

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW URBAN GREEN POLICIES AND AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE ACTION



Recommendations for New Urban Green Policies and an Agenda for Future Action

The previous chapters outlined the research and practical findings of the GreenKeys Project and described the proposed general conceptual framework for formulation and adoption of an urban green space strategy with its set of supportive tools. In this final chapter we use the research findings to draw together conclusions about the project. We then present our recommendations for a set of integrated green space policies which are designed to support sustainable urban development in European cities.

The GreenKeys Manual and its 'Tools' present the results of research and actions which have been undertaken with a view to improving the quality of life in urban areas. The central tenet of the work has been the creation and improvement of urban green spaces. The manual is a synthesis of the expertise and experiences gained by the GreenKeys Partners during the course of the project. This work has involved 20 partner institutions in the development of a complex set of process tools designed to aid decision making in the planning, developing and maintaining of urban green spaces. The process of 'building up' the Urban Green Space Strategies was initiated in the Partner Cities and it was in these cities that the range of pilot projects were implemented which led towards the conclusions that have been reached (CD-ROM Tools > City Folder). The core goal of the GreenKeys Project was to develop a framework and formulate an Urban Green Space Strategy that aids the decision making process for spatial urban development. The framework is backed by practical experiences and adopts a strategic planning approach incorporating green space issues. The importance of a strategic approach for urban

green spaces is widely discussed in Chapter 2. If we are unable to demonstrate effectively the value to the environment and society that green spaces deliver we risk green spaces remaining on the periphery of public policy priorities and unable to attract more resources (URGE Team 2004).

Urban and green space development do not necessarily have to be converse, antagonistic or conflicting. This premise has in turn generated the philosophy that came to guide the Project's work, namely: the mixture of description and explanation of evidences and experiences of formulating Urban Green Space Strategies. This is of especial note as there are currently few exchanges of experience: consequently the approach has not to date been widely used in formulating and adopting such strategies. With the new urban planning paradigm of sustainable urban development the value of green spaces has to be put forward, recognised and placed at a higher level, than is presently found, within the political agenda.

The importance of urban areas for sustainable development has just been acknowledged throughout Europe. The issue of explicit urban policies by the European Commission in the last few years has culminated with the adoption, in 2007, of the 'Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities'¹².

In the Leipzig Charter a general European urban policy framework has emerged. This heralds an integrated policy approach for sustainable city development as a key element and through this the social, economic and environmental issues all need to be addressed simultaneously. The Leipzig Charter values cities as 'engines' of societal and economic development, and highlights an important role for urban development in future European policies. The importance of good governance is also recognised, with citizens needing to be involved and, if necessary, empowered to be able to act.



Fig. 5.1-5.2: If we want more sustainable cities in the future we have to start now. Tree planting action during the GreenKeys International Conference in Sofia (BG). (IOER 2008)

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A positive attitude (e.g. Leipzig Charter, Aalborg Charter of European Cities & Towns towards Sustainability) concerning the role of urban green spaces in European cities can be detected: an attitude which is even shared by city authorities, the scientific community and the general public alike. The attitude and the various charter statements are not, though, very robust from the point of view of green space issues. As discussed in the previous chapters, urban green spaces provide an essential structural and functional contribution to cities that is very much in line with the policies for sustainable urban development. Green spaces make cities more attractive and 'liveable' as they give local neighbourhoods the identity that helps engender a sense of belonging. They also have positive effects on the ecological balance and diversity of surrounding areas, across local administrative boundaries.

The general attitude in green space planning is, however, often expressed solely through spontaneous action and direct intervention to a pressing problem. Consideration is centred only on the short term effects which are set against limited time horizons - just day to day solutions! The attitude lacks, however, the sustained benefits that could accrue from Urban Green Space Strategies that are developed with a longer-term perspective in mind and which are implemented within a larger spatial context. The spontaneity, temporary nature and consequential ineffective implementation within the urban green sector often results in an unwillingness amongst municipal administrative departments to devote much in the way of time, energy or other resources to the issues. To date, in nearly every city, the financial and personnel resources for green space management are growing scarcer. With this situation comes the illusory belief that good quality green spaces can be provided for free. There are, nevertheless, many options in which green space quality can be saved and maintained with little outlay of funds but with enormous positive effects.

