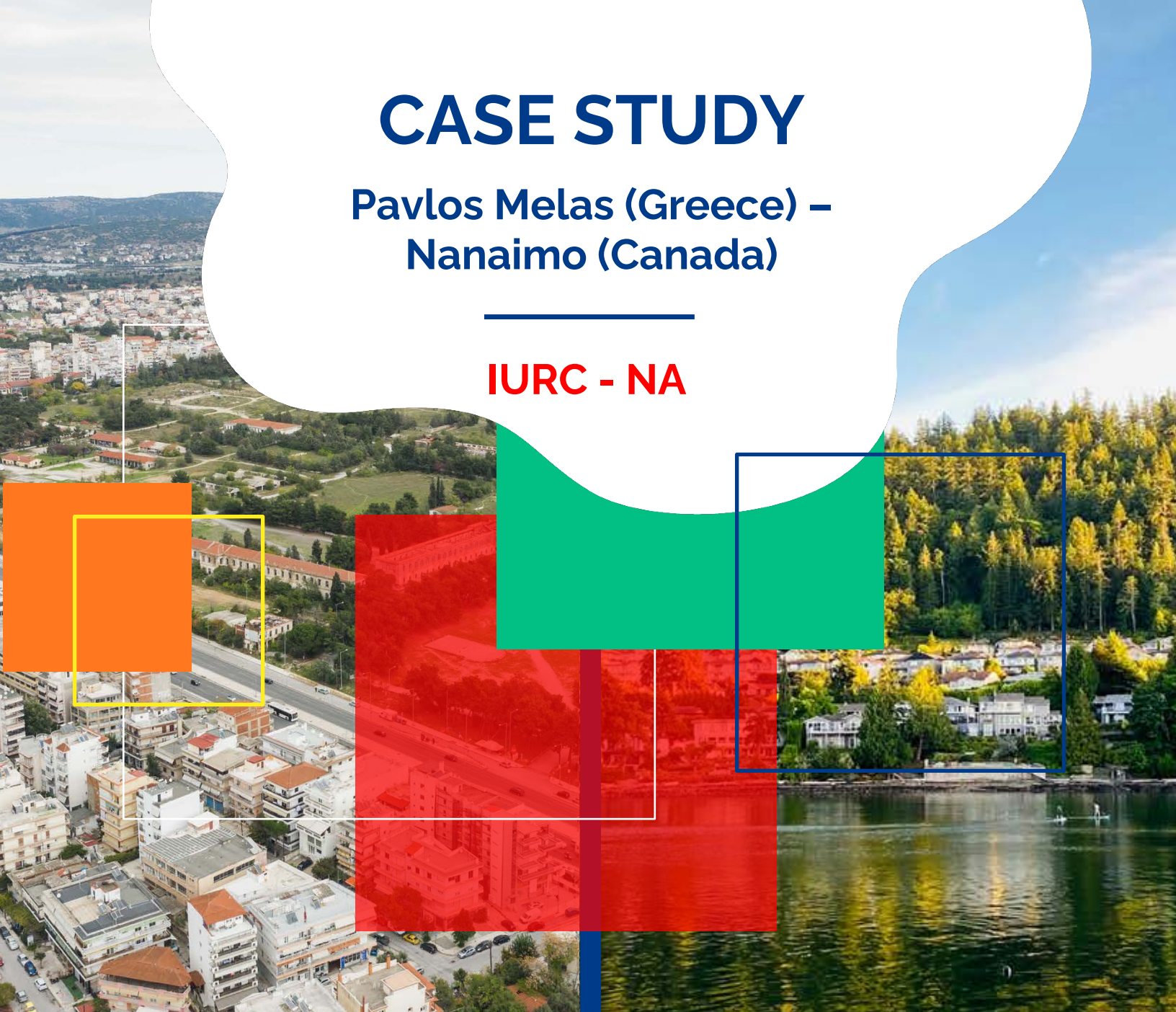


CASE STUDY

Pavlos Melas (Greece) –
Nanaimo (Canada)

IURC - NA



SEPTEMBER 22, 2025

Thematic Network(s): Urban Planning

Topic keywords: Park Management, Community Engagement, NBS, Sustainable Governance, Public Space Activation

NANAIMO – PAVLOS MELAS

IURC – CASE STUDY

Innovative approaches to urban park management, featuring practical tools such as leases, licenses, and co-management agreements, as well as nature-based solutions for transforming large parks.

