



Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbors and new-planted orchards,
On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
And to your heirs for ever, common pleasures,
To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.

(William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act III)

The citizens of Rome listen, spellbound, to Marc Antony's funeral oration for Julius Caesar. Upon learning that the slain dictator willed his gardens and parks to the people, the crowd is freed from its inhibitions and runs wild. At least, Shakespeare imagined it could have happened that way; even Elizabethan London had room for a sentimental yearning for green areas, which already then were associated with primordiality and inner harmony. In short, we cannot escape our nature, neither the one that surrounds us nor the one found within. No matter how much city people indulge in the romance of the pavement, the need persists to be able to stretch one's legs in a wooded glade or along a beach, and inhale a pinch of healthy air worthy of the name.

As is well known, humans have their origins in

nature and claim to periodically wish to return to it. Historical circumstances have placed obstacles in the way, but the ties remain significant even in the setting where nature might seem most remote – the vulnerable and almost completely artificial modern metropolis. Only on journeys into space are the ties completely cut, but most depictions of fictitious space travel take it for granted that the need is met to some extent by accompanying green plants or even entire gardens. The ties between human culture and nature go back to the beginning of time, as is well known. At the site of the oldest monument we know of to date, the place called Göbekli Tepe, in what is now southeast Turkey, people chose to create a sculpture park of sorts by erecting T-shaped stone pillars – some over three meters tall – about eleven thousand five hundred years ago. The purpose of this almost inconceivable physical feat in a culture lacking metal tools or permanent homes remains unknown, but in line with the standard dictum that whatever archaeologists do not understand they define as cult-related, the general interpretation of researchers for now is exactly that: an aspiration to communicate with higher (or lower) powers. Many of the monoliths bear carved reliefs of the surrounding fauna: lions, wild boar, foxes, scorpions.

Indeed, the oldest culture is a mirror of nature. Once humans domesticated some of the fauna and designated the remainder as wildlife, the process of domesticating nature itself began.

Ever since cities were first built, their inhabitants have had a need to escape, at least for a short period, to recuperate away from the crowds, the noise of traffic and the insalubrious air. At first this was not a problem other than on the individual level; nature ruled and was accessible everywhere beyond the city walls or limits, and often enough even within them. As more and more cities were built, in the early cultures of the Near East, structured greenery in the form of enclosed gardens emerged as the most desirable environment imaginable, known in the Avestan language as *pairi daeza*: paradise was a garden. Parks and gardens gradually increased in scope. The world's first would-be national urban park, the spectacular party facility *Domus aurea*, was located in central Rome in an area cleared following the devastating Great Fire of Rome (64 AD), though it failed to meet this criterion as it was reserved for its owner, the emperor Nero, and his guests. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, urbanization declined and people prioritized concerns other than parks. As convincingly shown

by British historian Simon Schama, the concept of an (ab)original landscape, Arcadia, where the sound and genuine life was supposedly lived, was preserved and developed during the Renaissance (as were so many other concepts of Antiquity). This landscape of the imagination, which often seemed to have little in common with its counterpart in reality on the Peloponnese, eventually branched into two lines of thought, involving the wild and the disciplined in life. This relationship was reflected in the physical park world. However, yet one more element was needed: the old Napoleonic soldier Claude François Denecourt (1788–1875) used his extensive knowledge of the terrain in the Fontainebleau forest outside Paris to make a strong contribution to modern man's contact with the more undisciplined side of Arcadia by clearing the first recreational trails in history.

The park may have its cultural roots in the ancient Near East, but the national park has its roots in the United States. The world's first national park was Yellowstone in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, inaugurated in 1872, followed by Sequoia and Yosemite in California in 1890. However, exactly how these areas

would be defined was not crystal clear. Not until 1969 did the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) declare that a national park was "a relatively large area with particular defining characteristics."

