

A Future for the Colentina Lakes Chain

Outcome statement of the 4th LE:NOTRE Landscape Forum Bucharest, Romania

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Part 1 - Overview, background and policy context

This outcome statement seeks to provide guiding principles for restoration of the Colentina Lakes Chain for the ecological, social and economic benefit of the entire city and environs.

The document is meant to initiate a public dialogue about the future of the lakes.

The Colentina Lakes Chain (referred hereafter also as Colentina), conceived approximately 80 years ago, is a public benefit, a cultural monument and a fundamental element of Bucharest that links the city to its metropolitan region. The project was planned and implemented in the interest of contributing to all citizens' health and well-being. The lakes occupy 3.25% of the city surface and have a high potential for providing recreation, climate regulation, small-scale economic opportunity and general improvement of environmental quality.

The transformation of the Colentina area by draining the marshes and establishing the lakes was originally conceived as part of Bucharest's green belt, and the area was partially arranged as a series of urban parks. Its primary purpose was the improvement of sanitary conditions and the structuring of the urban expansion to the north. Recreational functions were subsequently added. The area of the lakes covers, on average, about 90.5 hectares.

Colentina is a territorial and strategic resource for the capital and its surrounding region, creating social, ecological and economical values, partly for today and mostly for future generations. The lakes' values are strongly threatened by recent changes in land use that lead to an increase in privatization and construction and reduced natural reactivity. The result of this is fragmentation, degradation, segregation and pollution along Colentina. This is a time-sensitive process, as transformations are continuously happening and many areas around the lakes do not have adequate sewage infrastructure. Therefore, the lakes' ecological integrity is under imminent threat.

The 4th LE:NOTRE Institute Landscape Forum¹ took place in April 2015 and included the participation of more than 120 spatial planning practitioners, educators, students and researchers from over 20 countries. The forum focused on imagining alternative futures for the landscape of the Colentina Lakes Chain in Bucharest. The working groups reflected on this landscape from four perspectives: rural fringe, heritage and identities, sustainable tourism and recreation, and urban sprawl and periurban growth.

Relevant policy documents supporting a sustainable future for the Colentina Lakes Chain, all valid or in force in Romania, include the European Landscape Convention², the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters³; the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent⁴; the Water Framework Directive⁵; the Habitats Directive⁶ and the Communication on Green Infrastructure⁷. Romania has legally adopted the European Landscape Convention but has not yet passed legislation with precise normative elements, although the national Spatial Planning Law includes landscape provisions and there is planning legislation governing protected areas. Under development are the National Territorial Development Strategy, currently in public consultation process, as well as national public policies related to landscape in the areas of urban development, mobility and national housing policies. Finally, Article 35 of the Romanian Constitution⁸ guarantees citizens the right to a healthy environment.

1 <http://forum.ln-institute.org/>

2 http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Landscape/default_en.asp

3 <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/treatytext.html>

4 http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/localdemocracy/cemat/VersionPrincipes/Default_en.asp

5 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html

6 <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/>

7 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm

8 <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=371>



Part 2 - Key messages - summary

These eight principles govern the final outcome statement for Colentina. An elaboration of these messages and their planning and policy contexts follows

1. A prosperous, healthy future for Colentina will require joint forces across administrative, disciplinary and social boundaries by building a long-term vision shared by all actors, including the public.
2. The guiding principles of sustainable spatial development⁹ should govern the planning process. The competing needs and interests of real estate, environment, transport, agriculture and public space need to be negotiated.
3. Public authorities, private actors and civil society organisations should utilize European, national and local financial instruments in an innovative way for implementing a sustainable future for Colentina.
4. Practitioners and educators from multidisciplinary fields – planning, ecology, social and economic sciences, engineering and design – should join forces with civil society for an inclusive and broad-based process designed to raise awareness and build knowledge about the importance and significance of the Colentina Lakes Chain.
5. The lakes should be treated as a coherent, indivisible element and the entire area should remain part of the public domain.
6. The approach should address issues of built heritage and the preservation of healthy neighborhoods.
7. The lakes should be considered as a flagship project and the eventual defining element for a true blue-green infrastructure network for Bucharest.
8. A comprehensive environmental restoration of the aquatic environment and the surrounding landscape is essential for maintaining the area's value.

