

# **The Ayazmo Park Case Study in Stara Zagora**

## **A First Case Study Report for NeighbourWoods**

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### **Case study Region**

The Stara Zagora Region is situated in the central part of Bulgaria (see Fig. 1), about 250 km eastwards of the capital Sofia and 180 km westwards of the Black Sea. The Balkan Mountain range/Stara Planina (more than 2000m high in this area) covers the northern part of the region. Just below the Balkans, the Sarnena Gora Mountain (800-1200m) spreads. The Upper Thracian Valley (ca 100-200m) occupies the central and southern parts of the region. The municipality of Stara Zagora is located in the Upper Thracian Valley, 197 metres above sea level, at the foot of the Sarnena Gora Mountain.

#### *Climate*

The climate is transitional continental. The invasion of Mediterranean air masses from the South is its typical feature. They cause significant warm effect and total melting of snow cover a few times each winter. In summer, they perform as dry, overheated ones. Another particularity of this area is the frequent invasion of continental atmospheric masses from the East. The average annual temperature is 12,9 °C. The average monthly air temperature amplitude is very low for Bulgaria – only 9,9 °C. The average annual sum of precipitation is 598mm. The four seasons are clearly constituted. The summer is hot and dry. The winter is relatively mild and snowless compared to the remaining territory of the country. The spring comes early. The autumn is warm until October.

#### *Soils*

The great variety of abiogenic and biogenic natural components determine the extremely variegated soil cover. Chestnut forest soil is the oldest in genetic aspect in the region. It is formed upon variable foundation of weathered matter of andesites, limestones, malms, etc. and Pliocene and early Quaternary deposits. This soil follows the uneven hilly relief. Chestnut forest soil is formed under transitional continental climatic influence with some Sub-Mediterranean characteristics. The soil has chestnut colouring and clayey texture. The variety of soil-forming conditions predetermines the existence of three varieties of chestnut forest soils in the area: typical, leached and lessive.

Another genetically old soil type is smolnitsa. It is a typical soil type for the Balkan Peninsular. The process of smolnitsa formation starts always in originally low location, even relief and heavy mechanic content of the soil-forming deposits. Their development was further influenced by forest (mainly oak) vegetation after the drainage of the region. Some signs of leaching and podzolization are well expressed nowadays.

Meadow soil occupies large areas in the region. Meadow-chestnut soil has primary meadow and secondary forest origin. It is formed upon the river terraces with relatively high level of ground water. Meadow-smolnitsa is formed in similar conditions. The meadow process in the latter is clearly manifested nowadays as well. Alluvial-meadow

soil is formed upon the alluvial deposits in the flood river terraces under the influence of high groundwater level.

Deluvial-meadow soil is formed at the foot of the Sarnena Gora Mountain in the presence of meadow plants and relatively high groundwater level. Deluvial deposits sometimes overlay the alluvial ones in the river valleys, and alluvial-deluvial soil is formed. At the outskirts of the deluvial train, the ground water periodically goes out at the surface. That gives rise to the existence of meadow-boggy soil.

#### *Natural vegetation*

The vegetation is into direct influence with the above cleared aedaphic factor. The natural vegetation populations in the region are as follows:

#### A. *Hydrothermal forests* of the lowlands

##### i) *Mesohydrophitic forests* in the river valleys upon alluvial soils

These forests used to occupy the flood river terraces of the bigger rivers. The dominating species of this population is *Fraxinus oxicarpa*. It is accompanied by *Ulmus foliacea*, and less abundant *Acer tataricum* and *Quercus pedunculiflora*.

##### ii) *Mesophitic forests* upon hydromorphic soil

Meadow-chestnut, meadow-smolnitsa, etc. soil varieties are thought to be hydromorphic ones. *Quercus pedunculiflora* reaches its optimal growing conditions in this situation. It is accompanied by *Acer tataricum*.

#### B. *Xerothermal forests* upon even relief and hilly outskirts with upon dry soil

##### i) *Mesoxerophitic forests* of *Quercus cerris* and *Quercus conferta*

The edificators are *Quercus cerris* and *Quercus conferta*. This population occupies even areas with poorer and dryer soils: typical, leached, and slightly podzolic chestnut soils. Small residual associations are located in several sites in the area. The society follows flat relief.

ii). The association of *Quercus pubescens* and *Carpinus orientalis* is formed upon old Pre-Quaternary surfaces on surrounding hills. The formation is largely represented at the outskirts of the valley at the foot of the Sarnena Gora Mountain. A residual society is located at an oblique southern slope North-East from Stara Zagora.

