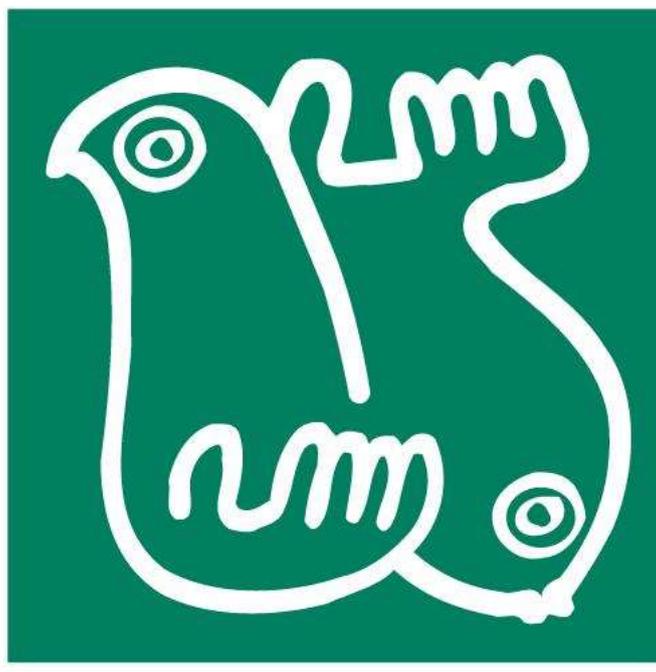


# **Report on good sustainability practices in Hungary**



**Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation**

**2019**

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	3
<b>Participatory planning</b>	4
Teleki square - case study	6
<b>Weaknesses in green space development and management in Hungary</b>	7
Proclamation to Protect Urban Green Areas and Green Areas (extract)	7
Városliget - the City Park	8
Római Part - Roman Beach	12
<b>Good practices</b>	16
Greenbelt Program	16
Community Park in Nyim	19
Tree of the Year	20
About the European Tree of the Year contest	20
About the Hungarian Tree of the Year contest	21
Campaigning - case study	22
The winner of the Hungarian Tree of the Year 2018 and European Tree of the Year 2019 contests	24
Hero trees 2018	25
<b>Recommendations</b>	26
<b>Useful links</b>	28

## Introduction

According to the United Nations' publication, [World Urbanization Prospects - The Revision 2018](#) 55 % of the world's population has resided in urban areas in 2018. The urban population of the world has grown rapidly since 1950, having increased from 751 million (30 % of the world's population at that time) to 4.2 billion in 2018. Around one in eight urban dwellers live in 33 megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants. By 2030, the world is projected to have 43 megacities, most of them in developing regions, and by 2050, 68 % of the world's population is projected to be urban.

A basic need of people living in cities to get in touch with some form of "nature", thus, green spaces, parks and plants on the streets will be more and more important. Green areas such as gardens, playgrounds and sports fields as well as woods and natural meadows, wetlands or other ecosystems provide space for physical activity and relaxation, and form a refuge from noise. Plants produce oxygen, and help filter out harmful air pollution, including airborne particulate matter. Water spots, from lakes to rivers and fountains, have a significant temperature reduction feature, and bind water and soil contributing to the fight against climate change.

Green spaces are also important to mental health. Numerous researches have shown that urban green areas help the physical and mental healing of anxiety, to overcome stress and improve humanity behavior and character. Recent estimates show that physical inactivity, linked to lack of access to recreational areas, accounts for 3.2% of global deaths, and outdoor urban air pollution is responsible for 1.3 million deaths annually - states the World Health Organization in its paper [Health Indicators of Sustainable Cities](#) published in 2012. The WHO recommended the availability of a minimum of 9 m<sup>2</sup> of green space per individual with an ideal Urban green space (UGS) value of 50 m<sup>2</sup> per capita.

These green spaces can be developed either by involving the public or not. In the first case, ready-made ideas and plans are presented to the people, public forums do not exceed mere information sharing, and consequently the population feels excluded from the process, and does not feel ownership of the result. In the latter case, real involvement happens and the development of the area

starts with a survey of the needs of the population, discussions, identification of different interest groups and conflicts. This method is called participatory planning.

## Participatory planning

Participatory planning is based on the involvement of the community throughout the whole development process. The preparatory phase, the planning and the implementation process itself all take taking place with with the real participation of the affected stakeholders, the local people. Planning results, mapping alternatives are continuously communicated widely to prepare decisions based on consensus during the whole process. It is beneficial not only because the community will feel the result their own, but also because the local people have a lot of knowledge about the development area that the professionals not necessarily do.

