

Building bridges over the Sokolowka river

▶▶▶ Cont. from page 1

there is also a price to be paid. Increased flooding, ground water contamination and pollution are just a part of this price that more and more of the cities' inhabitants are having to pay for this new development.

Giving rivers back to the citizens

Driven by a concern for climate change a group of scientists and environmentalists are joining forces with the city administrators to "build a bridge" of common understanding in the community which will bring about a long held dream of liberating these lost rivers and giving them back to the citizens of Łódź to enhance their lives. Supported by a global EU-UNESCO action research programme aptly named SWITCH, a Learning Alliance Stakeholder Group has been formed to help realise this dream.

This is based upon a common understanding that by opening up these rivers to the skies once again we can give them space and at the same time provide ourselves with a space to breathe. To release them from their concrete tombs we can also liberate ourselves from the stresses and pressures of our modern lives. If we look after them then they will surely look after us is the thinking that is driving the enhancement of the Sokolowka River in the Baluty district of the city. To put back again the gentle meanders and wetlands along this river we will be returning it to a more natural existence and this will help absorb the flooding brought about by increasingly unpredictable summer rain storms.

Through re-established wetlands and vegetated margins, once again we can provide a refuge not only for the water vole and the sliver-sided fish but also we can make a space for us to spend time with our children or quietly walking our dogs, whilst at same time protecting our homes from the despair of flooding.

MARCIN WOJCIECHOWSKI



Pabianka reservoir on the Sokolowka river

SWITCH was conceived a few years ago to promote an active dialogue between scientists who were increasingly becoming alarmed at changing weather patterns and busy city planners trying to create better spaces in our urban environments. What was needed, it was argued, was the ability to engage both of these communities in the process of identifying the threats and uncertainties for water management in our cities of the future by providing real demonstration projects on the ground in more than 10 cities around the world.

A tall order, you may say, but Łódź, like in the other SWITCH cities, has risen to that challenge and is now bringing together the best of its researchers, engineers, planners and politicians into a Learning Alliance Stakeholder Group which will not only look at helping to deliver the vision that the Sokolowka River will be brought back to life but also to build a "brid-

ge of understanding" between this city and other cities around the world.

As we increasingly change from an industrial economy into that of a knowledge-based one, we need to share this new knowledge and learning with others and at the same time demonstrate to our citizens the real benefits on the ground of engaging in this global knowledge, addressing local issues and having a community-based delivery process.

Łódź, which itself means "boat" may once again restore this image of hope and be able to navigate itself into a prosperous and dynamic city where its inhabitants will no longer walk over their lost rivers but walk alongside the new green corridors that these will increasingly provide in the future. It will be our gift to our children and a small but very much needed contribution to saving this unique place that we call planet Earth.

Let us continue to build these bridges. ●

Łódź, a water city today? ...a water city tomorrow?



Do YOU know?

- Łódź is located in a watershed where 18 streams take their origin, among which the 13 kilometers long Sokolowka river.
- The climate of Poland has changed remarkably during the last decade, increasing spring precipitation and causing a deficit of water in the summer.
- The urbanization process in Łódź reduces the extension of green areas and ponds, increasing the production of more storm water and the frequency of flooding in some regions of the city.

- Flooding is one of the most important risks for some regions of city, causing safety and environmental health problems and the deterioration of some recreational spaces.
- Łódź's reservoirs are used for recreational purposes, but some of them are contaminated by the sewer system and storm water when the flooding occurs.

What can YOU DO for Łódź?

- Involve all society sectors (government, private and civil society) in the development and implementation of a master plan for water management of the city.
- Keep ditches, streams and river beds and banks clean to diminish flooding risks.

- Expand water reservoir areas and develop more recreational facilities for Łódź's citizens and visitors.

- Increase citizen awareness about Łódź's water management problems and opportunities and promote more active participation of the population.

- Create a risk map of the city related to water management and implement activities to decrease the vulnerability of the city, enforcing the water law and punishing the polluters. Join to the Łódź water management improvement movement!!!

We call upon you to join the Łódź SWITCH Learning Alliance for integrated water management. Let us work together to improve the living conditions of all Łódź people and visitors. ● **MARTIN RIVERA**