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AngelGREEN: Green Network Development Strategy of the 13th district of Budapest.

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Introduction

The planning of greenways and green networks is relevant not only on regional scale and in rural and suburban areas but also in the scale of settlements or even districts within the cities. The AngelGREEN is the green network development strategy of the 13th district (also called as Angel-land) of Budapest. The strategy has been elaborated in order to help the district's Environment Management Non-profit Ltd. in its objectives of developing and maintaining the green spaces owned by the District Council. The strategy serves as a framework to determine priorities in the company's management responsibilities, and it is also expected to contribute in a gradual increase of public participation in planning and maintenance of the green network.

Background/Literature Review

Strategic planning is described by Dale, as finding the best fit between the capabilities of a given organisation, its mission and objectives and the context, the condition of the environment where the actions in order to achieve the objectives are to be undertaken (Dale 2004:18). Dale emphasizes that strategic planning is being elaborated for a given organisation, hence when designing a scope of actions the capabilities of the organisation should be taken into consideration. In the case of city strategy, it can not be elaborated as an "internally affair" of the given organisation (usually the local municipality). Using the lessons learnt from city strategy drafting in Budapest between 1991-2001, Pallai describes creating a predictable & reliable partnership with the stakeholders as one of the six key requisites of a successful strategy forming process (Pallai 2008:7). Her suggestion is, that an effective urban strategy in South East Europe should contribute to the transformation of the old management routines and to the creation new one "that supports information based, transparent, and effective decision making".

In this sense Urban strategy planning is a type of collaborative planning, and as such belongs to of the post positivist branch of planning theories (Allmendinger 2002: 16). The term collaborative planning was first used by Patesey Healey, who suggest that collaborative planning "is about why urban regions are important to social, economic and environmental policy and how political communities may organise to improve the quality of their places" (Healey 1997: xii). If this definition is accepted, collaborative planning focuses on development policies of urban regions. Putting theory in practice, means to create a process where not only the planner and the client, but a wider scale of stakeholders is involved in the decision making.

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Creighton describes it as a “two-way communication and interaction with the overall goal of better decision that are supported by the public” (Creighton 2005: 7). Collaborative planning and public participation is an instrument in how to shift political leadership from government towards governance. This shift means sharing some of the responsibilities of the state or the local government with the voluntary and private sector, or directly with the citizens (Stoker 1998: 21). Collaborative planning is a tool which can facilitate active political involvement, and can help in building political consensus through debate. However there is also a dark side of collaborative planning. It is an instrument, critics suggest, can become as a tool of manipulation, control, exclusion and ultimately of oppression (Harris 2002: 30-31). The occasions when collaborative planning is misused or abused causes an increasing level of suspicion and scepticism about collaborative planning in general among the potential partners (Bartha 2008: 57). Despite the dangers and the challenges, there seems to be an agreement, that collaborative planning is an instrument which can make a major contribution in “deepening democracy” (Fung&Wright 2001: 5) which is still a major challenge in the post socialist countries of Europe.

Goals and objectives

The AngelGREEN Strategy was elaborated by the 13th District Environment Management Ltd, which is a non profit company owned by the district council. It is the company’s responsibility to maintain and develop the condition of vegetated surfaces owned by the district council, and also to improve the district’s environmental conditions.

The primary goal of the strategy is to integrate the various elements of public and semi public urban spaces into a well linked, well managed and sustainable network. These elements include the patch type and linear elements of the urban green areas. It is also an aim of the strategy to increase the number and to improve the physical and aesthetic conditions of these elements.

The second main objective of the strategy is to improve the communication between the District Council and the residents, to involve them in the process of decision making, the creation and maintenance of the urban greenery.

The subject of the strategy is the green network system of the 13th district of Budapest. In our understanding it includes the public and semi public open spaces with significant proportion of vegetation and/or recreational land use. In the case of the 13th district of Budapest these are the following:

Table 1. The green network elements in the 13th district of Budapest

Patch type green network elements	
Margit Island	City park, unique asset with great recreational importance.
District parks	Parks above 10 000 sq m. size, which have a significant role in the district green network.
Public gardens	Public green spaces of lesser scale, which are important recreational areas of their neighbourhood
Forest area	A smaller size forest area on the People's Island.
Housing estate green spaces	Public green spaces around high population density, multi-storey housing estates.
Institutions with significant vegetation	Semi public green spaces, with significant recreational use, such as school and nursery, gardens, public baths, open sport stadiums
Lineal green network elements	
Danube embankment	A green corridor which needs significant enhancement. Southern part used as a public road, the Northern part is a former brownfield site, partially revitalized.
Rákos-stream	A canalized stream with a stream of wider or more narrow public green spaces along it.
Tree alley	Tree plantations along traffic routes in various conditions.
Greenways	Planned lineal green network elements with significant greenery, open for pedestrians and cyclists.

