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Improvement of Living Conditions in Levice *Slovakia*

Best Practice

New for 2002

Categories: Environmental Management:
- urban greening

Level of Activity: City/Town

Ecosystem: Continental

Summary

The Practice "Improvement of the life conditions in Levice" addresses some of the problems faced by the residents of Levice town. The practice engages various aspects and sectors of life that are cross-cutting in an integrated manner. The main objective of the practice is to provide better conditions for healthy life through the creation of more green areas and increasing the recreational options for children and youth. Levice has been a member of the Association of Health cities of Slovakia (AHCS AZMS) which helps in the creation of the city's Health profile and implementation of the Health plan.

A large central park has been created in the centre of the town. It is situated where an old building without historical value once stood. The park has sidewalks, benches and a little lake now. It is used as a relaxation zone for all - adults and children. Children have a "big fish", for their games and benches have been installed for adults. Some unused roads have been transformed into use for other purposes. One of largest of these areas is a big "Skate park" with all skating elements including a U-ramp. It was once an unused quiet car park. This initiative originated from teenagers, who lives in suburb, and have few options of how to spend their free time productively. Some of them - students of a Technical high school designed and constructed all parts of the Skate park.

"Big Toys" have been constructed for children in unused areas within the town's centre. "The grapy hut", a play pen for children, is built where formerly there was an old hut and vineyards. "The Circus" is situated where a real circus was built when it performed its shows in Levice.

In collaboration with various partners, a plan to improve public health through the implementation of The Health plan is currently underway. Specific material about public health have been developed touching on life-style and its influence on health. Through workshops, seminars and exchange of lessons learned effort is being made to reverse the deteriorating trend in the quality of life. The practice "Improvement of the life conditions in Levice" is an example of how different partners can work together for the welfare of citizen

Narrative

SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

The town did not have any recreational facilities and no green areas or parks for relaxation. This presented a grave problem in children's security when playing and resulted in increasing numbers of young and teenage dependents on hard drugs, alcohol and tobacco. The town had a lot of unused bitumen areas and roads that were unkempt following years of disuse. Levice had a high mortality rate, being ranked "First place" for mortality from cardio-vascular illness in Slovakia. There was also an increasing number of children with hyper sensitivity.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

- "Green areas are everywhere": Create more (sports) opportunities for children and youth to spend their free time. Varied exploitation of large unused bitumen and beton roads and areas;
- Better life conditions for all categories of inhabitants: Increase average life expectancy in the town;
- To sensitize citizens on basic rules of healthy life-styles and nutritional value of food, decrease mortality from cardiovascular illness.

FORMULATION OF OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:

Main objectives are:

- Create more green areas in the town, more possibilities for children and youth and improvement of quality of life for all inhabitants.

Strategies:

- Co-operation between Local authority office specialists and other organizations;
- Mobilization of local financial, technical and human resources;
- Comprehensive valuation of actual public health level by statistical calculations;
- Engagement of the inhabitants in the process of "greening the town";
- "Clear (unused)" areas - valuation of efficiency;
- Valuation of other opportunities for children and youth;
- Creation of new sport and relaxation areas;
- Performance new health life - style ideas on public level;
- Educating children and youth in schools about health.

MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES:

Financial resources:

- Local authority's budget - provision for these funds is made within the chapters of public green areas and relaxation areas. The money was accredited by Local authority parliament and was applied by rule and line.
- Fundraising - Financial aid has been received from "Globtel account", a fund oriented towards children and teenagers. This money was used for construction of Skate park elements.
- Special funds - The Local authorities created a special fund named after a distinguished figure in Levice history - Gen. Milan Rastislav Stefanik. This fund has supported construction of new a park.

Technical resources:

Students from Technical High Schools designed all elements of the "Skate Park" with the help of their teachers.

Human resources:

- Students volunteered their time towards the construction of the Park.
- Specialists from the Local authority office, department of public green coordinated all activities concerning the public green spaces.
- Specialists from partner organisation helped to create The Health Profile and the Health Plan.

The key actors in this initiative are listed below:

- Mr. Ladislav Kisely Dipl. Ing., Mayor of Levice

- Mrs. Maria Parakova Dipl. Ing., specialist for public greening and special coordinator of the "Skate Park"
- Mrs. Eva Furdova Dipl. Ing., coordinator of AHCS in Levice and general compiler of The Health Profile an the Health Plan of Levice
- Mr. Gejza Legeny Dr., secretary general of AHCS
- Mr. Zdeno Korman Dipl. Ing. project manager, The Best Practice coordinator.

PROCESS

Implementation of the project was determined by three themes - The first phase of the project addressed technical issues and sought to answer the "How", "where" and "when" of the new town's park and the financial implication. The second phase consisted of problems about childrens' and teenagers' recreational opportunities in the town. The last part of initiative is oriented towards public health.

