

# Learning from communities' involvement in the management of parks

The cases of Zoo Lake and Thokoza Park,  
Johannesburg



**Sizakele C. Hadebe**

A report prepared for Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo,  
as part of the CUBES series: Exploring Participatory Governance of Johannesburg  
Urban Parks

January 2016

Center for Urbanism and the Built Environment Studies (CUBES), University of the  
Witwatersrand

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## Executive Summary

# Learning from park users committees (or Friends of the Park) in the township and in the suburbs: The cases of Thokoza Park and Zoo Lake, Johannesburg

Sizakhele Hadebe & Claire Bénit-Gbaffou

### Why compare Friends of the Park in Thokoza and Zoo Lake Parks?

Since its establishment in 2011, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) is interested in establishing, sustaining and formalising partnership with park users committees (or Friends of the Park, FoP), to assist with the management and development of the park – in particular in the context of scarce public funding.

Many observe the contrast between former white and middle class suburbs, where park users committees seem numerous, resourced and relatively functional; and the scarcity of park users committees in lower income townships.

This difference does not come as a surprise due to the contrasted histories of the two parts of Johannesburg, still marked by its strong apartheid legacy.

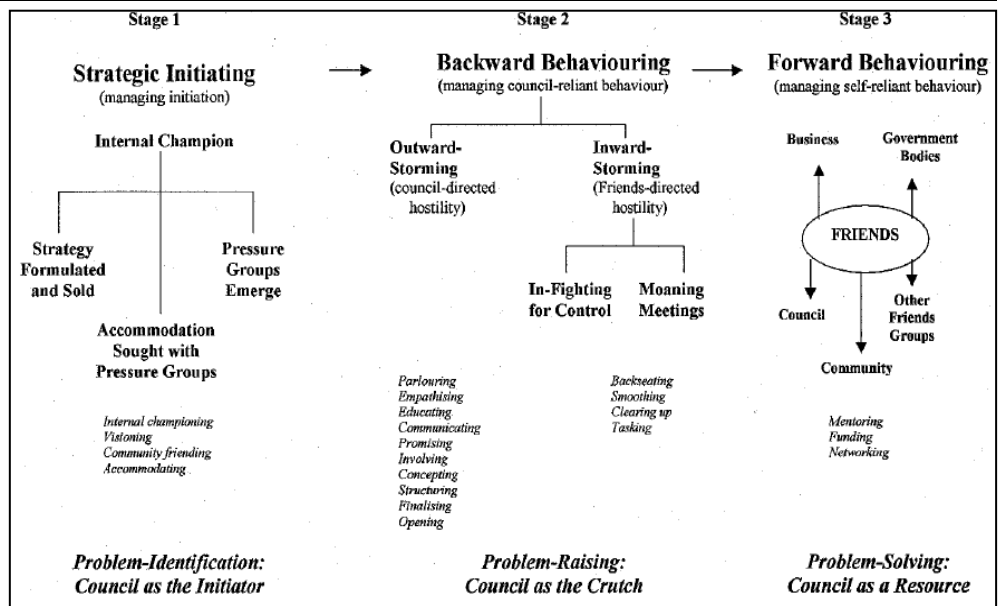
A multiplicity of parks have been developed for 50 years in what is still being called ‘the leafy suburbs’. In contrast, greening initiatives and parks development have only started recently in black townships, where open spaces were either used as buffer zones or occupied by informal settlements, hosting a few informal social and economic activities (cow grazing, payer, initiation).

Friends of the Park are still few in former townships, but it is interesting to observe how they work, and compare and contrast them with Friends of the Park in the northern suburbs – and how they are supported or not by JCPZ drive towards community partnerships for the management of urban parks.

This study has chosen Thokoza Park (Soweto) and Zoo Lake (Parkview), both flagship parks for JCPZ, and managed with the participation of strong park users committees.

### Managing parks with Friends of the Park – a useful template

Jones (2010) provides a useful template analysing the role that City parks officials should play, if they want to develop partnerships with Friends of the Park (or park users committees). He argues officials’ role is to facilitate communities movement towards self-leadership, in various phases of their consolidation and relationship with the municipality. There are five management roles that state officials play in this process: Managing initiation; managing council-reliant behaviour; managing official-directed and intra-FOP hostility; managing self-reliant behaviour; and managing potential threats to the process.

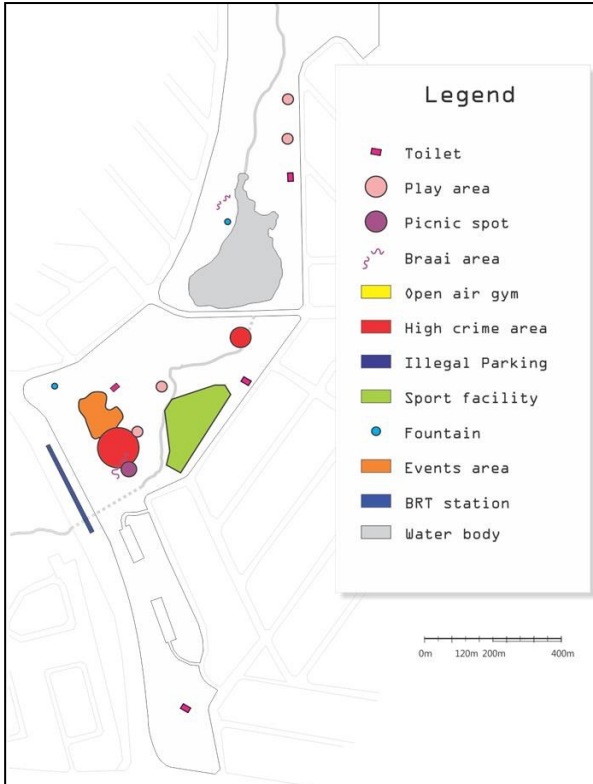


Source: Jones, R. (2010) Partnerships in action: strategies for the development of voluntary community groups in urban parks, *Leisure studies*, 21 (3-4), 305-325.

This sketch is useful to provide guidance to officials so as to cycles Friends of the Park might go through- including tension and conflict with City Parks, and forms of self-reliance that lead to autonomy and disconnect from the municipality. It also stresses the fact that joint management of parks with civil society do not require less city officials’ involvement – but a continuous one, with specific facilitation skills. What this sketch does not show, and that might be crucial - especially in a city like Johannesburg- is the role of party politics and the role of money and resources in these dynamics.

# Thokoza Park Committee

Thokoza Park, located in Soweto, covers an area of 4.5 hectares. It includes a water body, Moroka Dam, and a river crossed by a bridge. It offers play areas for children, picnic spots for families, sport facilities for the youth. It is easily accessible thanks to a nearby BRT station, and hosts many activities and events throughout the year. It is extremely well used throughout the year.



“The model that was applied here in terms of dealing with crime is now being used all over the city to deal with crime in parks . We use Thokoza Park as a case study through my influence” (Clr Phamodi)

## ***Establishing park users committees to manage Thokoza Park – from money making to safety issues***

► JCPZ initiated a Friends of the Park committee during the development of Thokoza Park in 2001, to help sustain the management of the park in the medium and long term. Many people showed interest in the park but only a few stayed interested beyond the launch of the park, who were provided training by JCPZ Stakeholders Liaison Officer in charge of the region. The structure FoP was registered, but was soon discredited as it became a private profit making venture for its members, rather than a structure aimed at finding resources for the management and maintenance of the park.

► A second structure, the Park Committee, was then formed (2008), aligned with JCPZ mandate, vision and procedures. It was led by the ward councillor and an enthusiastic park user, Mzwakhe Nhlapo, who became ward committee member in charge of parks and the environment. The Park Committee had an important security component, with JCPZ ranger manager, JMPD manager and SAPS sector manager participating; but it also consisted of relevant municipal entities such as Johannesburg Roads Agency and Joburg Water.

► Because safety concerns were rising in the park (murder and rape), a safety committee was established in 2014 to specifically set up a safety strategy, together with the Community Policing Forum. The committee and all the members came up with a strategy to be stationed in the park before big events, prior and during the festive season, to prevent incidents rather than to come in and react to the after they had taken place.

## ***A state-driven Parks committee, aimed at overcoming government fragmentation to solve ad hoc and periodic issues***

The Park committee and the Safety committees are both predominantly driven by Mzwakhe Nhlapho and the local ward Councillor. Community is only involved by raising issues in public meetings, but Mzwakhe has no substantial team of community members who are part of the committee and help him in solving issues. A second specificity of the park users committees for Thokoza Park, is they heavy presence of the state -

mostly around issues of security, but also to integrate municipal entities relevant to the management of the park (JRA and Joburg Water). Mzwakhe is also there not solely as a member of the community but also as part of the state as he is a ward committee member. Assumptions that communities in the townships can not support a Friends of the Park structure are to some degree proven to be true - for this committee to work, there has to be very strong state presence and involvement.



### **Mzwakhe Nhlapho, Driving force of FOP in Thokoza Park**

30-40, Chairperson of the Park Committee, Environmental Activist (NGO Ukhamba), ANC member & ward committee member(parks and agriculture)

Mzwakhe works closely with the councillor Phamodi, together they are driving community participation in the management of Thokoza Park. He has been involved in parks committee in its three different forms, and is the person to go to for the community to raise park management issues. He won several awards for his involvement in community environmental projects (City Parks, City of Johannesburg).



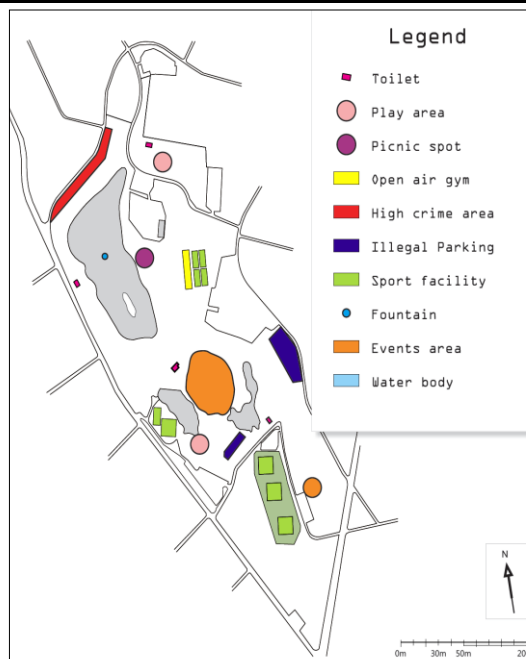
# Zoo Lake Users Committee (ZLUC)

Zoo Lake covers an area of 46.6 hectares. The park has a large pond that covers roughly 8% of the park and it has many trees, many of which are mature. The pond usually has waste material floating in it but the park grounds are generally well kept. The park has the following facilities within it: the Moyo's restaurant, Utilities Building, toilets, a basketball court, a soccer pitch, a children's play area, the Bowling Club, the Boat Club and the Zoo Lake Sports Club.