The current European and some national urban policy documents show that the 'urban sustainability' subject has at least made it onto the political agenda – this, though, applies only indirectly for green space development. Explicit urban policies targeting green spaces at the national or European levels are non-existent. Putting green space issues into practice remains, therefore, a major challenge and urban green space development really needs to be firmly supported by national and regional governments along with the European Union. The GreenKeys' framework on the development and formulation of an Urban Green Space Strategy at the municipal level aims to explain the basic building blocks and procedural steps of an approach that attaches



Fig. 5.3: The „soft factors“ often end up as the losers in the fight to develop urban space. (Carsten Irmer 2008)

Given that:

- *Urban green provides an essential structural and functional contribution to cities so as to make them more attractive and liveable. They are a key factor of the quality of life in an urban environment.*
- *Even if the Leipzig Charter calls for a more sustainable traffic infrastructure, it is expected that the use of cars as the main mobility medium will remain and continue to cause the main conflicts in urban areas: air pollution and soil compaction. Urban green is able to purify the air that cars pollute but has to operate in the small land space left by the traffic planning.*
- *In addition, urban green spaces have to be well-designed and functional. They must offer aesthetic and historic qualities so as to attract locals and tourists.*
- *To date, the relevance of green spaces in adapting urban areas to the effects of climate change and in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions is not adequately reflected in urban planning decisions.*
- *Given the fact that urban green spaces have an important role to play in securing biodiversity in an urban environment, they are not adequately considered in decision taking.*
- *In a Europe of changing age structure, increasing variety of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds and with diversifying lifestyles, the social dimension of urban green is of continually growing significance. Green spaces are becoming of increasing social relevance as places for public intercultural meetings (or encounters), communication, improving health and well-being and for combating segregation. This may lead to a changing requirement regarding the supply and functions of green spaces.*
- *The transfer of policies and experiences from elsewhere has often failed because they have not been adapted to suit local administrative structures – especially political and decision taking frame conditions.*

The formulation of Urban Green Space Strategies has the capacity to help European cities generate ideas and solutions for a range of urban development problems. The process of formulating an Urban Green Space Strategy is not, however, a readily achieved exercise. The experiences of GreenKeys show that:

- The cooperation between related actors (local authorities, professional consultants, scientific advisors and the public) is essential. The interaction between different departments and with the local inhabitants it is not a common practice in many city administrations. The examples in the project show that the starting of inter-departmental and department-inhabitant cooperation processes will differ in the periods of time taken, and may be very time consuming. The most important aspects of the process are the seeking of confidence, commitment and trust amongst the parties and the development of common goals.
- The participation of citizens in the process of planning, designing and maintaining of urban green spaces is a positive factor in motivating them to consider and to care for the spaces as an integral part of city life.
- Positive steps towards upgrading the quantity and quality of urban green spaces have not been implemented due to an inability to provide proper long term maintenance. The discovery of financial backers for planning and implementing new urban green spaces is often much easier than securing a backer who provides resources for keeping and maintaining the existing and new green spaces. Maintenance, in particular, has not been a public success.
- Preparing an Urban Green Strategy also requires thinking at the regional scale. The value of green space does not stop at the administrative and political boundaries and linkages are important between urban and rural open spaces or landscapes.
- The use of an interdisciplinary approach (administrative and scientific) to address this complex issue and to examine the links between social, environment, biodiversity and urban development provides a good opportunity for the successful formulation and lasting implementation of an Urban Green Strategy.

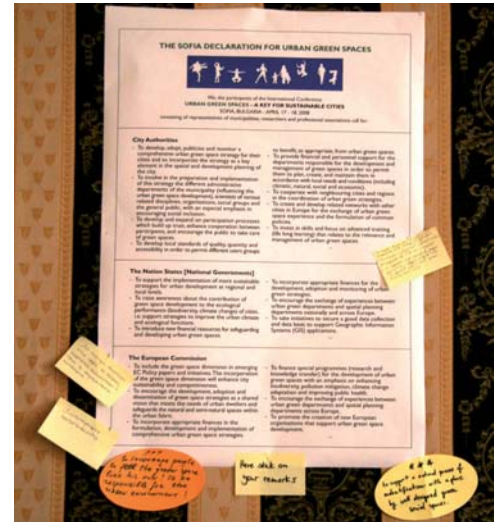


Fig. 5.4: The formulation of the GreenKeys recommendations is a long process, backed by the experiences gained in the project. These culminated in open discussions during the GreenKeys International Conference in Sofia (BG). (IOER 2008)



Fig. 5.5: Green spaces as public goods assume several functions and bring benefits to urban areas – but their value still has to be put forward and demonstrated. (Dresden 2006)



Fig. 5.6: Green spaces offer many potentials – these have to be discovered and revealed. (Stefanie Rößler 2008)

added value to the existing local initiatives and planning practice. The strategy framework is cross-cutting, covering many environmental, social and economic aspects and issues.

Widely and wisely applied, it will contribute to more sustainable urban development in European cities because it explicitly considers:

- Sustainable use of natural resources,
- Maintenance and preservation of natural capital,
- Establishment of biodiversity policies,
- Creation of more sustainable land use patterns, and
- Paying attention to the social needs of citizens.

The cross referenced evidence on developing a methodology for formulating an Urban Green Space Strategy suggests that urban green space development needs to be initiated by city administrations. This action has, in turn, to be supported by national and regional governments and by the European Union.

