

Collaborating  
on Quality  
of Place



**Green Work(s)** EUROPEAN CONFERENCE  
12-13 OCTOBER 2010  
BRUGES

Developing open space in peri-urban areas

Lectures  
Workshops  
Excursions

Organised by the Flemish Land Agency (VLM) within the framework of the Belgian EU-Presidency.

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# Final Recommendations of the Green Work(s)! Conference

Green infrastructure (GI) can be defined as a strategically planned and delivered network of high-quality green spaces including multifunctional open spaces, parks, waterways, trees and woodlands. Green infrastructure should be managed as a multifunctional resource supporting environmental and quality of life benefits for our local towns and communities.

Investments in green infrastructure are important because they can create many economic, environmental and social advantages to people's living and working area. During the development process, green infrastructure should be considered as a multi-functional add value to the planning process, where a sustainable place keeping will safeguard its success.



## *The conference Green Work(s)! focused on the added value of green investments from 5 points of view:*

### **social**

How to increase public awareness of green spaces, how can different target groups add to a high-quality management of open space.

### **economic**

Demonstration of economic surplus value of green investments, how to convince stakeholders, governments and the business world to financially support green investments.

### **ecological**

Importance of more and high-quality peri-urban green spaces, biodiversity in peri-urban green spaces, the role of farmers in protecting agro biodiversity, increasing attention for restoration of valuable landscapes in border regions.

### **planning**

An efficient planning ensures a successful execution; an integrated approach adds to a high quality planning and realisation, integrating biodiversity in the planning process.

### **place-keeping**

Characteristic properties of management in peri-urban regions, how can place-keeping projects deal with biodiversity questions, the value of good management in place-keeping projects.

### **The social benefits of green infrastructure**

The development of green infrastructure should be implemented early on in the planning process of urban or peri-urban development projects. Green infrastructure is not a cost but an investment! Developing green areas in urban and peri-urban areas needs the involvement of all stakeholders: private and public, at the local, regional and national level. Special caution is recommended when recreational goals start to predominate the planning process. For a strong, vibrant and sustainable Europe, we should invest more in green infrastructure to increase the general quality of life. Green infrastructure is of major importance to increase cities' attractiveness. Inhabitants and professional organizations share a responsibility to safeguard the social and physical well being of all people living in (peri)-urban areas. Therefore, they should collaborate on an equal base. In order to guarantee success, green infrastructure should be overall accessible for everyone.

### **The economic benefits of green infrastructure**

To guarantee success, we should ensure a strong involvement of both political and business society in the planning of green infrastructure. If we can provide hard evidence demonstrating the value of green spaces, economic arguments can convince decision takers to ensure the development and protection of high quality green infrastructure. The economic benefit of green investments lies primarily in the increase in property values through investments in attractive residential areas and in the increase in the quality of outdoor places for relaxation and play, improving health and well-being. Besides advantages for the real estate and recreation in the area, increasing numbers of visitors of a more attractive area may have a positive effect on the hotel and restaurant sector in the area.

For a successful implementation of green infrastructure, adequate (socio-) economic valuation tools need to be developed and combined with methodological rigour, tailoring both specific local circumstances and more 'global' questions of research design and constraints. Green infrastructure is a valuable part of our urban economy.