Part 3 - Elaboration on key messages

1. *A prosperous, healthy future for Colentina will require joint forces across administrative, disciplinary and social boundaries by building a long-term vision shared by all actors, including the public.*

A sustainable future for Colentina requires intensive awareness-raising among civil society, private organisations and public authorities about the value of this landscape and its vulnerability. In order to promote stewardship of the site, the public should be actively involved in the planning process through consultancies, workshops, and other forums. A non-governmental association dedicated to facilitating the restoration and rehabilitation process should be formed. The educational value not just of the site but also the process of its transformation should be respected and built upon to ensure the stewardship of future generations.

The proposal for approaching the site's heritage and identity should balance both a process-based approach and a design-based approach, that is, parallel to the generation of design proposals there should also be proposals for how the public can be involved with the process and how the environmental sanctity of the site will be sustained. Legal barriers and gaps contributing to the current conditions need to be identified. The individual local communities (neighborhood level) as well as the communities of the entire lakes area (regional level) have no forum for organization and thus for initiating and driving change, which is essential if there is to be political will for such a project. Social efficacy of the residential community around the lakes should be enhanced with institutions such as community centers, markets, community gardens and other institutions that promote cooperation and built community ties. Density can be selectively increased in strategic areas while multifunctional open spaces are improved by design solutions.

Design solutions to be proposed ("research by design") for built and open spaces should promote the means for strengthening social capital and build capacity of the community to demand municipal accountability. An enforcement of laws meant to protect open spaces and architectural heritage and discourage/penalize violations is required. There are significant gaps in enforcement of existing laws for zoning and protection, and further gaps within the laws themselves.

2. *The guiding principles of sustainable spatial development¹⁰ should govern the planning process.*

The competing needs of real estate, ecology, transport, agriculture and public space need to be negotiated. A mutually-respectful guiding concept should be shared by all actors respectful of their mutual benefit. A broad-based coalition involving authorities, non-governmental experts and the public should take the lead in developing a feasibility strategy. Of critical importance is the preservation of existing green space. Different scenarios for the site should be considered to answer the problem of unchecked, unplanned construction that contributes to the site's deterioration and the irreversible damage to its pattern heritage.



3. Public authorities, private actors and civil society organisations should utilize European, national and local financial instruments in an innovative way for implementing a sustainable future for Colentina.

The whole is more than the sum of the parts. Colentina is a metropolitan asset for creating ecological, economic, cultural and social values for the benefit of all adjacent communities. European funding mechanisms are tailored to support measures in this field, with the keywords being green infrastructure and ecosystem services. However, any project application in this field will be more convincing if based on an integrated and inter-communal strategy. Inter-communal approaches will substantially increase the potential for creating values. For example: a cycling route will be much more successful if conceived across municipal boundaries and connected to different local leisure and tourism destinations. Ecological restoration needs to include measures all along Colentina if a positive effect on biodiversity is to be achieved. The quantification of the economic potential of tourism and recreation to generate jobs should be a central part of the strategy. Other sustainable forms of economic development can include urban agriculture, with particular attention to developing local brands for food products. European funding sources already in place include: the European Regional Development Fund, the Natural Capital Financing Facility of the European Investment Bank, the Life Programme of the EU's Environment Directorate and the Results-based agri-environment schemes as a new tool of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

4. Practitioners and educators from multidisciplinary fields – spatial planning, landscape planning, ecology, social and economic sciences, engineering and design – should join forces with civil society for an inclusive and broad-based process designed to raise awareness and build knowledge about the importance and significance of the Colentina Lakes Chain.

The task of re-conceiving the lakes begins with understanding the many drivers and pressures affecting the area: its location at the urban fringe, as well as proposed roads, land use changes, and many other technological, environmental, legal and economic drivers. Capacity mapping taking account of the site's ecological, aesthetic and cultural sensitivity is a necessary precursor in the planning process, to result in a territorially-based strategy for what activities can be incorporated where based on demands and pressures. With respect to the principles of the European Landscape Convention, this process should, in part, take the form of a landscape observatory and include information exchange on policies and experience, compilation of historical documents about the landscape, and the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess the effectiveness of landscape policies.

5. *The lakes should be treated as a coherent, indivisible element and the entire area should remain part of the public domain.*

Uncontrolled privatization and development should be stopped immediately, and no plans should be permitted that damage the natural environment or built heritage. The lake shores should permit continuous free public passage for pedestrian and cycling traffic, meaning that fences on public territory should be removed and roads or paths built to guarantee open access to the public, if necessary involving walkways on the water or other innovative solutions. The social and ecological continuity and connectivity of the lakes should be respected, cultivated and maintained and all measures should be taken that permit proper ecological management of the water. This includes respecting and if possible enlarging existing buffer zones around the lakes. The ecological rehabilitation and management of the lakes should also be utilized as an educational tool for local schools and communities. A unified identity for the lakes as a singular landscape - that is, a name, a management entity, a master plan, a standard for protection and preservation - is essential.

