

Urban green spaces

Due to their characteristics and potentials, urban green spaces have become one of the key foundations for the sustainable development of cities and for providing a good quality of life within urban areas. The various possible uses and activities that are connected with numerous important needs of urban inhabitants, diverse favourable ecological and environmental impact of green spaces with regard to climate and water conditions and also reducing the impact of harmful emissions all have a significant influence on the quality of living conditions in urban areas and on people's health and happiness. Aside from this, due to their spatial attributes and natural elemental characteristics green spaces have prominent potentials for clear structuring and co-designing within urban spaces.

Recommendations from the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007), clearly define the importance of the complex urban development policy and creation and also the importance of providing high quality public spaces and urban landscapes. These recommendations are clearly supported by the Lisbon Strategy, the European Landscape Convention and the Gothenburg Strategy.

And yet the issues of planning, preservation, design and the managing of urban green spaces are in many cities and countries only of marginal significance – they are dealt with fragmentary approaches, without clear visions and strategies, without clearly expressed political interest and also the appropriate support networks.

The political, economic and social changes which we have been witnessed in recent decades in many countries had, and still have a fundamental influence on the growth and development of cities. Cities in the Eastern European countries have undergone dramatic changes and these changes have had a huge impact on urban green spaces within these countries. Accelerated urban development creates a heavy burden and creates greater pressures for developing green spaces. The situation is additionally aggravated by the quick profit orientated private investors and the change of land ownership itself. Another factor

that aggravates this is the lack of public financial means, because even those countries with a very well developed methodology and policy for planning and managing green spaces, such as Great Britain, also confront numerous problems, hindrances and a general reduction of funds for such spaces.

The issue of urban green spaces is a subject with inherent conflicts in the sense of: nature – culture, protection – development, public – private, individual – community, active – passive, controlled – free. It often represents the problems of conflict of very diverse interests, within a certain space and a big challenge for professional researches and opportunity to seek adequate answers in order to enable more efficient practices to be carried out.

We have to highlight the immense diversity of urban green spaces and to highlight some of the quite common misconceptions that green spaces are more or less a uniform type of urban space, defined only by its specific appearance. Parks and playgrounds, residential landscapes, urban forests, waterside spaces, recreation areas, small gardens, avenues with trees, botanical and zoological gardens, as well as private gardens, graveyards, forests, waterways and farmlands are all integral parts of a city's landscape, specific and very different types of urban green spaces, when amalgamated, create an urban space and its living conditions.

We can see a huge discrepancy between professional understanding and for ever seeking newer, better and more efficient approaches to planning and designing urban green spaces, and the attitude of politicians and city administrations with regard to these issues. One of the key steps in order to improve the situation is therefore represented by substantive professional exposure of the problems and the possibilities and by examples of good practices which can improve the awareness about meaning and capacities of urban green spaces with regard to the improvement in the quality of living and the urban environment.

Ina Šuklje Erjavec