The main parameters of new town's park and the area for its construction had to be defined. The area identified had a focus on local businessmen and enterprises with the intention of building a big department store. The Local authorities have been of tremendous help and they strictly defined the area for the park.

A problem encountered was with flexibility to the design of the park. The "Big Fish" project for children had to be integrated into the park which was not acceptable according to the architects of the project. After making some changes to the conditions, the architects agreed to incorporate "Big Fish" project. Another problem is with thieves and vandals, who have demolished some benches and totally destroyed the irrigation system in the park that must be rebuilt at a cost of US \$ 8,000! A complete security hidden camera system, which will "keep watch" in the park will be put in place.

The situation was different in the "Skate Park". The initiative to build a skate park came from teenagers, who were spending their free time on the streets. Students of the Technical High school designed and constructed all parts of the Skate Park. 40 street ball baskets were built at unused bitumen areas. A major concern was the question of skaters' security in the skate park, because it is situated on a former car park in the center of the suburb. There was need to separate skaters from rush traffic and the specialist Mrs. Parakova, designed a special "green barrier" between the Skate Park and the road. Although some people from this suburb complained of noise from the Skate Park, the measurement of the State department of Health indicated that the level of noise is the same as other parts of the town. It's viewed as a problem of generation gap. The new U-ramp in the Skate Park was finished in autumn 2001 and the rest of the Park is completely finished now.

The Health profile is a summary of various indicators of public health. This profile completely describes trends and habits in inhabitants' life-style and food consumption. The Health plan of Levice also describes in detail ways, how, who, when, where and what will be done to try and change the adverse status of public health. Mrs. Furdova collaborates with various organizations on this plan. It has been the first comprehensive material about improvement of public health, especially children.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

- There is an increased opportunity for children's recreation in local town centres (in suburbs): "Circus", "The grapy hut" and "Big fish" in the town's park. They are very popular in town with children using them all summer.
- More possibilities for youth and teenagers: 40 street ball baskets have been built in the town centre on unused areas, Skate Park.
- Young in-line skaters and skateboarders no longer use banisters and stairs in center of town for their activities. With the skate park, two different groups are immediate beneficiaries - teenagers and the local authorities. Teenagers don't destroy the town's benches and trash baskets, on the contrary they strongly protect Skate Park against damage.
- The Health plan is now on course of realization. The first concrete results will be able in summer

2002.

- Levice town is greener and looks modern and younger before the start of the initiative. All citizens feel the positive atmosphere everywhere.

SUSTAINABILITY

The basic concept of this initiative predicts development of other initiatives. Development of green areas and creation of other possibilities for children are targeted for 2 - 5 years. The local authorities support efforts to change the town to a modern, beautiful place. Finance has been secured for further development of the initiative. The local authorities together with other stakeholders will be seeking for further financial support from the European Union and other institutions.

LESSONS LEARNED

A lot of new skills and know-how was acquired during the implementation of the initiative. Specialists visited workshops and seminars dedicated to cases of improvement of life conditions and greening in cities and towns. We discovered that cooperation between Local authority, organizations and townspeople equals to the big results. We have learnt the importance of the voices and ideas from people. We learned that if possibilities are created for young people, they don't seat in pubs and drink, but engage in sport and do some useful activities and as a result, we have fewer dependents on drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

TRANSFERABILITY

The initiative is easily replicable in other towns in Slovakia and Central Europe especially in towns, where there are unused lots and local conditions supports the initiative. Street ball baskets in suburbs have been constructed in many other towns in Slovakia as well as other parts of the world. The concept of Health plans is used in many towns in Slovakia and in European Union

Key Dates

September 1995 - Beginning of Town Park's construction,

September 1999 - First part of park is completely finished and is opened for citizens,

August 1998 - Beginning of child utilizations' construction ("The grapy hut" and the "Circus"),

1st of July 2000 - Beginning of Skate Park's construction,

1st of September 2000 - creation of Health town office,

28th of June 2001 - Local authority parliament accepts the Health profile of Levice,

30th of June 2001 - Skate Park has been finish and opened for use by teenagers,

13th of December 2001 - Local authority parliament accepts the Health plan of Levice,

1st of January 2002 - Beginning of Health plan's realizatio

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Type of Organization: Non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Financial Profile

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Year	Total budget in US \$	Partner A (% of the budget)	Partner B (% of the budget)	Partner C (% of the budget)	Partner D (% of the budget)
1997	240,000	-	-	-	-
1998	120,000	-	-	-	-
1999	150,000	-	-	-	-
2000	80,000	-	-	-	-