The natural fauna, in general, is thermophilic. Lots of Mediterranean, Pontomediterranean, Asiatic and steppe varieties are spread, together with Eurosiberian and European varieties.

The region is heavily anthropogenised. The natural phytocenoses are destroyed, and favorable conditions for the establishment of secondary xero-thermophilic shrubs appear. Mesophitic and xerophitic grass populations are widely spread too.

The artificial afforestation of the area is not always successful because of the usage of foreign for the region populations: *Pinus nigra*, and *Pinus nigra* in combination with *Pinus silvestris*; *Thuja orientalis*; *Betula alba*; *Robinia pseudoacacia*, etc. Forests dominated by *Pinus nigra* frequently occupy the natural ecological niche of oaks, or mixed societies of oaks and *Carpinus orientalis*. It is impossible for the natural fauna inhabitants of oak forests to survive. Afforestation with oak is rarely done. The afforesters prefer *Quercus petraea* and *Quercus robur*. 34% of the forests in the region occupy non-favorable locations.

The agrophitocenoses dominate at the place of natural forests and grasslands now. Intensive conventional agriculture was largely developed until the beginning of 90s. The area of the municipality is almost totally transformed nowadays into agricultural lands in the lowlands and artificially afforested areas in the higher parts of the territory to the North. Only some small residual forests are preserved here and there.

A dense net of irrigation and drainage canals are built in the basins of the rivers. This kind of anthropogenic interference changes to a great extent the natural river flow. Sub-dominant complexes of hydrophilic meadows develop along the canals.

#### *Land use*

The whole region covers an area of 5,152 km<sup>2</sup> constituting 4.6% of the total area of Bulgaria. The land use of the territory is divided as follows:

Agriculture	2961.4 km <sup>2</sup> (57%)
Forest area	1539.2 km <sup>2</sup> (30%)
Towns, villages and other settled areas	346.7 km <sup>2</sup> (7%)
Ores and minerals yield areas	150.8 km <sup>2</sup> (3%)
Water area	116.3 km <sup>2</sup> (2%)
Transport and infrastructure areas	37.6 km <sup>2</sup> (1%)

#### *Agriculture*

Agricultural land takes the largest share of the region. The lowland of the Thracian Valley is fertile and productive. Cereals, sunflower, cotton and vegetable fields, as well as orchards and vineyards are spread mainly in the lowlands in the South. The eastern part of the region hosts the world famous Valley of the Roses, which produces a considerable part of the world's attar – extract of roses. Not only roses, but also lavender, mint and valerian are produced in the valley among the Balkan Mountain and the Sarnena Gora Mountain in the northern part of the Stara Zagora Oblast. The large pastures in the plains and foothills are conducive for cattle and sheep breeding. According the governmental programme for structural reform the agricultural land has been restituted to former owners, while measures to accelerate the development of land market are being undertaken. Recent agricultural reform aims for comasation of the restituted property at the moment.

Due to the everlasting agricultural reforms and lost traditional markets in the period of transition, the decrease in agricultural production is enormous. During this period, the

size of non-cropped agricultural land constantly increases to reach to about 22% of the total arable land at the moment. Extremely low wholesale prices of agricultural goods and uncertain markets do not stimulate producers towards increase in the size of cropped land. Low level of agricultural development (in terms of mechanisation, cropping, fertilising, and use of high-quality seeds) contributes to low yields, deteriorated quality of production, and reduced market competitiveness. There is also a tendency towards decrease in the number of basic types of livestock: cattle, pigs, sheep and poultry.

#### *Mineral resources*

The Stara Zagora region is considered to be rich in underground mineral resources (in comparison with the territory of Bulgaria as a whole). The presence of large reserves of lignite coal in the Maritsa-Iztok Reserve is the basis of heavily developed thermal power supply industry. 72% of all the investigated resources of lignite coal in the country are concentrated in this coal reserve, while the total production of briquettes in Bulgaria is located only in the town of Galabovo (30km South from Stara Zagora).