Method(s)

The elaboration of the strategy started in September 2007. The structure of the document was created according to the recommendations of the Greentree Studio Ltd, which participated in the planning process as a consultant of the Environment Management Ltd. The planning process was preceded by an attempt to create a green structure development concept for the Municipality of Budapest (Pro Verde! 2006). However by the time the document was finished and was debated on a couple of public hearings, the political will to codify it evaporated. During the process of strategy forming in the 13th district, the Greentree Studio utilized the experience gained during the former (city level) planning process, while the Environment Management Ltd. provided the necessary information on the green network and on the existing development concepts.

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The first part of the strategy document presents a brief overview of the issues related to the green network development:

- Brief historic overview of the process of urbanization in the district.
- Survey of the structure of green network in the district.
- Analysing the responsibilities of green space management and development in the district.
- Analysis of the vegetated areas and their changes by utilization of satellite image analysis (Gábor, Jombach, Ongjerth 2006, 2007).
- Presenting an overview of the tendencies of changes in the district's demography.
- Analysis of the public opinion on green network by public opinion poll. (Ipsos Opinion Poll Institute 2008)

The above chapters suggest that it was the intension of the planning team to present a broad overview of the evolution of the district's green network, the multi stakeholder structure of how the green network was maintained at the time of the survey. Presenting the demographic tendencies the public opinion on the district greenery demonstrates, that the planning team regards the quality maintenance of green network not as an aim but as a tool which can make the public and semi public spaces of the district more pleasant and functional for those who use it.

The findings of the survey chapters were transformed into a SWOT analysis, where they were structured into two main groups, such as the physical conditions of the green network, and the social-economic-legislative environment of green network management. Following this, the diverse group of weaknesses and threats were structured into a PROBLEM ANALYSIS and at the same time - in a rigorous manner - a MEANS-ENDS ANALYSIS was formed to create answers to each issue mentioned. The programs of the Strategy were formed according to the results of this MEANS-ENDS Analysis. This process we believe, made the strategy forming into a logical and transparent process (Dale 2004: 107-120).

In order to help communicating the findings of the analyses, a vision statement was created by the planning team. The statement stands as the following:

*As a result of our programs, which were accomplished in partnership between the district council and other partners, along the whole strip of the **Danube embankment** new pedestrian greenways and high quality green spaces have been created, which form a **North-South green axis**. The **Rákos-stream's** bed has been renaturalized, and it now forms an **East-West recreational corridor between Budapest and the suburbs**. Along the stream new playground and ecological pathways have been created. These **green corridors are linked with the district's residential areas through a well structured and attractive greenway system**.*

The North-South greenways (Göncöl st-Kassák st., Pozsonyi st., Tatai st.) and the East-West greenways (Csanády st., Révész-Csángó st., Meder-Babér-Dolmány st,

Kámfor st.) also connect the parks, public gardens and the traffic calmed urban squares with each other.

*The parks, public gardens and playgrounds of the district are of high quality, safe and clean. Today the street furniture and the services provided by the green spaces fully fit the recreational demand of the residents. The public green spaces have become characteristic and welcoming parts of the residential areas. **The regeneration of public spaces has been a major contribution in transformation of the district into a prestigious part of the capital.** Today the parks of the Margit Island are connected by pedestrian bridges and frequent public transportation boats with the 'mainland'.*

*The People's Island has been transformed in the past years significantly. It has become a Margit-island like, popular recreational destination. The complex renewal of the railway areas at east border of the district, has created high quality and mixed use areas, with high ration of open and public spaces. **This brownfield renewal makes the People's park much more easily accessible than it was in the beginning of the 21st century.** In the present days the 13th district is – literally – a flourishing district of Budapest. (AngelGREEN 2008: 36) [emphasises by the author]*

The strategy suggest, that this vision can be realized in the “not too far future” if two priorities are constantly considered kept in mind, and the six recommended programmes are gradually converted into projects and realized. The priorities and the programs are the followings:

A. To improve the quality and quantity of the elements of the district's green network.

1. Park and public garden program; the aim is to turn the district's parks, squares, housing estate areas into high quality, safe, attractive public areas.
2. Greenway and green corridor program; the aim is to create a continuous green corridors along the Danube embankment and the Rákos stream, and to connect them and the smaller green spaces with the network of greenways.
3. School and Nursery garden program; the aim is to turn the gardens of kindergartens and schools into areas supporting education, playing, and encouraging children's creativity.
4. Environment management program; the aim is to improve the maintenance quality of the urban green spaces, to improve the environmental quality of open spaces and the resident's environmental awareness.