## Zoo Lake Park Users Committee – From autonomy to rebuilding a relationship with the State

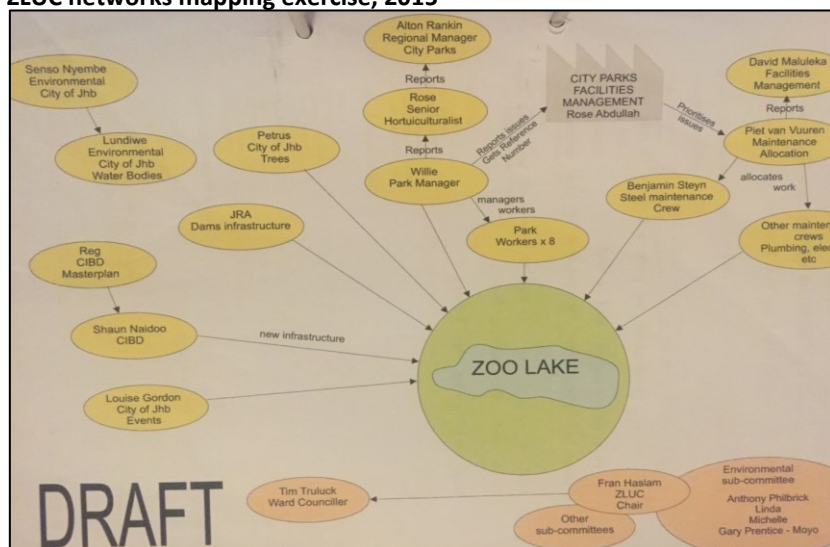
► Zoo Lake Users Committee (ZLUC) was established in 1996 as an initiative of the state to work together with communities living around the park. The community at Zoo Lake was vibrant and enthusiastic getting involved. ZLUC was officially recognised by the City when City Parks was established in 2001. ZLUC had a community liaisons officer from JCPZ come in and facilitate the relationship between the state and the community. The committee was chaired by the local (DA) councillor until 2009, had a well running fundraising section, and they were able to conduct some physical upgrades to the park (for instance the sports club) that the state could not afford.

► ZLUC's autonomy and ability to decide on upgrades using the funding it had raised has however been curtailed since 2011, with JCPZ reinstating the municipal entity's mandate to manage parks. This has coincided with a crisis in ZLUC, which became dormant until 2015 where Fran Haslam, the current chairperson, was elected. This trajectory however means that significant knowledge, experience, networks in and out of the state were lost, that the current ZLUC is attempting to reconstitute. ZLUC is also working to re-establishing a relationship with JCPZ, as there is no active JCPZ representative to guide them in this respect.



"If you attend a meeting and the ward councillor starts demanding things in front of the community, it makes things difficult and the officials will keep quiet and not say anything. They will say they can only report back to the City, the councillors then were notified that it's not their responsibility to do that, they can't go demanding things." (City Parks official)

## ZLUC networks mapping exercise, 2015



## Building networks, using committee members' skills and resources

ZLUC involves many community members, the local councillor, a few businesses and some institutions. It is structured in several portfolios, where fundraising, communication and marketing, events management and security have a large team. Unlike Thokoza Park, ZLUC struggles however to get City Parks and City officials to participate or appear in its meetings. However, the network mapping exercise that was undertaken by ZLUC (2015) shows a number of key officials in JCPZ and other municipal entities, although represented with a degree of confusion reflecting the complexity of Johannesburg local government.



### Fran Haslam, Active Driver of Zoo Lake Users Committee

59, retired professional in Finance, DA member.

Chair Person of ZLUC since 2015, she was an active member of Saxonwold and Parkview Residential Association, and former chair of the Community Policing Forum in Parkview. In ZLUC she is currently working on getting more stakeholders from the state to attend the committees meetings to assist them on solutions on park management issues. She has initiated a visioning exercise for her committee, where members were asked to map their networks and frame their vision for Zoo Lake.



# Comparing the Friends of the Parks' activities, focus and structures



## Issues discussed at ZLUC meeting 18 September 2015

- JCPZ has no money to fix anything, only for trimming and cutting grass
- There is no one monitoring the recyclers, the rubbish is lying around the bins. There are not enough bins
- The kids from surrounding crèches come to play, and leave the place dirty.
- Alcohol abuse and noise from events
- Breaking of Park by-laws and absence of a by-law enforcement structure
- Master plan was done without the consultation of the community (when ZLUC was dormant) – time to engage with it.
- Lack of engagement of the state even after multiple invitations
- Need to consolidate a security strategy by liaising with Parkview police and the CPF.

The presence of the ward councillor (DA) at the meeting was useful but also provided a bias: rather than encouraging pragmatic solution, he was interested in consolidating complaints and promising better service delivery “when the DA is ruling Johannesburg”.

## Differences and similarities

Zoo Lake users Committee	Thokoza Park Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structured in a variety of portfolio reflecting a wide but specific range of interests: communication, fundraising, environment and safety.</li> <li>- Committee members have professional skills and resources to offer (cf ZLUC website). Many have been involved in community affairs and in the park for long (experience)</li> <li>- Difficulty in engaging with JCPZ and other municipal entities. With JCPZ, the relationship focuses on physical maintenance and events management.</li> <li>- Strong presence of the DA councillor (also shadow MMC – Parks), a degree of politicisation of issues sometimes problem solving, sometimes detrimental to pragmatic solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No portfolios, role of coordinating various state entities to solve ad hoc issues, and address one main concern : crime.</li> <li>- A single person committee, with an activist driving the Park committee as an NGO strongly integrated with state institutions. He can use his various local networks / political skill to solve issues.</li> <li>- Community only mobilised on an ad hoc basis (campaigns, events), with stipend for participation. Education campaigns aim at changing behaviours in the park.</li> <li>- Park Committee is mostly state-run: ward councillor and ward committee member as drivers, SAPS-JMPD-rangers strong presence, but also JRA and Joburg Water.</li> <li>- Strong involvement of the ANC councillor, able to mobilise his networks in the party and the state to solve issues.</li> </ul>

“In Thokoza Park we run campaigns. We had an educational campaign, we don’t want people drinking at Thokoza Park. So on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014, we had a community prayer, then on the 5<sup>th</sup> Dec that’s when we were stationed here in the park, SAPS and the JMPD, we had 5 meetings and some people did not participate. Some of the residents living immediately adjacent to the park drink so at first they did not want to be involved because it meant they also couldn’t drink in the park. But after a few days of the campaign running they came around and started supporting the campaign because they noticed the difference. The park was safer. We want to organise this again before December.

We also organised the Save my park campaign: we go to the schools assembly and teach the children how to use the park equipment, how to be safe in the park, storm water drain pipe, the children go in there.” (Nhlapo 2015)

## Conclusion & recommendations

► The two parks committee are driven by genuine passion and commitment to the park, by one or a group of local activists using their professional, practical and political expertise to participate in the management of the park. However, this passion does not seem to be matched by an equally committed and identifiable City Parks official. **The Stakeholder Liaison Officers possibly have too many parks to cover to be able to genuinely facilitate, accompany and partner with these local activists.**

► Therefore, one cannot talk in either of these cases of a ‘partnership’ between communities and JCPZ. Thokoza Parks committee is largely a state structure, with limited involvement of the community – it is useful to overcome institutional fragmentation on an ad hoc basis, and Mzwakhe plays almost the role of a Community Liaison Officer (mobilising and informing communities). ZLUC is working in quasi autonomy, with less freedom than before, and struggles to navigate the state. In both cases, an **exercise of joint visioning (e.g. through a Master Plan) could be used to explore constraints and opportunities and build the relationship.**

► Both FoPs are politicised - meaning access to state networks, or power to raise issues (watchdog or blockage role). **These politics can be problem-solving and foster responsiveness and accountability in the short term, but they do not replace a longer-lasting partnership with City Parks authorities, which could lead to more practical and innovative management solutions.**

# 1. Introduction, scope and rationale

Since its establishment in 2011, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) has been interested in establishing, sustaining and formalising partnerships with park users committees (called Friends of the Park – FoPs – in international jargon), to assist with the management and development of urban parks, in particular in the context of scarce public funding.

Many observe the contrast between former white and middle class suburbs, where park users committees seem numerous, resourced and relatively functional; and the scarcity of park users committees in lower income, black townships. This difference does not come as a surprise due to the contrasted histories of the two parts of Johannesburg, still marked by its strong apartheid legacy. A multiplicity of parks has been developed for 50 years in what is still being called ‘the leafy suburbs’. In contrast, greening initiatives and parks development have only started recently in black townships, where open spaces were either used as buffer zones or occupied by informal settlements, hosting a few informal social and economic activities (cow grazing, prayer, initiation). FOPs are still few in former townships, but it is interesting to observe how they work, and compare and contrast them with FoPs in the northern suburbs – and how they are supported or not by JCPZ drive towards community partnerships for the management of urban parks.

## 1.1. Case studies

This study has chosen Thokoza Park (Soweto) and Zoo Lake (Parkview), both flagship parks for JCPZ, and managed with the participation of park users committees. The research examines the FoPs in their efforts to manage the two parks. It studies the objectives of the FoPs and how these influence the management of public space, interrogating the nature of the relationship of FoPs with JCPZ.

