

## Review of a challenging EFLA congress dedicated to the green infrastructure

The EFLA regional congress named 'Green infrastructure, from global to local' took place between Saint Petersburg (Russia) and Stockholm (Sweden), Uppsala (Sweden) and Helsinki (Finland) between the 11 and 15<sup>th</sup> of June after the General EFLA Assembly. From the beginning the organizers' aim was clear : introducing a long-term infrastructure vision, building cooperation with numerous events, presenting interesting contributions and strengthening the EFLA network.

Arriving in Saint Petersburg is a change of scene: not only the streets are built on a large scale, but also the underground transport network is impressive and the buildings appear as majestic remnants of the Soviet period. No wonder that the congress began in Saint Petersburg as five previous and successful congresses occurred in this town. In this context, the Marble Palace suited perfectly the holding of a congress with attendees and lecturers from all over the world.

- Conclusion of the Russian part of the EFLA congress by the EFLA President Nigel Thorne in the impressive space of the Marble Palace



Alternating keynote presentations with short presentation sessions and site visits (through three countries nonetheless!), the congress provided wide-ranging and thorough material to participants.

One of the first topics was the *Urban green infrastructure for climate benefit* by Nancy Rottle, from the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington (USA). Living in a rapidly urbanizing world, predicted climate change effects could dramatically impact our lives : summer droughts, stronger winter storms, rising sea levels... 'Planners and designers are challenged to find solutions to help prepare for the inevitable impacts that existing atmospheric carbon levels are predicted to cause, while also promoting practices that will minimize those levels and therefore potentially reduce the severity of effects'<sup>1</sup> Ms. Rottle presented several practices, especially regarding stormwater management. Water harvesting, cleaning and re-use can reduce energy used to pump water, or can maintain the full climate-mitigation function of vegetation while being integrated in the landscape.



Saint Petersburg itself was not forgotten: in the 'Venice of the North', priority is given to preserving historic elements and at the same time introducing contemporary landscape elements.

One of the best examples is the Nevsky Prospekt, a main axis crossing the town from west to east. Regulations were developed in 2010 in order to protect its heritage and improve the urban environment quality. This

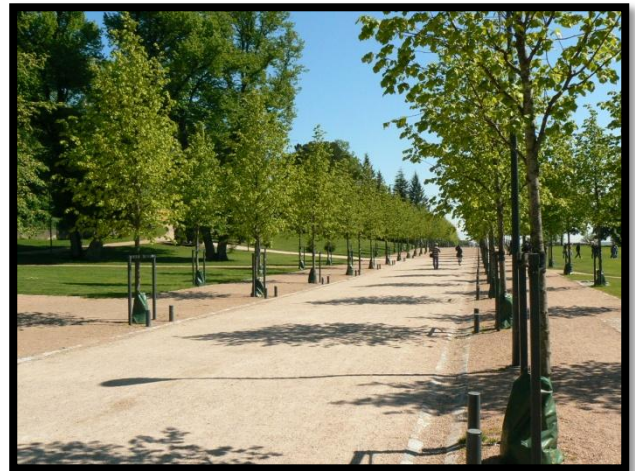
is essential in these places flooded with tourists: the vegetation definitely creates an architectural image. During her presentation *Saint Petersburg green infrastructure*, Maria Ignatieva, Professor at the Uppsala University, went back over some key points of Russian green infrastructure to date: composed of a random combination of gardens, parks, and street trees it doesn't lead to favorable urban environment conditions. As a result, large undeveloped areas are found in the central parts of cities and suburban areas are isolated. Saint Petersburg is not an exception to this rule. Although there is potential for development in the suburban areas, where the construction sites and open spaces are, the problem is to introduce green places in the historical centre. At the same time suburban neighborhoods are suffering from a lack of interest in comparison to the historical centre. However with the latest masterplan in 2004 the town keeps improving its infrastructure, like the establishment of green corridors along the transport areas. 'The development of green infrastructure of Saint Petersburg by reducing its discretion and increasing its connectivity will enhance the stability and ensure the sustainable development of Saint Petersburg as a whole'

During the congress some unusual topics were also approached:

- *The green infrastructure for the dead* by Wingsze Vincci Mak, from Hong Kong. In a dense town where the ash niches available in the public columbaria are decreasing, combined to an increasing death rate the burial problematic is also linked to social factors. In this context, building large-scale funeral homes has to be developed in order to ease social disturbance, use green as a platform to bring dead and living neighborhoods together and bring death back to nature.
- *Vegetative outdoor advertising as a green infrastructure* by Krzysztof Herman from Poland. With the European Football Championship, advertising has expanded in this country as well as the use of living greenery. In fact, advertising with green has a very positive connotation and will be used more and more.
- *Scenarios for the recognition of seasons in cities*. Indra Purs raised this problematic in Latvia, where 4/5th of the year is out of season according to the conventional landscape practice design

After two days of congress in Saint Petersburg, it was then time to take the Allegro train. Direction: Finland, Helsinki. Walking in the Kaivopuisto park, on the sea front, was the occasion to discover other landscape management methods. The boat trip between Helsinki and Stockholm was an ode to nature, with marvelous landscapes visible in the early morning.