Springs of thermal mineral water northwards and westwards from Stara Zagora (within 15-20km) show precious balneological characteristics and premise the development of a number of spa resorts.

#### *Industry*

Industry plays a leading role in the regional economy, generating more than 60% of the income. The energy complex Maritsa-Iztok, with its three large thermal power plants, plays a significant role in the economics of the Stara Zagora Region. It provides 38% of the electric power production of the country.

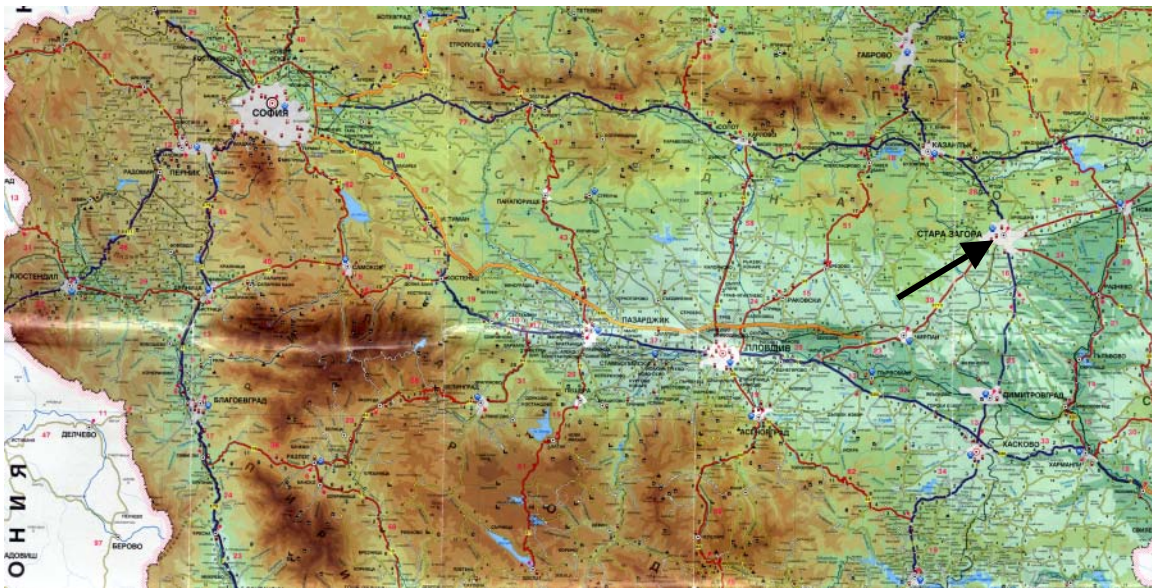
Other branches of the regional industry, such as mechanic construction, manufacturing, food processing, beer, wine and tobacco production, have also solid market positions. Most of these branches are export-oriented. As the country has only recently embarked on its way to free market economy, the economic context is changing rapidly. Since 1991 important steps have been taken in the frame of privatisation, banking, sector reforms, agricultural liberalisation. The lost positions of Bulgarian companies on the international markets, mainly in the former communist block, as well as the crises in Western Balkans (esp. Kosovo and Macedonia), highlight the difficulties in implementing economic reforms.

#### *Transport*

The region is a strategic crossroad between East and West, North and South. The intensive transport flows in the East-West and North-South directions are facilitated by Belgrade/Thessaloniki-Sofia-Bourgas and Bukarest-Russe-Istambul railway and highway infrastructure. The Shipka and Haimboaz passes through the Balkan Mountain are of great importance for the transport in the region. Highways and railways link the region with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania to the North, as well with Greece and Turkey to the South. The Stara Zagora airport functions only for agricultural purposes after the collapse of communism. In the recent past, there were regular flights to Sofia and to Bourgas.

### *Population*

4.7 % of the country's population is located in the Stara Zagora Region (382,977 inhabitants or a population density of 74 people per square km). A decreasing population number during the last decade is typical for Bulgaria as a whole, as well as for the Stara Zagora Region. Although the natural population growth rate is negative for the Stara Zagora Region (- 4,9 ‰) it is still higher than the Bulgarian average (- 5,1 ‰). The labour force, defined as the economically active part of the population elder than 15 and younger than the retirement age, represents about 44% of the total population. The degree of workload is lowest for people of higher education (75.5%) and highest for people of primary or basic education (92%). The region is characterised by significant potential of highly qualified engineers and technicians, agronomists, vets, nurses and physicians which to a high degree reflects the profile of specialised high and higher education in Stara Zagora, as well as the inherited structure of regional economy during the latest few decades. The rate of unemployment in the region varies per period. It was 9.6% for 2000. Youth (age 18-24) shows the highest rate of unemployment (33.6%). This is a shared tendency for the whole country.