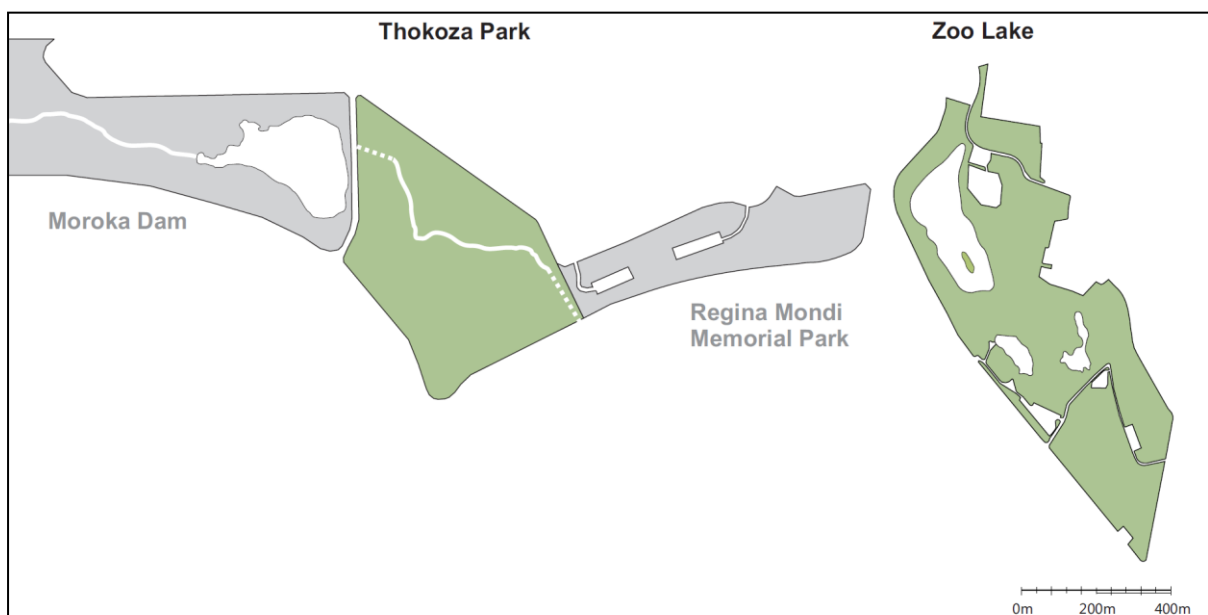


Figure 1: Comparative sizes of the two selected parks

## 1.2. Problem statement

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ), formerly City Parks, has a relatively bad reputation as a state agency managing public open spaces – possibly linked to the scarcity of public funding and challenges in organisational and institutional culture. Hence the need and growing (political) will to define a new approach for the management of public parks in Johannesburg, that has manifested in City Parks 2011 institutional restructuring and the development of a new strategy, emblematised in the 2013 City Parks Corporate Strategic Plan.

It is in this context it is interesting for JCPZ to learn lessons from the experiences of those communities or groups that have organised themselves around the issue of park management, in order for CJPZ to better formalise, institutionalise and perhaps generalise forms of participatory management structures. Currently, there is indeed limited literature, models or documented and sustained experience of such forms of management. But there are a number of parks in JHB where communities have set up resident's management structures – their history and practice are yet to be documented.

Some of the questions that this research seeks to answer are as follows:

- What leads to FoP emergence and sustainability?
- What do FoP actually do?
- What are opportunity and constraints in FoPs' involvement in parks management?
- How can JCPZ best support and regulate FoPs' involvement in parks management

## 1.3. Context of this research report

This research report has been extracted from a larger body of work, an Honours research report submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand in 2015 (Hadebe 2015). That report, entitled *Learning from communities' involvement in the management of parks*, explored the dynamics of FoPs in their engagement with park management, analysing in particular how they interact with City governing structures, community members and the parks that they attempt to manage. It was initiated as the result of a partnership between the University of the Witwatersrand's Center for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies (CUBES) and Johannesburg City Parks and Zoos (JCPZ), coordinated by Prof. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, as part of the NRF-funded research programme 'Practices of the State in Urban governance' (HSRG 96277) that she leads.

The report presented here is based on this academic work, summarising its main findings to make them more accessible to JCPZ officials. Together with several such reports produced by CUBES, it serves to document the key findings of CUBES research exploring community engagement in the management of parks in Johannesburg.

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## 2. Managing parks with Friends of the Park – a useful theoretical template

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Jones (2010) provides a template that proves quite useful at an operational level to understand the cycles that Friends of the Park structure undergo, in their development. Jones analyses in particular the role that City parks officials should play, if they want to develop partnerships with

Friends of the Park (or park users committees). He argues that officials' role is to facilitate communities' movement towards self-leadership, in various phases of their consolidation and relationship with the municipality.

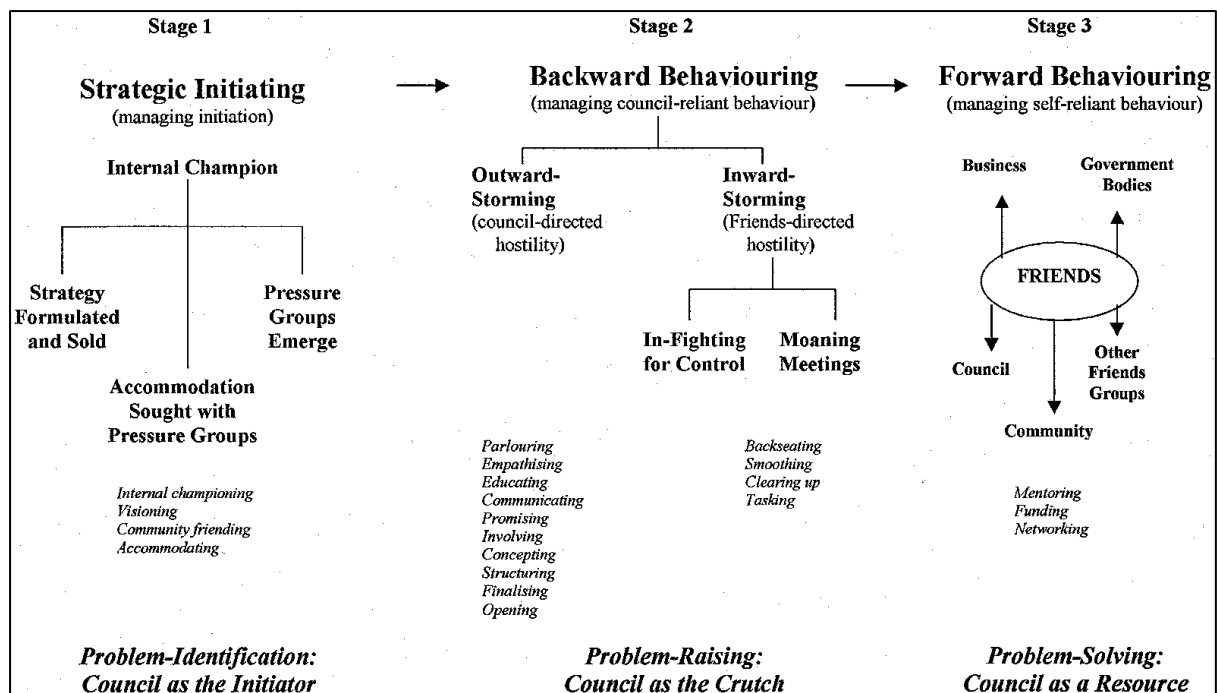


Figure 2: The three stages of an FOP's development towards self-reliance.

Source: Jones (2010).

There are five management roles that state officials play in this process. They must manage:

- Initiation;
- Council-reliant behaviour;
- Hostility (official-directed and intra-FoP hostility);
- Self-reliant behaviour; and
- Potential threats to the process.

This sketch is useful to provide guidance to officials so as to cycles Friends of the Park might go through, including tension and conflict with City Parks institutions, and forms of self-reliance that lead to autonomy and disconnect from the municipality. In particular, it shows that defiance and hostility towards municipal institutions are part of a normal process of mobilisation, and that apt management by officials might transform this negative form of mobilisation into more constructive type of engagement – provided proper human resources are invested into the engagement, based on continuity, trust building, and a degree of transparency, in particular about scarce resources and council policy, political and administrative processes.

The model indeed also stresses the fact that joint management of parks with civil society do not require *less* city officials' involvement – it might in fact require, if not more involvement, at least involvement of officials of a different nature, emphasizing continuity and facilitation skills.

What this sketch does not show, and that might be crucial especially in a city like Johannesburg, is the role of party politics and the role of money and resources in these dynamics. Another specificity of the South African case perhaps is that in some cases Friends of the Park are perceived by the municipality and JCPZ as having become *too* autonomous from the institution–

and JCPZ has been trying to find the right approach to claim back some of its prerogatives in the management of parks, that the institutional weakness of the late 1990s and first decade of 2010 has led to abandon to Friends of the Park. On the other side, many Friends of the Park have also complained about the lack of responsiveness of municipal institutions – also calling for better communication and partnership with the City. Therefore, Jones’ emphasis on constructing FoPs’ self-reliance is perhaps not the main drive of the dynamics at stake in Johannesburg, and the real challenges rather lie in which roles and functions each player are the best placed to perform, and how these roles can be best acknowledged and coordinated.

### 3. Lessons from Thokoza Park Users Committees

Thokoza Park, located in Soweto, covers an area of 4.5 hectares. It includes a water body, Moroka Dam, and a river crossed by a bridge. It offers play areas for children, picnic spots for families, sport facilities for the youth. It is easily accessible thanks to a nearby BRT station, and hosts many activities and events throughout the year. It is extremely well used throughout the year.

#### 3.1. Introducing Thokoza Park

Thokoza Park is located about 21km from the Johannesburg inner city. Soweto, the area within which the park is located, is generally characterised as being spatially dislocated from economic development, which is concentrated in the north of Johannesburg. Thokoza Park is 37km from Sandton (the second largest and fastest growing node). Significantly however, Thokoza Park is only 7km away from the Chris Hani node, which is Soweto’s biggest node, and only 13km away from South Gate, which is still the biggest node in the south of Johannesburg.

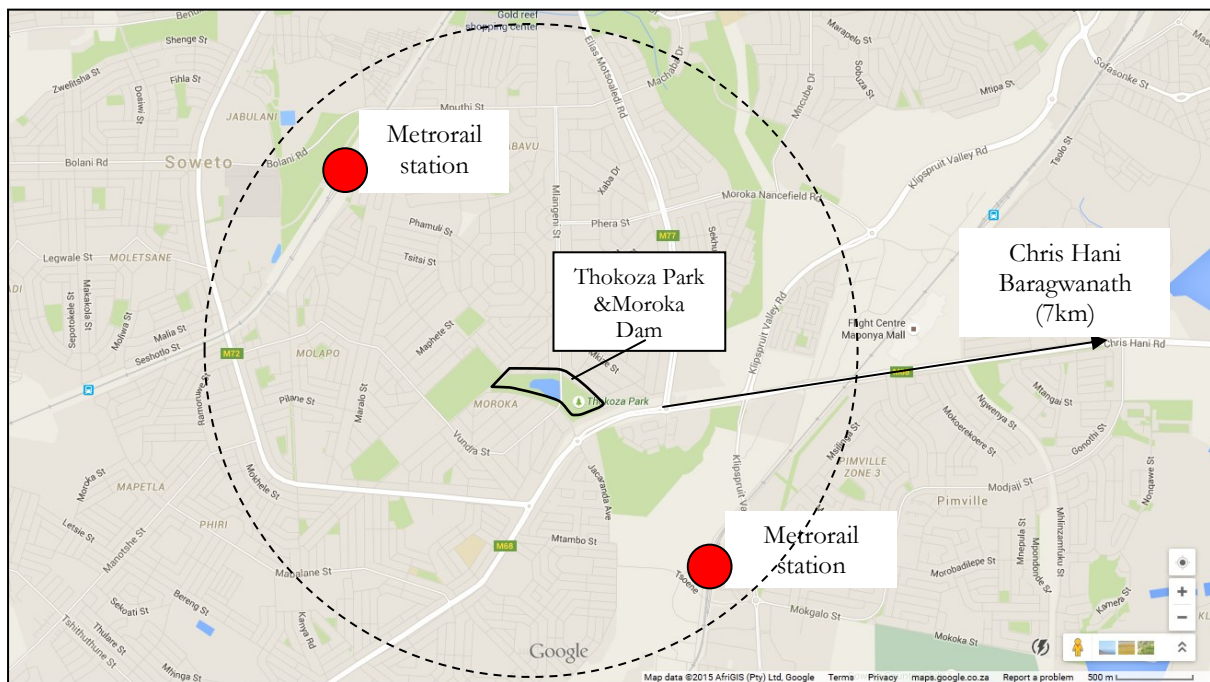


Figure 3: Location of Thokoza Park (after Google, 2015)



The park is surrounded by townships, Moroka, Pimville, Dlamini and Jabavu, where the standard sizes of properties range between 500m<sup>2</sup> and 1000m<sup>2</sup> (the biggest stands being smaller than the smallest stand found in the suburbs around Zoo Lake). The area is characterised by the prevalent presence of backyard rooms, squashed into already small stands. There is a relatively low level of car ownership per household, although high levels of traffic congestion along Klipspruit Valley Rd and along the Golden Highway and the M1 highway indicate a pronounced increase in car ownership in Soweto in general. There is an abundant presence of taxis and other forms of public transport. Beyond the presence of public transport routes, the area is characterised by the presence of public transport infrastructure such as taxi ranks, BRT stations and railway stations.