If the promised land to the west represents the national park pioneering effort, Sweden is in a solid second place. Explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld launched a proposal to set aside land for a national park in 1880, though Ångsö National Park in Roslagen archipelago, the first of its kind in Europe, did not actually become established until 1909. However, the process did not stop there; an additional eight parks opened in Sweden that same year and the process then continued, leading to today's 29 parks. In other words, it is logical that the national urban park concept was first introduced in Sweden. Or was it? The question is how to designate facilities like the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco and Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City, both established in 1972. Possibly they might not be considered proper national urban parks since they both consist of several unconnected areas. But what would they otherwise be called? And then we have the Urban Wilds Initiative in Boston, also with roots in the 1970s. But we were

talking about Northern European national urban parks.

One reasonable criterion for a national urban park is that it be located in a city. During the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and even the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment, for the most part parks tended to be under strict private ownership. But things started happening in the 19th century. According to US cultural historian Paul S. Boyer, the history of the public urban park can be divided into three periods: the romantic (1850–1890s); the rationalistic (1890–1950s), and the regenerative (1950s–). Romantic parks often followed the formula of the English countryside park in order to convey expansive and striking vistas. Rationalistic parks can be said to comprise part of the art of social engineering that viewed parks as settings for surrogate human activity, as a type of valve, where people could work out their frustration and anxiety in, for example, a tennis match. Regenerative parks, in light of a fledgling environmental awareness and the oncoming green wave, are viewed as attempts to link awareness of local tradition with ecological awareness and sustainable development. The national urban park can be said to build on all of these models, and more.

Master nature and long for it anew. Seclude yourself from the bustle of things and then arrange the seclusion.

Development or obliteration. Did Arcadia arise only after it was ravaged?



Here, Londoners take their leisure outside Kenwood House on Hampstead Heath.

Nature is never far away in Sweden; even in Stockholm's inner city, residents seldom have to walk farther than 300 meters to reach a green space. Stockholm County alone has 27 nature reserves and two national parks, the previously mentioned Ångsö in Roslagen's inner archipelago and Tyresta in Södertörn. The city's green areas also receive diligent use. Landscape architect Thorbjörn Andersson has employed the expression "social sacrament" to describe Swedes' relationship to nature, and in this context cited a Jesuit priest who had long served in Sweden: "On the continent we see God in another person. You Scandinavians see God in nature." In the 2009 competition with 34 other European cities for the designation European Green Capital 2010, Stockholm was selected based on its well-established principles for sustainable development and its stated future goals. Even though the expert panel recommended Hamburg in the first round, the jury chose to reward Stockholm (Hamburg was awarded the distinction for 2011). The jury stated:

[Stockholm] has an outstanding, long historical track record of integrated urban management also confirmed by its ongoing credible green credentials. Ambitious plans for the future clearly demonstrate continuity.

The area known as Kungliga Djurgården derived its name from its having served as the royal hunting grounds during the 16th and 17th centuries. Ulriksdal Palace was established at the north end in the 17th century and further expanded over the centuries that followed. Haga Park (Swedish: *Hagaparken*) originated in the 18th century and many connoisseurs consider it to be one of the foremost examples of the English park style outside the United Kingdom. At the south end of Djurgården a large number of upper-class, architecturally significant villas were built during the 19th century and early 20th century, as was the world-renowned open-air museum Skansen. After many years of encroaching development of inner city green spaces, against the intentions of the Riksdag, a decision was taken in 1994 to protect Djurgården by law, and to connect its north and south ends into a single area that

would be granted a unique legal status. In 1995 this area was designated a national urban park with the following words, often-quoted ever since then, from the Chapter 4, section 7 of the Swedish Environmental Code:

The Ulriksdal-Haga-Brunnsviken-Djurgården area is a national urban park. New development, new buildings, and other measures shall only be permissible in national urban parks if they can be undertaken without encroaching on park landscapes or the natural environment, and without detriment to any other natural and cultural assets of the historical landscape.

