence, quality, and
implementation can be dependent on other factors such as the capacity, management, and leadership of staff undertaking municipal administration, especially in a centralised governance context.

1.3 Organisational leadership and culture

Choumert (2010) points to the urgent need for research to evaluate the impact of bureaucratic behaviour on the allocation and use of public resources for urban greenspace provision. Organisational leadership and culture appear to play an important role. Leadership here refers to the “interpersonal influence that gets an individual or group to do what the leader wants done” (Wood et. al, 2004, p.512) and includes establishing direction and developing future vision (Kotter, 1990 in Wood et al., 2004). Opportunity for leadership occurs at organisational, team, and/or individual levels. For example, a Parks Board or Department, a community garden group, a departmental work team, or their appointed representative or manager can all exhibit leadership through their vision for urban greenspace provision. But organisational culture is important as well. Schein (1990, in Wood et al., 2004, p.436), describes organisational culture as “the system of shared beliefs and values that develops within an organisation and guides the behaviour of its members”. It comprises observable aspects (stories, rites, rituals, and symbols), shared values, and common assumptions. Similarly, Van den Berg and Wilderom (2004, p.570) define organisational culture as “shared perceptions of organisational work practices within organisational units” and suggest it comprises “autonomy, external orientation, interdepartmental coordination, human resource orientation, and improvement orientation”.

Scholars have reported the critical relationship between leadership and personal effectiveness and organisational culture (Kwantes and Boglarsky, 2007). Organisational
culture can manifest itself as the degree of internal cooperation, collaboration, mutual respect, trust, and engagement amongst an organisation’s members. Organisational leadership and culture in greenspace provision are under-researched. The greenspace literature includes references to compromised provision attributable to dysfunctional teams or passive/aggressive organisational cultures. Perkins (2009), for example, has recounted how disagreement and competition between different staff and elected officials about park budgets (expenditure and revenue) detrimentally impacted park provision and maintenance in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Similarly, Tang and Wong (2008) observed negative outcomes in open space provision for Hong Kong when planners chose the path of least resistance when approving development at the cost of increasing urban greenspace provision.

1.4 Political leadership

At a local level, political leadership also affects greenspace provision including if and where new urban greenspace is provided as well as how it is maintained. The role of political leadership emerges through decisions and advocacy. Challenges occur for municipal government when politicians make election promises for projects that they cannot deliver – such as a new neighbourhood park (Flinders and Dommett, 2013) – or when elected leaders champion cost-saving measures. Budget cuts to the maintenance and management of Philadelphia’s Fairmont Park system, for example, resulted in the physical decline of park assets (vegetation and facilities) and social disorder (increasing violent crime) with concomitant impacts on the city’s image (Brownlow, 2006). In some cases, economic growth-oriented development policies promoted by the political leadership may actively reduce urban greenspace. Istanbul is a case in point, where a popular park was proposed for demolition to make way for a politically favoured shopping mall and hotel project (Cengiz et al., 2019). Political leadership is a strong driver in shaping provision of urban greenspace,
evidenced by a similar study of a mid-sized city in Canada (Boulton et al., 2020). As noted by Hoch (2002), practitioners need to guide elected leaders and inform them about the costs and benefits of their decisions and the requirements of local policies.

To summarise, the scholarly literature broadly demonstrates that governance tools (legislation, policies, plans, strategies, and budgets), organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership are prominent governance factors shaping urban greenspace provision. However, comparatively less is known about how the interplay of these factors affects the development, coordination, and implementation of urban greenspace commensurate with current and future needs and desires. For centralised governance structures, the perspective of insiders within local government is rare. There is a need for more detailed assessment of greenspace governance tools and their role from that insider’s perspective. In addition, despite the abundant research examining cities of the developed world, fewer studies have explored the challenges of supplying urban greenspace in Australia – one of the world’s most urbanised countries. Likewise, the role and management of secondary cities as critical contributors to the functioning of urban and rural areas is also under-studied (Cities Alliance, 2019). Compared with cities of Asia, Europe, and North America, research concerning urban greenspace provision is relatively scarce for cities of Oceania, Africa, and South America, especially for mid-sized cities (Boulton et al., 2018). To address these knowledge gaps, about how the interplay of governance factors configures urban greenspace provision at the local scale from an insiders’ perspective, we undertook a case study of a rapidly growing, secondary, mid-sized Australian city. The theoretical framework, developed from the literature review (Boulton et al., 2018), guided our data collection and analysis.
2. Methods