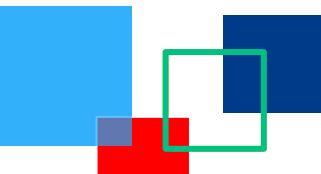
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the IURC North America programme, Nanaimo (Canada) and Pavlos Melas (Greece) engaged in a knowledge exchange focused on parks management. Both cities brought unique approaches: Nanaimo with its advanced systems of leases, licenses, and co-management agreements, and Pavlos Melas with its ambitious project of transforming a former military camp into a thriving Metropolitan Park. The reciprocal technical calls, visits, and hands-on site walks fostered mutual understanding and allowed both cities to extract applicable models and tools for local adaptation. This cooperation also brought the cities closer together, demonstrating the value of learning through real experiences and planning with community engagement.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Cities today are rethinking how they care for parks, not just as green spaces, but as essential infrastructure for community wellbeing, climate resilience, and cultural life. As urban areas become more densely populated and land use pressures increase, managing parks effectively is no longer just about maintenance. It's about creating systems that can support diverse uses, foster social connection, and respond to changing community needs. Municipalities must balance these different aspects alongside long-term environmental goals while building flexible, inclusive frameworks that allow cities to share responsibility with local organizations, residents, and other partners. This requires governance models that are not only flexible but also equitable and community-centred.

The City of Nanaimo in Canada offers a compelling solution, having developed a highly structured, collaborative approach to parks management through a combination of leases, licenses, co-management agreements, and a transparent fees and charges framework.



In Nanaimo, park governance is embedded within a legislative and policy framework that enables a diverse range of users, non-profits, sports clubs, cultural organizations, and even commercial entities to access and co-steward public land. The city manages a significant number of formal agreements across its parks, recreation, and culture portfolios, each tailored to different operational, community, and partnership models. This system allows for both long-term leases and short-term licenses, with co-management agreements used for joint oversight of key facilities such as stadiums, art galleries, and tracks.



Figure 1. Delegates from Pavlos Melas and Nanaimo visiting the Q'UNQ'INUQWSTUXW Stadium premises at the City-managed Stadium district. The name q'unq'inuqwstuxw (pronounced ki-KIN-ish-TOOK) means to "return/give back," which honors the land, becoming a reminder to give back more than what they take from the land.

To guide the process, the city has established a clear internal workflow: applicants submit proposals, which are reviewed through inter-departmental referrals, followed by negotiation of terms, legal drafting, and council or delegated approvals as required. Importantly, agreements are actively monitored, with systems in place for renewals, payments, and compliance.

Complementing this governance structure is a rationalized fee system designed to balance cost recovery with accessibility. A key innovation was the simplification of user group classifications into four main types: two non-profit categories based on age group, private users, and commercial entities. Discounts are applied accordingly: up to 50% off for youth-oriented nonprofits (NP1) and 20% for adult/mixed-age nonprofits (NP2). A further policy revision introduced a two-tiered impact system for park bookings, distinguishing between low-impact community use and high-impact events, accompanied by adjusted discounts of up to 75% for NP1 and 50% for NP2, ensuring affordability for grassroots and civic groups.

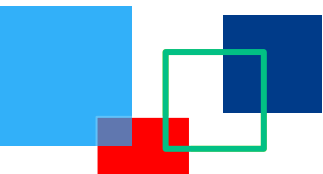
This approach is not only fiscally responsible but also socially equitable. By embedding park access within a legal and financial structure, Nanaimo can leverage public land for the common good while ensuring consistency, transparency, and long-term sustainability. This system offers valuable insights for cities like Pavlos Melas, where large-scale green redevelopment projects, such as the Metropolitan Park, seek replicable governance and partnership frameworks that can activate public space through shared responsibility and community engagement.



Figure 2. Delegates from Pavlos Melas and Nanaimo visiting a playground managed by the City of Nanaimo.

RESULTS AND **IMPACT**

By developing a structured, inclusive framework for park governance, Nanaimo has created a model that supports both public access and long-term sustainability. Through a blend of leases, licenses, and co-management agreements, the city enables community organizations, nonprofits, and even private entities to participate in the life of public green spaces. This model does more than manage land—it builds shared responsibility. With over 85 formal agreements across its parks, recreation, and culture portfolios, Nanaimo has successfully activated its public spaces in ways that are community-driven, legally sound, and financially viable. The introduction of a simplified rental classification system and tiered fee structures has also helped improve transparency, reduce barriers to access, and increase revenue, projected to grow by €509.000 (\$822.000 CAD) over four years. These funds are reinvested into park infrastructure and programming, reinforcing a cycle of care and use.



For the municipality of Pavlos Melas, park management is a critical challenge as they prepare to open the renovated Metropolitan Park and must regulate its future uses, including recreational and cultural activities, partnerships with the private sector, maintenance, and other related aspects. From their cooperation with Nanaimo, and through a series of technical calls, study visits, and meetings facilitated by IURC NA, invaluable insights emerged. Pavlos Melas staff learned how Nanaimo adjusts rates based on the type of group requesting park space, and how years of experience have shaped a robust and adaptable regulatory framework, which they hope to use as a model when designing their own.