The same year that the National Urban Park was established, 1995, the Swedish government decided to inventory other potential areas that could conceivably become national urban parks, with the stipulation that the city in question should have a population of about 50,000. After an initial review of seven cities – Gothenburg, Helsingborg, Malmö, Norrköping, Trollhättan, Uppsala, and Örebro – only two areas remained for the final round: Uppsalaåsen-Fyrisån and Älvrummet in Trollhättan. The municipalities involved were tasked by the government to formulate a basis on which to build the parks. However, no decision was ever taken and the matter was dropped.

The Stockholm–Solna National Urban Park, as it is now known (the previous name "Ekopark" has now fallen out of use) encompasses a total of about 27 km². The park has a wealth of flora and fauna: over 800 different flowering plants, more than 1,200 beetle species and about 100 nesting bird species, to name just a few examples. In addition to being a living environment for insects and birds, its groves of ancient oaks constitute one of the largest concentrations in northern Europe. Many well-known museums are located in the area, including Skansen, Nordiska Museet (the Nordic Museum), the Swedish Museum of Natural History, the Vasa Museum, Prins Eugens

Valdemarsudde, and the Thielska Gallery. In addition, Stockholm University, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, and many other education and research institutions are located within the park limits. The cultural, biological, and social significance of this park is invaluable.

Ownership is a complex issue. The Swedish state owns the majority, but the City of Stockholm, Stockholm University, Solna and Lidingö Municipalities, several property companies, private owners, and others are also in the picture. Approximately 80 percent of the land is cared for by Kungliga Djurgårdens Förvaltning (the Royal Djurgården Administration), which ultimately answers personally to the King. The County Council is tasked with coordinating management and development efforts. A good illustration of the difficulties associated with coordination can be found in the December 17, 2004 County Council report:

Experiences from the meetings with Solna and Stockholm as well as Kungl. Djurgårdens Förvaltning indicate that it would be appropriate for the County Administrative Board to assume a better defined role in the work of developing the national urban park. The County Administrative Board is involved as a consultant for large construction and landscaping projects, but has neither the means nor the resources to follow up on each individual construction permit that affects the national urban park. Yet another problem involves plans adopted prior to 1995 which in some cases constitute encroachment upon the parkland and natural environment, and are also detrimental to the natural and cultural assets of the historical park landscape in general. In a few cases the relevant plan areas are also in proximity to important divergent plate boundaries.

The second to the last line may be a reference to Alba Nova, the university's physics, astronomy, and biotechnology center located on the shore of the bay, Brunnsviken. When the center opened in 2001, it

proved to be considerably more conspicuous than promised. At a WWF seminar in March 2008, Minister for the Environment Andreas Carlgren declared his intention to "empower the County Administrative Board to make decisions on conservation, maintenance plans and development measures, and to assume a coordinating role to maintain protection". However, other stakeholders continued to make themselves heard.

Allow us to make a historical comparison: in the early 19th century the rolling heaths north of London, known as Hampstead Heath at least since the 16th century, became the object of admiration among prominent cultural icons such as poet Leigh Hunt and painter John Constable. At the same time, the London population increasingly made weekend outings to this nature reserve, which in some parts had been over-exploited for other purposes (the high-quality sand that covered the heath was dug up and sold to construction companies). When the owner of the heath announced his intention in 1829 to build both homes and a brick mill in the area, public opinion was ignited and efforts for preservation began. That particular construction proposal never got off the ground, but the landowner did not give up and threats to the heath continued, especially after the 1860 construction of a train station there which greatly increased wear and tear caused by celebrating weekenders. Confronted with the threat of industrial-scale sand extraction in the 1860s, the Open Spaces Society was formed, one of the founders of which was John Stuart Mill. In 1872 the majority of the area was finally acquired by the Metropolitan Board of Works, London's most important government body at the time. The accompanying Hampstead Heath Act declares: "The Board shall at all times preserve, as far as may be, the natural aspect and state of the Heath." Thus the area was saved for the public, at least for a while. The current administrator, the Corporation of London, is now confronted with rising maintenance costs for the enormous park (3.2 km²), and the ravages of overuse are a constant problem. Recognize the pattern?