*Fig.1 Stara Zagora in Bulgaria*

### **The municipality of Stara Zagora**

The territory of the Region is administratively organised in 11 municipalities. Majority of the population (68.4%) lives in urban areas. Stara Zagora (see Fig.2) is the largest municipality (1019,3 km<sup>2</sup> and 173,717 inhabitants, 2001). It ranks sixth in population among all Bulgarian municipalities - and it is the principal administrative, economic and cultural centre of the district. The municipality consists of the city of Stara Zagora and 50 villages located in its administrative boundaries (in Bulgaria, a municipality refers to not only the central city but also to its surrounding villages). More than 85% of the population lives in the city.

### *History*

The municipality of Stara Zagora has a long history, which goes back to some eight thousand years ago. The remains of Neolithic dwellings, and various archeological discoveries of Thracian and Roman times witness its ancient history. The town was first established by the Thracians during the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It was given the name of Beroe. Later on (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.) after the inclusion of Thrace in the Roman Empire, the town was rebuilt again close to the ancient Thracian village. At that time the town experienced the peak of its development and was named Avgusta Trayana. Later on, the city changed its name to Vereya and Irinopolis (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), named after the Byzantine Empress Irina. During the Middle Ages the city was named Boruy (13<sup>th</sup> until 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). The Turks conquered the city and named it Eski Zagra. The city was known under this name until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the liberation for a short period it was given the name of Zheleznik. The Ecclesiastical Council, 1871, in Istanbul named the city Stara Zagora. During the National Revival the city was one of the centres of the Bulgarian National Movement for Liberation. During the War of Liberation (the Russian-Turkish War) in 1877, some of the most violent and intensive battles took place in the surroundings of Stara Zagora. After the retreat of the Russian army, Turks burnt the city and razed it to the ground, leaving the Eski Mosque as the only untouched building. The city received its freedom for the second time on 23 January 1878. According to the Berlin Treaty, the city remained within the autonomous region of Eastern Rumelia. Numerous monuments on the territory of the city remind of these dramatic times. The historical memorial the “Defenders of Stara Zagora” was raised to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the Liberation at the place of the bloodiest battles.

The city was rebuilt again at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The design of the new city was made by the Czech architect Ljubor Bayer. It is characterised by a rectangular street pattern. The first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were years of economic growth and prosperity in Bulgaria and also in Stara Zagora. A period of social and economic renaissance of the city began. The establishment of socialist rule in 1944 and the spectacular rise of urban population in the post-war years (mainly as a result of land deprivatisation) resulted in a new architectural outlook of the city, which is largely dominated by high-rise apartment blocks.

### *Environment*

Stara Zagora challenges a range of environmental problems. The industry causes heavy air, water and noise pollution. Lignite thermal power production, for example, is associated with polluting emission of sulphur dioxide. Currently an internationally funded project on cleaner technologies is ongoing. But also the many smaller enterprises, scattered all over the area, cause considerable pollution. In recent years, pollution sources have become increasingly varied. Among them, transport and heating have become more prominent.

The goal of the Development Strategy of the Municipality of Stara Zagora 2000-2006, is the improvement of the quality of urban environment. A Local Environmental Action Plan (LEAP) has been developed to address a wide range of environmental problems the municipality is facing.

### *Green structure*

Agricultural lands occupy the southern lowland areas of the municipality, as well as the lower mountainous areas in the North where they alternate afforested terrains. The Bedechka and the Oryahovska River run through its eastern parts; the Syitliyka and the Banska River drain the territory in the West. The rivers are very small and get dry each year for a period of 75-100 days. The period of low waters continues for 4.0-4.5 months, and the river runoff during that time consists of only 3-5% of the annual runoff.