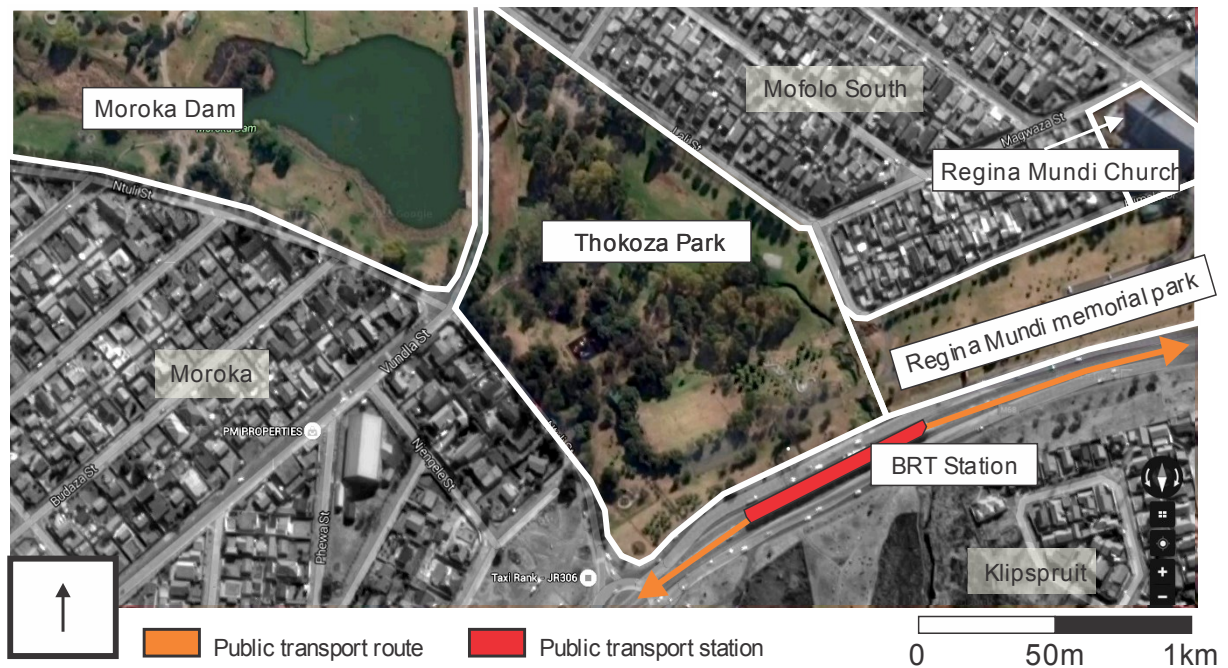


Figure 4: Contents and surroundings of Thokoza Park (after Google, 2015)

The area around Thokoza Park is characterised by a severe lack of trees. The size of the properties seems to make it very difficult for residents to build a reasonably sized house and also keep a garden. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of trees in the area are to be found in publicly owned properties such as streets, schools and parks. Thokoza Park has the highest concentration of trees in the area and (to the extent that trees represent a large and sustained investment in public space) the park may be said to be the largest and best-kept public space across Moroka, Pimville and Jabavu. It is not the only open space however, as Soweto is characterised by large undeveloped spaces and since the park forms part of a large collection of open spaces along the Klipspruit River. However, parks like Thokoza Park (as well as other parks in Soweto, like Dorothy Nyembe) are unique in the amount of investment that has gone into making them parks rather than just open space. This distinction is also reflected in the use of Thokoza Park by residents.



Figure 5: Activities and opportunities within Thokoza Park (Hadebe 2015)

Criminal activities tend to be concentrated to the west of the park, between the main road and the stream. This area is also the space for events organisation, which is the primary income generating asset within the park. Notably, the pond in Moroka Dam also has potential as a recreational area and even as an income generating asset. However, it has not been developed to facilitate recreational activity.



### 3.2. A genealogy of the Friends of Thokoza Park (and other park users structures)

The development of the Thokoza Park FOP occurred in three stages.

In the first phase, JCPZ encouraged the formation of a Friends of the Park committee during the development of Thokoza Park in 2001, to help sustain the management of the park in the medium and long term. Many people showed interest in the park but only a few stayed interested beyond the launch of the park. Those interested were provided training by JCPZ Stakeholders Liaison Officer in charge of the region. The FoP structure was registered, but was soon discredited as it apparently became a private profit making venture for its members, rather than a structure aimed at finding resources for the management and maintenance of the park.

A second structure, the Park Committee, was then formed (2008), more aligned with JCPZ's mandate, vision and procedures. It was led by the ward councillor and an enthusiastic park user and activist, Mzwakhe Nhlapo. The Park Committee had an important security component, with JCPZ ranger manager, JMPD manager and SAPS sector manager participating; but it also consisted of relevant municipal entities such as Johannesburg Roads Agency and Joburg Water.

In the third phase, because safety concerns were rising in the park (with prominent cases of murder and rape), a safety committee was established in 2014, to specifically set up a safety strategy, working together with the Community Policing Forum. The committee and all the members came up with a strategy to be stationed in the park before big events, prior and during the festive season, to prevent incidents rather than to come in and react to the after they had taken place.

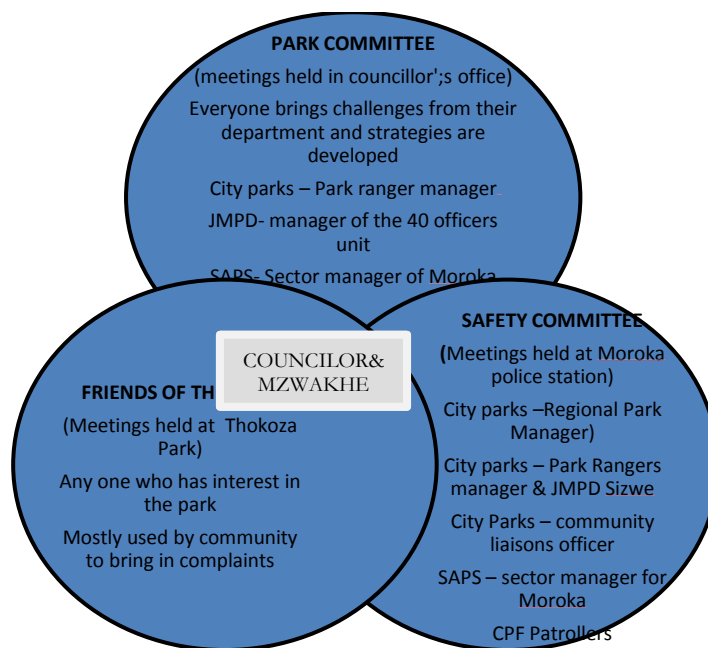


Figure 6: Three structures involved in the management of Thokoza Park

#### *Friends of the park 2001*

In 2001, Thokoza Park was being revamped, and a FoP committee was established so that it becomes part of the launch. City Parks wanted to get the community involved so that the new park would be accepted and looked after by the community. Mzwakhe, who is a key player in the

present FoP structure, was also part of this early committee. Most of the people who were involved did not stay actively involved beyond the launch of the park. Mzwakhe and a few others remained involved after the launch, “We were involved but we had no direction” Mzwakhe explained. In 2005 Mzwakhe became a ward committee member and he was assigned among other parks Thokoza Park to be his area. The FoP Chairperson at the time (between 2001 and 2006) had, according to Mzwakhe, a hidden agenda; he wanted to make money out of the park. “They registered a company, when they see white people they would want money from them”, explains Mzwakhe. Although Friends of the Park were always conceptualised as fundraisers for the management of parks, the funding raised might not have been used for park management but more for personal business. City Parks started being uncomfortable with these practices, and the FoP then stopped being actively involved with the park. The name “Friends of the Park” remained but it had become little more than a platform to voice community complaints. Mzwakhe was already working with City Parks and he then was working along with the Community Liaisons Officer on how to structure a new committee.

### ***Park Committee 2008***

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In working together with City Parks and after Mzwakhe had gone through several training programmes with City Parks, the Park Committee was launched in 2008, chaired by the councillor, Mr Richard Phamodi, and deputy chaired by Mzwakhe. Mzwakhe express “we now had order and we worked on the structure that the committee must have certain members from different departments”. Members of the Park Committee include:

- Councillor(Richard Phamodi)
- Ward committee member (Mzwakhe)
- City Parks Community Liaisons Officer
- Park Rangers Manager (who also represents the JMPD 40 man squad division assigned to help with park by-law enforcement).
- SAPS - Sector manager of the area(Moroka Police station)

The meeting are held once a month in the councillor’s office and there they discuss City Parks maintenance schedule, and the ad hoc challenges they face. Everyone brings challenges and then the Parks Committee collectively decides on solutions and way forward on those issues.

In 2014, growing concerns over safety in the park increased to alarming heights. Mzwakhe explains: “It was not just one issue, it was murder, rape, hijacking, all the incidences happening following each other. There was an outcry from the community that enough is enough. Something has to be done”. That was when the Park Committee decided that a safety committee was necessary to deal with these issues directly.