### **The ecological benefits of green infrastructure**

As habitat fragmentation and urban sprawl are increasingly jeopardizing our natural resources, the ecological and environmental functions of peri-urban green areas (habitat and migration routes for wildlife, water management, sustainable food production,...) are gaining more and more importance. Our quality of life strongly depends on the environmental quality, and several ecosystem functions are indispensable to support our daily needs. However, the battle for land, and the growing population disturb that equilibrium that was once able to support our life style. Floods, contaminated drinking water, infertile soils, endangered species. are all examples of how ecosystems can fail to intercept fluctuations. Especially considering climate change, it is very important to invest in resilient ecosystems able to deal with larger fluctuations. Therefore, it is important that early on in the planning process of land development, ecosystem services are taken into account when considering trade-offs between different forms of land uses. Land development should already be prepared in the spatial planning phase and can as such have a larger positive impact on biodiversity in peri-urban areas. In addition, when developing nature in peri-urban areas, one should aim at an integrated approach, looking further than solely preserving biodiversity. This will require a (re-)new(ed) approach of stakeholders involvement. To deliver more nature, more land is necessary. Therefore local land banks are an important tool. The general public is often not aware of the environmental impact of land projects, since environmental impact reports are not always understandable to the public. Biodiversity is still an abstract word to many people. It is therefore important to invest in clear communication to reach the public.

Farmers play a major role in enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services in our open space. They manage the main part of the rural open space, and can therefore have a large positive impact on preserving habitat and nature quality. There is a lack of confidence between farmers and nature conservationists. Well thought, realistic management plans developed with the farmers can restore confidence and respect between farmers and nature conservationists. Farmers can help to increase agro-biodiversity through participating in agri-environmental schemes, on an individual or collective basis. However, the outcome of such agri-environmental measures will depend strongly on the motivation and education of the farmers involved. Governments should invest in increasing the involvement of farmers in decision making, defining biodiversity goals for a wider area and introducing biodiversity in the education of farmers.

Soil biodiversity should be a priority for European Union policy, as it provides multiple services: a healthy, living soil ensures a sustainable food production, protects against flooding through its water storage function and, if well managed, functions as a large carbon sink.

### **The planning aspect**

Integrated projects offer specific opportunities to control today's extremely complex spatial claims and fast evolutions. A good design and designing research is an interesting bottom-up method to work out complex planning cases. The local landscape can play a key role in design as the source of information and inspiration in order to create more landscape diversity, coherence and identity. Peri-urban regions deserve an own special statute at the European policy level. A statute that recognizes and formalizes the need for a well-considered management of the multiplicity of functions peri-urban regions fulfill in our urbanized and urbanizing societies. They should be considered as special areas of management. Widely varying governance structures for a good planning process make the search for common policy lessons difficult. In the planning phase governments have to be earlier involved in policy choices and policy to align to. This also calls for a political responsibility. Hence, the planning process becomes more efficient and effective.

### **The place-keeping aspect**

There is a transnational concern that there is too much emphasis on the 'place-making' of places rather than on the long-term management, or 'place-keeping'. Land development and planning generally focus on the creation of a plan, development of an area, but seldom consider the following up of the status and the evaluation of the measures taken. Place-keeping includes partnership, governance, funding and evaluation. Innovative methods of place-keeping appear through case study analysis.

Harmonious Park and Green Space Management is a vision for everyone working on parks, urban and suburban green space today and in the future. Good place-keeping processes are necessary at the start of a place-keeping project.

## *Conclusions*

The overexploitation of natural resources, the increasing urban sprawl and globalization pose a very serious threat to our quality of life and biodiversity. What are the major points of action we can all take to improve and protect green spaces and biodiversity?

- Firstly, the positive impact on our environment of participation of local people is underestimated. Accordingly the question we should ask ourselves is: how can we involve more people? We must make it easier for local people to get involved. People need to own their local environment, and therefore we should avoid top down decision making.
- Secondly, we should demonstrate that public money is paying for public goods: ecosystem services should be quantified. Future investments should always consider ecosystem functioning and implement green infrastructure in the early planning. In that way, green infrastructure becomes an investment rather than a cost.
- Thirdly, we need more private sector investments. The private sector has the funds and the opportunities to invest in green infrastructure, but needs clear and consistent requirements to get fully involved.
- Finally, communication with the non-believers should happen in clear and simple language. We should use the language of dreams, find local champions of local places who can pass on their stories. We should get out of our comfort zone and use the best practices, research available to invest in a sustainable healthy environment, our future.