In the North and East, there are four large forest parks encompassing the city, namely Ayazmo (320ha), Borova Gora (40ha), Bedechka (106ha) and Chadar Mogila (130ha)

Within the city, there are several larger public parks: Alana (1 ha), the City Garden (1.1 ha), the Station Garden (3.6 ha), the Christina Morphova's Garden (2.2 ha); as well as numerous smaller ones – among them most favorite are the Lake (0.5 ha), Peperka (0.7 ha), Trakiya (0.6 ha), Podpolkovnik Kalitin (0.25 ha), etc. Numerous green spots are spread among the high apartment buildings; in the school, kindergarten and nursery yards, playgrounds. All these sites are municipal property. The public access is free, except for the kindergarten and nursery yards which, for safety reasons, are only accessible for the kids attending them. Schools, kindergartens and nurseries traditionally develop and take care of the green areas in their yards. Green spaces among high apartment buildings are located on public municipal terrains; they are developed and taken care of by citizens on voluntary bases.

A very characteristic green element of the city are the many lines of trees. Practically, all streets are lined by trees on both sides: among the various species used by city urban landscape architects predominate *Tilia tomentosa*, *Sophora japonica*, *Celtis australis*, *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, *Cercis siliguastrum*. A specific element of the urban green architecture are 'the green tunnels' of trees that meet each others branches across the street. There is a total of 12.8 ha of green grass area along the streets.

A lane with lime trees as a green corridor connects the city centre with the Ayazmo Park. Along this pedestrian walk are several sites which remember to the city's history: a Roman Forum used nowadays for theater and opera performances and concerts; 3000 year old ruins just across the street from the Forum is being transferred at the moment in a park area with lots of green elements; Roman mosaics, a theatre and an opera house, etc.

One of the Deputy Mayors of the municipality is responsible for environmental protection, including the urban green space, which is under the responsibility of the Directorate "Territorial and Urban Management". An exception is the zoo in the Ayazmo Park which is under the responsibility of the Cultural Directorate.

Every year the senior landscape expert of the municipality, working under the head of "Architecture, Projects and Control" department, prepares the management plans of the urban green spaces and trees for the next year. These are simultaneously made with the

according financial plan. The average annual budget for all the green spaces is about 100000 Euro. For example the planned budget for green areas in 2002 was 201400 Lev (equals 103018 Euro). This budget also includes 54 salaries: a landscape architect, 3 technicians (a forester with university degree and responsible for Ayazmo park, a highschool graduate in gardening and a highschool graduate in technical construction) and 40 gardeners (10 in Ayazmo park). In addition, since 2000, various work in green spaces is carried out by about 60-70 workers. In 2002, the involvement of 70 workers has been financed by the Beautiful Bulgaria Project (funded by UNDP and Bulgarian government) as well as a national programme for unemployed funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Care. The latter are employed on a timely basis (e.g. from 1/12/2001 until 1/4/2002) and help the regular staff (snow cleaning, litter sweeping). The actual work in the field is conducted by a separate company for greening and maintenance, which is owned by the municipality and employs about 90 of the workers. The main work is the maintenance of the urban parks. At present a detailed list is being made of infrastructure in need of repair. It is, for example, the intention to restore 86 playgrounds.

The Municipality of Stara Zagora, with the financial support of the Beautiful Bulgaria Project, has recently begun with a systematic green space improvement, the most significant being:

- 2000: the City Garden, focused on renovation of the alleys and infrastructure;
- 2002: the lane from the centre of the city to the Ayazmo park – Methody Koussev Street – focused on renovation of the street and sidewalks;
- 2002: Alana, focused on the renovation of the alleys and building a new historical monument;
- 2002: Ancient Street (a green area among Roman ruins from the 3th century A.D.)

The Municipality managed to complete the renovation of the central square (with a variety of green elements and decorative fountains) in 1999, and to renovate the Trakiya Park and build a new historical monument in 2000.

For the next years, the efforts will be focused on the Ayazmo park.

Voluntary labor forms an enormous amount of the total efforts of green space maintenance. Traditionally, citizens and school children participate in actions of planting trees in early spring. There is a believe in Bulgaria that every human being should plant at least one tree in his/her life. Each year, there are a number of planting initiatives, especially in the parks around Stara Zagora. Clean-up days, organized by schools and NGOs aim to collect household waste and litter in green areas and parks. The activities during the week around Earth Day are basically focused on planting and clean-up of green areas (the Earth Day voluntary actions followed the traditional voluntary actions of the same character at the same time of the year that were devoted to Lenin's birth day during the communism).