Our case study draws upon multiple data sources, consistent with Rapley (2007), including interview transcripts and a selective review of official documents (formal plans, strategies, and policies). The latter were used to cross-check interviewees’ claims and triangulate findings (Bryman, 2015). Drawing from the secondary city types described by Roberts (2014), Logan City, on the periphery of the Brisbane metropolitan region, which shoulders a significant portion of local population growth, was selected as a secondary city positioned within a cluster of cities (Cities Alliance, 2019). Logan is positioned along the major north-south transport corridor connecting Brisbane to the Gold Coast, and the state of Queensland with New South Wales. Like other secondary cities, including Wolfsburg (Germany) and Gaziantep (Turkey), Logan is a centralised hub of logistics and manufacturing (Cities Alliance, 2019, p.20). Logan was also chosen based on the lead author’s experience in senior roles over the decade preceding the data collection, offering extensive insight into urban greenspace delivery and the role of governance factors. The primary data collected for qualitative data analysis was derived from interviews with the lead author’s former peers.

2.1 Data collection

Data collection involved purposively identifying a list (Bryman, 2015) of 72 local government elected officials and officers with a role in urban greenspace provision from the local government case study. These officials and officers represented the organisation both horizontally across the four directorates (Community and Customer Services; Organisational Services; Strategy and Planning; Roads and Water Infrastructure) and vertically at different position levels (from officer to executive and elected). The lead author selected a purposive sample of 15 potential participants based on their previous effective working relationships;
an approach that sought to achieve candid contributions from interviewees, with the lead author acting as practitioner-researcher using the benefit of hindsight (Table 1). Twelve semi-structured interviews with an average duration of 44 minutes were conducted between November 2017 and February 2018). The interviewees were mostly male (7 out of 12).

Nine open-ended questions were asked in a consistent sequence to examine interviewees’ perceptions of the local government’s role in urban greenspace provision (see Appendix A). This method sought to facilitate respondents’ participation in a candid and at times conversational interview, while allowing for the collection of different perspectives over a short timeframe (Barbour & Schostak, 2011; Veal, 2011). As participants may have held views conflicting with the publicised position/s of their employer, semi-structured interviews also provided the opportunity to ask questions about the administration’s policy and processes, such as the background to policy development and procedural challenges, efficacy, relevance, and application. Such information about the context of policy and process and the practices of greenspace provision would not otherwise be evident from solely examining policy documents. Interviews were conducted by the lead author, apart from their own interview as a participant; this was conducted by one of the co-authors.

2.2 Data analysis

The case study data was analysed qualitatively in three steps. First, we completed a systematic review of the literature on factors that influence greenspace provision (see Boulton et al., 2018) and from these results, synthesised a framework of factors, further informed by the lead author’s professional experience as a municipal greenspace manager. Using this framework as a lens for analysis and interpretation, interview transcripts were then
analysed using NVivo. Finally, the transcripts were analysed inductively using Leximancer to determine emergent concepts and themes in addition to the preliminary framework, their interrelationships, and relative importance to the research question (Angus et al., 2013; Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Given the complexity of issues and quantity of data derived from our interviews, we present the findings in two parts, commencing here with the interplay of the governance factors (governance tools, organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership). This interplay is also affected by community expectations; financial and natural resources; economies and markets - factors we partly explore elsewhere (Boulton, Dedekorkut-Howes & Byrne, 2019; Boulton, Byrne, Dedekorkut-Howes, 2015).

### 3. Urban Greenspace Provision in Logan

We begin our case study with an overview of Logan, its urban planning context, and governance structure that applies to greenspace provision. Next, we detail the results of our interview transcript analysis: the local manifestation of the factors shaping urban greenspace reported by the interviewees in general and the interplay of governance factors at a more detailed level.

