



„Making attractive urban spaces - more quality for urban environment“



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UrbSpace

Urban spaces – enhancing the attractiveness and quality of the urban environment



Introduction

Towns and cities are perceived as engines of regional development, offering a broad range of services and economic and cultural opportunities. However, urban concentrations of population bring a number of problems. The spread of urbanisation removes previously clear boundaries between settlement and surrounding landscape, putting great pressure on the natural landscape setting. In many urban areas, the historic core is surrounded by physically separated new suburbs, which are nevertheless functionally linked to the urban centre, leading to growth in road traffic resulting in the loss of biodiversity and fragmentation of the natural environment. In this context open spaces play a vital role (see the functions described above). Their environmental importance of open urban spaces is underlined by their potential to mitigate adverse effects of climate change, which are likely to be especially marked in urban areas. The design of high quality urban spaces, involving inputs from community groups, is also an increasingly important aspect of the planning process. Such places help to define the public life of a village or town by strengthening the „local spirit“.



Definition Urban open space

Urban open space is a generic term covering all non-built up spaces within the administrative boundaries of a town or city. In this sense urban open space includes all 'outdoor' spaces including streets and squares, woodlands and agricultural areas as well as traditional parks and gardens. More recently the concept has been expanded to include those parts of the built fabric which are open to the sky, including roofs, terraces, balconies etc. and even building facades, where these can be clad with vegetation. As a consequence of this extended definition is important as urban open space can be seen as a continuous matrix of space within which all the built components of the city are situated, and which flows between and over the buildings, linking the urban centre with the surrounding peri-urban and rural landscape. As such it can be seen as representing an essential part of the basic infrastructure of all urban areas.

Functions of Urban Open Space

Understanding the varied functions of urban open spaces is an important part of helping to improve their effectiveness, both by enabling better management of existing urban spaces as well as improving the design of new ones. There are many attempts to list these functions, but the following summary divides the functions into three main groups:

- **Environmental and ecological functions**
- **Social and societal functions**
- **Structural and aesthetic functions**

Environmental and ecological functions include:

- Climatic amelioration
- Noise screening
- Influencing the hydrological cycle – storm water management
- Providing habitats for wild plants and animals

Social and societal functions include:

- Providing space and facilities for leisure and recreation
- Facilitating social contact and communication
- Access to and experience of nature
- Influencing human physical and psychological health and well-being

Structural and aesthetic functions include:

- Articulating, dividing and linking areas of the urban fabric
- Improving the legibility of the city
- Establishing a sense of place
- Acting as a carrier of identity, meanings and values

Principal objective of the project

Principal objective of the project "UrbSpace" is to promote sustainable urban development taking into consideration all aspects and functions of urban open space (as described above), and its improvement in terms of design quality, accessibility and functionality.

These objectives will be achieved by realization of the following activities:

- state of art analyses in the participating project countries
- definition of relevant criteria and principles for public space design in smaller urban areas with regard to all aspects of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic)
- development of a joint strategy and tools for sustainable urban spaces involving relevant stakeholders to improve the planning process with respect to accessibility for all
- development and realization of pilot actions in different central space urban areas – designed and worked out through a participatory process by communities
- dissemination of results throughout the project lifetime at different levels (from local to European) and targeting different actors.



Partners

The partnership of the UrbSpace project comprises a variety of multi-sectoral organizations (local and regional authorities, universities, NGOs, etc.) ensuring a multi-actor approach. The pilot actions in different central target areas (urban, coastal and cross border) will examine the implementation of the joint strategy for sustainable urban spaces. The project is being realized during the period from November 2008 till October 2011 and it is implemented in Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The project leader is REC Slovakia. The partners of the project are as follows.

(see the map)

State of art analyses

The output of this first project activity is based largely on the outcomes of the two questionnaires survey addressed to all the project partners and carried out by Vienna University of Technology, Department of Landscape Architecture.

