

U-parks, U-turns we love, Utena district Municipality

Utena is the tenth-largest town in Lithuania with a population of 34 000 (2012). Between 1960 and 1990 this industrial town was endowed with a living landscape preserving nature (a system of rivers, lakes and valleys) over an area of 140 hectares. Continued systems of preserved natural areas are ecologically important, but their aesthetic and recreational functions were not recognised. Between 1990 and 1998 the State embarked on a process of private property restoration and land privatisation. The municipality made great efforts to save these areas as public spaces. Combining the protection and management of the unique landscape to gain the recreational potential of the area, Utena District Municipality developed city gardens in the town centre (2005), the banks of the Krašuona River in a densely built-up residential area (2009), and the Dauniškis (2005) and the Vyžuona (2010) parks which are now large central recreational areas (total area 50 hectares).



The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe conferred a special mention of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention for the 3rd Session 2012-2013, for "Giving attention to the urban landscape as a common good" to the authors of the project for its great value in favour of democracy. This project is of great interest because it counterbalances the wave of land privatisation that followed the end of the Soviet era. Here, public land regains its importance and can be enjoyed by everyone on a daily basis since its reclamation of a public park network in urban areas. This system of urban parks is a fine exercise in landscape planning as applied to individual and collective well-being. The landscape is regarded as a common good, enabling participatory practice to be developed. This achievement undeniably has a sustainable development dimension. The involvement of the Landscape Architects' Association and the use of parks as "teaching areas" for future professionals is particularly interesting.