#### 3.1 Urban planning context

##### 3.1.1 Case study site

Logan is a mid-size city located approximately halfway along Australia’s eastern seaboard and is part of the South East Queensland (SEQ) region (The State of Queensland, 2017). With an area of 959 km² and an estimated resident population of 334,358 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020), the local government area (LGA) has a gross population density of 3.48
persons per hectare. However, as illustrated in Figure 2, the density across the LGA varies from 0.26 to 26.91 due to Logan’s land-use pattern comprising both urban areas (five persons or more per hectare) and non-urban areas (less than five persons per hectare) (see Appendix B). Although the city has an average population weighted density that would be considered equivalent of countryside areas in many European cities, Logan’s patterns of land use and population density are similar to low-density North American cities of San Antonio and Portland (Mees, 2009). Logan is also diverse with 215 different cultures and is comparatively young with 50% of the population aged under 30 years. In contrast to other parts of SEQ, Logan has a higher level of comparatively disadvantaged residents characterised by higher unemployment (8.9%), lower income (households earning a high income of $2,500 per week are 4.2% lower), and lower education levels (9.9% lower percentage of persons with a Bachelor or Higher degree) (id consulting, 2020a). As Australia’s eighth largest Local Government Area by population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020), Logan is Queensland’s fifth largest growing LGA, with an annual average growth rate of 2.41% compared to the SEQ average of 2.2% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Logan’s estimated resident population is forecast to reach 614,918 by 2041 resulting from significant projected growth of 143,625 residents in two of the state’s top three growth areas, Greenbank and Jimboomba (The State of Queensland, 2018a).

3.1.2 Greenspace governance structure

With a British-derived planning system, Australia has a hierarchical structure of government - from Commonwealth to local government. Local government is created by state government

1 In Queensland all land is part of an LGA and local government boundaries include vast areas of nonurban uses such as national parks and farmland.
and is “accountable to higher levels of government” (Tewdwr-Jones, 1999, p.244). In Queensland, local government exists as an organ of the State Government, constituted through the powers of the *Local Government Act 2009* (The State of Queensland, 2020a). Greenspace is governed by a structure involving both local and state governments. Land use planning in Queensland is governed by the *Planning Act 2016* (The State of Queensland, 2018b) which superseded the *Sustainable Planning Act (SPA) 2009*, the legislation current at the time of data collection. As the head of power for strategic planning, land use planning, and development assessment at both State and local levels, SPA is described as a “hybrid land-use planning system”. It is characterised by both certainty and flexibility: flexible as a *performance* system having a strategic role and allowing some discretion; and certain as a *conformance* system, hierarchical in principle, providing certainty via a function focused on implementation rather than application (Steel and Ruming, 2012, p.169). Additionally, Queensland’s *Economic Development Act 2012* (The State of Queensland, 2018c) gives the Minister for Economic Development Queensland (EDQ) the power to declare land identified for development to deliver significant benefits to the community Priority Development Areas (PDAs). EDQ is responsible for planning, assessing, and guiding development within PDAs (The State of Queensland, 2020b). As a result, governance tools (e.g. town planning schemes) are mostly determined by the State government but developed and implemented by local government (except for PDAs which remain a State government responsibility).

While development of Logan’s two PDAs (Greenbank and Jimboomba) is controlled by the State (EDQ) (Logan City Council, 2020), land use in the remaining LGA is governed by the *Logan Planning Scheme*, prepared in accordance with SPA and amended to align with the current *Planning Act 2016* (Logan City Council, 2015a). SPA required local governments to prepare a *Local Government Infrastructure Plan* (LGIP), detailing existing and future
requirement for trunk infrastructure (The State of Queensland, 2009). *Trunk infrastructure* includes parks defined as “development infrastructure for sport and recreation by a local government” that were identified in an LGIP and “the only park infrastructure for which infrastructure charges can be levied” (Logan City Council, 2015b, p.13). These infrastructure charges are levied by Council in accordance with the Planning Act and paid by the applicant (property owner or their representative) proposing new development. The *Planning Act 2016* did not make major changes to these requirements and definitions. The *State Planning Statutory Guideline* requires the ongoing pursuit of a standards approach (area per population) for park provision, and infrastructure charges are capped for property development (The State of Queensland, 2014), thus limiting revenue to support infrastructure delivery. Additionally, land for environmental purposes is funded through a separate local government levy determined by the Council and charged to property owners as a portion of their annual property tax.

As extrinsic material informing Logan’s LGIP, Logan’s *Park Strategy 2015* (Logan City Council, 2015b) defines provision standards for the City’s urban greenspace - specifically parks. In managing current development and planning for future growth and consistent with Queensland’s *Statutory Guideline 03/14 Local Government Infrastructure Plans* (The State of Queensland, 2014) Logan City Council uses a ‘standards’ approach with targets for park area, distribution, design, and facilities (Logan City Council, 2015b). Logan enjoys parks for sport and recreation at a provision ratio of 4-4.5ha per 1000 residents, generally consistent in area provision with park standards for other cities in Australia and the USA (Byrne, Sipe & Searle, 2010). This figure increases to almost 25 ha per 1000 residents when combined with environmental and undeveloped parkland, excluding other types of public urban greenspace, such as roadside vegetation (gardens and street trees), cemeteries, or drainage reserves. As
would be expected from these figures and its humid subtropical climate, Logan’s physical landscape is visibly “green”, characterised by abundant vegetation on public and private property, contributing ecosystem services and benefits and enhancing the city’s green appearance (Fig. 3). Based on the area provision ratios, Logan seems to be remarkably successful at providing urban greenspace - especially parks.