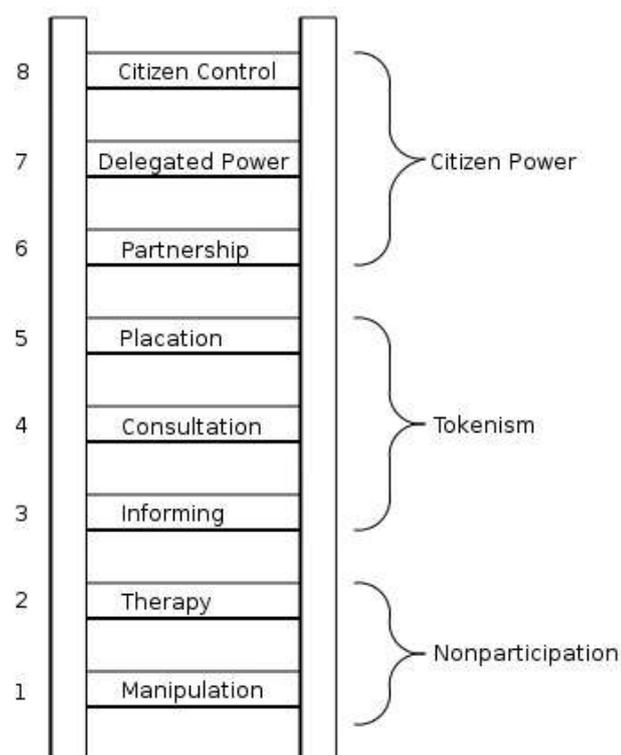
Arnstein's Ladder, presented in an article published by the American Association of Designers written by Sherry R. Arstein in 1969, determined the levels of participation based on the depth of involvement of local actors - the greater the role of the local people in decision-making, the higher we stand on the imaginary ladder.

According to Arnstein's description, the first level of the ladder is manipulation, where the designer gives a "recipe" to solve the problem, and the project leader tries to avoid any involvement of the population. At the second stage of the ladder, the designer of the plan explains its significance, operability and greatness after the completion of the plan, but does not involve the locals in the planning process. These two lowest levels of the ladder were not considered to be participation by Arstein.

On the third level, the information is shared already at the beginning of the process, but the flow of information is still one way, which does not allow feedback. Thus, it is still a superficial step towards participatory planning, as there are no tools available to the stakeholders to influence the process. On the fourth level, interviews, questionnaires, public forums, and other organized discussions contribute to a real dialogue between the local population and the designers. New ideas may come up, but there is no guarantee for their realization. At the fifth level, civil society organizations and

groups appear, which already have the right to discuss the project in detail, but have no real power and right to vote, decisions are still made by those in power.

On the sixth level there are joint committees operating, on the next the public delegates representatives to the decision-making bodies. Citizen control is the highest level of participation where there is no mediator between the parties. To do this, of course, it is necessary for the community to have the appropriate professional competence, as the processes here are managed by a local civil society organization, which reports back about its work to the community.



[Ladder of citizen participation, Sherry Arnstein 1969.](#) Wikipedia

There are some good examples of successful participation planning in Hungary like the renewal of the Teleki Square (8th district of Budapest), where both the designer and the investor had the ambition that the design would be carried out according to this methodology. A new civil society organization (Co-operatives of the Teleki Square Association) was established by local people in the district, which participates in the maintenance and protection of the new space and organizes the programs on the outdoor stage created there.

## Teleki square - case study

Located in the 8th district of Budapest, Teleki Square has lived its relative golden age in the 1960s and '70s. Since then the state of green space and public safety have deteriorated continuously. In the framework of an urban rehabilitation program launched in 2005 financed by the European Union, the green area of the 14,000 m<sup>2</sup> Teleki Square was renewed in 2013. The planning process was an 10-week open workshop series that anyone could join at any time. The people in the neighborhood were invited to take part in the project by posters and leaflets with the question "What Should Teleki Square Look Like?", later anyone could comment on the development process online primarily on Facebook on the [page dedicated to the project](#).

Local people were enthusiastic at the public forums, realizing that they could decide for themselves about the future of their environment in a constructive, democratic way. Planning occasions began with professional presentations followed by group discussions with 10-30 people. Controversial issues were decided by voting after discussing the arguments in constructive debates. During the planning process, participants also visited the square several times to be able to imagine the rehabilitation in practice. The most important ideas and plans were put out to the site (stuck on trees) serving as information materials for the passers-by.

During the planning process the participants have explored the history of the square, then analyzed its current state, and mapped the future: how to use the park in the most practical way, in favour of as many age groups as possible, how it can be diverse and inclusive. The principles that formed the basis of the park's concept were that the park should be inclusive, open and diverse; and these principles were kept in mind during all the phases of the process.

The planning process was also a kind of definition of the local people's vision of their own lives. The process brought together a group of residents, strangers made friendships and are still working together for the common purpose. In the course of the work, a civil society organization was established, which has been involved in the maintenance of the community park since the completion of the square, and is also active in organizing community programs.

An important lesson of this work is that such cooperation can only be successful if the local people see that the professionals are committed and take seriously the importance of participation, and are open to the ideas of others. The designer must have pedagogical and moderator skills to see the common ground in the different perspectives so that the diverse opinions can reach consensus. Without this, it is not possible to conduct a participatory development process accepted by everyone in the group.

## Weaknesses in green space development and management in Hungary

In the inner districts of Budapest, per capita green area is as little as 1.5 m<sup>2</sup>. This contributes to a situation when particle matter (PM10) and nitrogen-oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) pollution regularly exceeds limits - prompting an infringement process by the European Commission.

Yet, apart from a few exceptions urban green areas do not have a real owner either at governmental or municipal level as public administration considers them neither part of nature nor part of the built environment, therefore they do not belong either to the institutions and authorities dealing with environmental issues or the ones dealing with the built environment and constructions. In addition, the Hungarian development policy still does not acknowledge that the urban green space is a community space, habitat, place for outdoor recreation, sport and leisure activities, important tool for air and climate protection - they often just treat it as a backup construction area. State and local government budgets tend to cut the resources planned to spend on green space maintenance if they must be redeployed for some reason.