In contrast to the strong national differences in how matters regarding urban open space are regulated for and structured, is the existence of European regulatives and policies which should be commonly understood and implemented in all of the countries to which the project consortium members belong. **The European Landscape Convention** is of particular importance. Although this is a piece of European legislation which applies in only 6 of the 8 countries involved in the project, in terms of its subject matter it is perhaps the most closely relevant to the subject matter of the project of all areas of European policy, in that it is not just the first European convention dealing with landscape as its main focus, but because it explicitly **gives urban and peri-urban landscapes equal importance** with rural and natural landscapes. Also of particular relevance is its strong emphasis on the importance of the role of the wider public in defining the landscape quality objectives with which landscapes, including urban and peri-urban ones, should be assessed. Therefore working papers were looking at the relevance of European policy and legislation on urban open space practices in



- PP01 REC Slovakia, The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, Slovakia
- PP02 Ekopolis, Slovakia
- PP03 Nadace Partnerství, Czech Republic
- PP04 Municipality of Brno, Czech Republic
- PP05 Municipality of Sopot, Poland
- PP06 Municipality of Brzeg Dolny, Poland
- PP07 Municipality of Nagykallo, Hungary
- PP08 Vienna University of technology, department of Urban design and Landscape Architecture, Austria
- PP9 Subregional development agency Karst-Brkini, Slovenia
- PP10 Fachhochschule Erfurt - University of Applied Sciences, Germany
- PP11 Legambiente Lombardia, onlus, Italy
- PP12 RiSSC - Research Centre on Security and Crime, Italy
- PP13 Local Development Agency, La.Mo.Ro., Italy

the countries of the consortium partners. The possible problem, however, is that there is apparently **still little appreciation** of the fact that it applies **equally to urban landscapes** as it does to rural ones, and that as a result it is concerned closely with urban open space.

The **Working paper 3.1.1** was showing, that within countries the **differing distribution** of powers and responsibilities between the various levels of government is present concerning the Urban open spaces. In some countries land use planning is regulated at the national level and carried out locally, while elsewhere the legislation is a regional matter, while decisions are taken at the local level.

The **Working Paper 3.1.2** is largely devoted to **understanding the way the process of creating urban open spaces work** in the consortium member countries. This starts by considering the extent to which they are aware of previous European projects in the field before focusing on a series of case study projects relating to urban open spaces in the consortium member countries. The following chapters consider how concrete projects related to the official regulatory and institutional structures in the everyday practice of the planning and design process. The final chapter of the Working paper 3.1.2 aims to **summarise the experience of the planning and design of urban open spaces in both theory and practice** in the consortium member countries.



Definition of relevant criteria and principles for public space

Environmental aspect

The environmental and ecological importance of the open spaces, especially green spaces, is one of the aspects the mostly recognized among other aspects of the open urban spaces. The environmental importance is underlined also by their potential to mitigate adverse effects of climate change, which are likely to be especially marked in urban areas.

The environmental aspects of open urban spaces are also stressed in many European policies, e.g. Leipzig Charter, Aalborg Charter of European Cities & Towns towards Sustainability, Thematic Strategy on Urban Environment, etc. This is one of the reasons why the Working paper 3.2.1 does not focus solely on description of particular favourable impacts of green spaces on a city's microclimate, but it is concentrating rather on less known areas, e.g. biodiversity and ecosystem services in relation to open urban spaces, threats to the environment and biodiversity in cities due to climate changes and fragmentation of the natural environment and on environmental aspects of local systems and interconnections among particular open urban spaces. Working paper 3.2.1 is also trying to deal with the environmental aspect of open urban spaces in relation to some trends in urban development, such as demographic trends and changes in the social structures of cities¹.

Principal aspects of the open urban spaces from the environmental and ecological point of view are as follows:

- Climatic amelioration of the urban environment
- Biodiversity conservation
- Ecological services
- Threats to the urban environment and urban biodiversity - climate change, fragmentation and connectivity, affecting the hydrological cycle – tackling storm rainfall problems
- Some indirect aspects related to the sustainable development – e.g. environmental education, health of the population, etc.