Our NVivo analysis of the transcripts reveals several factors influence urban greenspace provision in Logan, generally consistent with the literature, including resources (financial, land, staff, and facilities) and community expectations, from residents and business - prominently (Appendix C). Likewise, several governance factors emerged from the transcripts: governance structure, governance tools, organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership. It is these factors and their interrelationships that we are concerned with here; they help answer our research question. The remaining factors are examined elsewhere (for example, Boulton, Dedekorkut-Howes & Byrne, 2019; Boulton, Byrne, Dedekorkut-Howes, 2015).

3.2 Tools governing Logan’s urban greenspace

As expected, a key factor undergirding urban greenspace provision for Logan was planning policy - a critical governance tool (Appendix C). The Leximancer analysis of interview transcripts (Fig. 4) illustrates that ‘planning’ as a theme, comprised the concepts of ‘land’, ‘having’, ‘ability’, ‘place’ and the ‘whole’. The role of planning in Logan is portrayed by the interviewees as more often regulatory than strategic, demonstrating the focus on compliance issues and less often on the strategic approaches to planning urban greenspace. Above all,
the interviewees’ insights revealed the tensions that occur when rules (certainty) inhibit innovation (flexibility).

3.2.1 Facilitating strategic outcomes

Compared with conformance to adopted policy, some of the interviewees yearned for a strategic approach to urban greenspace provision. Their experience demonstrated that greenspace provision is not equally available, distributed, accessible, or even suitable for facility development across the city. Several managers recognised the importance of urban greenspace provision, its value, and the critical challenge that rapid growth presents to provide essential infrastructure. For instance, Manager 2 suggested that “planning needs to consider all types of greenspace in the city... [but] it looks purely at parks... other greenspaces can offer something and help deliver the services that parks are trying to deliver”. This suggests that strategically re-defining greenspace for Logan is essential, including recognising the demands and opportunities for integrated purposes such as transport, drainage, and recreation. However, there are perceived challenges that are associated with state planning legislation, which to date, lags in acknowledging the opportunity for green infrastructure planning, by insisting on specific network plans: “integrated planning and coordination of network plans can fall through the cracks because... of timeframes and different networks being at different stages of [the] planning cycle” (Officer 2).

3.2.2 Regulating compliance

Interviewees identified a range of experiences where urban greenspace provision is controlled, and/or restricted by established rules. Some perceive Council’s policies and
Management Directives as an important framework to guide the budget process and decision-making, regulate internal process, and support innovative funding approaches (Executive Manager 3). “Innovation” in this sense means attracting external grant funding for environmental protection, recreation, arts, and culture. Others believe that these governance tools support consistency and good decision-making from a citywide and corporate perspective (Manager 4). Likewise, having clear rules was helpful in managing expectations of newly elected Councillors attempting to alter the direction of how and what parks and facilities are provided based on personal preferences (Manager 4). For others, constraints of the development assessment process meant that attempts to acquire land for parks by negotiation at the development application stage were rarely successful (Manager 3). However, outside the organisation’s internal governance framework, consistency was perceived to be compromised. Officer 2 observed that differential levels of service for parks delivered in state-managed PDAs (Greenbank and Jimboomba) and the rest of the city posed risks to managing community expectations and allocating resources for asset management and service delivery equitably over the long term.