In 2016, Greenpeace Hungary has issued [a petition with 5 points](#) addressed to the government to ensure that the Hungarian administration catches up with the more developed Western European and North-American practices.

### Proclamation to Protect Urban Green Areas and Green Areas (extract)

We call for the government, Members of Parliament and leaders of the capital city to take urgent action according to the following:

1. Urban green spaces and trees must have the same protection as infrastructure networks!
2. Developments should primarily serve the rehabilitation of neighborhoods in bad condition, and not to burden the city's green spaces!
3. Good owners for urban green spaces! There should be an officer responsible for the maintenance and development of green spaces in all urban municipalities.
4. Priority public investments must not be exempted from environmental protection regulations!
5. Nothing about public parks without local civil society.

Budapest, November 23, 2016

The full text of the proclamation is available [here](#) (in Hungarian).

As Greenpeace Hungary stated in its [study on urban green spaces](#) authorities should provide the public with a real consultation and appeal possibility in the case of green spaces and construction sites with large areas of green space as the current practice is unsustainable and results in passive resistance, which can easily lead to aggression as it happened for example in the case of Városliget (City Park) detailed below. To avoid this, it would be necessary to prepare multivariate plans in case of controversial investments already in the early planning phase and make them publicly available with a clear impact assessment and explanation without manipulation. The most effective way of successful public investment is the introduction of participatory methodologies to promote professional and social consensus, to ensure public dialogue and participation. A government should strive for agreement and consensus even before the physical start of investments, and if it is not available, then, according to the will of the majority, it must change its plans.

There have been two recent emblematic cases in Budapest that perfectly demonstrate what happens when the local community is not involved in urban green area development from its beginning: the Városliget (City Park) and the Római Part (Roman Beach). In both cases members of the communities, activists, civil groups have been working voluntarily for years to reduce the damage the planned developments would cause.

### Városliget - the City Park

Városliget is a 200-year old park in Budapest, one of the oldest city parks in the world, a UNESCO World Heritage Site threatened by proposed plans to create a new museum district on the site.



The original state of the park - Photo: [Ligetvédők](#)

The park undoubtedly needs attention to restore its former beauty as in the last decades it did not receive the care it deserved. As an answer to this need the government launched the [Liget Budapest Project](#) without any prior consultation with either the local population or civic and professional organizations. The project aims at developing a museum district and cultural centre in the park by destructing large parts of the greenery to make space for the new museum buildings. The Liget Budapest Project would replace more than 1,000 trees in the now tranquil park with 300,000 tons of concrete buildings, destroy a fragile inner-city ecosystem and consequently negatively impact the city's air quality. No wonder that the proposed plans were quite far from what the community wanted.



The park under construction - Photo: [Ligetvédők](#)

According to a [Median survey ordered by Greenpeace Hungary](#) in 2016, 86% of citizens in Budapest were not in favour of this plan and these numbers haven't changed since then. Ordinary people, civil society organizations and groups, professionals and environmentalists have formed a protest group called "[Ligetvédők](#)" ("Park Protectors") with the aim to protest against the government's plans. They are demanding that the park is renovated without constructing new buildings, since green space in Budapest is already scarce and the museum district could be built in other locations within the city.

Activists intervened for the first time three years ago when construction crews entered the park and began cutting trees in an area designated for the Hungarian House of Music. To protect the endangered trees 24/7, some of the protesters moved in and camped in the park. Instead of hearing the opinion of the professionals and activists, the government acted aggressively against peaceful protesters, criminalizing them, and removed them with security guards who even beat the activists. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the security guards have been assisted in several cases by the police to act beyond their powers. Court cases have revealed that the protesters have been unlawfully removed from the site in several cases. Eventually the demolition work, including the felling of more trees, resumed.

In some cases the protest was successful: eventually the Transport Museum will be built not in the park but on abandoned industrial area (brownfield), the planned Museum of Architecture will be opened in a closed hospital building and the Museum of Photography will also be built outside of the park. Activists are constantly documenting the offenses and initiate legal action - without them looting would take place twice as fast. The Liget Protectors managed to protect the oldest trees from mutilation that would have been caused by the preparations for the Swimming World Cup in 2018. The Budapest's local government "Ten Thousand New Trees to Budapest!" program would not have been created without the Liget protection movement either.

According to their ["Constitution"](#) the Ligetvédők are self-organized, party-free, independent individuals, operating on a voluntary basis, following the principles of nonviolence. Their goal is to make decisions about society preceded by real, broad social consultation and a consensus-based decision. They also declare to preserve the natural and cultural values. Their principle is that everyone is equal: everyone in the movement has the right to participate and vote until it complies with the Constitution. Their operation is based on participatory democracy, having no leader and no main organizer, shaping the processes together. Anyone can join them: their decision-making body is the plenary, and their meetings are held at a pre-announced time and place. They state that their conscience can question the written legal system, so they consider civil disobedience as an appropriate tool to achieve their goals.



Activists - Photo: [Ligetvédők](#)

Attempts to hold a referendum about construction plans in the park were precluded by the government, making it difficult for citizens to voice their concerns, but activists continue protesting in the park and in their online interfaces - their [website](#) and their [facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) pages and [Youtube channel](#) - and in the media.