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B. To enhance the partnership in the planning and maintenance of the green spaces and to improve the regulatory framework of the green space management.

5. Partnership & communication program; the aim is to improve the information flow between the Local Authority and the residents, to promote working in partnership.

6. Environmental regulations program; the aim is to determine the regulations and the management models which hinder the sustainable management of the green network, and than to change them.

The document also present a short estimate on how much funding each program requires per year. The suggestion is, that a annual maintenance and development cost of the six program is 1015 million HUF gross (approx 3,76 million EUR).

Results

After finishing the draft, the document was sent for commenting to the districts chief architect, to the District Development Committee, to the neighbouring, District Councils, to Budapest City Council, to the educational, sport and recreational institutions of the district, to real estate developers active in the district, and to civil organisations. The document was also published on the district's website, and an online forum was opened for commenting. On 30th of April 2008 a public forum was held where the draft strategy was presented and was commented on by public. This "traditional" way of asking for comments resulted in a limited number of reactions. Six comments were received in writing, while on the forum couple of dozen comments were made. Most of these comments were supportive, welcoming the intensions of the strategy, making recommendations on minor changes or asking for elaboration of the programs and projects in greater details.

On 26th June 2008, by the recommendation of the district development committee, the district assembly accepted the AngelGREEN Strategy as a part of the district's policies. Later it was incorporated into the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of the district.

Discussion and conclusion

The intension of the planning team was to create a green-network strategy for the Environment Management Ltd. which is discussed and accepted by the majority of the stakeholders and which priorities can become an integrated part of the district's development policies. The critics may suggest, that in this two aims the planning did not achieve a significant breakthrough. The programme, developed chiefly by the planning team, was presented on some forums for commenting, generated a very limited number of responses. This suggest, that the information about the strategy making and the request for commenting did not reach the majority of the

stakeholders (who are all the organisation based, people living and working in the district). And so the critics may suggest, that the openness of the planning has much common with displaying of the plans at the cellar of the planning office, as it is described so sarcastically in *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. (Adams 1979: chapter 1.) Other critiques suggest, that the strategy is merely greenspace and green network strategy. And although it formally has become a part of the district's Integrated Urban Strategy, there was no open discussion on how the priorities set in this document may conflict with the priorities of traffic network extension or residential and retail developments. (Bardóczi 2008.)

Both of these criticisms were very accurate at the end of 2008. However there was and there is a significant difference between the making of AngelGREEN Strategy and making of other greenspace and green network development strategies my company was involved in. This document was created not as a compulsory requirement to access EU funds, or as a background document for political campaigning. The decision to engage in strategy planning was the independent decision of the company which is actually responsible for the maintenance and development of the green network. The 13th District Environment Management Ltd. needed a long term vision and clear priorities in order to be able to priorities on occasionally ad-hoc development intension of council members and other interest groups. Priorities and long term vision was also needed to create solid foundations of criticising development proposals of other sectors.

The strategy has been the framework of the activities of the Environment Management Ltd since 2008. The programmes proposed by the strategy resulted in some new and pioneering activities of the company. One of these is the green space audit indicative. Utilizing the survey method of Greenspace Scotland (Greenspace Quality 2008:35-41), the company has created its own method of analysing the functioning and the popularity of green spaces (Gábor: 2010). An other new initiative was the creation of a new interactive website (www.angyalzold.hu). On the website both the programmes and the recent projects of the strategy are presented and can be commented on by the public. The description of the project include the project area, the timing and the budget of the project as well as the problems, the main objectives, the detailed project elements, the partners and the ways of the monitoring and maintenance. The website also serves as an information hub, where online data on the districts green network, and other relevant information is being published. An important goal of the interactive website, to make the district green network policies transparent, and accessible for potential partners.

Pallai suggests that in the case of city strategies the simple, deductive and fast track strategy planning does not work (Pallai 2008:10). Instead, she suggests, a much longer gradual process can lead to a strategy with fair cross-sectoral priority setting, selection of projects with best possible impacts, predictable and reliable partnership with stakeholders. This conclusion seems to be accurate in the case of the AngelGREEN strategy too. The creation of the strategy documentation was only the first step in strategy forming.

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