



The world of Greenscom

Communication Urban Growth and Green

“Planners and policy-makers would like to get people involved in the planning and maintenance of green areas, but often they lack the necessary tools to achieve efficient participation.”¹ This article aims to introduce the Greenscom project and to explain the conditions for its follow-up.

Greenscom

“Issues like the effectiveness of green structure planning, access of different actors to planning and decision making were addressed in a European research project „Communication Urban Growth and Green“ (Greenscom) led by Alterra, Green World Institute in 2002-2003. The effectiveness of tools in fourteen cases in various locations in NorthWest Europe was studied with the help of seven partner cities. The outcome of this project will be a „toolkit“ of planning concepts and policy instruments.”²

In 2004, ten new countries will enlarge the European Union. In these countries the planning systems are getting decentralized and local authorities have new responsibilities. The legislative background for public participation has been renewed after forty years of a closed planning system, and still needs to be improved. This leads to the conclusion that it would be worth to extend the Greenscom project to the candidate countries and share experiences between the practitioners and researchers.

A fundamental task of my internship was to prepare an overview for three

central European countries: Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, and to gather information about the current situation in urban development related to green open spaces. I also looked for potential partners for the Greenscom follow-up in these countries. After getting in acquaintance with the project, I did deeper research on the case of the preserve “Hvezda” in Prague in the Czech Republic.

Young democracy

During the past forty years, the environment of the Czech Republic has been damaged as a result of the irresponsible attitude in the development of industry. The centralized planning system did not allow public participation and the totalitarian regime resulted in a general mistrust in society. Now, due to the progressive economic development, the issue of urban growth is more important and often interferes with urban green open spaces.

Since the revolution in 1989 the environmental protection has become a priority and the public awareness about it increased rapidly. Because of a relatively young democracy the public still dislikes to be actively organized. On the national



Aerial photograph of the Hvezda preserve in Prague 6
(Courtesy archives of the Prague City Council, Department of City Greenery)

Anna Salingerova

MSc Landscape Architecture
Anna.salingerova@wur.nl

level NGOs are very active, but their methods of protesting can be very radical, which makes communication rather difficult and often not transparent. "Development of the public "life" struggles with lack of communication, public space, information systems and co-ordination of the actors."³

In the local context of the case is Prague 6, the fifth largest district in city of Prague. Its favorable social and natural conditions make the district more "special" than others. In this district many residents are actively involved in the social life, both in organized groups and individually. The Prague 6 officials support residents in establishing Civic Associations (CA), especially related to environment. This enables residents to participate in the Administrative Control. Participation of the public in the direct creation of new green spaces is not usual.

Preserve "Hvezda" case

This case is a study of the relationships between actors, processes and used tools at local level. It was chosen because of its thematic relevance for Greenscom project and also because of my personal interest in it.

The Hvezda preserve is a green area in the municipality of Prague 6 registered as a forest of special importance. The public protested against interventions appeared in the past, but the officials made no compromises. In 2001 the Maintenance Plan was developed by order of the owner, the Prague City Council. When the keeper of the preserve, the Forests of the Capital City of Prague, started to implement the Plan it reflected to a strong reaction of the residents. While studying this case I discovered interesting similarities with the Dutch case study of Houten, described by Sybrand Tjallingii. This case is about communication between designers, residents and the management of green areas in Houten. Instead of designers, the forestry experts participated in the case of the Hvezda preserve.

In both cases, similar innovative instruments were used, such as public forum or joint site visit. The Hvezda case leads to a disputable change of methodology in forest reclamation, showing a certain limit for public participation. On the other hand, the public action is a positive feature from the social point of view. The participation in planning is

relatively new phenomenon and not only citizens but also managers and planners are still learning how to use this opportunity.

Conclusion

The problems in communication on urban growth and green in North-West Europe and in Central Europe can be considered as similar. Sharing experience in this field would significantly contribute to the practical relevance of the Greenscom toolkit. The follow-up of Greenscom project with extension to Central Europe is under consideration at the moment. Partners from CEE countries will be invited to the final Greenscom conference.

For me as a student this was "the University of Communication". I also learned about the actual work of a researcher. Alterra is an excellent example of the applied-research institute with a great opportunity for students to learn about scientific perspective of their profession.<<

Footnotes

- 1 Anonymous, *Brochure GreenScm*, Alterra, 2003
- 2 Aalbers C., Ekamper T., Tjallingii S., *Top van den M.: Work Package: the Netherlands, Case Studies Houten and Utrecht*, Alterra, 2002
- 3 Kapcalova H.: *Analysis of social participation in Prague 6*, VSE – Faculty of National Economy, Prague, 2002

References

- Markvart J.: *Town and Country Planning in the Czech Republic*, UUR, Praha, Brno, 2002



Public meeting with the residents of Prague 6 in autumn 2002 (Courtesy of the Prague 6 municipality)