The State’s role in supporting urban greenspace provision through regulation was flagged by several interviewees as potentially helpful: some interviewees sought higher levels of government support in both protecting greenspace and helping to ensure that all authorities are providing greenspace in a consistent manner; others reported the benefits of legislation that enabled “required contribution[s] to parks in terms of developments so there was funding … to help provide a reasonable parks network” (Executive Manager 2). However, state requirements that restrict planning for integrated networks that deliver multiple benefits and outcomes (including drainage, recreation, and biodiversity) are reported as a
hindrance by mandating short delivery timeframes to achieve fast policy reform, or in the
case of development applications, reduced decision-making timeframes that inhibit
extensive community engagement and collaboration between agencies. Weaknesses in
governance tools including compliance with regulations set by state agencies, for example
implementation of capped infrastructure charges (developer contributions) and the Local
Government Infrastructure Plan, were also evident. In this regard:

_Developer contributions can only go to fund half... it kind of makes a mockery of_

[making plans]... [when] ..._infrastructure charges [are] capped by the government... why_

_bother doing all these fantastic strategies ...because they [are] not going to be_

_delivered._ (Executive Manager 3)

Despite a close alignment with ‘needs’ of people, ‘planning’ is disconnected to a large extent
from ‘community expectations’ (wants) and distant from ‘financial resources’ (Fig. 4).

Frustrations amongst interviewees were evident with respect to how planning policy has not
aligned with local community needs or the City’s financial resources. Senior officers
perceived that standards were failing to meet community needs especially in socio-
demographically disadvantaged areas of the city: “[Pocket parks] might meet the planning
rules but they do [not] meet the community’s needs very well... Too many of them ...cost too
much to maintain [and] servicing them... becomes a nightmare and a burden.” (Executive
Manager 1). Manager 1 also pondered “how our policies can be adaptable to change and
community needs”. It is perhaps such hindrances to effective urban greenspace provision
that endear a strategic planning approach for the staff concerned.

The interviewees revealed a tension where compliance was required to meet planning
legislation, yet it was often flexibility that was desired. Reflecting on a local strategic planning
experience, Manager 3 remarked that “the plans were there... but it [is] the ability to actually deliver it – capacity, money, political will, and all those things to actually do it”. This suggests that having the plans or the right tools in place is necessary, but not sufficient. Having the ability - people who are experienced, politically savvy, strategic, cooperative, and capable – is critical. Hence, while the governance tools may exist to support greenspace provision, the interviewees identified the importance of staff attitudes, relationships, and competencies in shaping provision outcomes.

3.3 Organisational leadership and culture

Organisational leadership and culture were salient factors, identified by several participants, in terms of the importance of having clear direction, a shared understanding of prioritised corporate goals, and good working relationships to support collaboration, to achieve urban greenspace in Logan. Interviewees described several examples including officer cooperation at all levels modelled by senior leaders as a catalyst for effective collaboration between branches. This perspective was prominent across all interviewee groups from political, executive, senior/middle managers to officers.

3.3.1 Clear direction supporting interpretation

The Executive Managers strongly emphasised the value of leadership: having experienced staff, competent at interpreting policy and confident to justify their recommendations to elected officials for decision-making. “It is absolutely so important [that]... the skill set of the officers making [delegated] decisions, not to be just... rubber stamping things and enforcing rules. They need to have the skills and the attitude to see above that... and whether there [is] still a good outcome, without just falling back on the rules” (Executive Manager 1). Likewise, observations by Executive Manager 2 highlighted the importance of leadership by an
effective manager for educating peers, politicians, executive managers, and the community about the value and contribution of parks. Equally, Executive Manager 3 suggested that good staff, strong individual advocates for parks who are also able to make convincing cases for elected representatives to approve funding, are essential.

When urban greenspace is conceptualised as a specific type – in this case, parks – it is clearly defined and responsibilities are hierarchical. However, when other greenspace types are factored into the equation (for instance, drainage reserves, street landscape, informal greenspace surrounding community centres, libraries, and other public facilities), blurred lines of infrastructure function and integration carry an accompanying risk of confused management responsibilities. In this regard, Manager 1 offered some reflection about the quandary of an agreed greenspace definition relative to its governance:

*We [are] still struggling with what open space is and defining it... because we can [not] see it, we can [not] draw a line around and you know, it does [not] have an asset tag. So until we can actually define what an open space is, what it means, how it is different to greenspace as different to recreation or is it all encompassing? Then it [is] going to be difficult to manage it.*

Our observations indicate that when boundaries between responsibilities are blurred leadership is essential to provide clarity and foster effective professional and cooperative relationships between officers, managers, and elected officials.