- *Boat trip between Helsinki and Stockholm : back to nature*



- *Lime tree path in the Kaivopuisto park, Helsinki : the 'treegator' water management system is mostly for the young plantations, a principle used also in Sweden coming from England*

As Professor Clas Florgård showed in his presentation *Perspectives of urban blue-green infrastructure* : 'Stockholm is from many points of view a model for a well-developed structure. Blue-green "fingers" connect the surrounding countryside as wedges into the very city centre, providing possibilities for clean air to enter the city, as well as ecological corridors.'<sup>1</sup> To understand the urban form and green infrastructure of Stockholm, conference goers also visited a number of key open spaces in Stockholm and surrounds

- Hagaparken, a treasure of Stockholm, is an example of English-style parks that emphasize the preservation of the natural areas. It is in fact the most visited in Sweden. However, this park is also facing urban pressure: more and more people are living close to its borders. This is a real problem because the estates are more valued than the green areas by the city planners. That, and its importance relating to climate change, is why the ecosystem must be protected.
- Berzelii Park , right in the centre of Stockholm. This one demonstrates the importance of consultation with users and residents. As the park was renovated in order to make it closer to its original form, people became involved in issues like tree felling and identifying which trees needed to be felled or pruned.
- The Kungsträdgården where the battle of the Elm occurred in 1971. As a subway station was planned, thousands of people gathered at the park in order to save the distinctive elms. This battle took place during several days and the situation became to be dangerous, but the trees defenders won. This event led to a change in the opinion, and even the park administrator had to quit. The news made it to frontpages all over the world.



Last but not least, we were led to Hammarby Sea City. It is the Stockholm's largest urban development project for many years. A eco-cycle model designed to ensure organic recycling throughout this area is known worldwide as "The Hammarby Model".



- Hammarby Sea City, expanding the inner city with a focus on the water, while converting an old industrial and harbour area into a modern neighbourhood

The presentation *Scales of landscape, Scales of design – for a green network in Bucharest* by Iona Tudora was without any doubts the most sarcastic one with the dramatic example of the development pressures of Bucharest, where nearly everything natural is demolished to build a house or a parking lot. This lack of vegetation is even to be found in the private gardens. This Romanian team investigated the creation/recreation of a green network in the town and determined three categories of further green networks elements: the local , urban and territorial scale.

Regarding the other side of Europe, the landscape architect Frédéric Dellinger talked about the *Green infrastructure and stormwater management in a city center* with the example of Lyon, third largest city in France. Instead of leading the rainwater to the pipes, it stays in the green infrastructure by three possibilities: raingardens, underground water treatment passing through tree substrates and reinforced grass pavements. This risky challenge has been a success; the local politicians accepting such a trial in collaboration with local service managers, although they are more used to a very vertical management system in order to work across disciplines. Another French colleague, Olivier Damée, spoke about the improved quality of life thanks to new urban landscapes along the tramways, in his presentation *Public transportation and green infrastructure : a new city for its inhabitants, the case of tramways in France*.

This congress was the opportunity to gather professionals from varied backgrounds in a very friendly and constructive atmosphere, livened up with numerous visits dealing with the challenge of landscape planning, design and management. Nigel Thorne praised this success : 'From my perspective as president of the European Federation of Landscape Architecture, the event was a real success for us, acting as it did as our regional congress and allowing the Federation's members to once again enjoy the professional challenge of visiting members countries across Europe (...)The topic of 'Green Infrastructure' is of world-wide importance and this was beautifully encapsulated within the title of 'From Global to Local'. Thus, the topic could not fail but to register with all landscape architects and allied professionals in the built environment. The range of presentations and the choice on offer throughout the conference programme was truly impressive.'

The congress concerned indeed not only green heritage but also future constructions. Students were encouraged to present and professionals were encouraged to publish their papers relating to the congress.

As landscape architects we create the environment in which the people live. Due to the growing green awareness over the last decades of the public, further transmitted and developed by the press, our responsibility also keeps growing. Only close collaboration between committed landscape architects, urban planners, technicians and politicians (...) can manage the development and improvement of sustainable living conditions, while campaigning for long-term, well-thought-out solutions over short-term economic gain.

This exchange platform showed us how different governments induce different ways to design. The local government is definitely a major key to achieving better blue-green infrastructure. Bit by bit, the situation is changing. The *European Landscape Convention*<sup>2</sup> has also become more powerful.



Let's work together for a better environment and see you at the next EFLA congress !

➤ Conclusion about the successful EFLA congress at the University of Uppsala by Maria Ignatieva, from the Organizing Committee



### **A few feedbacks about the congress**

*Just a note to thank you all for the excellent and well-organized conference you held in St Petersburg and Uppsala. Thanks to your efforts, the topic, the interesting content of key-notes and presentations and the wonderful excursions in St Petersburg, Helsinki, Stockholm and Uppsala have made this conference a highly enjoyable and memorable experience.*

Dr Shelley Egoz, School of Landscape Architecture, Lincoln University, New Zealand

*I had high expectations and they were all fulfilled and I absolutely enjoyed every minute of the conference. I came away inspired by all the presentations which were as broad as the scale of the conference's topic.*

Hassân Bitar, Ph.D. Institute of Urban Planning, Lebanon

1 Ignatieva, M., Egoz, S, Menzies, D., Melnichuk, I. (eds) 2012. Green Infrastructure: from global to local. St. Petersburg, Publishing House of Polytechnic University, St. Petersburg.-198 pages

2 Author's note : the European Landscape Convention book was edited by the European Foundation Landscape of Architecture in 2011 and can be purchased on the following website :

[http://europe.iflaonline.org/index.php?option=com\\_tevent&view=itm&layout=nws&id=201&ck=2012-10-3-23-3-47](http://europe.iflaonline.org/index.php?option=com_tevent&view=itm&layout=nws&id=201&ck=2012-10-3-23-3-47)

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