

HANDS ON THE LOCAL GREEN: COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS OF GREEN SPACE CO-DESIGN IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

In recent years, we have experienced an increase in volunteering actions in Slovakia, accompanied by investments into climate change mitigation measures. Green spaces provide the public with the opportunity to take on an active role in the climate action as one of the UN sustainable development goals. However, unprofessional interventions often have negative consequences, for instance we can observe how trees that were planted in good will by enthusiastic residents during Socialism, need to be felled these days, because they were planted too close to the building facades. Therefore, it is very important that enthusiastic activism has professional support and/or leadership. Recently, there have been several voluntary actions coordinated by landscape architects or other professionals. In this paper we will present these good practices by the example of three selected initiatives - 1) Park rodín Tvrdošovce (Park of Families, ViZia civic assoc.); 2) Zelený plán Galanta (Green Plan, civic association), and 3) Strom darom Nové Zámky (Tree as a Gift, ETC, civic assoc.). The study will provide a comparative analysis and evaluation of these three voluntary actions, with a particular focus on their commonalities and differences, in the context of citizen engagement, co-design and shared residential active recreation experience.

Key words: green infrastructure, landscape architecture, nature protection, residential recreation, volunteering

Introduction

A sustainable development of recreation considering the aspect of nature and landscape protection is strongly related to raising the environmental awareness of the public. Many people want to engage in nature or ecotourism, they wish to take part in activities that may have a benefit for their local environment. There is also a rise in communal consciousness and participation in community activities (Bell et al., 2009; Tóth et al., 2014).

The low interest in protection and development of public spaces and greenery in Slovakia has been the impetus for volunteer initiatives. The low involvement of people in public realm is often exploited by certain "politics" in an attempt to buy public space, which changes its public essence. This is an extremely sensitive phenomenon which demands transparency in its negotiation and public input in relation to its formation and reformation. The execution and manner of usage of the public area is a significant factor of development policies, whether in an urban, municipal or rural context (Faltán, 2010).

Strategic, conceptual and sustainable spatial planning of settlements is important. However, big changes in the territory require major investments by the local government and it takes a decade for expected change to come. Those processes cannot respond quickly enough to the needs of urban population as climate change progresses (Pfeifer, 2013). Intervention of volunteers in public space is important, since they are improving the quality of life of urban and rural residents today.

Material and methods

The subject of the study is an insight into 3 civic associations that act in transformation of public space. All of them are located in the south-western part of Slovakia. Collected information were obtained from the websites, FB pages, statutes of civic associations and by interviewing initiatives. The study offers an overview of the mission, objectives, main activities of the civic associations (CA), non government organization (NGO) and the source of funding.

Results

Park of Families Tvrdošovce / ViZia civic assoc. (CA)

The project **started in 2019** by an initiation of parents of children attending the local kindergarten. The idea was **to transform** the spacious (1ha) unused area into a park. They brought in local **landscape architect** Attila Tóth for expert guidance. Park of Families is the **main activity** of the ViZia (CA) in the rural setting of the settlement **Tvrdošovce** founded in **2020**. Today the association coordinates the

establishment and maintenance of the area. **The mission** of the (CA) is the **protection, restoration, creation and improvement** of landscape, nature, environment and green infrastructure **in the countryside**.

One of the objectives of the (CA) is to raise environmental awareness and civic engagement. **The community** of volunteers consists of members of (CA) but also those who only want to participate on work in the park. Volunteers meet regularly and the community has naturally expanded. The activities of the (CA) are accepted by the municipality and annually supported financially too.

Outcomes in 2 years are **30 planted trees** in the park with the **tree anchoring and irrigation bags**. As well as established a **perennial flower bed**. The community project participated on the **Weekend of Opened Parks and Gardens in 2021** organised by the National Trust (See Fig. 1).

The funding all together in 2020-2022 was **7 700 €**. The **85%** was granted by the **Foundation of COOP Jednota**, the local community support programme, other **15%** donated by the **Tvrdošovce Municipality**.

Source: [Park Rodín]. Facebook, [OZ Vízia]. Facebook, interview with co-founder Attila Tóth



Fig. 1: Guided tour in the park by Attila Tóth – Weekend of Opened Parks and Gardens 2021, Source: <https://www.facebook.com/OZ-ViZia-112084020561540/photos/323184156118191>

Green plan Galanta / Green Plan (NGO)

Is the **main activity** that started in **2019** by the **Green plan NGO** founded in **2018**. From the beginning the organisation offers conceptual, strategic approach for **the protection and development** of green spaces in Galanta. The project emphasize on the use of current environmental concepts, stormwater management in both urban and landscape environment. One of the **mission** is to create and promote the latest solutions for better and sustainable public space and environment. One of the **objectives** is to support, propose and promote solutions and methods of landscape architecture and urban design and management of settlements and landscapes in the context of climate change. The co-founders and members of the association (Eva Sušková and Pavel Suško) are **professionals and engaged citizens** who want to educate the public for the benefit of society. The community grows very slowly despite the professional approach of the NGO.