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Baltic, neighboring Finland had been monitoring developments in Sweden with interest, and decided to adopt the urban national parks concept. In 1999 specific legislation came into force, through an amendment (section 68) to the Land Use and Building Act, which states:

A national urban park may be established to protect and maintain the beauty of the cultural or natural landscape, historical characteristics, or related values concerning the townscaping, social, recreational, or other special values of an area in an urban environment.

Two years after passage of the Act the first park was established. The idea is to gradually create about ten parks throughout Finland, a number that the Minister of the Environment considers to be a maximum. Cities must submit an application and the Ministry of the Environment decides on the matter. The applicant city must meet four criteria:

1. **Content (significant natural, cultural, or park area)**

2. **Extent and interconnectedness (it should be possible for people to get from one urban district to another through the green structure)**
3. **Ecology and continuity (various species can move and interact, and the area in question should not have sharp boundaries with the surrounding countryside) and**
4. **Central urban location (the area must begin in the urban center or its immediate vicinity).**

As of this year Finland has five national urban parks: Hämeenlinna (established 2001), Heinola (2002), Pori (2002) and Hanko (2008); Porvoo National Urban Park will open this year.

Hämeenlinna in Tavastia Proper, about 100 kilometers north of Helsinki, with a population of around 66,500, became a city in 1638. The national urban park was established on January 10, 2001. The park currently occupies 7.38 km². It is dominated by the elongated lake Vanajavesi, which stretches through the city. The center of the park is home to the city's medieval castle with surrounding walls and beaches, as well as its military barracks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The lake connects these areas via the city park dating from the 1840s with Aulanko's large recreation area and park. When Aulanko was created in 1885, many foreign trees, flowers, and bushes were planted; today it is more of a forest than a park. Part of the forested park is a Natura 2000 site. There is a desire to expand the park with a 1.36 km² field to the northwest, which is dominated by a forested ridge from the ice age. It is also the site of a deep lake and swimming arena that was used in the 1952 Olympic Games.

Heinola in Päijänne Tavastia, Province of Southern Finland, has about 21,000 residents. Gustav III made the community an administrative center in the region and it gained city status in 1839. The former industrial city's grid is intersected by a broad, tree-lined avenue from 1785. In the mid-nineteenth century a city park was established and a shoreline park was added in the 1890s. Several facilities and interiors from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been preserved. In addition there are interconnected, elongated municipally owned green areas.

Pori in Satakunta has more than 76,000 residents. The city by the river Kokemäenjoki was founded in 1558, though its forerunner on the same site, Ulvsby, gained city status in 1365. The national urban park covers about 9.5 km². The most important cultural elements include the industrial facilities along the north shore of the river, the neo-Gothic Pori cathedral, the neo-Gothic Sigrid Jusélius Mausoleum, the neo-Renaissance city hall, as well as the Pori bridge over the river.

Hanko in Uusimaa has a population of about 9,700 and was founded in 1874. The area of the park covers a total of 630 km² of land and sea. The natural heritage assets largely consist of the diverse seashore and archipelago, including shoals and sandbanks. In addition, the park includes the Natura 2000 sites Tulliniemi nature reserve and bird protection area, as well as parts of the large sea nature protection areas of the Tammsaari and Hanko archipelago and the Pohjanpitäjän-

lahti bay. The park also includes many smaller nature protection areas with rare and endangered fauna and flora. The built environments include the Boulevard, the old buildings at Korkeavuori (High Mountain) by the Western Harbor, and the residential neighborhood by the Spa Park. The rock carving area at Hauensuoli (Pike's Gut) is a candidate for the UNESCO World Heritage list. Information provided by the Ministry of the Environment also states the following:

The decision about the national urban park includes the consent of 95 private individuals or societies. Without this initiative such a representation of the built heritage would not have been possible.