When setting concrete environmental criteria and standards of „open urban spaces“ it is necessary to take into account the whole range of requirements, not only in accordance with the environmental aspects described above. However, at the same time it is necessary to comply with the principles of sustainable urbanism in accordance with a requirement for a compact city in order to avoid urban sprawl and fragmentation of the environment.

“Open space standards/criteria“ include:

- **Quantitative components** - e.g. amount, area, etc.
- **Qualitative components** – e.g. percentage of vegetation, percentage of sealed surfaces, percentage of woody plant coverage and other additional indexes in accordance with functional use of „open space“
- **Accessibility components** – dealing with the need to create inter-linked networks of open spaces, with their proper distribution in the territory and with determination of proper attraction territories for inhabitants.

These were elaborated in comprehensible table form. Moreover other qualitative aspects related to the climate change and other negative threats, as well as biodiversity conservation, were included in the last chapter of the Working paper 3.2.1.

For more information visit the web page of the project UrbSpace, link http://www.urbanspaces.eu/files/Act_3.2.1_envi_aspect_REC_final.pdf



Public participation aspect

Public spaces are practically ideal projects for participatory processes. They are relatively clearly delineated, citizens use them almost daily and they bring together a number of topics relating to environmental protection, safety, leisure time, etc. that make them an attractive topic for residents.

Public participation in public space improvement projects is based on general principles of working with the public. A number of specific techniques have already been developed in this field and are used with success and these techniques are described in the Working paper 3.2.2.

The Working paper is summarising as well the reasons, why public participation is important in the field of open spaces planning and renewal:

- Brings ideas and needs of the community
- Creates consensus and prevents conflicts
- Teach communication
- Develops social capital of the community
- It the Fundament of sustainable development concept

Working paper 3.2.1. also concludes by summarizing the principles relevant to the public participation methodology, **context and the concrete open space as follows:**

- All potential target groups should be involved in the project.
- There must be a clear, externally presented public participation plan with clear time frames.
- Various manners of addressing the public should be used in communication, information dissemination and participation.
- The project leader (implementation team) needs to be familiar with participation principles and methodology, understand them and accept them.
- An external consultant with sufficient experience in public participation, communication and facilitation of public meetings should be part of the participation process.

¹ Ensuring quality of life in Europe's cities and towns, Tackling the environmental challenges driven by European and global change, EEA report, 2009



- Over the course of the project, citizens ought to be able to find out how the project was developing and how their opinions are being used.
- Local sources should be used in project preparation and implementation, particularly in terms of local citizens, important players in the area and local technologies, materials, etc.
- The property owner should ideally unconditionally consent to the project aim and accept responsibility for maintenance.
- The project site should be locally significant, frequented, accessible and naturally invite use. There ought to be long-term high demand for a change to the site.
- The initial initiative should best come from the bottom up, not only from the top down.
- There needs to be good cooperation between the initiating group, (e.g.) non-governmental organisation, and municipal leadership.

For more information visit the web page of the project UrbSpace, link http://www.urbanspaces.eu/files/Act.3.2.2_Public_participation_FINAL.pdf

Gender aspect

The Working paper 3.2.3 describes the gender aspects relevant to urban spaces. Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment, and social cohesion. To integrate gender mainstreaming in urban planning processes means to promote structures which support the equality of women and men, by accepting their differences for the purpose of equal opportunities.

In order to define public spaces with regard to gender aspects **two important issues** specific to urban process should be taken into consideration: one related to the problem of **safety** which involves women, children, the disabled and the elderly, and the other one concerning the **accessibility** of all public spaces. Gender mainstreaming in urban planning focuses on the **integration of gender equality in all stages of the planning process**: from formulating the objectives to planning the measures and to implementing and evaluating them.

Applying a gender point of view to the urban environment means first of all to understand that cities should be planned for women and men of every age, salary and race.