### ***Safety Committee***

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This committee was established in 2014 as a direct response to the growing safety issues in the park. The meetings are held at Moroka Police station, chaired by the councillor or Mzwakhe, and they are public meetings (open to every member of the community). People attending include:

- Councillor
- The ward committee member
- JCPZ representatives
- SAPS
- Patrollers

Issues	<p><b>Izikhothane (crowds of young kids who attend parties in the park and do not follow by-laws).</b></p> <p>“It is an on-going issue, happening during school holidays most prevalent in December. Children come from all over JHB. They close the street, they park on peoples drive ways, and they drink, fight and have sex. They come in the afternoon and the criminal uses see the visitors as their victims, they see target. The criminal uses come for girls and some for robbing people. The community was outraged and mobilised to get state intervention and deal with the issue.”</p> <p><b>Damage of playing equipment</b></p> <p>“The children don’t know how to use the equipment, they vandalise instead of use it, they break the chains on the swings.”</p>
Strategies	<p><b>Izikhothane</b></p> <p>“We had an educational campaign, we don’t want people drinking at Thokoza Park, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014. We had a community prayer. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Dec we were stationed here in the park, with SAPS. We had 5 meetings. It was challenging to get people to participate. Some of the residents living immediately adjacent to the park drink, so at first they did not want to be involved because it meant they also couldn’t drink in the park. But after a few days of the campaign running they came around and started supporting the campaign because they noticed the difference. The park was safer. We want to organise this again before December 2015.”</p> <p><b>Damage of playing equipment</b></p> <p>“We go to the schools assembly and teach the children how to use the park equipment, how to be safe in the park, to avoid playing in storm water drain pipe, the children go in there.”</p>

**Figure 7: Issues dealt with by the Parks Committee and Safety Committee**

Source: Author’s interview with Mzwakhe, 2015.

In the Park committee meetings first, and then in the safety meeting, the councillor will get complaints and then escalate the issues to the relevant Member of the Mayoral Committee. This committee came up with a strategy to deal with safety issues in parks. The councillor has been able to share this strategy in his platforms and today it is used in many of the City’s parks when there are similar park safety issues. The councillor proudly explains that

“The model that was applied here in terms of dealing with crime is now being used all over the city to deal with crime in parks. We use Thokoza Park as a case study through my influence”.

It is not entirely clear however what the model really consists of. Is it the proactive involvement of the police in the festive season and around the time of events in the park? Or is it the councillor’s ability to leverage high level political support, through the Mayoral Committee, which might be difficult to replicate in wards where the local councillor is less involved or less networked?

### 3.3. Specific features of Thokoza Park FoP

Two main features mark the structure and workings of Thokoza Park users structures. The first is the existence of a dedicated champion, whose expertise, livelihood and networks are constructed around parks management, in the person of Mzwakhe.

**Figure 8: About Mzwakhe Nlapho (Thokoza Park committee facilitator/ Chairperson)**

Profile	<p>Black, Male 30-40 age, ANC</p> <p>Does not live close to the park</p> <p>Has been involved in the park since 2001 (14 years; since its launch)</p> <p>Ward committee member</p> <p>Award winner: City Parks (won an award for community based projects dealing with the environment); City of Johannesburg (won 2 awards); MTK award(3 awards) (nominated as a champion)</p>
Duties	<p>1) Monitors City Parks maintenance schedule</p> <p>2) Days for litter picking, contractors on weekend</p>

	3) Not in the park daily 4) Organise meetings 5) Deal with park complaints 6) Organise events and awareness campaigns (sometimes with City Parks, sometimes alone)
How he became involved with the park	Mzwakhe has been an environmental activist for a very long time. He was elected as a ward committee member in the environment portfolio. He is employed in an NGO called Ukhamba, focusing on environmental and agriculture programmes, in particular working with schools on children’s environmental education. Recently he got involved in a cooperative that does landscaping and urban agriculture.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ward committee member get a stipend from the city of Johannesburg (“it is part of my duties to play a big role in the park”)</li> <li>- Ukhamba (NGO);pays him a salary</li> <li>- Cooperative is new, not making money yet</li> <li>- “In terms of events, City Parks will fund the events, if its awareness, then we work closely with educational division at City Parks. If it’s a big event they will ask me to get a team of people from the community to assist. Some events they will get paid some they will not.”</li> </ul>

The Park committee and the Safety committees are both predominantly driven by Mzwakhe Nhlapho and the local ward Councillor. Community at large is only involved by raising issues in public meetings. This means that Mzwakhe has no substantial team of community members who are part of the committee and help him in solving issues. His involvement in the park has almost become a full-time job, where he operates as community liaison officer, but without the status of a municipal employee. This might become an issue in the long term and a limit to sustainability and generalisation, although Mzwakhe has found other livelihood strategies connected to his passion and expertise in parks, communities and the environment.

A second specificity of the park users committees for Thokoza Park, is they heavy presence of the state: mostly around issues of security, but also to integrate municipal entities relevant to the management of the park (JRA and Joburg Water). Mzwakhe is also there not solely as a member of the community but also as part of the state as he is a ward committee member. What can be learnt from this case study therefore is the importance of integrated platforms to solve park issues, which do not belong only to JCPZ but are broader social issues requiring the involvement of various state and municipal institutions. The FoP’s drive has led to the creation of such integrated platforms which seem to efficiently overcome some of the silos characterising the way the state works. This also has been facilitated by an active and strongly politically connected councillor – an asset for Thokoza Park, but which might not be possible to generalise for other parks throughout the city. Assumptions that communities in the townships cannot support a Friends of the Park structure are therefore, to some degree, proven to be true - for this committee to work, there has to be very strong state presence and involvement, and a dedicated champion working almost in an official capacity to liaise between communities and state institutions, with dedicated resources to do so.

A third lesson is that, because of the FoP structures’ (necessary) focus on safety, opportunities for park development and in particular the development of recreational park facilities (that could also become small businesses) do not seem to have been explored yet. The pond for instance has not been considered an asset, and no recreational activities have been developed around it as yet, in contrast with Zoo Lake for instance. A participatory process for the development of a strategy for the park could be a way to both consolidate community involvement in the parks management, and encourage such dynamics to emerge.

## 4. Lessons from Zoo Lake Users Committee (ZLUC)

Zoo Lake covers an area of 4.6 hectares. The park has a large pond (“the Lake”) that covers roughly 8% of the park and it has many trees, many of which are mature. The park grounds are generally well kept. The pond usually has some waste material floating in it, but is used for recreational purposes with rowing boats, fishing and feeding of the ducks and geese. The park has the following facilities within it: the Moyo’s restaurant, Utilities Building, toilets, a basketball court, a soccer pitch, a children’s play area, the Bowling Club, the Boat Club and the Zoo Lake Sports Club.

### 4.1. Introducing Zoo Lake

Zoo Lake is located about 5km from the Johannesburg inner city, 12km from Sandton and 3.5km from Rosebank. These three areas are the three largest economic nodes in Johannesburg and the Johannesburg inner city remains the largest in terms of economic activity (although in the last 20 years it has lost a significant share of upmarket residents to the other two nodes which also have higher rates of growth).

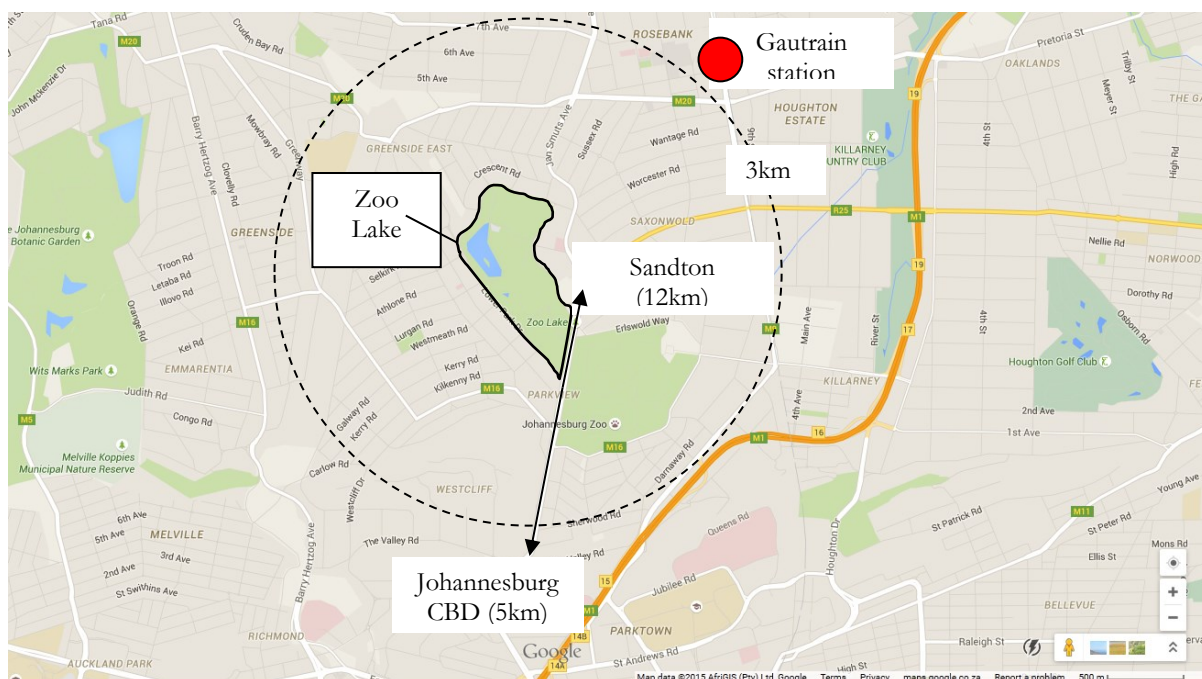


Figure 9: Location of Zoo Lake (after Google, 2015)

The park is surrounded by the neighbourhoods of Parkview, Parkwood, Saxonwold and Greenside, where the stand sizes of properties range between 1050m<sup>2</sup> and 4400m<sup>2</sup>. Other characteristics of the neighbourhoods are the widespread presence of swimming pools and a relatively high level of car ownership per household. Also noteworthy is the presence of a large number of trees (especially along the streets), which likely indicates that rates have been collected and invested in the area for a significant amount of time. The presence of well-kept public properties (which is what streets are) might also indicate, perhaps, that there is a general concern among those living in the area about the condition of public amenities, although the condition of the streets is by itself not enough to state this conclusively.

Zoo Lake is located along Jan Smuts Avenue and, together with the Johannesburg Zoo, it forms an green space system that straddles this road. Jan Smuts Avenue is a major transport route connecting Sandton, Rosebank and Randburg to the inner city. Although Jan Smuts Ave is a major taxi route, the neighbourhoods around Zoo Lake are characterised by the absence of taxi ranks, which might indicate low taxi patronage among the mostly car-dependent residents of the area, or at least limited attention to this type of users.