Since **2019-2022** has Green plan NGO carried out **6 variouse projects** in the town of Galanta. Activities began with **21 page strategic document** of 10 ideas for the development of greenery and public spaces in the Town of Galanta. This kicked off the rest of the projects where **44 trees** were planted with **tree anchoring**, established **653 m² of meadow** (See Fig.2) and **443 m² of perennial flower beds**. **6 oak benches** were constructed in total, **fence and the gate** in one of the projects. The

NGO has received **69 500 € in 4years**. The Ministry of Investment donated **57,7%** , the Municipality of Trnava **28,8%**, the Municipality of Galanta **7%** , the Ekopolis **3,6%** and the private donation was **2,9%**. Most of the **maintenance** is organised by TSMG (Technical services of Galanta).

Sources: [Zeleny plan o.z.]. Facebook, www.zelenyplan.sk, interview with the co-founder of the project Eva Sušková



Fig. 2: Project perspective of the Cherry orchard with neighborhood bench, 2021, Source: <https://www.facebook.com/zelenyplan>

Tree as a gift Nové Zámky / ETC..., civic assoc. (CA)

Is the **project** that started in **2017** under the **ETC..., (CA) Ecological training center** founded in **2008**. The (CA) was founded by one of the project members in the past. Non of the volunteers except the founder are members of the (CA). **The mission** of (CA) is to open a space for creative activity and self-knowledge through active mental development and physical recreation and the search for values in simple and natural things. One of **the main objective** is to increase a civic engagement in public realm and raise environmental awareness. Two experienced landscape architects - Slobodníková, Balogová and their friends were looking for an **effective tool to influence management of municipality** through public spaces in the city. The pilot project started on the 8 000 m² public space in front of the cinema Mier. The area had no concept of future development. (CA) esigned an agreement with the municipality for the use of this space for the purpose of planting and caring for trees. **The outcomes** of the project in **5years** are **63 planted trees, 510 planted shrubs** and **132 m² of extensive perennial beds** were established (See Fig.3). During the planting a hidden historical path called Mlynská Street **was discovered** with granite paving, which we used for **constructing of 6 new, unique benches**. **The funding** from 2017-2021 was **15 440 €**. Except from donation of the residents **34,5%** , there was Participatory budget of Nové Zámky **50%**, Orange Foundation **11%** and the Municipality of Nové Zámky **4,5%**.

Discussion and conclusion

While examining all 3 organisations thiese topics occurred to be discussed and researched further. If the organisation shows a small interest of volunteers on the project, does it lead to include constructors work in the budget when applying for funding? The help of volunteers and the Municipality with the establishment of greenery and the post-planting maintenance is one of the most important things in the context of sustainability of the projects. For example watering is challenging when there is no well on site or the only source of water is the potable one.



Fig. 3: Autumn planting of perennial flower bed, 2020 Photo: Dominika Danczi
Photo: Dominika Danczi

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=strom%20darom>

Sources: [Strom darom]. Facebook, Personal volunteer experience as a co-founder – author, interviews with other co-founders of the project Tree as a Gift Lucia Balogová, Martin Slobodník

As Falt'an (2010) writes, public space is a very socially sensitive phenomenon and needs to be the subject of a broader social discourse. The biggest challenge of volunteer associations changing the public space is how to attract more interest of general public and to establish a healthy, collaborative relationship with the local Municipality! Authorities, professionals and the public in Slovakia need to learn new methods, strategies for planning the public space. The case studies serve as a source of information for further research in the field of bottom-up participatory planning in Slovakia.

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Souhrn

Studie představuje 3 dobrovolnické iniciativy, které se podílejí na proměně veřejných prostor v městském a venkovském sídle v jihozápadní části Slovenska. Je to náhled na proces vzniku, představení hlavních aktivit a financování. Společným rysem dobrovolnických organizací je přinášet nové trendy zakládání a údržby zeleně ve veřejném prostoru. Všechny projekty chtějí propojit

jednotlivce a skupiny ve snaze vytvořit komunitu, která bude společně pracovat na změně tváře veřejného prostoru a ochraně životního prostředí.

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