## Római Part - Roman Beach

Although the Danube crosses the whole city the Római Part is basically the last natural connection between the city and the river, the only place in Budapest where the people have the possibility to enjoy the riverside as most of it is built in by roads and harbors. The Római is located at an approximately 5 kilometers long stretch along the Danube riverside of the city's North-Western 3rd district, Óbuda-Békásmegyer. It is outside of the city's tourist attractions but it has a special atmosphere and therefore loved by inhabitants as a local recreational area, natural reserve - part of the Natura2000 network -, and water sports, primarily boating such as kayak and canoeing facility since the 19th century.

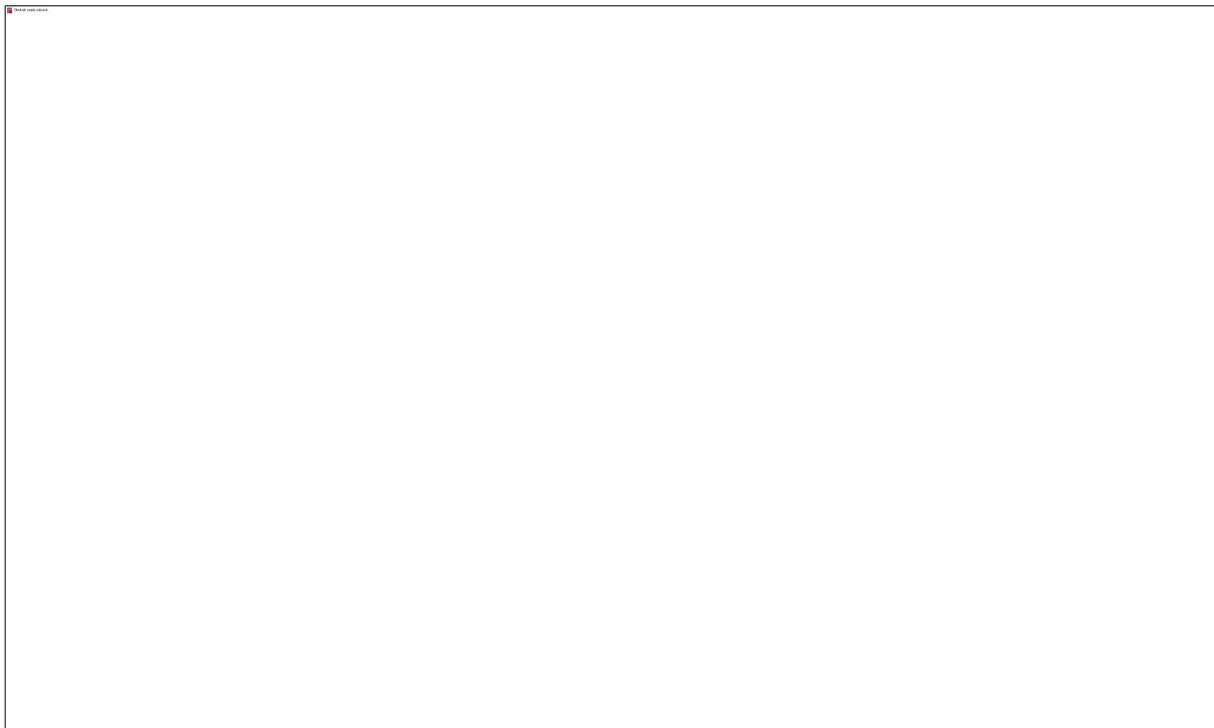


Photo: [Maradjanak a FÁK a Rómain](#)

The promenade with numerous open air restaurants and bars, lined by beautiful trees is a popular destination among runners and cyclists and a popular walking area for families with children and dogs although it is in quite a bad shape now, and should be renewed with flood-resistant furniture, public spaces, playgrounds, toilets, cycling paths, using planning solutions which help the peaceful co-existence of the different users (pedestrians, children, cyclists, rowers, etc.).

The Római Part and streets of the 3rd district's residential area that lie nearby were flooded by the river several times in the past. To protect the area, in 2013, the Budapest city council decided to order the construction of a mobile dam at the Római Part. Ever since then there has been a long debate about the appropriate type and location of the planned dam. Inhabitants and local organizations criticize the plans as they doubt the benefits and effectiveness of this specific type of flood protection.

The biggest problem of the current mobile dam plan is that its building would make it necessary to cut down approximately 1,500 trees on the shoreline in order to avoid the danger of fallout, and result in an environmental disaster for the wildlife of the area. The edges of the banks would be paved with stone like in the inner parts of Budapest, thus the gravel would be removed and the lively fauna perish. The Római, as locals know and like it, would disappear together with the trees.

Another problem is that this solution wouldn't give full protection for the 55,000 inhabitants of the area as the soil conditions on the riverside would lead to only a fragile flood protection and endanger the entire neighborhood in case of breach during a flood. The area behind the dam would become swampy because the mobile wall could reach up to 4 meters, which requires two-three times as deep ferroconcrete foundation on the whole 3 kilometres long riverside section. This underground wall would cut the underground water streams coming from the hills at a depth of 6-8 meters, which would result in swappiness on the protected side of the wall.

Experience shows that all of Budapest is threatened by more frequent and intense floods, which is linked to climate change, the artificial narrowing of river floodplains, the reduction of the riverside's green areas, the growth of paved, fast-running areas with low water retention capacity, clear-cutting of forests and soil erosion in the mountainous areas. If Budapest continues to narrow its floodplains

with investments like the Római Part, then both the level and frequency of floods will increase, and the decision-makers will act against the EU Floods Directive.

