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Environmental education in the town of Strakonice year by year or “Pilgrimage through the Contemplative Landscape”, Municipality of Strakonice, Czech Republic

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**NOMINATION OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC FOR THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE AWARD 2013
RECEIVED THE CZECH LANDSCAPE AWARD 2012**

Pilgrimage through the Contemplative Landscape or The Environmental Education of Strakonice Town Year by Year

The ecological educational project in Strakonice began back in 1997 when the Strakonice municipal authority - environment department came up with a series of articles on protected monumental trees. A year later it published articles about protected areas, and the series was concluded in 2001 with an exhibition on the natural beauties of the Strakonice district and its twin towns in Netherland and Switzerland. The idea of presenting landscape through thematic sub-projects is nothing new, but the use of the latest technologies makes it more attractive, especially as it is possible to involve people of all ages and thus contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.



The project is made up of one-year lasting sub-projects that follow one another thematically and focus on landscape in natural and cultural perspective. Each of the thematic series is accompanied by a quote from a book called *Contemplative Landscape* by the author Ladislav Stehlík (first published in 1947), a native of Bělčice village near Blatná town in the South Bohemian Region. Linking a perspective that is over fifty years old with the present day creates an inspirational view of the historical development of the South Bohemian landscape. The sub-projects highlight the uniqueness of the landscape of Strakonicko, Blatensko and Vodňansko micro-regions in the natural, cultural and historical context. It underlines the concept of sustainable development, the importance of functional and sustainable use of the landscape as an interconnected and interrelated entity which, when understood and used correctly, ensures its people a high-quality, healthy and satisfied life. In the long term this project raises public awareness of the South Bohemian landscape while helping people attain a healthy self-confidence and respect towards the place where they were born and live.

General awareness about the importance of the landscape for societal development is given primarily through the conceptual character of the project as a whole. One component of the landscape is presented in an integrated manner each year. The set of information is continuously supplemented in order to create an integrated complex. 11 out of the 14 planned thematic series have been executed so far:

- 2003 – Step by Step Visiting the Protected Nature Areas of the Region: a series about the areas of special protection
- 2004 – Step by Step Visiting the Protected Nature Areas of Blatensko and Vodňansko micro-regions: a follow-up to the region's areas of special protection
- 2005 – In the Shade of Protected Trees (together with the year's theme, Year of the Tree): an introduction to the region's protected monument trees
- 2006 – At the Springs of the Living Water I: series about the most important "miraculous" and healing water sources and wells
- 2007 – At the Springs of the Living Water II: part two of the series – linked to the clean-up of natural water sources
 - Town in Nature, Nature in Town: series on the natural and cultural monuments and wonders of Strakonice linked to the renewal of small-scale religious architecture and the pilgrimage site Dobrá Voda in Podsrp hill near Strakonice. This cycle was incorporated as a part of the celebration on an occasion of 640th anniversary of receiving a town charter of incorporation and granting of town privileges to Strakonice.
- 2008 – Rivers, Brooks, Streamlets – From Springs to Estuaries: series on watercourses linked to the clean-up of the river Otava, the building of the source and stories of Otava bargeers in Timber Rafting
- 2009 – On the Ripples of Silver Fishponds: series about the most important fish ponds and pond culture systems in the region
- 2010 – On the Pathways of Mansion Parks and Gardens: series on the region's chateau and mansion parks and gardens, the launch of monitoring and the planting of original fruit tree varieties on what used to be farm estates
- 2011 – The Mysterious Shadows of the Forest: series on forest complexes in the region linked to the International Year of the Forest – a reminder and clean-up of Jewish forest cemeteries
- 2012 – "He Went that Way, He Had Bagpipes": series linked to the Year of the Bagpipers 2012 organised by the town of Strakonice, presenting the bagpipe tradition in Strakonice in connection with the historical development of the region's landscape (Name of the theme was created from the words of traditional folk song)

In the series planned for 2013, primary school pupils will prepare – as part of a literary competition – stories on the historical creation and utilisation of the landscape as preserved in the storytelling of seniors. A series on mineral wealth and a series on the relationship between the South Bohemian landscape, region and culture (literature, painting, film, folklore) are planned for 2014 and 2015 respectively. An update and a re-start of the project as a whole is scheduled for 2016.

Each series consist of a theoretical part and a practical part. First the Council release an announcement of the yearlong theme and the competition for schools and school pupils. The announcement is followed by

a series of 10 up to 18 articles, which in a narrative form describe natural, cultural and historical context to the selected landscape features. Articles include even legends and gossips which could be found in the history books, chronicles or narrations of elderly. Articles are published every year, initially in the local journal, and since 2006 they are freely available on Strakonice websites. Each article is concluded by the set of questions. The school pupils can answer these questions and the winner (class/school) receives a price of an attractive field trip for up to 20 pupils to other regions of the Czech Republic.