Figure 10: Activities and opportunities in Zoo Lake (Hadebe 2015)

The events area is an important asset in the park – as cultural and music events of local to metropolitan magnitude occur there on a regular basis, a source of income for the City. So is the lake, where boat rides are offered (at a quite affordable price), and where the geese and ducks also constitute an attraction for families and children. Parts of the park have been developed commercially (Moyo Restaurant, and the Club House), and parts of it are for private use (Sports center). The northern end of the park, where the boathouse and the restaurant are located, has a high concentration of reports of crime

## **4.2. A genealogy of the Friends of Zoo Lake**

Zoo Lake Users Committee (ZLUC) was established in 1996 as an initiative of the state to work together with communities living around the park. The community at Zoo Lake was vibrant and enthusiastic getting involved. ZLUC was officially recognised by the City when City Parks was established in 2001. ZLUC had at this stage a Community Liaisons Officer from JCPZ come in and facilitate the relationship between the state and the community. The committee was chaired by the local (DA) councillor until 2009, had a well running fundraising section, and ZLUC were able to conduct some physical upgrades to the park (for instance the sports club) that the state could not afford, with a high degree of autonomy.

ZLUC's autonomy and ability to decide on upgrades using the funding it had raised has however been curtailed since 2011, with JCPZ reinstating the municipal entity's mandate to manage parks and oversee investments in the park. This has coincided with a crisis in ZLUC, with committee members leaving, or becoming less active. ZLUC therefore became dormant until 2015, where Fran Haslam, the current chairperson, was elected.

This trajectory however means that significant knowledge, experience, networks in and out of the state were lost, that the current ZLUC is attempting to reconstitute. ZLUC is also working to re-establishing a relationship with JCPZ, as there is currently no active JCPZ representative to guide them in this respect.

### ***Zoo Lake Users Committee - beginnings (1996-1999)***

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The area around Zoo Lake was and still is predominantly DA. In 1996, the ward councillor was Mike Moriarty. He took the lead for the initiative of mobilising park users in participating in parks management. According to ZLUC current chairperson, the City sent notifications out to each ward councillors to have park committees in the major parks, and Clr Moriarty responded by setting up the Zoo Lake Users Committee.

People invited to the committee included local community, and officials from City parks, the zoo, security, roads, services, electricity, Joburg environment. Residents initially mobilised mainly because of their complaints and concerns about how events were organised in the park at the time. The City delegated officials to participate in the committee, initially. The Committee remained chaired by the ward councillor, which also ensured that the link between residents and municipal institutions was activated.

### ***Local government restructuring and ZLUC consolidation (1999-2005) – a functional, but autonomising, fundraising vehicle***

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Although the ZLUC had been vibrant, giving a voice to the community and functioning well for some time, it encountered difficulties from 1999-2000 because the municipalities (which at the time had not yet been amalgamated into a metro) were not functioning properly and there were challenges in service delivery.

The IGoli Process began and between 2000 and 2001, City Parks was formed. City Parks then appointed a Community Liaison Officer (Oscar Olifant) and one of his responsibilities was to attend meetings with the ZLUC and report back to the City. The park was hosting lots of events



and one active committee member, Lucy Taylor, came up with the idea of raising funds, to complement ailing municipal funding.

Lucy was dealing with projects around raising funds to do the things ZLUC envisioned for the park, in partnership with a variety of stakeholders, many of which private businesses. ZLUC had to register under the Section 21 Companies Act, non-profitable organisation, for fundraising. City parks was to a certain degree monitoring these activities: ZLUC had to notify the City’s Risk and Audit department about all the funding coming in, and where the money has gone to. There was however a fair level of autonomy, as illustrated through the revamp of the sports club via private funding. One member of ZLUC reports:

“There was this person, who ran a sports facility. He approached us and said he needed a place to run a few sports events. He asked us if it’s possible for him to use the bottom part, where the sports centre is. We were happy to [allow him], I discussed it with the board. Even before we agreed to sub-lease to him, he already began to make the area nice. He phoned SAPS and they got rid of all the vagrants. I think he had a few contacts at Johannesburg Property Company as well. We worked again through JPC for the sub-lease, and after it was finalised, he began with the changes. It is also this guy who helped putting in flood lights and makes the club house nice, with a little restaurant, fencing it and paying a security guard to be stationed there. Before the upgrades, the area was terrible. This guy and ZLUC did help a lot with providing equipment for the area. It was for the upliftment of the community. The ZLUC acted as the link between him and City Parks, they informed him of then correct procedure to follow to allow him to invest his money in the sports club.”

This type of initiative, and the exact linkages between private initiative, ZLUC support and City involvement remains to be analysed more in depth. It does not seem to have been reproduced or emulated, possibly because it became contested, and politicised. It appears that ZLUC throughout these years became too independent politically and financially, in the eyes of the municipality. For instance, the municipal official who was member of ZLUC reports that he had to leave for political reasons: “I left the committee in 2001 because the area was DA and the office was ANC and my boss at the time felt odd sending me to a DA camp”.

***Times of crisis – ZLUC becomes dormant (2006 - 2014)***

With City Parks lesser involvement, and also the departure of Lucy as the chairperson in 2005, ZLUC lost some of its stamina, and became quiet for a number of years. The various chairpersons that succeeded her did not manage to drive as efficiently community mobilisation, fundraising nor partnering with the City. Graham Wright, ZLUC chairperson between 2009 and 2013, moved out of Johannesburg but continued chairing the committee from the Western Cape as there was no volunteer to take over. It was only when the councillor Tim Truluck called the community to get involved in the park committee, that new energies came on board.

***Reviving ZLUC (2015-today)***

Fran Haslam, the current chair, recalls that she became increasingly worried about what she saw as decay in the park, and she decided to join the local residents association, Saxonwold and Parkwood Residential Association (SAPRA). ZLUC had then become a subcommittee within the residents association. Responding to the ward councillor’s call, she volunteered to get involved in ZLUC and after two years of involvement, she took up the position of chairperson in 2015, with no opposition.

**Figure 11: About Fran Haslam (ZLUC chairperson)**

Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ White, female, 59</li> <li>▪ Affiliate of the DA</li> <li>▪ Retired professional in finance</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lives opposite to the park (moved in the area in 2013).</li> <li>▪ Was the Chair of Parkview Community Policing Forum</li> <li>▪ Is a member of the Saxonwold and Parkwood Residential Association (SAPRA)</li> <li>▪ Been involved in ZLUC since 2013, chairperson of ZLUC since 2015</li> </ul>
Duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Walks the park on a daily basis with the grounds men to see what needs to be done</li> <li>▪ Work with City Parks to make sure the park isn't going into decay, that there is proper maintenance and management of the park, and make sure that the by-laws are being maintained</li> <li>▪ Monitor people's behaviour to make sure that the park is not trashed. Try and educate park users so that they use the park respectfully.</li> <li>▪ ZLUC sees itself mostly as a monitoring programme, "it can't influence a lot of things in the park because it does not have authority."</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fran is volunteering her services without getting paid for her time.</li> <li>▪ She hasn't been part of any big events yet in the park</li> </ul>

Source: Author's interview with Fran Haslam

There has been a lot of activity in recent months although the ZLUC remains a non-registered committee, with no official standing within the City of Johannesburg institutions: the committee falls under the category of 'residential issues' along with residents associations. It is currently in the process of re-formalising its strategy, vision and status to establish more formal links with the City and JCPZ in particular. ZLUC new motto has been defined as "Keep our park clean, green and safe".

### 4.3. What ZLUC does

After being dormant for several years, ZLUC had to confront pressing issues of park decay, including the development of an informal homeless shelter on the park premises.

After failed engagement with JCPZ, ZLUC resorted to a more aggressive media campaign and finally reached the Mayor with its concerns over the management of homelessness in Zoo Lake. In the absence of a broad City strategy on homelessness, it resulted into the eviction of park's residents by JMPD, and an agreement (to still be formalised) for the Zoo Lake Sports Center to manage the area, in conjunction with JCPZ.

After this initial, antagonistic form of engagement with JCPZ, and realising that it could not work without JCPZ, ZLUC adopted a more constructive take, and its professed principle is now to

"render assistance and ongoing advice to the Johannesburg Council and Johannesburg City Parks. [ZLUC] will assist with the promotion of social culture and communal activities, promotion and appreciation regarding the open spaces system. They will assist in the raising of funds for the park and to co-ordinate the activities of various outside bodies using the facilities and the park." (<http://www.zoolake.org/about-zluc.html>, accessed January 2016).

On an everyday basis, ZLUC members currently act as a watchdog, on an everyday and voluntary basis – checking the grounds with JCPZ staff, making sure park users respect the park, with limited capacity for by-law enforcement in this respect, however.

Figure 12: The Zoo Lake User's Committee (ZLUC): Current issues and strategies stated in the Sept 2015 workshop

Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "JCPZ states that there is no money to fix anything. There is only money for trimming and cutting grass."</li> <li>▪ "There is a lot of litter in the park and it is not properly managed. There are not enough proper bins. The vagrants open the bins and the rubbish lies around the bins. No one monitors the recyclers. The kids also come to play and leave the place dirty. Park users tend to braai anywhere, litter and damage the trees."</li> <li>▪ "There was a Master plan for Zoo Lake that was done without engagement with the community. Instead it was developed by a consultant. In any case JCPZ seems to say there is no funding to implement it."</li> <li>▪ There is a lack of communication and response when ZLUC constructively engages with JCPZ. There is no</li> </ul>
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	Community nor Stakeholders Liaison officer consistently involved from JCPZ.
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ZLUC is being re-launched. A workshop was organised to map existing networks, consolidate and update ZLUC vision and strategic plan.</li> <li>▪ ZLUC is attempting to re-establish links with relevant officials in various City departments and municipal entities (JCPZ, JRA, SAPS, JMPD), but with limited success so far. The answer seems to be consistently ‘we can’t help you’, “we won’t spend any more funding in Zoo Lake”.</li> <li>▪ ZLUC is putting together a campaign to help keep the park clean. Starting with the schools that bring their kids around, and working towards posting signage educating park users in the park itself.</li> <li>▪ ZLUC has painted the benches.</li> <li>▪ ZLUC has offered to pay for some maintenance or refurbishment costs, but CJPZ’s response generally is “no, we will get it done”. The general message ZLUC gets is that it can make changes but it needs to consult CJPZ first. However there are limited responses and not a continued relationship that would make this easy.</li> </ul>



Figure 13: Meeting of the ZLUC, September 2015 (image by Author)

#### 4.4. Specific features of Zoo Lake Friends of the Park

ZLUC involves many community members, the local councillor, a few businesses and some institutions. It is structured in several portfolios, where fundraising, communication and marketing, events management and security have a large team.