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In light of the recommendations and requests above the support and interlinkages between these levels of governance can encourage and guarantee the quest for sustainability in the urban environment. Good quality green spaces are a necessary precondition for the achievement of sustainable development. The GreenKeys Manual is designed in the hope that it will prove to be an inspiration to its readers in providing ideas and references of what is possible. It highlights the problems and obstacles a city may face while preparing a Green Space Strategy and provides examples of opportunities and the measures available to handle and solve them. The GreenKeys Model is not a blueprint that should be followed in strict adherence: it is more a model that offers a process to formulate an Urban Green Space Strategy. Cities are not equal – and their individual potentials have to be discovered and revealed – but they are confronted with many similar problems and challenges. The GreenKeys Methodology is sensitive to the local traditions and peculiarities and the ideas it promotes can readily be tailored to local situations and characteristics. The proposed GreenKeys Methods and Tools are recommended, therefore, as a means of identifying the driver and establishing a system and working approach for developing, adopting and monitoring the implementation of a comprehensive Urban Green Space Strategy. Green space development is a continuing issue requiring regular attention: both for urban development and for research and investigation. This is especially relevant against the background of a continuously and rapidly changing society where new knowledge is required.

In the spirit of GreenKeys:

- Improving green space is a commitment for investment into the future.
- If we want our cities to have more sustainable futures we have to prepare them now!



Fig. 5.7: Improving green spaces is a commitment for investment into the future. (Ulrike Wolf 2006)

Therefore the GreenKeys Project calls for:

City Authorities

- To develop, adopt, publicise and monitor a comprehensive Urban Green Space Strategy for their cities and to incorporate the strategy as a key element in the spatial and development planning of the city.
- To involve in the preparation and implementation of this strategy the different administrative departments of the municipality (influencing the urban green space development), scientists of various related disciplines, organisations, social groups and the general public, with an especial emphasis in encouraging social inclusion.
- To develop and expand on participation processes which build up trust, enhance cooperation between participants and encourage the public to take care of green spaces.
- To develop local standards of quality, quantity and accessibility in order to permit different user groups to benefit, as appropriate, from urban green spaces.
- To provide financial and personnel support for the departments responsible for the development and management of green spaces in order to permit them to plan, create and maintain them in accordance with local needs and conditions (including climatic, natural, social and economic).
- To cooperate with neighbouring cities and regions in the coordination of urban green strategies.
- To create and develop related networks with other cities in Europe for the exchange of urban green space experience and the formulation of common policies.
- To invest in skills and focus on advanced training (life long learning) that relates to the relevance and management of urban green spaces.

National Governments

- To support the implementation of more sustainable strategies for urban development at regional and local levels.
- To raise awareness about the contribution of green space development to the ecological performance (biodiversity, climate change) of cities. i.e. support strategies to improve the urban climate and ecological functions.
- To introduce new financial resources for safeguarding and developing urban green spaces.
- To incorporate appropriate finances for the development, adoption and monitoring of Urban Green Space Strategies.
- To encourage the exchange of experiences between urban green departments and spatial planning departments nationally and across Europe.
- To take initiatives to secure a good data collection and data base to support Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications.

The European Commission

- *To include the green space dimension in emerging EC Policy papers and initiatives. The incorporation of the green space dimension will enhance city sustainability and competitiveness.*
- *To encourage the development, adoption and dissemination of Green Space Strategies as a shared vision that meets the needs of urban dwellers and safeguards the natural and semi-natural spaces within the urban fabric.*
- *To incorporate appropriate finances in the formulation, development and implementation of comprehensive Urban Green Space Strategies.*
- *To finance special programmes (research and knowledge transfer) for the development of urban green spaces with an emphasis on enhancing biodiversity, pollution mitigation, climate change adaptation and improving public health.*
- *To encourage the exchange of experiences between urban green departments and spatial planning departments across Europe.*
- *To promote the creation of new European organisations that support urban green space development.*



Fig. 5.8: Green spaces in many cities occupy significant 'high monetary value' areas: this makes it all the more important that we should properly use and care about these precious aspects of our heritage. (Stefanie Rößler 2008)

The advancement of Urban Greening Strategies is a learning process encouraged by the exchange of knowledge and by comparing experiences. Each GreenKeys Partner supports the ongoing process of communication and welcomes contact from anyone who is interested in the project, its results and opportunities for future collaboration. A list of contact persons can be found on the enclosed CD-ROM Tools.

The Manual **GreenKeys @ Your City**, the Tools and further information about urban green space issues are available on the GreenKeys website at www.greenkeys-project.net.

You also can contact the GreenKeys co-ordination team under greenkeys@ioer.de.

¹² German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS) (ed.) (2007): Leipzig-Charta zur nachhaltigen europäischen Stadt, Berlin.