This activity is accompanied by the thematic lectures led by experts for school-pupils, adults, elderly or professionals, other competitions (thematic paintings), exhibitions, radio – broadcasts, publishing DVDs and publications. Practical activities such as renewal and clean-up of water sources and wells, clean-up of the river banks, reforestation, renovation of religious architecture, cemeteries, monitoring and re-planting of original fruit tree alleys became traditional in this area within these years. All social and age groups of the public, including the disabled are involved in the project. The project has been utilised in school teaching as well (biology, history, geography etc.).

The project also initiated long-term co-operation between primary schools and the environment department of the Strakonice municipal authority. Schoolchildren may also take part in the decision-making process through the Children's Board, especially in matters concerning the appearance and tidiness of the town, the protection of environment or the preservation of cultural heritage. The eldest generation (seniors, homes for the elderly) also take part in the project by contributing their memories of what farming and the relationship to landscape were like in their time – these inputs are subsequently used when preparing thematic texts and articles.

The project inspired the creation of a national campaign called City of Trees. In 2010 Strakonice was designated as the venue for the national Ecological Education in Practice conference for employees of municipal authorities of the South Bohemian region, employees of non-governmental non-profit organisations and anyone else in the Czech Republic who might be interested. The project was also a source of inspiration for the town of Blatná, which started to organise annual thematic exhibitions on environmental topics.

The information people acquire through the project makes them realise their ties to South Bohemia as a place from where they may set off to the rest of the world but where they may also return to at any time. What is more, they may do so feeling that they are part of "European" nature, because, for example, water from the rivers in Strakonicko micro-region flows into the seas; because the harsh living conditions in this region often forced previous generations to seek work in other countries; because the fish from the micro regions of Blatná and Vodňany ponds are exported to the rest of Europe; because the international bagpipes festival in Strakonice is the result of not forgetting one's roots; because timber from South Bohemia's forests helped build Prague, Vienna and even Hamburg. To say it simply, because the "locals" form a distinct part of Europe and have something to offer. And this is where the main strength and power of the unique landscape of South Bohemia lies.

An example of the announcement of the year-long theme of the project:



The Municipality of Strakonice
The Department of the Environment



January 25, 2006

The municipality of Strakonice in collaboration with municipalities of Blatná and Vodňany are pleased to announce an opening of the 4th year of the environmental competition for the second grade of elementary schools in Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany districts with the theme:

"At Springs of Living Water" of the Contemplative Landscape 2006

Every Wednesday, starting on February 15th and ending on May 3rd, 12 articles will be published on Strakonice websites, representing "miracle" springs of Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany districts, almost sacred in the past, often completely forgotten today. It was believed that their water heals and recovers. Their basic data, characteristics and related attractions will be given in short articles and at the same time all existing functional spa towns and villages in the Czech Republic will be presented as well. As well as past years, the guide through the theme would be the local poet Ladislav Stehlik, author of the book of poems "The Contemplative Landscape".

Ending of every article will consist of two questions, focused on natural, cultural and historical context to the subject. It will be necessary to deliver answers to the Strakonice INFOPOINT or via e-mail: miroslav.sobr@mu-st.cz by Monday week after. The competition will be held in a separate line for primary schools and in a separate line for the public, so that every individual can attend. After the end of the twelve part on May 3rd, the overall evaluation of responses will be held. The best schools will be announced. The correct answers and the interim order of schools will be published in Tuesday's edition of the journal.

After the experience of past years, either the school as a whole or an individual classroom groups may participate in the competition. Within the framework of the competition, individual class groups would be assessed separately.

The best schools will receive material prizes and for schools at first and second place of Strakonice District and the winning schools in the districts of Blatná and Vodňany will receive a two day field trip in addition.

Examples of the articles published in local newspaper or on the internet:

Theme: "Visiting Protected Nature Areas in the Region" 2003

Article No. 8, A Natural Landmark - Pools at Hajské (6.67 ha)

In a river valley between villages Hajská and Modlešovice, wave after wave is rolling on into the distance, creating an endless series of heaps - a remnant of our gold-rushed ancestors' activities, first Celts, who named the river then known as Watava (Rich Water), and later Slavs. Goldbearing placers have achieved prosperity during the Lucemburghs reign, afterwards they flickered out. But in 1943 explorations proved that the average gold content is still 0, 018g on the solid meter of local sand and noteworthy is also the great content of pyropes! For its importance heaps at Modlešovice were declared a protected archaeological site.