The gender perspective in open space planning must include:

- Gender differentiated statistics, analysis and utilization of sites or locations
- Assessment for the utilization of areas and sites (how women use public spaces, assessment of access, ethnic minority and immigrant women needs take into the consideration),
- Rules about decision making e.g. including women in the public planning process
- Rules regarding the participation women in each step of the planning process and decision making process
- Responsibilities in planning process

When planning takes into account the different needs of women and men, this means:

- public transport routes that support women's travel patterns
- measures to make public space feel safer at night





- more support facilities, such as local shops, childcare, and public toilets
- employment opportunities locally, meaning more mixed use development
- more women would be able to take employment, training, and leisure opportunities
- economic development opportunities would be increased
- social inclusion programmes would be more effective.

For more information visit the web page of the project UrbSpace, link http://www.urbanspaces.eu/files/Act._3.2.3_Gender_Aspect.pdf

Security aspect

This working paper 3.2.4 deals with the strategies for public spaces analysis and design with respect to the issue “**Security and social cohesion aspect**”. The working paper focuses on two areas:

- highlighting the crime prevention opportunities (or risks) coming from the other strategies for urban design, by “thinking criminal” and “thinking policeman”
- presenting ad hoc security strategies (not solutions) in order to make safer places.

The working paper focuses on the CPTED - Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, a criminological approach, and the ENV 14383 “Prevention of crime: Urban planning and building design”, a regulatory instrument for planners and architects.

CPTED describes approaches to crime prevention through environmental design, and asserts that “the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and an improvement in the quality of life”. The role of design in crime prevention is described in a theoretical section of the Working Paper, followed by case studies, a description of the relations between security and other aspects, and finally the concluding part contains a proposal of the criteria and principles to follow for designing and maintaining safer public spaces.

The conclusion focuses on the following issues:

- **Access and movement:** places with well-defined routes, spaces and entrances that provide for convenient movement without compromising security
- **Structure:** places that are structured so that different uses do not cause conflict
- **Surveillance:** places where all publicly accessible spaces are overlooked
- **Ownership:** places that promote a sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community
- **Physical protection:** places that include necessary, well designed security features
- **Activity:** places where the level of human activity is appropriate to the location and creates a reduced risk of crime and a sense of safety at all times
- **Management and maintenance:** places that are designed with management and maintenance in mind, to discourage crime in the present and the future

For more information visit the web page of the project UrbSpace, link http://www.urbanspaces.eu/files/Act.3.2.4_Security_and_Social-aspect.pdf

Accessibility aspect

The Working Paper 3.2.5 deals with the important aspect of accessibility. There the accessibility and Design for All approach are understood not only as permitting access for everyone to a certain area but also as a guarantee that all citizens (e.g. children, pregnant woman, elderly persons and people with disabilities) are able to use the public space and its facilities in the same way - regardless of their individual capabilities, cultural background or place of residence. Thus accessibility opens urban spaces to everybody, and it promotes equal opportunities, not the uniformity of the population.

As a basic principle the Design for All approach is future-orientated and represents a key goal of European policy. Accessibility and Design for All are incorporated in this form in the policies of





- Differences in height of surface level: should be generally avoided or reduced to a minimum
- Elements of urban life, environment and furniture: there should be a harmonized and functional relationship as well as secure and respectful positioning; clear and perceivable marking in order to avoid potential obstacles, etc.

For more information visit the web page of the project UrbSpace, link http://www.urbanspaces.eu/files/Act.3.2.5_Accessibility-aspect.pdf

Urban design and architecture aspects

Working Paper 3.2.6 focuses on formal design and landscape architectural aspects of the design of urban spaces. The key finding and principle which is outlined in this paper is that the design aspects of urban spaces provide a formal vocabulary for integrating all other functional considerations to create a whole which is greater than the sum of the parts. From this point of view, the design aspects cannot and must not be considered separately from, but in combination with and as the way of integrating the wide range of functional considerations associated with the design of urban spaces.

Nevertheless there are a number of important considerations which need to be taken into account. These relate to three different scale levels of the design process: the design of the urban space itself, the scale above this which defines the context of the space; and the scale below this which is concerned with detailed design and the use of materials.

the European Union, and furthermore are topics covered by the Lisbon Treaty, the amending the Treaty on European Union. The overall approach of Design for All has not only economic implications (e.g. fostering the tourism sector), but it also has a sustainable long term impact by preparing cities for demographic change and the rising share of an elderly population.

