

Visiting Łódź, the water city

For the first time in my life, I had the great opportunity to visit the legendary and beautiful city of Łódź in Poland



•• I was part of an international group of professionals who participated on the Process Documentation for Learning Alliances and Action Research workshop, organized by several organizations, including the Sustainable Water Management Improves Tomorrows Cities Health (SWITCH) project staff of Łódź.

MARCIN WOJCIECHOWSKI

Initially, I was so impressed by the beauty of the city and the hospitality of its people. The combination of the historical and new buildings with the green areas and water reservoirs gave me a relaxing and safe environment that I needed during my visit and that I could not find in other cities, including my home town in Honduras, Central America.

Łódź is historically and geographically connected to water. It's a water city!!!! The city development was facilitated by the water resource presence in the region and the potential for using that resource for the development of the city remains high and promising.

During the workshop, I shared experiences and discussed with my colleagues from other countries the water management situation around the world, including Łódź's current situation. In general I feel Łódź is a privileged city in terms of availability of water, compared with other cities of the world. Do the Łódź people know that? Do they know the real value of water?

As part of the workshop's activities, I interviewed different important persons in the city, who expressed their opinion about the current water management situation Łódź. Jan Degirmendzic, Assistant Professor of University of Łódź, told me that the climate of Poland has changed remarkably during the last decade, increasing spring precipitations and causing deficit of water in the summer. The Professor Marek Zawilski at the Technical University of Łódź expressed his concerns about the current problems caused by the lack of a master plan for water management. He said the urbanization process, without planning, reduces the extension of the green areas and ponds, increasing the production of more storm water and the frequency of flooding in some regions of the city. He also mentioned that the lack of enforcement of the law related to the property and usage of rivers and stream banks and the blockage of ditches by solid waste or constructions are reducing the evacuation capacity of the storm water, causing flooding in some areas of the city. Flooding is one of the most important risks for some regions of the city, as it triggers overflowing of the



Teresa reservoir on the Sokolowka river

sewer system in some streets and contamination of water reservoirs, causing safety and environmental health problems and the deterioration of some recreational spaces.

The professor Maciej Zalewski, the lead of ERCE, the European Regional Centre for Ecohydrology, supported by the city authorities, has gained 600 000 Euros from the European Union for implementing a pilot project to improve water management in some areas of the city. The undertaking is included in the EU SWITCH project concerning integrated urban water management. Łódź is one of the nine demonstration cities around the world where the innovative solutions are to be tested in practice. I was so glad to see the local effort to solve the water management problem in Łódź, in coordination with international organizations, which will serve as an example for other cities around the world that face similar problems around water management. However, more efforts should be done through the implementation of the SWITCH project and other initiatives in Łódź, in order to raise the community's awareness about water management problems, to increase community participation in the different project phases, strengthen coordination and involvement of the different society actors (government, private and civil society) in the development and implementation of a master plan

for water management of the city, 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 holding the polluters accountable.

As member of the water and sanitation network in Honduras, I have seen the benefits of the networking system in order to strengthen coordination and provide better opportunities to join efforts in order to solve problems. The learning alliance implemented by the SWITCH Project in Łódź is an excellent opportunity for confirming the importance and benefit of working together on planning and implementing an integrated urban water management. The same approach could be used to solve other community problems.

After having a pleasant and productive visit to Łódź, I realised we have similar problems in other parts of the world, including my country; but at the same time we have resources and committed and motivated people who care about what is happening around them and are available and willing to help other people to improve their living conditions. Łódź, the water city, is not an exception!!! so I would like to return to Łódź in order to see the clean, safe and recreational city that everybody would like to have, including me. ●

MARTIN RIVERA