We are going to explore their western part, near the Hajská village. After the end of the gold rush heaps were turned into a pasture. The area has gradually gone through a natural regeneration and has been periodically flooded by the river. These processes have created labyrinth of pools, lagoons and lakelets among heaps, a true paradise full of birds, smells and little frogs. An expert would find delight in European Green Toad (*Bufo viridis*), Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*), Fire-bellied Toad with red spots on its belly (*Bombina bombina*), or Marsh Frog (*Pelophylax ridibundus*). But the most rare and protected one is the Common Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates fuscus*), the only frog that can be identified from others by its eyes. However non-experts and children favorites are European Tree Frogs (*Hyla arborea*) and our little "crocodiles" – Common Newts (*Triturus vulgaris*).

Another reason for the emergence of the protected area is an unusual combination of sun-loving and xerophilous vegetation on heaps and wetland vegetation of water pools. Protected Water Violet (*Hottonia palustris*) in the white and pink carpets covers round eyes of ponds. It is a reward for the costly soil exposure and cleaning of the pools, which was done few years ago. This activity also boosted up the growth of massive Tufted Loosestrife (*Lysimachia thyrsiflora*), small meadow Starwort (*Stellaria palustris*) and carnivorous Southern Bladderwort (*Utricularia australis*). Regular mowing of aggressive Fescue Grass and cutting off self-seeding birches and aspens, favors the growth of Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza majalis*), Sweet Flag or Calamus (*Acorus calamus*) and Yellow Irises (*Iris pseudacorus*). All together it creates a contrast to endless carpets of Heather and Blue Daisy (*Jasione*) on the top of heaps.

Everything here is reminiscent of the golden treasure hidden in sand - elegant Golden Oriol (*Oriolus oriolus*), shimmering shiny feathers of pheasants, flying beetles Rose Chafers (*Cetonia aurata*), blooming

golden flower of Dense Mullein (*Verbascum densiflorum*). Yes it is wonderful and beautiful here, but golden treasures you have to search elsewhere ...

"In the Shadow of Protected Trees" Across the Contemplative Landscape 2005

Article No. 19

Theatrical Linden in Březí village

(The circumference of the trunk is 720 cm, height 24 m, estimated age at least 500 years)

Linden in the village of Předmíř

(The circumference of the trunk is 640 cm, height 26 m, estimated age - 400 years)



"In a gentle land of silhouettes you anticipate "Oujezd" behind the walls, "Předmíř" hill behind the wave of forests, "Zámlyni" with the shining fishponds, and in the back behind the surface of the "Metelský" fishpond you feel an outline of the "Třemšín" mountain. It's a breathtaking sight, in which stripes of fields, forests, ponds, sunshine and shadows vary as chessboard pattern - astonishment and reverie."

Here is a poetic description of the north part of the Blatná district, which branch out to hills named "Brdy" and to which a potato flower was putted into heraldy by the poet. The poet could not choose a better option, as potatoes and Předmíř creates an interconnection, which has a great sound in the agricultural sphere. Only small fields had to give way to modern mass-production, but the soul of the landscape has not changed. It remained pensive, melancholic and faithfully captured by two protected lindens, one in Předmíř village and another in nearby village - Březí. Both are ancestral lindens, which were supposed to bring peace and happiness into the house of the family settled on a farm. By the size, shape and location in villages, they resemble siblings. And maybe they also have a similar fate, as life flows slowly, calmly and without undue excitement in this beautiful corner of Blatná micro-region.

The exception was a rainy August of 2002, when the nearby fishpond "Metelský" got into the Czech history. Storm water wave from a cracked dam swept away part of the Metly and Předmíř villages. It has also kicked off another huge wave, but this time, the wave of human solidarity, on which the whole nation can be rightfully proud of. After three years the fishpond was repaired, new houses were built in villages and those tragic events are forever stored in a fizzing memory of the linden in Předmíř.

Its older sibling in Březí village was spared of such experiences. However, it can tell us other stories, because, according to a local tradition, its origins reach to the times of Charles IV., and even Jan Žižka (significant Hussite leader of Czech descent) sat down in its shadows as well! But the linden prefers to remember a famous amateur theatre, which was placed nearby in the former Inn named "U Kloučků". The pride of the local community was a game "Dog Headed" written by Alois Jirásek, which was played in costumes loaned from the faraway Prague. It is a pity that there was not also another game played "The Lantern". There is no other stage that could offer such a beautiful lime tree to shelter miller's Hannah, like that one in Březí village. In those times it had itself a spacious hole, which would easily include even three Hannahs. Over the years, the hole has healed, which is a sign, that the "theatrical" linden in Březí is still far from to say its last word, which we kindly yield to the Lady of "The Lantern" game: "I understand and perceive, what you should have known but you haven't, or you have, but still ungenerously have disturbed. The tree here, it presents the feelings of people, sacred by their respect and loyalty... ". We have to agree tacitly with these words by looking at the massive crown and trunk scarred by centuries.