But beyond policy and revenue, the most profound impacts emerged through the collaboration itself. When Nanaimo staff visited Pavlos Melas, they were invited to walk through the vast Metropolitan Park. This former military camp is being transformed into green and mixed-use spaces through adaptive reuse of historical buildings. This experience echoed a guiding principle in Nanaimo's approach to land: in British Columbia, Canada, Indigenous peoples teach that walking together on the land is a way to show respect and healing, both from and for the land. During the site visit, this philosophy came to life. As Nanaimo and Pavlos Melas staff walked side by side through the park, a deeper understanding emerged, not only of the land's possibilities, but also of the people and communities who might inhabit and shape it. The shared walk became a moment of connection, trust, and mutual insight that helped cement the relationship between the two cities.



Figure 3. Delegates from Nanaimo walking through the Metropolitan Park with the City of Nanaimo representatives, explaining the future use of the abandoned buildings.

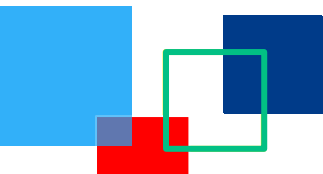




Figure 4. Aerial image of the future Metropolitan Park in Pavlos Melas.

The exchange continued when Pavlos Melas visited Nanaimo and explored parks that had already undergone transformation, from industrial brownfields to vibrant, community-centred natural spaces. Discussions around fees and charges, licensing processes, co-management models, and the participation of volunteers for park upkeep gave Pavlos Melas a concrete framework to draw from as they look to operationalize and activate their own Metropolitan Park. They were also inspired by the way Nanaimo implements and monitors its sustainable strategic plan, using data and digital tools to remain accountable and agile, with mechanisms in place to make course corrections when needed. Particularly striking was Nanaimo's long-range planning approach, anchored in a 25-year vision, which encouraged Pavlos Melas to integrate long-term scheduling into their own emerging plan.

On the other hand, Nanaimo learned from Pavlos Melas how they balanced political, religious, and community interests while planning for the redevelopment of the park with input from the different groups, as well as the value of strengthening personal relations amongst City workers, which facilitates the advancement of interdepartmental City projects.

This reciprocal learning, facilitated by the IURC NA programme, has created lasting value for both cities. For Nanaimo, it was an opportunity to share and reflect on their approach; for Pavlos Melas, it offered adaptable tools, validated strategies, and a deeper sense of readiness for what comes next.

KEY FIGURES

85+

formal park use agreements in Nanaimo (leases, licenses, co-management).

10,000+

community inputs used to develop Nanaimo's comprehensive City Plan – Nanaimo Reimagined.

€509.000

(\$822.000 CAD) estimated increase in rental revenues over four years through fee system reform.

LESSONS LEARNED

Parks are more than green space; they are systems of shared care: Successful parks management requires more than infrastructure; it depends on frameworks that support stewardship, participation, and long-term community engagement. Nanaimo's structured approach demonstrates how legal agreements and policy tools can be leveraged to create inclusive, vibrant public spaces.

Pricing policies can promote equity: By implementing a tiered fee structure based on user type and event impact, Nanaimo created a fairer system that encourages community use while maintaining financial sustainability. Discounts for nonprofits, particularly youth-oriented groups, help make park spaces more accessible to those who need them most.

Governance matters: Formalizing relationships through leases, licenses, and co-management agreements gives cities the flexibility to engage a wide range of partners, from nonprofits to private actors, while ensuring accountability, transparency, and consistency over time.

Walking the land together builds more than knowledge, it builds relationships: The site visit to Metropolitan Park in Pavlos Melas revealed the power of a shared experience. Inspired by Indigenous teachings from Canada, the act of walking the land fostered deeper understanding, trust, and cultural exchange, key ingredients in any meaningful cooperation.

THE INTERNATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME IN NORTH AMERICA

The International Urban and Regional Cooperation program in North America (IURC NA), funded by the European Union, partners European cities with Canadian and USA cities to facilitate knowledge exchange through online tools, face-to-face interactions, study visits, participation in thematic and networking events, and capacity-building initiatives. Its activities support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement. The program is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, researchers, innovators, community groups, and citizens. IURC NA is financed under the EU Foreign Policy Instruments and benefits from the strategic support of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission.

Author: IURC North America

For more information, please contact us at info-na@iurc.eu

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Links to related outputs:

[Nanaimo's City Plan](#)

[Nanaimo's 2023-2026 Council Strategic Framework](#)

[Nanaimo's Integrated Action Plan](#)