

European Garden Heritage Network - Award 2014
Award ceremony at Shloss Dyck, 5th September 2014

**Laudation for category: “LARGE SCALE GREEN
CONCEPTS”**

By

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Member of the jury, EGHN**

**Winner in the 4th category: (the network of) National Urban
Parks, Finland**

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Headlines within the field of urban planning are today about density and identity, vertical structures both for buildings and greenery, boosting awareness of social economics and a huge range of other more or less honorary attributes. It seems that the old discussion and fundamental concept of green fingers, green ring belts and Garden cities are not breaking news any longer. We all remember and notice the important distinction between the

Nature of the city (which everyone talks about) and Nature in the city which is not so trendy in glossy Architectural magazines.

But there are exceptions. Some ideas and visions just need a different environment to be sown, grow and then harvested. One such best practice is soon to be awarded. It's the planning concept and implementation of the National Urban Parks of Finland.

I start with a small excuse. May I dare to say that you are not world-famous for high skylines, urbanity and your everyday life 24/7. No! Finland is the country of thousands of lakes, huge never-ending forests and a maze-like archipelago. In this landscape Finnish cities have found an extremely good and strategic location – frequently in reach of the landscape and natural assets.

The tradition to both live and work close to nature obviously penetrates the minds and the senses of your people. Your national authors and poets all remind us of different ways to relate to nature. Runeberg - a little bit rational. Alexis Kivi - very romantic, Juhani Aho - personal indeed and Tove Jansson's beloved nature framing the Mumin stories. Last but not least - Eino Leino - who in the poem Nocturne captures landscape and life.

*The forest's darkness breathes nearby,
The red of clouds where day sinks deep,
The blue of windy hills asleep,
The twinflower's scent, the water's shade--
Of these my heart's own song is made.*

Do I need to say – you just did listen to the soul of a great nation.

Is it a coincidence, is it a sign in the sky or just an ordinary Finnish invention and miracle. Eino Leino wrote a poem. Finnish ministry of Environment did translate that poem to a Planning Act and several cities did translate it into a network of National Urban Parks.

Those parks are now counting six and there are planning objectives for another four or five. They all have impressive assets. They consists of valuable land for urban diversity, cultural historical structures, central scenic parks as well as extensive green areas, ecological corridors and a network of pathways linking city parks with rural areas at the urban fringe. They also consist of shores of bays and creeks even when they locate nearby attractive city centers. And very often – they also constitute valuable land for further urban construction and expansion.

Our Finnish colleagues are committed - these urban parks are both of national and local importance. They are protected green areas by national law. Not with rigid rules but on the contrary - with intelligent guidelines. These must be considered when society changes and there is a need of new master planning.

Of course you are aware of the global and urban threats. You try to avoid urban sprawl and deal with the challenges of climate change. But you don't go for just one solution – you prefer broad perspectives and you are dedicated to local needs, demands and concepts.

You have promoted the awareness of green resources. They from now on will be more well-known for all in charge for planning in

the cities within your network – and of course also for the public. Those issues are today taken care of in up and running cities as Hanko, Heinola, Hämeenlinna, Pori, Parvoo and Turku.

My friends, you today hear about the birth of an important new trend within urban planning which we all hope will bloom beautifully.

Many European cities have a lot to learn from the concept National Urban Parks. Follow this best practice – and when do remember the line of Eino Leino with some added words from me:

*“The twinflower's scent, the water's shade--
of these National Urban Parks my heart's own song is made”.*

Congratulations to Ministry of Environment and all Cities of Finland involved!

We welcome our Finnish friend and colleague Mr Jukka-Pekka Flander to get the award!