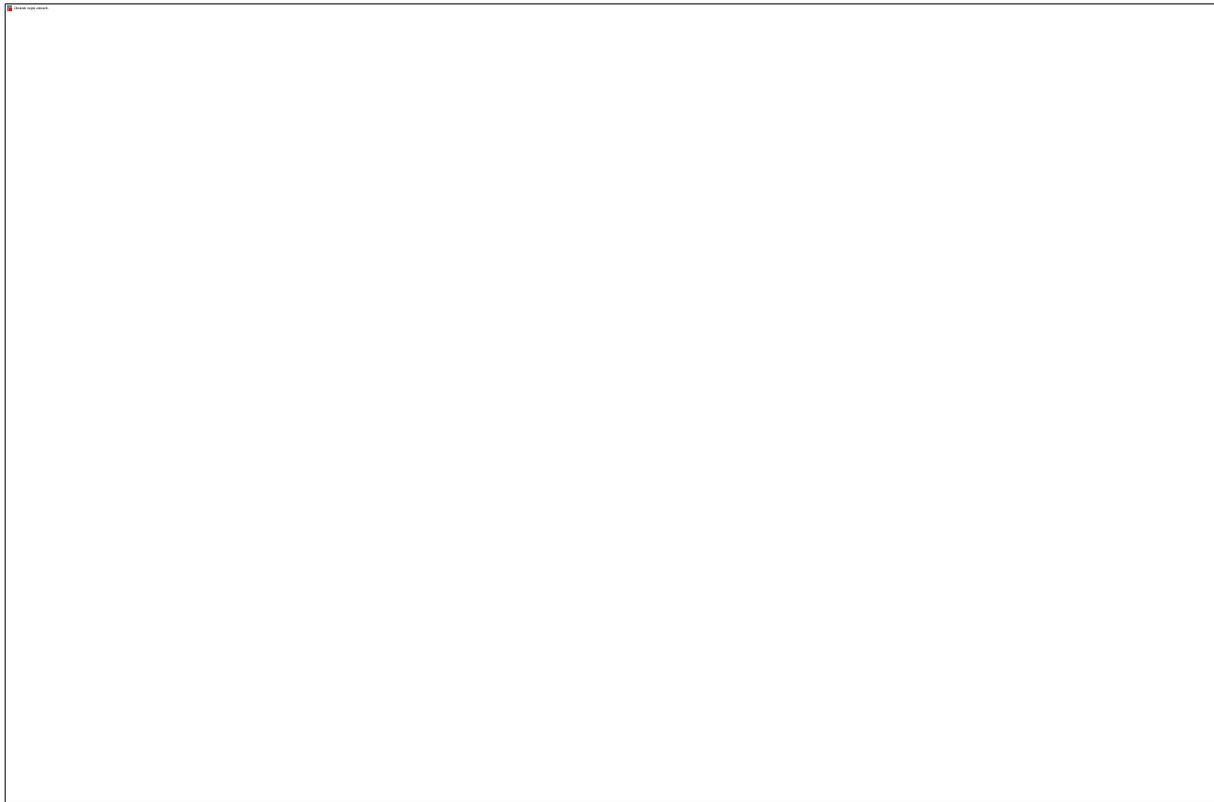
Local people and 58% of the population of Budapest (according to a [research](#) conducted by the Závecz Research in 2017 ordered by Greenpeace Hungary) support the development of a centralized process of flood protection at the banks, which protects the area against the middle-range floods happening in every 5 to 10 years and which does not damage the environment. Local activists and many professionals suggest to construct the new dam further away from the embankment along Nánási street and Királyok street, that has been a secure solution for decades. This would be a more secure, more rational and much cheaper solution than the mobile dam.



Photo: [Maradjanak a FÁK a Rómain](#)

Therefore, local people are represented by several civil society organizations and groups joined together in the [Maradjanak a FÁK a Rómain](#) (Save the Trees on the Roman Beach!) campaign that was founded in 2013 by the [Valyo, Város és Folyó Egyesület](#) (City and River Association), when the destructive and risky plans were published by the city council. The number of the followers of the [Maradjanak a FÁK a Rómain facebook group](#) has grown over thousands of people and a number of

civil society organizations joined their work too: the [KÉK - Contemporary Architecture Center](#), the [Hungarian Association of Landscape Architects](#), [Protect the Future](#) and other smaller groups. In March 2013, the group organized a demonstration of 2,000 people in the Római, which contributed to stopping the implementation of the proposed plans. In 2016, the dam was again put on the agenda. The campaign group was reconvened, and they involved the total population of 55,000 using the Római and affected directly by flood protection. In October 2016, this diverse team organized the demonstration of about 3,000 people protesting for a safe and environmentally friendly alternative of the dam. Besides organising demonstrations the members of the group has also collected more than 10,000 signatures and launched [facebook groups](#).



Activists collecting garbage - Photo: [Maradjanak a FÁK a Rómain](#)

According to critics the only people interested in and benefiting from the construction of the mobile dam are those who own real estates, villas and resorts - partly constructed illegally in the past decades - between the Danube and the Nánási street, directly in the floodplain of the river. They have an stake in higher property values through the complete flood protection of the neighborhood.

As a consequence of the debate and widespread opposition against the city council plans, the implementation of the dam construction works is still pending, and alternative solutions are still in discussion, but it is more and more hopeful that the mobile dam in its original form will not be built and the trees in Római Part can still be saved.