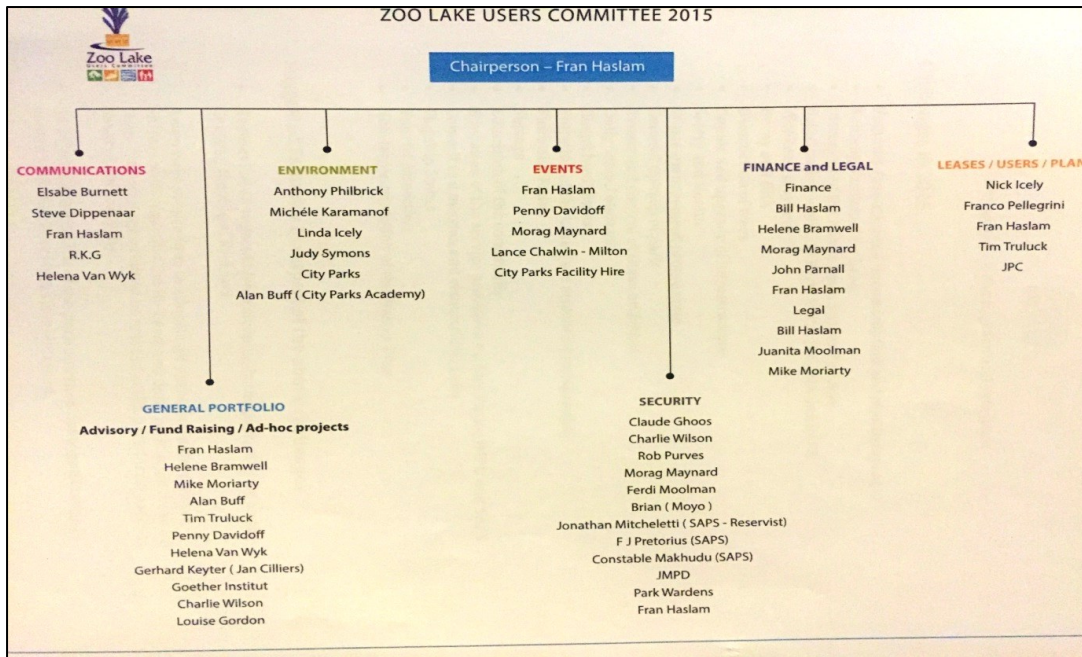


Figure 14: ZLUC organogramme.

Unlike Thokoza Park, ZLUC struggles however to get City Parks and City officials to participate or to even appear in its meetings. It has not always been the case: initially City officials were quite involved in the committee. However there seems to have been disengagement throughout the years, and simultaneously the Committee has become more autonomous politically and financially. There are limits to this autonomy though, and ZLUC is attempting to re-establish networks with the City and CJPZ.

Its network mapping exercise (ZLUC 2015) shows a number of key officials in JCPZ and other municipal entities that they are attempting to liaise with. However, it also demonstrates a degree of confusion on the way the Council is structured, reflecting the complexity of Johannesburg local government (and CJPZ own institutional complexity), incredibly difficult to navigate for outsiders.

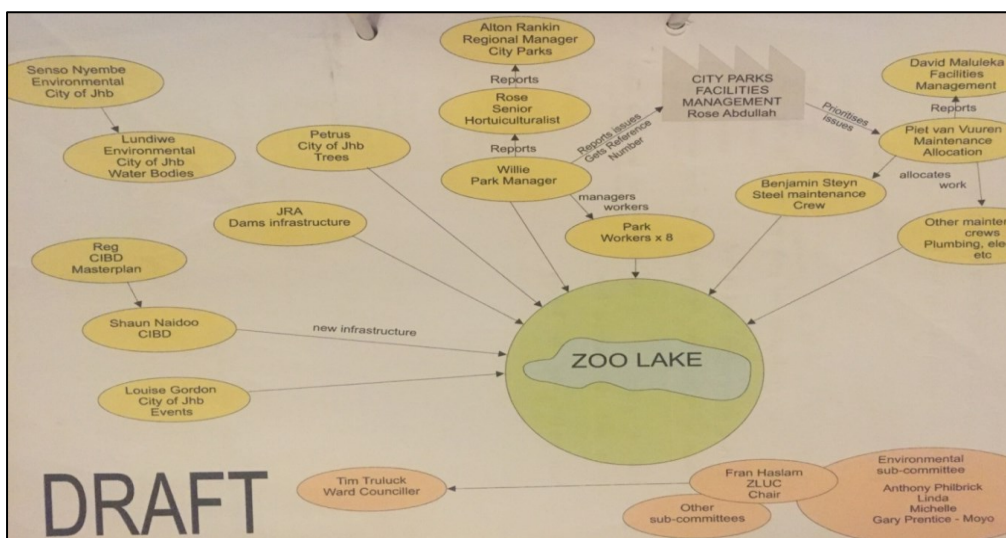


Figure 15: Network mapping exercise undertaken by ZLUC, Johannesburg workshop, 18 September 2015.

ZLUC, in this respect, direly needs the facilitation of a Community or Stakeholders Liaison officer able to help them navigate municipal institutions and networks – a needed resource in the contemporary context.

The involvement of ward councillors (from the DA here) can be seen both as an asset and an impediment to this endeavour. On the one hand, local councillors are familiar with some of the municipal ways of working, and can assist FOPs to navigate processes and institutions and establish pragmatic strategies to get things done. On the other hand, the politicisation of parks issues to score political gains against the municipality, especially in years of local elections (such as the one forthcoming in 2016), might jeopardise attempts to build a constructive and sustained relationship. This politicisation might be unavoidable, but it is also for ZLUC civil society members to keep a proper distance, use politics when pressure is needed but not fall into the trap of destroying the potentials for constructive relationships with municipal officials.

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## 5. Discussion

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### 5.1. To what extent are the characteristics of the FOP a response to issues within the park?

ZLUC was initiated by the city in 1996 as a programme that was looking at how the state can work together with communities to give them what they really need. The invitation to join this programme was extended to the ward councillor. He responded, together with the community around the park: at the time the main concerns were around events management and residents' complaints about them. In 2001, when the City Parks division was established, they found that the ZLUC was still active and they got together with them to further assist. The formal recognition of the ZLUC was in 2001. At the time, the biggest need seemed to be about the park's maintenance and the lack of resources to do so: as a result, ZLUC increasingly focused its activities around fund-raising, but there seem to have been some contestations about the use of such funding, and therefore this initiative vanished. Residents' interest in the ZLUC has been revived in recent years because of concerns regarding the lack of maintenance and the contravention of park bylaws by the users of the park. ZLUC's position is now to try and work jointly with JCPZ, but it has not yet managed to establish consistent and efficient networks with relevant officials.

The Thokoza Park FOP was established as part of the development and launch of Thokoza Park in 2001. Whilst JCPZ encourages FoP to fundraise so as to complement meagre municipal resources committed to park management, this encouragement might have gone too far, with FoP committee members suspected of using the structure to fundraise for their own benefit. Subsequent iterations of park users' structures, such as the Park Committee (launched in 2008) have been much more monitored and have involved less community members, more state institutions. An additional structure, the Safety Committee, was created in 2014 to respond to specific safety issues in the park, especially during festive times of the year.

### 5.2. FoP involvement with the management or physical upkeep of parks

The physical maintenance of the park is mostly provided for by JCPZ, by means of a park manager, chief grounds man and his team. As both Thokoza and Zoo Lake are "flagship parks"

in the city, they have a higher cycle of maintenance than other parks in Johannesburg, with CJPZ staff being present several days a week. In Thokoza Park, there are fourteen people in the team and at Zoo Lake, there are four grounds people. They come in to cut the grass and trim the trees and pick up the trash, trim flower beds. “You have to make a special request for painting and electrical fixings and so forth”, says Fran.

In Zoo Lake, Fran Haslam walks the park every morning with the lead grounds man and highlights the issues of maintenance in the park that the team must attend to, she is not allowed to bring her own team to fix or work in the park, only people from CJPZ are allowed to do things in the park. If she wants to fix something or organise a clean-up in the park she has to get authorisation from city parks for that activity beforehand. Fran Haslam calls the different departments within City Parks and CoJ for special requests.

In Thokoza Park, Mzwakhe the facilitator of the 3 park users committees also monitors the park, checking that it is maintained, that City Parks is following their schedule of maintaining the park and he also reports further issues that need immediate attention. He further organises the community and surrounding schools for events like water week and Arbor Day for functions that will include the community and schools coming together to clean the park and the stream. They do not do this on a day to day basis only on special occasions.

In both Parks the physical aspect of the park is under City Parks management and the FoP groups are not allowed to make physical changes to the park or fix/maintain anything without JCPZ consent. The initial ZLUC was more involved in park maintenance, and they found the resources to do so after having established a strong fundraising element to their committee. However, this initiative was not continued.

### **5.3. Interactions with the state – in quest for the right balance**

In Thokoza Park, the park users structures are framed mostly in terms of engagement with and within state institutions. Both the park committee and the safety committee bring together different state entities such as JCPZ, the JMPD, Park Rangers, CPF and SAPS – in order to coordinate responses to issues mostly framed in terms of safety. Probably thanks to the ward councillor’s own political networks, but also because of the salience of safety and security issues in and around the parks, the involvement of these state institutions seems to have a degree of continuity – regular meetings, and presence during key moments such as events and the festive season. Other issues get directed to the Mayors’ office via the councillor, (it has not been possible to document exactly which issues and how they were solved). Both the councillor and Mzwakhe represent the community, as part of the ward committee but also thanks to their multiple local networks. Interaction with the state is therefore central to the working of the park users committee, and goes beyond CJPZ. On another side, the interaction with CJPZ itself does not seem particularly developed: beyond everyday management issues, there does not seem to be visible strategic engagement around the park’s development, a master plan or further opportunities for the development of other park amenities.

ZLUC has moved from a quite close relationship with the municipality (with the presence of a City Parks employee in their rank, and sustained attendance to meetings from a Community Liaison Officer), to a more distant relationship where it seemed to be almost running on its own, to a more antagonistic relationship. At the moment the present committee is trying to redevelop a constructive relationship with CJPZ, and to get stakeholders to be part of their committee, or attend their meetings, help them with the correct procedures to follow and guide them in the

solutions they are coming up with to tackle their issues in the park. Such a relationship still has not been established.

In both cases, ward councillors are very involved in the park users committees, which has both benefits and limitations. As elected local representatives, their involvement is crucial and helps broaden the park committee to a level of community representation. As members of the City Council, they are aware of how the Council works, and often are able to assist park users committees in understanding processes and legislation, resources and constraints, accessing institutions and networks, crafting strategies accordingly. They bring of course also a degree of politicization in the park users committee, which is probably impossible to avoid, and has contrasting consequences for the workings of these structures. In Thokoza Park, the political alignment of the councillor with City Council has facilitated access to state institutions and decision making levels. In Zoo Lake, political opposition has sometimes been instrumental in being vocal and putting pressure on the City, but it might at times have jeopardised the committee's ability to build a long-lasting and constructive relationship with the municipality.