6. *The approach should address issues of built heritage and the preservation of healthy neighborhoods.*

“Protecting by changing” principles, rather than strict historic preservation, can be applied in determining a treatment plan for preserving the built heritage of the lakes. This is quite varied as the lakes chain passes from the urban to the urban fringe to the rural zone. In the more urban areas of the lakes chain, there is a significant amount of mid-century architecture forming organic, well-loved communities that have very distinct identities but that are quite vulnerable to unchecked demolition and development. The large number of underused or abandoned industrial building stock could, through adaptive reuse, become creative, socially-dynamic community assets like incubators, arts centers or markets. How the built fabric of recent history is interpreted and how it should be protected or adapted to better meet contemporary needs is a key question to be addressed. The rehabilitation of the lakes is also a representation of learning from the past, as they were actually well-managed in their early history. The ultimate goal is to have inclusive, diverse communities connected to the lakes and a mutually-supportive relationship between humans and the natural environment. The lakes represent an asset both to the communities that directly surround them and to greater Bucharest.

7. *The lakes should be considered as a flagship project and the eventual defining element for a true green-blue infrastructure network for Bucharest.*

Urban and peri-urban sprawl are global issues negatively impacting both urban and rural areas because of their increased energy, land and soil consumption; strain on infrastructure; promotion of a car-dependent lifestyle that negatively effects public health and weakens community ties; elevated greenhouse gas emissions, air and noise pollution levels; and consumption of agricultural lands. Cities need a long term sustainable policy vision to develop coherent approaches to enhancing mobility, increase access to the natural environment and provide social and cultural opportunities and employment. Coherent planning concepts for the periphery are essential to maintaining healthy connections between the urban and rural landscape. The fragmentation of local municipal, county and sectoral authorities is a major issue that must be addressed, as a unified administrative approach to the lakes chain is essential. An investigation of the possibilities of formalizing a single strategy and, if possible, a single, neutral governing entity (nonprofit organization or development authority) is essential, as is facilitating an understanding of



the lakes chain as a common good for all. Connection infrastructure for cycling and hiking, for example from Mogoșoaia castle to Cernica forest, can further enhance the site's potential and value.

8. *A comprehensive environmental restoration of the aquatic environment and the surrounding landscape is essential for maintaining the area's value.*

Uncontrolled sewage disposal in the lakes is a chronic problem that has led to deterioration in water quality in the past decades. In order to implement the Water Framework Directive objectives and to improve the quality of life in the peripheral areas of Bucharest, it is also necessary to increase the sewage network coverage and to limit or eliminate uncontrolled waste disposal. The natural biodiversity of the aquatic and the surrounding landscapes should be restored and protected for the benefit of the environment and the community. The rehabilitation of the lakes will represent an exemplary project for future generations, and further represent a significant asset in terms of Bucharest's natural areas as well as its built heritage.

Background of the Bucharest Landscape Forum

The Landscape Forum Bucharest was organized from April 21 - 25, 2015, by Ion Mincu University for Architecture and Urbanism, the University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, ASOP, the Romanian Association of Landscape Architecture and APUR, the Professional Association of Romanian Urban Planners in cooperation with the LE:NOTRE Institute.

The LE:NOTRE institute was established under the auspices of ECLAS, the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools, as an umbrella organisation for interdisciplinary collaboration between education, research and innovative practice in the landscape field. Its objective is to develop and strengthen the links between landscape education, research and innovative practice, in the public, private and not for profit sectors.

It aims to achieve this by furthering and facilitating communication, collaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas on an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral basis, in order to promote the wider and deeper understanding of the cultural, environmental, social and economic role of the landscape for the benefit and well-being of society as a whole.

What distinguishes the LE:NOTRE Landscape Forum from other European landscape events is the focus on dialogue, debate and discourse. It provides a unique opportunity to interact creatively with colleagues from a range of landscape disciplines in informal workshop and field visit settings.

Landscape Forum Website: <http://www.forum.ln-institute.org>

LE:NOTRE Institute: <http://www.le-notre.org>

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