Fig. 2: The Ayazmo Park in Stara Zagora

### Case study area: the Ayazmo Park

The Ayazmo Park, one of the landmarks of Stara Zagora, is situated on the southern flank of the Sarnena Gora Mountain and covers an area of 320 hectares. Bishop Methodiy Koussev, who is now buried there, initiated the Park in 1895. He organised the first planting campaigns and turned the almost bare and eroded hill (formerly destroyed and disrespectfully called by the Turks, Akhmak Bair or Fool's Hill) into a marvellous arboretum, containing tree species unique for Bulgaria. He coupled this with an irrigation scheme and built also a church on the top. Ayazmo Park received its name, which means shrine – curative mineral spring, from the Bulgarian Christian population. He imported many of the plants from Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Spain, Italy, etc. From the very beginning the citizens collaborated in the creation of the park. For example, everybody coming to the church services was expected to carry some soil and many people volunteered over the years in planting and maintaining trees.

Stara Zagora has many reasons to be proud of its Ayazmo park. It owes its exceptional scenic beauty to a combination of factors, among which lush vegetation and a highly original location stand out. As a result of the continuous afforestation campaigns during the years, the main part of the park is a woodland consisting of diverse stands of conifers (*Pinus nigra*, *Cedrus atlantica*, *Cupressus sempervirens*, etc.) and broadleaves (*Quercus spp.*, *Tilia platyphyllos*, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, etc.).

The park has over 150 exotic tree and shrub species from different parts of the world such as *Pinus halepensis* (Aleppo pine), *Laurus nobilis* (bay tree), *Euphorbia tirucalli* (pencil tree), *Malus pumila* (paradise apple), *Quercus infectoria* (Aleppo oak), *Ginkgo biloba*

(ginkgo) and so on. Higher up the park is bounded by natural stands of *Carpinus orientalis*, *Quercus cerris* and *Quercus pubescens*. It has a number of very diverse formal and informal paths, a nice green-tunnel walk of cypresses and cedars, and impressive panoramas of the plain and of the city.

The woodland itself consists of a number of forest types showing different degrees of naturalness according to the former design and the management frequency. The historic part of the Park, i.e. the one neighbouring the centre of Stara Zagora, consist of formal planted stands of *Quercus aegilops* and other broadleaves while walking up to the church multilayered stands of *Pinus nigra*, *Fraxinus angustifolia* and *Robinia pseudoacacia*, or even-aged, informal stands of *Tilia* and *Aesculus* accompany the visitor. A complex of stands dominated by *Cedrus atlantica* and *Cupressus sempervirens* constitutes the structure of the formal part of the park. The by pine dominated stands show frequently a low density of the canopy layer due to the decline of pines due to still unknown causes. The gaps open in the canopy of pine stands are re-colonised by broadleaves deriving from natural regeneration or enrichment plantings.

Close to the sports area, at the end of the Cypress-Cedar walk, a monumental Aleppo pine constitutes a view reference for as a key for the more informal part of the park. There, mixed stands of broadleaves dominated by oak species alternate, or very often merge with, spots of forest dominated by pine, cedar or cypress. A former nursery area constitutes an interesting collection of various tree species.

A special attraction of the Park is the 3 ha zoo, which on nice days attracts over 1000 visitors. Spread over the park are flat areas created at different heights. Some of these areas are designed as sports fields (4 badminton courts, 1 tennis court and a multifunctional sports field). Other facilities are an open-air theatre, a small hotel and restaurant, children's playgrounds, sports fields (e.g. 4 badminton courts), an astronomy observatory.

Ayazmo Park is a favourite place for outdoor experience and recreation of the city inhabitants of all ages. A part of them are voluntary participating in tree planting, litter clean-up, infrastructure repair. This is organised by the city and NGO's, or in a spontaneous way.

Unfortunately, in recent years the Ayazmo Park has much suffered from forest fires, air pollution, illegal tree cuttings and lack of maintenance. There are also juridical problems concerning the function of and the accessibility to three private properties within the park.