In both cases, park users committees' understanding of municipal institutions (and JCPZ organogramme) seems to be partial and blurry, limiting their ability to understand the constraints, acknowledge the mandates and come up with innovative ideas and collective initiatives for the maintenance and development of the park. JCPZ resource limitation has meant that these committees do not benefit from a sustained engagement with a parks official able to coordinate their engagement with JCPZ. As explained by one JCPZ official commenting on ZLUC's challenges in establishing a relationship with JCPZ,

“CLOs are very important for Friends of the Park, as they are the ones that deal with mostly the social issues, by getting different departments to come to the meetings and see how they can help the committee and the park. The Liaison Officer also has the advantage of working in other parks and has access to other liaisons officers that work in other parks thus they can share strategies that have worked in other areas. Currently ZLUC is lacking a Liaison officer. They are struggling to get the departments to help them as they are initiating the relationship without the Liaison Officer. They are also fuzzy on how City Parks works.”

#### **5.4. Interactions with the community**

“People that get involved in Thokoza Park, they do not like the formal process because they will have to sign legal documents, they are reluctant to do that”, explains Mzwakhe when it comes to discuss the work of volunteers in the park. Mzwakhe rather facilitates the involvement of the community through verbal agreements. When JCPZ organises events at Thokoza Park, JCPZ will ask him to get a team together and he will go to the community and find people who want to be involved (occasionally for a stipend): handing over flyers, going door to door informing people about the event, distributing refreshments, coordinating transport and parking, etc. The FoP does not have fixed membership and it does not have portfolios. Involvement in the FOP is on an ad hoc basis, except for Mzwakhe who offers both his professional expertise and his political and social network to the three structures involved in the management of the park.

In Zoo Lake, there is a constant team of individuals who are working on the parks issues as they evolve. They are formal members of the ZLUC, some of which coordinate specific portfolios on which they will report at each meeting. Their involvement is longer-standing than in Thokoza park users structures, and based on a variety of skills and resources (such as web design, environmental concerns, business networks). Their individual resources as professionals allow them to volunteer their time and not expect any financial retribution for their time, unlike in Thokoza Park where the struggle for survival partly explains the more limited involvement of community members into the park users structures.



ZLUC seems to be facing a situation where they need to revive interest in the park whereas the Thokoza Park FOP has never enjoyed significant interest from the community. Difference in community involvement between the two park users structures therefore seem to confirm assumptions that park users work best in resourced, middle-class communities where residents are not primarily concerned with issues of survival. However, this explanation is not sufficient, and low-income communities are known to actively mobilise around collective issues and participate in local civic meetings in Johannesburg. Two other lines might be relevant to explain the difference in community mobilisation in our cases.

This report first argues that community interest in FOPs and, consequently, their involvement in park management, is informed to a large extent by history, and in particular the community's attachment to the park. For some members of ZLUC, such as Fran Haslam, the connection with the park is because of the experience of growing up around the park and interacting with it over a very long period of time. In contrast, the recent character of Thokoza Park and other parks development in Soweto, means such historical layers and representations have not yet developed on a broad base – community attachment to the park might be in the process of being constructed. Although this phenomenon was discovered and recognised as being very impactful during the production of this research report, its investigation laid outside of the scope of the research questions. More research needs to be done to better understand the historical development of Zoo Lake; how this correlates with the development of a meaning of Zoo Lake; and how certain triggers (physical interventions, for instance) moderate the development of this meaning and mediate between competing meanings. Both state and civil society actors have a role to play in creating, debating, constructing these meanings.

The second element explaining the contrast between levels of community involvement relates to different political positioning of the two parks. It seems clear that each committee's need for public interest is being driven by different factors from the other. For the ZLUC, community involvement is a key resource, in the absence of strong state involvement, and is integral to the functioning of the committee. Whilst general meetings remain limited, the committee is broad and representing a variety of local stakeholders. In Thokoza Park, the involvement of the community seems to have strong links with political objectives – mobilising the community around events; and potentially ad hoc management objectives (users education, ad hoc cleaning campaigns).

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1. Learning the lessons in a comparative way

Figure 16: Recapping the profile of park users committee in Zoo Lake and Thokoza Park

Zoo Lake Users Committee	Thokoza Park committees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structured in a variety of portfolio reflecting a wide but specific range of interests: communication, fundraising, environment and safety.</li> <li>- Committee members have professional skills and resources to offer (cf ZLUC website). Many have been involved in community affairs and in the park for long (experience)</li> <li>- Difficulty in engaging with JCPZ and other municipal entities. With JCPZ, the relationship focuses on physical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No portfolios, role of coordinating various state entities to solve ad hoc issues, and address one main concern : crime.</li> <li>- A single person committee, with an activist driving the Park committee as an NGO strongly integrated with state institutions. He can use his various local networks / political skill to solve issues.</li> <li>- Community only mobilised on an ad hoc basis (campaigns, events), with stipend for participation. Education campaigns aim</li> </ul>

<p>maintenance and events management. There is a strong claim to engage on more strategic development issues, which has not yet been responded to</p> <p>- Strong presence of the DA councillor (also shadow MMC – Parks), leading to a degree of politicisation of issues sometimes problem solving, sometimes detrimental to finding pragmatic solutions</p>	<p>at changing behaviours in the park.</p> <p>- Park Committee is mostly state-run – ward councillor and ward committee member as drivers, SAPS-JMPD-rangers strong presence, occasionally JRA and Joburg Water.</p> <p>- Strong involvement of the ANC councillor, able to mobilise his networks in the party and the state to solve issues.</p>
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The two parks committees are driven by genuine passion and commitment to the park, by one or a group of local activists using their professional, practical and political expertise to participate in the management of the park. However, this passion does not seem to be matched by an equally committed and identifiable City Parks official. The existing Stakeholder Liaison Officers possibly have too many parks to cover to be able to genuinely facilitate, accompany and partner with these local activists, as advised by Jones in the above-mentioned template. Therefore, one cannot talk in either of these cases of a ‘partnership’ between communities and JCPZ.

Thokoza Parks committee is largely a state structure, with limited involvement of the community – it is useful to overcome institutional fragmentation on an ad hoc basis, and Mzwakhe plays almost the role of a de facto Community Liaison Officer (mobilising and informing communities) – but without the status nor the salary.

ZLUC is working in quasi autonomy, with less freedom than before, and struggles to navigate the state. In both cases, an exercise of joint visioning (e.g. through a Master Plan) could be used to explore constraints and opportunities and build the relationship.

Both FoPs are politicised - meaning access to state networks, or power to raise issues (watchdog or blockage role). These politics can be problem-solving and foster responsiveness and accountability in the short term, but they do not replace a longer-lasting partnership with City Parks authorities, which could lead to more practical and innovative management solutions.

## 6.2. Recommendations

The research has identified four key principles that the state can employ in order to integrate FOP efforts into its public space management structures:

- ▶ *Leadership* – the recognition and support of key actors who drive the development and operation of FOPs
- ▶ *Responsiveness* – The use of agents within the state such as the CLO and councillors to manage the state’s responsiveness to FoP needs.
- ▶ *Incentives* – Recognising the role played by different kinds of incentives in motivating the involvement of community members and key actors at different points in the development of FoPs
- ▶ *Proactivity* – Recognising the key role played by the state in moderating the creation of meaning in public space and thus shaping agendas of FoPs

It is noted in this research that the above set of principles risk romanticising participation. This paradigm of participation tends to neglect the fact that invented spaces today exist in the context of deliberate efforts by planners to mobilise communities for the purpose of absorbing them into the formal planning structure. In this context, where the state’s capacity is shrinking and where it plays an increasingly small role in the physical dimension of public spaces, there tends to be a growing emphasis on the legal dimension, where the rules of who does what in the creation

and upkeep of public space are expanded to include community members and FOPs. The state's increasing absence in the provision of the physical contents of public spaces also means that spaces are increasingly being created through personalisation, where people bring their own materials to furnish public spaces.

Although the neoliberal state has withdrawn from playing a large role in the physical dimension of public spaces it retains a monopoly on authority. Therefore it could be argued that today the state hands out authority and responsibility rather than financial resources and the services of planning experts. The state still plays a role as a source of management expertise but today the emphasis is on transferring some of this management expertise as well as some of the responsibilities of managing public space to members of the community and to FOPs. It is tempting to also see FOPs in the same light, to say that they are involved in the management of public space and that what they need from the state is financial resources, skills and authority. To a certain extent this is true. These are things that FOPs do. However this is a narrow view of what the management of public spaces entails. It limits the kinds of recommendations that can be made in response to park issues to those that focus on financial resources, technical skills and legal powers and the state's role in facilitating access to these. Lynch (1984) and Amin (2006) argue that the notion of good public space precedes modern laws and modern technical skills, and that good public spaces have managed to exist even in societies that were materially less resourced than modern communities. So then the poor condition of modern public spaces cannot simply be explained away by referring to money, skills and laws. In addition to their role in shaping the physical character of public spaces and enforcing the bylaws that govern their use, those involved with the management of public spaces must also assume the role of modulating the process of creating meaning within these spaces. FOPs, because of their ability to facilitate interactions (between members of a given community, between the community and the state, and between the community and the physical park itself) have the potential to be incubators for such processes of creating meaning. They could be used as vehicles for initiating such processes within communities, beyond management structures and by-law enforcement.

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## 7. Reference list

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Since its formation in 2011, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) is interested in establishing, sustaining and formalising partnership with park users committees, to assist with the management and development of the park – in particular in the context of scarce public funding.

Many observe the contrast between middle-class former white suburbs, where park users committees seem numerous, resourced and relatively functional; and the scarcity of park users committees in lower income, former Black townships.

This difference does not come as a surprise due to the contrasted histories of the two parts of Johannesburg, still marked by its strong apartheid legacy. A multiplicity of parks have been developed for 50 years in what is still being called ‘the leafy suburbs’. In contrast, greening initiatives and parks development have only started recently in townships, where open spaces were either used as buffer zones or occupied by informal settlements, hosting a few informal social and economic activities (cow grazing, prayer, initiation).

Friends of the Park are still few in former townships, but it is interesting to observe how they work, and compare and contrast them with Friends of the Park in the northern suburbs – and how they are supported or not by JCPZ drive towards community partnerships for the management of urban parks. This study has chosen Thokoza Park (Soweto) and Zoo Lake (Parkview), both flagship parks for JCPZ, and managed with the participation of dynamic park users committees.



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