The coastal town of **Porvoo** in Eastern Uusimaa has approximately 48,000 inhabitants. It is located on an ancient trading site and had gained city status by the 1380s. May 22, 2010 was designated a day of festivities for the grand opening of the national urban park in Porvoo. The park is planned to occupy an area of 22 km², stretching all the way from the national landscape in the Porvoo river valley to the Old Town and onwards toward the manor house environment at Stensböle and Haiko on the west side of the city. A large part of the park is water area.

Experience shows that the national urban park movement contributes to increased employment through tourism and, best of all, increased local pride. Cities that are in line to receive national urban park status include Imatra, Kotka, Kuopio, and Turku, Finland's third largest urban area after Helsinki and Tampere. The cities Forssa, Lohja, Savonlinna, Rovaniemi, Seinäjoki, Valkeakoski, and Vaasa have consulted with the Ministry regarding this matter. In little more than a decade it would seem that Finland will indeed meet its self-imposed quota by a wide margin – an impressive achievement and excellent confirmation of the sustainability of the concept.

In Norway, the Bygdøy peninsula on the west side of Oslo – which includes the Bygdøy Royal Estate and Oscarshall Castle from the mid-nineteenth century – has for many years been proposed as a potential candidate for a national urban park, but to date the Ministry of the Environment has been indifferent to the idea, noting that current environmental and cultural legislation offers sufficient protection. In **Denmark** the first national park (Thy) was established in 2009, with another one (Mols Bjerger) opening this year and more on the way, although it seems that the concept of a national urban park has not yet been considered.

Finland's neighbor to the south, **Estonia**, took a first step in September 2009 toward development of national urban parks. The Devemark project (Sustainable Historic Park Management and Development in Finland and Estonia 2009–2012), coordinated by the Center for Extension Studies at Åbo Akademi University, represents a collaborative effort between Finland and Estonia. Eight Finnish and eight Estonian institutions are participating, in addition to eight non-commercial Finnish and Estonian organizations. The



Forest meets sea at Hanko National Urban Park.

project is being financed by the European Regional Development Fund's Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007-2013 (€ 1.1 million) and participating organizations (€ 0.29 million), for a total project budget of € 1.3 million. The project description on the Devemark website (www.devemark.utu.fi) clearly states the objectives:

The aim of the project is to find ways to manage and develop historic parks, gardens and cultural environments in a sustainable way in Southwest Finland and in the Estonian counties of Tartu, Saare, and Jõgeva. The Finnish National Urban Park model will be presented in the project and the signing of the international Florence Charter in Estonia will be promoted.

Note that the latter is a 1982 preservation agreement for historic gardens within the framework of the cultural heritage protection organization International Council for Monument and Sites (ICOMOS), an addendum to the better known Venice Charter from 1964. No national urban parks are to be found south of Estonia, although the national parks listed below are found in proximity to cities.

Latvia has the 917.5 km² national park Gauja in the north, between the cities of Sigulda (about 16,700 inhabitants) and Cēsis (more than 18,000 inhabitants), established in 1973, and the 381.65 km² Kemeris (established as a national park in 1997) by the Gulf of Riga and west of Jūrmala (55,600 inhabitants).

Lithuania has the 82 km² Trakai Historical National Park, which surrounds the small town of Trakai (5,357 inhabitants) 28 km west of Vilnius; the 264 km² Kursiu Nerija (on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2000) by the coastal town of Neringa, as well as Plateliai in Samogitia, which with its 1,100 inhabitants is the starting point for excursions to Žemaitija National Park. In 2008 the latter received the national Lithuanian tourist organization's prize for excellence.

Poland is home to the 385 km² Kampinoski National Park, which incorporates the Bielany Forest Reserve and is located on the northwest edge of War-

saw by the confluence of the Bug, Bzura, Narew, and Vistula rivers; the 262 km² Koziences Landscape Park in Masovian Voivodeship and the 76 km² Wielkopolska National Park about 15 km south of Poznań.