### 3.3.2 Cooperation and collaboration

Senior staff in municipal government have a responsibility to instil a shared understanding of prioritised corporate goals and facilitate efficacious relationships that support collaboration across the organisation. However, interviewees, particularly at officer and manager levels
(Officer 2; Managers 2, 3, and 4), reported that conflicting priorities and limited cooperation between work groups is at times a hindrance to collaboration. In a broader sense, the interviewed elected officials recognised the benefits of effective working relationships between councillors, officers, and the community, along with a shared vision. “We [have] had senior bureaucrats who have... been focused on maintaining sustainable life for kids... community... sitting down, thinking... what can we build or produce, this year, next year... forward planning is very important” (Elected Official 2). Collaboration between councillors and officers also needs a balance of influence. “It [is] a partnership: the community, the Councillor, and the officers, sharing the vision... then setting out to... attain it, and then maintain it” (Elected Official 1).

Approximately three quarters of the interviewees identified human resources as an important part of park provision, explaining how and what types of resources support or inhibit this important role of local government. Executive Managers particularly were concerned with the critical selection of competent managers: it is “the credibility of the person in charge of parks, in the eyes of the executive and the council” (Executive Manager 2). From this perspective, competent managers and executives must effectively navigate organisational decision-making processes and garner support before a proposal gets to the political arena. In “an executive decision-making process... the credibility of... the manager at the professional level can often help or hinder getting good outcomes” (Executive Manager 2). These findings point to another important governance factor at play in shaping urban greenspace provision: political leadership.
3.4 Political leadership

Political interest, support and leadership in the provision of greenspace - particularly parks - is a key factor represented in almost all of the interviews. As illustrated in Figure 4, the interview data reveals that councillors (elected representatives) are directly linked to money and community; they are the decision-makers that determine allocation of the organisation's financial resources; they are held accountable for their decisions and actions by their local community especially when seeking re-election. From these perspectives, provision of urban greenspace is driven or hindered by political leadership through advocacy and decision-making.

3.4.1 Advocacy and decision-making

Interviewees reported establishing a vision for urban greenspace provision as essential; some also suggested a need for advocacy. Managers and elected officials alike perceived that having a vision was the basis of seeking to represent the community; "every time I went to an election, I had a dream... otherwise there was no purpose in getting elected" (Elected Official 2). As the elected community representatives, it is the councillors who formally approve the local government's proposed plans and budgets; they "determine the priorities" for allocating resources (Executive Manager 3). This means that "political will and the buy-in" is essential because "in the end, it [has] to come back [to Council] to approve the funding" (Elected Official 1). From an executive level, advocacy by political leaders led to decision-making in allocating financial resources through the annual municipal budget. In this case, effective political leadership delivered relative success or otherwise, of assigned portfolio responsibilities – such as parks and urban greenspace.
I [have] seen Councils where there’s been an elected person, passionate about parks, who’s been able to deliver significantly more than that council might have delivered in the term before them without that leadership and commitment around the council table. And I [have] seen parks portfolios that deteriorate or increase in profile in a council, dependent upon the respect of the person leading those portfolios (Executive Manager 2).

Identifying future parkland, obtaining Council endorsement of plans and funding, engaging landowner/s and completing land acquisition takes considerable time and effort by many involved in these activities, even when owners are agreeable. Approval to acquire land compulsorily for parks is arguably one of the most contentious decisions that confronts elected officials. An unwilling seller affords a greater challenge: “it [is] very tricky and [a] politically uncomfortable situation to force people to sell” (Manager 2). If political leadership is absent at the time of making the hard decisions to proceed when there is uncertainty or significant political risk of community resistance, the entire planning process is undermined. Experiencing a controversial land acquisition opportunity and the perceived absence of flexibility in a rigid plan was challenging for Manager 3: “when the heat came... from local [residents]... Councillors were... starting to buckle [and]... looking for ways to wriggle out of what the Parks Strategy [required]”.

Leadership, as described by the interviewees, is closely tied to the governance tools (state and local planning instruments) that ideally identify long-term needs, set the vision, map the way forward with master plans and their associated budgets, funding strategies and mechanisms, and importantly, foster organisational unity. Interestingly, in discussing the purpose and importance of urban greenspace, few interviewees raised issues of changing
goals or new goals, especially concerning climate change and accompanying flooding, fire, and urban heat impacts. This again points to the importance of leadership when relying solely on governance tools; it means that opportunities for innovation in responding to new and emerging issues are potentially overlooked.