## Good practices

Unfortunately, nowadays the proportion of green areas is decreasing rapidly, but it seems that with cooperation there is hope that even our grandchildren can enjoy the beauty of a park or a green area.

*"It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished." - William H. Whyte*

The words of the American urbanologist, the founder of "Project for Public Spaces", show that public spaces can be built only with the involvement and participation of the people living there, the members of the local community. This opinion becomes more and more accepted in Hungary as well. Grassroot local initiatives and the organizations supporting them, which did not wait for external initiation, had (and still have) a key role in changing the way of thinking about the process of shaping and greening the environment.

## Greenbelt Program

Ökotárs Foundation launched a unique environmental [program](#) in 2006, with the aim to help communities create more and more beautiful green spaces and at the same time make these communities stronger and more environmentally aware. For more than a decade, the program was supported by the MOL company, and since 2018, by other donations on a smaller scale.

Hungarian civil society organizations which represent local communities may apply for support, with a minimum of 1500m<sup>2</sup> of green space to be created or renewed. Another basic condition is that the area must be open and accessible to everyone. Since 2012, communities of condominiums in Budapest could also apply to the program, and from 2014 onwards community gardens were supported, too. Besides tree planting, the program also covers the costs of cleaning up public spaces, setting up or renovating selective waste bins, as well as place bike storages, benches, tables, sculptures.

Applicants received grants of a few hundred thousand forints (app. 1500 € on average), and 20% of the total program costs had to be provided as own contribution, but in our experience, communities were able to mobilize two or three times bigger additional sources through mobilizing local resources.

The program supports the planting of indigenous plants only, and it is expected that implementation is carried out in an environmentally friendly manner and in the framework of community action with the involvement of the population of the settlement, the local government, local entrepreneurs and institutions. The goal is to encourage the participation of the whole community, including schoolchildren to work in the projects, teaching them how to protect their environment and to appreciate the fruits of their work every day in a nice park or playground. Of course, the creation of a green space is not only hard physical work, but a relaxing entertainment, because while the little and big ones are busy, the delicious food is being prepared, and you can hear pleasant music from the background. This is how this program not only focuses on our environment, but also brings communities together.

The success of the program is well-demonstrated by the fact that over the past 12 years, local organizations and the public have created hundreds of thousands of square meters of wonderful green space with enormous enthusiasm and mutual support, with the voluntary work or support of municipalities, schools and other local businesses and organizations. It has also been proven that not only money matters, as the success and long-term impact of the programs did not depend on the amount of money received but rather on the close co-operation of the participants, mutual support, and the local organizations' and people's enthusiasm, integrity and faith. Since 2005, 338 grantees have planted 117,000 trees, shrubs and flowers, on 1,820,000 square meters, with the involvement of nearly 30,000 volunteers.



Photo: [MOL Zöldövezet](#)

The application procedure usually had two rounds:

In the first round, applicants submitted an idea presenting the area and the way the local community would be involved in planning the greening and transformation of the space. The selected applicants could plan the final landscaping with the involvement of the local community and experts, and submit it during the second round. The winners of the second round received support to implement their program.

Applicants selected to the second round could take part in a one-day training session with a brief overview of the method of community planning. This was based on the book "How to Recreate a Public Space?" which all participants receive after the training. The publication is basically a translation of the American Guide for Public Spaces and its adaptation to the country, which has been specifically addressed to help people conduct their own community planning process. Some Hungarian case studies are also available in the Hungarian edition.

The success of the program is also proven by the fact that the renewed green surfaces have become real community sites and are regularly visited by residents. According to the reports the awareness

and cohesion of the local communities increased significantly as a result of the program, thus nearly 700 other community-related community events happened in the settlements. The intention of the Green Belt program was to increase the environmental awareness and knowledge of the population as well as the appreciation of environmental values beyond the renewal of green surfaces. The goal has been clearly achieved, as applicants have reported that the program has made communities much more aware.

Community Park in Nyim



The aim of the program of the Nyim Cultural and Tradition Association was to create a small park surrounded by indigenous trees and shrubs, that is suitable for sports, cooking, roasting bacon, walking and relaxing. Their goals were successful: during three occasions, with the active participation of the local population and the help of over 80 volunteers they planted native trees and shrubs and flowers. They built a petanque and a bowling track, an open fireplace and benches, a table, a selective waste bin and a small wooden bridge as well. Following the finishing of the last works the new co-developed area has indeed become a community space by a competition for children (bowling) and another for adults (petanque). The cohesive power of the community has been further strengthened by the placement of messages for the future generations put in a time capsule by the participants.

Grant amount: 600 000 Ft (1870 EUR)

## Tree of the Year

The aim of the Tree of the Year contest is to strengthen the relationship between people and trees and to raise awareness to the natural and cultural value of trees.

About the European Tree of the Year contest



The [European Tree of the Year contest](#) (ETY) originated in 2011. It was inspired by the popular Tree of the Year contest, which has been organised in the Czech Republic by the [Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation](#) since 2002.

The European round is a finale consisting of the winners of the national rounds. Every year, the online voting for the European Tree of the Year is organized by Environmental Partnership Association (EPA), of which the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation is a member.

The first European voting was organized in 2011. Since then the number of countries involved in the contest has risen from 5 (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia) to 15. We are helping to establish the contest in countries outside of Europe now.