The seven success factors listed below are explained in detail in the Working paper - their application supports the successful implementation of a Design for All approach on the local administrative level:

- decision-maker commitment
- coordinating and continuity
- networking and participation
- strategic planning
- knowledge management
- resources
- communication and marketing

- Providing accessible information about the characteristics of open spaces for people with different needs to ease pre-planning a visit or stay
- Guaranteeing connection to barrier free public transport system and facilities/parking for users of individual transport close to open space access points
- Creating linear or circular routes along points of interest with regular options to intersect and make shortcuts
- Considering the compatibility of parallel forms and purposes of using urban open spaces
- Securing the maintenance and functionality of the barrier free equipment in urban open spaces
- Surfaces of places and paths: these should be free from any irregularities that provide a risk (generally this means they should be firm, non-slip, level, and without joints)

The following chapters of the Working paper are focusing on general requirements for environments accessible for all with respect to horizontal and vertical movement, design of streets, transport etc.. In the last chapter the basic ideas of Design for All for a good designing of urban open spaces which shall be considered in each planning approach are concluded, e.g.:





At the contextual scale the key issue is the way in which an urban space relates to and is integrated with its urban landscape context. The main issues to be considered include:

- Urban spaces should be part of a larger strategic network – integration not isolation
- Edges, thresholds and entrances – links are needed to surrounding areas/spaces
- Openness and flexibility for different uses and to different groups of users is vital
- Spaces should providing the physical basis for other open space functions
- Sustainability should also be visible in design terms

At the site scale the focus is on the formal organisation of the spatial and functional elements into a harmonious overall composition. Here the most important considerations include:

- The creation and definition of outdoor space
- Attention to overall spatial composition
- Consideration of human scale, anthropometrics and the sense of enclosure
- Awareness and implementation of the Gestalt principles of perception
- Use of design to aid direction and orientation

- Circulation and movement through spaces – design for orchestrating spatial experience
- Finally the design concept should be seen in terms of its potential for narrative and symbolism

At the detailed design scale there are also a number of factors which need to be taken into account in order to ensure that the use of materials and the way in which they are put together is not in conflict with, but instead makes a contribution to supporting the overall design intentions which are articulated at the two larger scales. In this context consideration must be given to the :

- Treatment of horizontal surfaces and their materials and detailing
- Creation of enclosure and the division of space and their materials and detailing
- Definition of 'roof' elements and their materials and detailing
- Use and positioning of structures, including their materials and detailing
- Potentials offered by furniture and lighting and their materials and detailing
- Role of art, interventions, installations, sculpture etc.
- Significance and use of vegetation as a design element, including plant materials and their use

Upcoming activities and events

According to the work plan of UrbSpace project, for the next period, the following principal actions and events are scheduled:

- 1 - the completion of the Joint strategy
- the guidelines document in 7 languages (March 2010)
- 2 - TU Vienna Students design works in Sidlisko II Presov urban space Presov
- 3 - the planning phase of the pilot actions
- 9 design concepts elaborated based on the Joint Strategy (July 2010):
 - Sidlisko II Presov urban space
 - Accessibility plan for Erfurt
 - Novy Liskovec forest park
 - Urban Tree Path design plan in Sopoty
 - Brzeg Dolny – Park documentation
 - Harangod park stand design in Nagykallo
 - Design document for open public area in Sezana
 - "5 Municipalities Park"
 - Design plan for the Municipalities of Alba and Nizza Monferrato
- 4 - The next meetings along with the Thematic seminar in April 2010. The Thematic seminar will focus on the principal results of WP3 (Joint Strategy) and is open for the limited number of participants outside the partnership. The visit of the pilot project areas and/or some other visits of the positive or negative urban open space "case studies" are expected. The detailed agenda will be provided soon through the project web page www.urbanspaces.eu.

We are wishing
to all readers
wonderful
Seasons' greetings
and happy new
year 2010!