4. The Tensions Between Certainty and Flexibility

The interplay of governance factors shaping urban greenspace provision in Logan mostly concerns governance tools, organisational leadership and culture (demonstrated by municipal staff), and political leadership (Fig. 5). This interplay produces particular park provision outcomes. Political leadership by elected officials via advocacy and collective decision-making can ensure adequate resources are allocated to support the development, endorsement, and implementation of governance tools (the Planning Act and Planning Scheme). Organisational leadership and culture facilitate staff collaboration, cooperation, and interaction – with each other, with political leaders, and with citizens and business concerned with urban development. The quality of governance tools depends on staff experience and their skills in interpretation, which facilitates implementation. This interplay is also affected by community expectations; financial and natural resources; economies and markets - factors explored elsewhere (see, for example, Boulton, Dedekorkut-Howes & Byrne, 2019).

[insert Figure 5 about here]

Our focus here on the governance factors reveals that park provision challenges appear to occur at the interface of theory and practice. Planning approaches to greenspace provision that are informed by theory are usually detached from the practical realities of service provision ‘on the ground’. The efficacy of the current planning approach for urban greenspace provision, which is mostly determined by state infrastructure planning...
instruments, specifically the *Planning Act 2016*, is tempered by the pragmatic realities of planning in a municipal setting (e.g., staff competencies and political agendas). In greenspace governance, significant tensions emerge as there is both a need for *certainty* and a desire for *flexibility*, to facilitate negotiations and discretionary decision-making (Yu & Hui, 2019). Moroni et al. (2020, p.326) advocate simplicity of rules for urban development to facilitate individual’s capacity to apply their knowledge spatially and temporally. For planners responsible for urban greenspace provision, it suggests having the autonomy to apply judgement fairly and consistently, aligned with the organisation’s priorities. King-Cullen (2015, p.18) has observed the balance needed for “planning regulations to be sufficiently clear and certain to ensure orderly growth... yet also flexible enough to encourage private development and innovation”; and as a legal process, unpopular decisions potentially attract litigation and/or voter backlash. However, even when there are individuals and teams with relevant expertise and requisite skills and experience, who are engaged with key issues and are assigned clear responsibilities, political leadership can affect greenspace provision outcomes. The discussion that follows examines the benefits and limitations of planning approaches with varying degrees of certainty and flexibility, informed by the findings of this research.

### 4.1 Certainty

The interviewees have illustrated that certainty in Logan’s planning approach is at times helpful and at others a hindrance to greenspace governance. Rivolin (2008) has suggested that the characteristics of a conformance system affords certainty derived through principles of hierarchy, having a regulative role, and a focus on implementation. Not surprisingly, the Logan case revealed the perceived benefits of certainty. It was implicit through interviewees’ (mostly staff) observations on rule-setting to scaffold decision-making particularly where
decisions may be politically unpopular or attract criticism from external stakeholders. The reported benefits of rule-setting included managing expectations of residents and elected officials, facilitating revenue from development processes, consistency in decision-making, budget preparation, and supporting consistent service delivery. This means that the typically risk-averse and conservative nature of municipal government therefore relies on some degree of certainty for staff and elected officials to successfully defend political and potential legal challenges as a manifestation of the interplay of the three governance factors. The extent of certainty required needs consideration and depends on local conditions of organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership.

4.2 Flexibility

In the case of Logan, interviewees perceived that successful greenspace governance could be achieved by redefining and transforming the processes for providing the city’s open space, for example, conceptualising parks, stormwater management, and road systems as green infrastructure. The desire and willingness to collaborate was apparent at all levels yet constrained by the rules governing how greenspace is provided, specifically what greenspace is (and is not), where it is required, and how levies are calculated, charged, and expended. Where cities such as Logan are experiencing rapid population and urban growth, governance tools, specifically policy, may need to be more malleable and able to respond faster to changing socio-demographic imperatives. In the context of urban property development, where profits and market advantage are essential ingredients to rapid urban growth, it is difficult to perceive how a collaborative approach, undergirded by trust and openness (Kronenberg et al., 2016) could be effective. In their review of innovation in greenspace governance across Europe, Buijs et al. (2016, p.162) observe “flexibility in rules, both formal and informal ones, is essential for successful collaboration”. Logan is not the only
municipality facing this dilemma, and in their analysis of tensions along the certainty - flexibility continuum, Steele and Ruming (2012) have argued for an alternative middle solution, a hybrid approach that provides for both certainty and flexibility.