The primary target groups are the local communities - civil society organizations, neighborhoods, schools, etc. - who care about green areas in their settlement and nominate their favourite trees in the competition. The indirect target group is the general public, who participate in the game in some form, such as a voter or a promoter in their circles or in the social media.

The voting period starts on the 1st of February every year and ends on the 28th. Everyone can vote for two trees. In the last week of the voting period the number of the votes is not public. The results and the winner of the contest, is unveiled in the award ceremony organised in Brussels in mid-March with the attendance of the nominators, organizers of the national contests, Brussels environmental stakeholders, supporters and media. The award ceremony is organised by the Environmental

Partnership Association and the European Landowners' Organisation, with support from the South Moravian Region, Mendel University in Brno and the S&D group from European Parliament.

The [www.treeoftheyear.org](http://www.treeoftheyear.org) website has 420 thousand unique visitors a year and the contest has 31,000 Facebook fans.

About the Hungarian Tree of the Year contest

The [Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation](#) (Ökotárs Foundation) organized the [Hungarian Tree of the Year contest](#) in 2010 for the first time with the aim of drawing attention to the trees in our immediate environment and the importance of nature and the role they play in our daily lives.

Anyone can nominate a unique individual tree or a groups of trees in the competition with a story that explains why the tree is important to

the community between the 21th of March and the 22nd of April. The age, beauty and size of the tree are not important, however it's a advantage, if it is indigenous, stands in public space or its history is related to an environmental case. The goal is to activate communities and support active communities. Nominations are accepted online through the Év Fája (Tree of the Year in Hungarian) website by submitting the name, species, height, GPS data, photos and most importantly he story of the tree.

From the trees nominated in the competition, the jury of Ökotárs Foundation chooses 12-15 finalists each year and the online voting decides which of them will receive the Tree of the Year Award. The jury also selects the Hero Tree - this recognition is about trees whose lives are in danger and for which their community actively work to save them. The contest's official partner, the National Forestry Association also selects a tree from the nominees that wins the Association's special award. In 2018 we accepted 35 nominees from all of the regions of Hungary and 12 were selected by the Jury.



The voting period starts in July every year and ends at the end of October. The number of the votes is hidden in the last week of the voting period just like in the European contest. Everyone can vote for one tree. In 2018 more than 16,000 people voted for their favourites.

The award ceremony is usually organized at the end of October with the attendance of the nominators, organizers, supporters and journalists. The winners are awarded with a health check and health care treatment for the tree, plates, diplomas and bird nests.

The Hungarian Tree of the Year is automatically nominated to the European Tree of the Year contest every year. In its 9 year old history the European contest was won by the Hungarian tree 4 times: in 2012, 2013, 2016 and 2019.

#### Campaigning - case study

In 2018 Zengővárkony's survivor, the sweet chestnut nominated by the Foundation for Pécsvárad won the Hungarian contest and finished fourth in the European. How they did it?

At the beginning the foundation only aimed at nominating a tree from the local sweet chestnut-wood because of its special history and the significant role it played in the community's past. Eventually they decided to choose not the most beautiful, biggest or oldest tree, but the one that with the most unique story: this particular tree - besides the difficulties experienced by the whole wood (diseases, etc.) - also survived once that it was set on fire. Luckily this tree was also the best for making photos and videos which are the most important elements of the campaign. Its location is also perfect - although it stands on a private land, at the same time it is on the route of Hungary's longest and most important hiking trail and can be visited by anyone.



Photo: Éva Kutas

All 400 people living in Zengővárkony village, but also the 4000 inhabitants of nearby Pécsvárad town were enthusiastic during the whole campaign, and both municipalities supported the tree. Four people were part of the organizing team and each of them spent one-two hours a day with working on the campaign during the voting period. One of them used rather his personal connections, while the other three were more involved in the online communication.

In the Hungarian contest the campaign team had no financial support, they paid Facebook advertisements from their own pockets, but for the European campaign the municipalities and a couple of local businesses contributed 880 EUR that made it possible to produce a professional [video](#) and to pay for Facebook ads. The nominators considered the videos to be most important tools of the campaign as they reached more people with them than with anything else. The second video produced by professionals reached 50% more views than the first one made by volunteers which means that even if there is no financial support it's possible to make a successful video.

80% of the campaign ran on Facebook. In the first part the nominators used their own and the municipalities' channels. Later they involved the county and nationwide media too. In the second part they also involved other communities such as schools, universities, civil society organizations and at the end celebrities as well. They also used Instagram but it was a bit less effective than Facebook. They pointed out that it's also important not to overdo the campaign to avoid the danger of boring the people.

As a result of the campaigns the tree not only won the Hungarian contest and had the fourth place in the European one, but they also activated several communities and made the sweet chestnut wood and its story popular in its narrower and wider environment as well.

In 2018 Ökotárs Foundation put even more emphasis on the community involvement aspect than in the previous years. The success of the tree always depends on the mobilizing capacities of the nominators, although through its own means Ökotárs also promotes voting, especially in the media. Particularly in medium-to-small settlements (for example, three years ago in Bátaszék) the whole population was active in the campaign. We aim to make better use of these energies and maintain them in order to protect the urban green spaces. Therefore we organized a one-day workshop for the nominators in order to teach them use the basic methods and tools of community involvement and communication.