Germany: the 805 km² Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft northwest of Stralsund; Jasmund National Park on the island of Rügen northeast of the same city; the remarkable industrial city park Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord (conceived by Professor Peter Latz); Fürst-Pückler-Park Bad Muskau in Oberlausitz between Bad Muskau and Legnica (in Poland). While the islands of Neuwerk and Scharhörn at the mouth of the Elbe river form part of the Hamburgisches Wattenmeer National Park and belong to Hamburg administratively, they lie 120 km northwest of the city.

Farther south on the continent, the island of Ada Ciganlija in the Sava river in central Belgrade should make an excellent candidate for a national urban park. To the west in Europe, the Sustainable and Accessible Urban Landscapes (SAUL) collaborative project involving the UK, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Germany and financed by INTERREG III 2003-2008 funding, has investigated opportunities for refinement of existing urban green areas (Frankfurt's Grüngürtel and Amsterdam's Noorderpark project). In the UK the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), which advises public authorities and plans for sustainable development in the run-up to the 2012 summer Olympic Games, has launched its Grey to Green campaign, which includes Liverpool's Green Infrastructure Network, along with the nearby Mersey Forest.

In Sweden there is certainly no lack of viable candidates for new national urban parks: besides Uppsala and Trollhättan, Gothenburg (with Änggårdsbergen and Slotsskogen), the historical naval station in Karlskrona (which is already on the UN World Cultural Heritage List) and the Södra Hällarna nature reserve outside Visby on Gotland have all come up for discussion, in addition to the other candidates discussed during the first Riksdag inventory. However, to date absolutely nothing has transpired. Perhaps the experiences from the capital city are a deterrent. Or is there

rather a lack of municipal initiative? Areas worthy of protection exist, the national urban park concept is well-established and one would think that the examples from Finland should provide hope and inspiration for the future.

Stockholm faces major transportation policy and urban challenges, largely due to the expected surge in population. Projects include the urban North Link highway; revamping of the lock Slussen that connects Gamla Stan and Södermalm; construction of the North Station area between Stockholm and Solna, as well as construction of the Norra Djurgårdsstaden office and residential area. The latter area borders on the National Urban Park and will impact it. The North Link has already spawned conflict regarding its route through Bellevueparken. Concerning the inflammatory issue about the new design for Slussen, murmurs are being heard about a new Almstrid (a successful civil disobedience movement in 1971 over a subway construction project), only many times worse. Whether the fate of the National Urban Park can engage Stockholmers as deeply remains to be seen, as does the ability of the city's powers that be to live up to the EU's green prize. In all probability the disgruntlement of the former will not culminate in the same actions taken by the agitated Roman masses in Shakespeare's play, who burned the homes of the latter in protest. However, most of the city's residents enjoy and are proud of the local natural resources and any perceived mismanagement risks repercussions on the political front.

On the one hand, it is difficult from the Swedish perspective to counter the impression that the baton for the development of a valuable idea in the area of sustainable development has been handed off to the other side of the Baltic for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, it is hardly constructive to view such a movement as some type of nationalistic contest. Sweden took a bold initiative in attempting the feat of creating a functional national park in the middle of what may be a quite small yet nevertheless international metropolis. Fifteen years later, valuable lessons have been learned, especially due to the commitment and good will ultimately demonstrated by both national and municipal authorities, as well as by independent opinion groups. Finland wisely began at the other end of the scale, choosing a somewhat different legal model and above all allowing local initiative to rule, rather than imposing decrees from above. Here, as well, valuable lessons for the future are to be found. The inevitability of urban development and the unpredictable wheels of progress perpetuate the need to defend urban natural resources. Nevertheless, the national urban park concept is here to stay. ✘

pontus reimers

Editorial consultant with a background as a classical archaeologist and lexicographer. Has worked at the Swedish Institute in Rome – work which included the excavation of the Temple of Castor and Pollux at the

Forum Romanum – and at Lund University. Editor in charge of ancient history and archeology at the Swedish National Encyclopedia, later chief editor of Bonnier Lexicon.