Conclusions

We commenced this paper with the aim of examining how governance factors shape urban greenspace provision through the theoretical lens of flexibility and certainty. The case study makes several empirical and theoretical contributions. In their descriptions of practice, participants referenced both flexibility and certainty in greenspace planning governance tools as a driver and barrier to providing Logan’s urban greenspace. However, the planning aspiration to deliver both flexibility and certainty is a chimera – what might look good in theory proves challenging in practice. By tapping into insider experience, our case study reveals perspectives of managers and decision-makers, and importantly highlights how and why governance factors are key drivers, barriers, and enablers of greenspace provision. Moreover, it shows how the interplay of these factors generates locally specific outcomes, offering important insights that are contextually relevant.

While the literature reports the presence of a diverse array of governance factors that potentially shape greenspace provision, our results show that it is the interplay of these factors, their interrelationship in practice, that ultimately configures greenspace provision outcomes. Consistent with the literature, our research has found that governance tools, organisational leadership and culture, and political leadership are deeply enmeshed within officer interactions, policy interpretations, and decision-making. While these observations are limited to this single case study, Logan has illuminated the nature of this problem within a
rapidly growing Australian city, and the practitioner experiences we report here may resonate with other cities in similar contexts internationally. The limitations imposed by a single case example inevitably raise some important questions for future research. What lessons can be learned from other cities that have similarly pursued a pro-development agenda as a political priority, where urban greenspace is highly valued and desirable? Do provision outcomes vary as population densities change? Given Logan is a low-density city, would the interplay of these factors operate differently in higher density cities, or those with decentralised governance structures? Does the growth trajectory of a city matter? Would the interplay of the factors we have discussed here produce different outcomes in cities with shrinking populations, such as Detroit in the USA? And might the experience of developing countries be different? In terms of our research method, would interviewees’ responses differ if they were sharing their insights with a stranger rather than a former colleague?

Greenspace planning in municipal government at first appearances may seem to be highly prescriptive – a rational accounting exercise involving the use of budget spreadsheets and policy interpretation to allocate parkland for residents. But our findings confirm that the interplay of governance factors in greenspace provision demands an approach more closely aligned with critical pragmatism, consistent with the perspective of collaborative planning advocates (including Healey, 1997; Innes, 2016; Innes & Booher, 2010).

Future research should move beyond the pursuit of solely spatial questions about the amount, distribution, accessibility, and quality of greenspace, which have dominated the literature to date, to better examine other dimensions of provision, including governance. How do the governance factors we have discussed here manifest in other settings, where there is either greater certainty or flexibility in the planning approach? Do they produce different outcomes for residents? Our findings point to the need for ongoing research that
continues to delve deeply into the situated experiences of greenspace planners and managers - those concerned with, and responsible for, urban greenspace provision in a municipal context. Rather than the blithe recommendations of so many greenspace provision studies that call for better planning or demand more parks in cities, by better understanding the role of governance in greenspace provision, it may be possible to identify novel solutions. Such solutions could entail experiments in multilevel governance, or the creation of new partnerships between residents, developers, and governments as the first steps in devising alternative approaches for urban greenspace provision, better attuned to the interactions of theory and practice.

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**Figure 1.** Conceptual model of factors shaping urban greenspace provision (Boulton et al., 2018, p.97).

**Figure 2.** Urban density of Logan's suburbs based on 2016 Census data (Source: .id the population experts, 2020).

**Figure 3.** Images of Logan's greenspace. *Left: View of Logan to the west from Springwood Reservoir; Top right: Local playground in Plunket Park, Woodridge; Middle right: Wetland area in Berrinba Wetlands Park, Berrinba; Bottom right: Tygum Park, Waterford West.*

**Figure 4.** Leximancer map of themes and concepts derived from interview transcripts where spheres' position represents relative proximity of concepts in the text; colour indicates importance relative to research focus being parks, urban greenspace (warmest - red) is most important; (coolest - blue is least); and size illustrates the relative frequency of concepts occurring in the text.

**Figure 5.** The interplay of governance factors and their interrelationships constituting urban greenspace provision in Logan.
### Tables

**Table 1.** Interviewee Sample and Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role &amp; Description</th>
<th>Identified</th>
<th>Invited</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Officers:</strong> Staff undertaking urban greenspace planning activities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3(^{(a)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managers:</strong> Senior staff responsible for teams or staff undertaking urban greenspace planning</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executive Managers:</strong> Directors including Chief Executive / City Manager</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elected Officials:</strong> Mayor and Divisional Councillors</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Total Municipal Representatives** | 72         | 15      | 12 \(^{(a)}\) |

\(^{(a)}\) An interviewee withdrew from the study post-interview.