We also want to use the popularity of the contest to put more emphasis on action to protect green spaces, that unfortunately is a problem not limited to Budapest. We communicate that voting and taking part of the Tree of the Year contest is important but not enough in order to protect green areas. Using our cooperation with Greenpeace Hungary we share tools and ideas regarding tree planting and rescuing, joint actions, cooperation with local governments. We also follow up and communicate the results and news regarding these joint actions through our online platforms (the [Év Fája facebook page](#) has 4600, the [Ökotárs Alapítvány page](#) has 2800 followers) and the media. As a result our goal is to improve the contest's community building and action generating aspects - besides the awareness raising.

The winner of the Hungarian Tree of the Year 2018 and European Tree of the Year 2019 contests

The Almond Tree of the Snowy Hill in Pécs - Symbol of eternal renewal

Species: almond tree (*prunus dulcis*)

Age: 135 years

Region: Pécs city, Baranya county, Hungary



Photo: György Mánfai

The almond tree in front of the the Church of Our Lady of the Snow has been delighting its visitors for 135 years. The almond blossoming has been a symbol of eternal renewal and education since Bishop Janus Pannonius wrote his poem about an almond tree in 1466. Standing on white rocks, defying the winds, this old tree was already being mentioned with love 100 years ago, and the wonderful panorama of the magical landscape and the imprint of the historical ages has astonished many more since.

Hero trees 2018

Trees on the Roman beach

Species: various

Age: 40-50 years

Region: Budapest, Hungary



Photo: [Város és Folyó Egyesület \(VALYO\)](#)

There are about 1500-2000 trees on the 3.2 km section of the Roman beach, providing a unique environment for relaxation and sports in the city; habitat for many bird species, and the floodplain forest is a hunting ground for beavers; shade and cool air in the summer. The hero trees of the Roman beach are not simply trees. They have become symbols of safe flood protection for 55,000 people living in the bay because the mobile flood protection wall is risky; they have become symbols of the preservation of the current recreational function of the floodplain, as if the dam is built on the shore, the current boathouses will be dismantled and the floodplain will be filled with residential complexes.

## Recommendations

### Selecting the area

- Carefully select the affected site - for example, don't choose an area that is often threatened by flooding, or inland water.
- Contact the owner of the area and the municipality and clarify the possibilities for cooperation, and what the owner is planning to do at the area and/or at its surroundings. Make sure that there is going to be no such works nearby that makes it impossible or difficult to approach the area to be developed.
- Survey people who are using the space. Ask them to rate its attractiveness, use, sociability and connections to other areas and their ideas regarding how to make it better.

### Involving the community, cooperating

- [The community is the expert!](#) Identify and convene the stakeholders as well as skills that could be brought to the project. Discuss the broader, long-term goals of each stakeholder and the settlement at large. Contact the institutions, organizations and individuals of the settlement at the very beginning of the program. Present the ideas and be opened to the remarks of the stakeholders.
- Contact the mayor (or the deputy mayor concerned), the council architect, the chief gardener and if the area is owned by the municipality, then the company that cares for it.
- In order to do “small jobs” (eg. garbage collection), it is worthwhile to look for institutions with “many hands”, eg. kindergartens, schools, civil society organizations, communities, sports associations.

### Planning

- Involve the community in the preparations of the planning: observing the place; talking with people who use the place about their ideas; identifying issues; identifying opportunities for changes that could be made in the short term.
- Before starting the work, make precise and realistic plans involving professionals if possible. Get the public utility map, development plan, gardening plan for the selected area and adapt the ideas to these. Examine the soil structure of the selected area. It may happen that the soil quality limits the list of plant species to be planted or requires the usage of machinery.
- Assign several dates to the works because the weather can interfere at any time. Agree on the dates with other active groups in the city in time in order to avoid organizing more than one event at the same weekend.

### Communication, media

- Continuous communication is very important to keep the issue always on the agenda - and in the heads. Partial results are also worth reporting.
- If possible, involve someone from the media in the program's "headquarters", because they will feel the work their own, thus the density and mood of the reports will be different.
- Keep track of the work on our online surfaces, publish all relevant news and photos.

### Implementing

- Start with short-term improvements - e.g. flower planting - that can be made and can encourage further works.
- Prepare the soil before planting. Larger excavations (grounding, ditching, digging pits for trees, etc.) must be carried out by professionals. Be careful not to plant trees under electric lines, because in a few years they will grow on the wire.

- If possible plant native trees and shrubs. Be careful to choose plant species that most people do not have allergies to.

#### Budget, finance

- Consider that there may be changes in the price of certain products during the implementation.
- Involve a professional in the budget planning.
- Do not count on verbal promises for donations, write agreements about them.

#### Closing the program

- Always list the people, organizations and institutions who helped the program.
- It's also possible to express gratitude by diplomas or keepsakes.
- Organize an opening ceremony full of heart if possible link it to a local community celebration, event (city day, village day etc.) or public holiday.

## Useful links

[11 Principles of Creating Great Public Spaces](#) according to [Project for Public Spaces \(PPS\)](#)

[European Tree of the Year contest](#)

[Health Indicators of Sustainable Cities](#)

[Ladder of citizen participation, Sherry Arnstein 1969.](#)

[Ligetvédők Park Protectors](#)

[Maradjanak a FÁK a Rómain \(Save the trees on the Római\)](#)

[MOL Greenbelt Program](#)

[Proclamation to Protect Urban Green Areas and Green Areas](#)

[Study on urban green spaces by Greenpeace Hungary](#)

[World Urbanization Prospects - The Revision 2018](#)