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Dzintari Forest Park, Jurmala City Council, Latvia

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National selection for the Council of Europe Landscape Award in Latvia and the project “Dzintari forest park”

Landscape management, planning and development issues are being increasingly emphasized since European landscape convention came into force in Latvia in the year 2007. Many municipalities recognize value of landscape and pay particular attention to their integration in the public space, but during the economic crisis that began in 2008, project development was limited due to lack of finance.

Therefore the “history” of the European Landscape Award in Latvia is very short and a special National Landscape Award has not been established. But every 2 years a selection of applicants for the European Landscape Award is held on a national scale.

In year 2008 and 2010 none of Latvian authorities or groupings considered their activities would qualify for this Award.

In year 2012 two local municipalities (*Jurmala town* and *Ādaži novads*) participated in the national selection of tender for European Landscape Award. Jurmala municipality presented the

project “*Dzintari forest park*” and Ādaži municipality - the project „*Recovering Adazi region’s waste dumping site*”*Utupurvs*”. Evaluation Commission of the project proposal was set up by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and applications were evaluated on the basis of rules governing the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe. The honour to represent Latvia on European level in the year 2012 was won by *Jurmala town* with the Project „*Dzintari forest park*”.

Why did Dzintari forest park project win? The answer is simple, because this project had followed all the rules and met the criteria set by the Council of Europe:

- 1. Sustainable territorial development** - Dzintari forest park is a sustainable solution how to preserve existing natural landscape, avoiding degradation and destruction by unattractive constructions. In addition the local government of Jurmala town has established rules for the management of the Dzintari forest park and provides funding for their implementation.
- 2. Exemplary value** -the project shows that it is possible to find a compromise between nature and city development. Project is an example of a good practice, because during the implementation of the project a solution is found how “to import” nature into the city life without any damage and make nature available to everybody.
- 3. Public participation** - during designing and building the park public were informed and public opinions and recommendations were taken into account by public consultations at the municipality.
- 4. Awareness raising** - Dzintari forest park is open and available territory for everyone - the place, where people can recreate from urban life and feel the nature and benefits from it.

Jurmala city

General facts about Jurmala:

- Biggest resort in the Baltics region
- Total area 100 km² (second biggest in Latvia)
- Coast line – 26 km
- 64% nature areas (including 34% forests)
- 56 000 inhabitants (fifth place in Latvia)
- 4000 historical buildings
- 408 architectural monuments
- 25 km to Capital city Riga centre
- 15 km to main airport «Rīga»

The specialization of the city - one of the lead Baltic sea region health resort, business, holiday and cultural center, that means – priorities of the city always are related to sustainable development, because the city can be proud of forests, dunes, white quartz sand beach, forests, Lielupe river and Baltic sea, but we always have to be smart in planning development in the city, because we are responsible of maintaining our natural treasures.

White quartz beach - the city's beaches are its largest draw. Four beaches have received the Blue Flag, which means they are clean, safe and well-maintained.

Mineral water, thermal water healing peat and sapropel mud – those treasures can be found in one part of the Jurmala city – Ķemeri.

National Nature park – “Ķemeru nacionālais parks” (NATURA 2000) is one of the biggest Natural parks in Latvia and it is partly located in Jurmala city. Rare and protected species can be seen in it. Popular is bird watching in the park. As well in Jurmala city one local nature park and two Nature preserves are located.

As resort most beautiful and attractive Jurmala is in summertime, but still Jurmala city council is working hard to extend the tourism season in Jurmala city with creating new services and infrastructure and supporting employers to develop new services and infrastructure according to Jurmala city specialization. Today during winter time in the city we can offer:

- Aqua park
- Closed concert Hall “Dzintari” (Opening in 2015)
- Jurmala city museum
- Winter tours in National Nature park – “Ķemeru nacionālais parks”
- Majori ice skating hall (01.11. – 30.04.)
- Cross-country skiing at the beach

The city as well is characterized by its wooden architecture with woodcut accents, cottage-style buildings and resort centers (19th century and the beginning of the 20th century). The wooden buildings of Jurmala are significant and unique cultural heritage. Jurmala buildings are made unique by the fact that historicism-style wooden houses are quite rare.

Jurmala city contains of 14 parts and one of those is Dzintari. The old wooden buildings is preserved in Dzintari. These houses were built by affluent people that is why the designs are ambitious and respectable. Dzintari is famous as well for the Open air concert hall “Dzintari” (unique in Europe), which regularly hosts outstanding artists and ensembles. And the third but not the least thing why Dzintari is well known and favourite is Dzintari forest park.

Dzintari forest park

How does it started

The idea that in Jurmala city the area where people can recreate from urban life, a place, where everyone, especially families can appreciate nature landscapes is needed has been on our minds since 2002.

Intensive development of public and living object construction around the nature territory increased significantly the number of visitors before the construction of the park. That could degrade park landscape in city centre. For that reason the idea was to arrange nature landscape according with new situation and includes nature into system of city infrastructure and save natural and different of the territory.

What we had – forest, partly collapsed walking paths (soviet legacy) and degraded territory.

Aim of the project - To protect and to preserve natural values rich landscape in the city centre, adapted it to the rapid development of infrastructure and urban life, to avoid natural landscape degradation by human activities.

The main aim of management and building was protect natural landscape in the city centre from damage and urban blight.

In 2003 we started to design the project and during period 2004 – 2005 detail plan of the park area was developed. In year 2006 the idea started to become true – we started to build the park.

During all the stages of the project Jurmala city specialists were involved – we kept an eye on all the process including choosing suitable and safest materials and equipment.

Building was finished in 2008 and the park was opened to everyone in June 2008.

Outcome of the project or what we did

1. Preserve natural landscape in the city centre.
2. Avoided natural territory degradation, adapting it to the urban life and making it available to everyone.
3. The infrastructure in the park is built considering the natural ground protection and infrastructure was built using natural materials, for example wood.
4. Find the compromise between the functions of city infrastructure and existing natural landscape.
5. Created beautiful holiday place for all family.

The Project showed that there is possible to find compromise between nature and city develop. Project is example of the good practice, because during the implementation of the project the solution how “to import” nature in to the city life was founded.

Good practices:

- The natural landscape in the city centre was saved, while surrounded territory was developing, including public and living buildings were built.
- Natural landscape were made available for everyone and at the same time protection of natural landscape from damage and human negative effect was provided/
- Infrastructure objects which were created to improve the park territory were built bypassing and respecting protected natural forms and grounds, and using natural materials with perfectly fit in natural landscape.

Dzinari Forest Park today

Dzintari forest park is unique because its locations - its thirteen hectares wide natural are located in the centre of Jurmala City.

Natural landscape with sea and dune pine is one of the biggest treasures in the city. Dzintari forest park is sustainable solution how to preserve existing natural landscape, avoid from degradation and destruction by constructions and other human actions. The forest park is open and available territory for everyone.

The park is suitable for both: admirers of active and calm recreation. The infrastructure objects in the park are evenly distributed along all park territory. There are children playgrounds for all age groups, road for roller skating and pedestrian roads, areas for skateboard, streetball, cafés, parking lot and toilets in the park. The park is opened all year round. In winter park is an excellent place for

distant skiing on a lighted trail. The access is very convenient; there is a parking place for 200 cars at the park.

One of the park greatest values are 200 years old pine tree grove and habitats, which are preserved intact till the present day, notwithstanding the rapid development of surrounding areas.

Still developing

In 2010 a sightseeing tower was opened in the park. The tower high is 33,5 m and it reveals unforgettable view of Jurmala. The tower has 12 balconies on different levels so everyone can choose the height. Visiting tower is free of charge.