The park has a national status of cultural and park heritage according to Regulation No. 5, Proclamation of Immovable Cultural Monuments, Ministry of Culture, Official Gazette 60 / 27.05.1998. The category is specified as follows: "A set of authentic material proofs of human existence and activities, which belong and are linked to the environment where or for which they have been created, as well as these permanently belonging to mobile worth." The Ayazmo Park has been promoted on the bases of the following clause:

“belonging to urbanism and cultural landscape – spatially specified structures of built or non-built territory, distinguished for their sustainable composition and being of significance for the development of urban planning science, interconnection of human being and natural environment, possessing structure-forming and maintenance role for the development of settlements and non-built territory.”

In the context of Regulation No. 5, objects of “natural significance” are defined as “objects with significant value for Bulgarian history and culture”.

## **Information on tools to be tested**

### *The need for a long-term vision*

From an exploratory case study visit in May 2002 during which also officials from the city administration as well as technicians involved in Ayazmo Park were interviewed, it became clear that the lack of a formal long-term vision concerning the management of the Park is currently considered as a main problem. While it is seen as fundamental to the long-term success of the Ayazmo Park to preserving and maximising the range of benefits it makes to the city and its residents, various important problems need to be solved, for example, concerning the private properties, the irrigation system and the health of the conifer stands. It is also felt that the park has various potentials, which are left unused so far as, for example, for local tourism and environmental education. Therefore, the aim is to develop an overall strategic framework, which reflects a long-term vision and integrates the main strategies for the future. Such a framework will enable co-ordinated decision and action and will also facilitate the attraction of much needed external financial support for projects which can put decisions and plans into practice.

### *The design of the communication process*

During a second case study visit in November 2002, it was agreed with the city officials to adopt a communication process concerning the long-term vision with all the relevant stakeholders. Central to the communicative approach will be the emphasis on the exchange of knowledge and the development of ideas through communication within the city authority and between the city and the public (users, residents, community groups). As the city authority has shown to be very open for this idea, the Ayazmo case study provides the context to test participatory approaches, which have the potential to develop new interactions between society and park management. The main tool to be applied and tested in the case study will be the communication process as a whole.

Within the city administration and the city council there are various views, ideas as well as knowledge and skills relevant to the park management. For example, the city employs various experts in landscape architecture, forestry, hydrology, education etc, however, they are spread over different departments. The idea is to bring together all the relevant officials together in a range of thinking days aimed at developing a common vision.

On the other hand, many different people have a shared interest in the park’s future: users, residents, sports clubs, nature organisations etc. Following an inclusionary approach it is essential that all interests are considered and where possible, met in the

overall vision. Therefore, in parallel with the formal thinking days, we have designed an informal process based on an alternation of wider and smaller participatory platforms (see Fig. 3). A description is given in the next section. The parallel process design (formal/informal) is based on the experiences from the Antwerp North case study. The designs of the platforms and the communication methods and techniques to be used are mainly based on the experiences with the Vordenstein case study (see for case descriptions the NeighbourWoods “best practices for public involvement” report). A crucial role will be given to a “bridging team” consisting of the city officials directly responsible for the park management and the Bulgarian NeighbourWoods partner (Earth Forever foundation). Its task is to lead the communication process and especially to build the necessary substantial connections between the formal visionary process and the informal public participatory process.

Along the communication process special attention will be given to reporting the Bulgarian media. This is already started in November 2002 with a press conference for the main newspapers and local radio.

A practical problem is that at the moment no maps exist of the Ayazmo Park. In order to support the development of the long-term vision and especially the communication process, various thematic maps (starting from 1/5000) will be made: vegetation (horizontal structure, vertical structure, stand dynamics, tree health), hydrology, infrastructure and paths, use, viewpoints and view axes, characteristic places and remarkable trees.

#### *Activities and actors involved*

(see also Fig.3)

Process co-ordination:

- Overall co-ordination: VUB and Earth Forever.
- Bridging team: will be the leading team of the communication process: landscape architect and forester responsible for Ayazmo Park + Earth Forever, with support from VUB and DISTAF for process management and data processing towards thinking days and public platforms
- Mapping: Earth Forever (collecting topographic maps and aerial photographs, field inventories and data base), DISTAF (classifications for inventories, digitalisation and presentation), possibly in collaboration with the royal orienteering association
- Story book: Earth Forever, supported by VUB and DISTAF (publication by the municipality still needs to be discussed)
- media: Earth Forever
- process evaluation: VUB, Earth Forever, DISTAF

Formal process:

- thinking days: developing the long-term vision; agenda to be set up with bridging team; main pre-condition: giving enough space for the public input from the informal process (participants: landscape architect and forester responsible for Ayazmo Park, all the other relevant experts of the city administration (environment, water, juridical

matters, traffic, culture, youth, social, relation with Rom community, museum, zoo director, etc.) local politicians, external experts (including DISTAF), moderator

- Interactive exhibition: for all citizens

Informal process:

- Semi-structured interviews about vision (perception, use and ideas for improvement) with frequent users on 7 selected locations in the park: 1. frog's place 2. multilayerd stand 3. cedar alley (close to the *Pinus halepensis*) 4. badminton court 5. open space 6. cypress and cedar mature stand 7. post-fire area with natural regeneration of oaks and planted *Cupressus arizonica* and *Cedrus atlantica* (by Earth Forever, and possibly high school students)
- Journalist style interviews about characteristic/favourite places and park stories in the park (by Earth Forever)
- Journalist style interviews about park stories (interviewees: old people/ interviewers: school children; in collaboration with school teachers)
- Drop-in event in the park (street stall with interactive maps), possibly matching the tree planting day of the municipality (for all citizens, encouraging the participation of children)
- Youth debate in municipal theatre (young people involved in a debate: set a thesis and an antithesis: "Artificial and Wild) (participants: youth club of highschool called "Debate" 15-18 years old, public: any age)
- Workshops: small discussion groups on long-term vision (selected key actors representing a wide scope of interests, landscape architect and forester responsible for Ayazmo Park, moderator,)

*Expected outputs*

Material outputs:

- Thematic maps of Ayazmo Park
- Storybook of citizens about Ayazmo Park
- Overall strategic framework (long-term vision and main strategies)

Immaterial outputs:

- New relationships between the public and the park management
- Initiation of communication (among city departments and between city and public) on a long-term basis
- Knowledge exchange NeighbourWoods -Stara Zagora
- Long-term vision as a material base for attracting external funds

## Working plan and time table

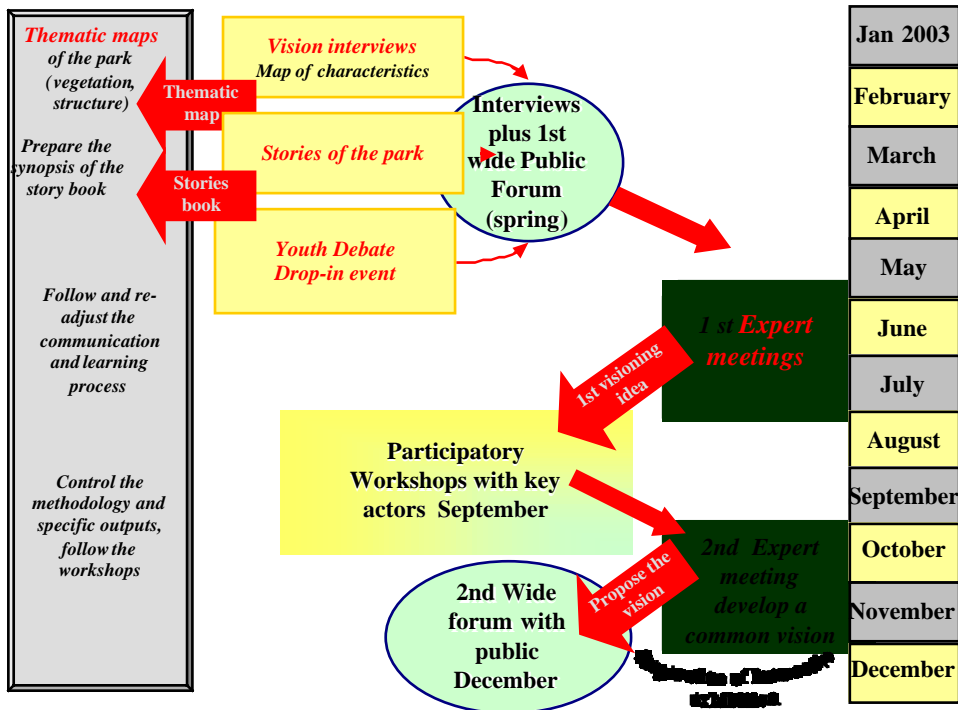


Fig.3: Working plan and time table