Workshop “Integrated Approach”: Building Bridges

On June 12th an international group of almost 30 experienced spatial designers, real estate developers and environmental professionals from Germany, the Netherlands, France and Flanders gathered in Stuttgart Germany, to participate in the CityChlor Workshop “Integrated Approach in Sustainable Urban Development”. In a relatively short but intensive workshop, these experts really talked with each other, instead of about each other. Will increasing demands for more sustainability lead to a common language and build bridges between different stakeholders in inner city (re)development?

Within the European Interreg IVB programme “CityChlor” aims to find solutions for the presence of chlorinated solvents in urban groundwater. Besides in technical approaches, part of the solution is expected to be found in socio-economic incentives. Attention to soil and groundwater issues in an early stage of urban (re)development is expected to attribute to the quality and livability of the newly designed and built area, to reduce overall costs, increase property values and lead to a better environment. This so called “integrated approach” is often mentioned as a way to achieve more sustainable urban developments, based on mutual gain of involved stakeholders. However, in practice we see a gap between soil and groundwater issues, spatial designing and area development. These “worlds” hardly interact, which results in less effective and less sustainable solutions. And where interaction does occur, it often leads to complicated, time and money consuming processes. CityChlor is building a practical guide with key success factors for an integrated approach that includes soil and groundwater.

Aim of the workshop was to get an international overview and insight in the topics that trigger different stakeholders and decision makers in the process of urban and real estate development. What are existing interesting issues and ambitions (pull factors) and steering rules (push factors) in the different countries? How do groundwater and subsoil play a role and where do we see chances for improvement? The answers and suggestions given by the participants give input and direction to the content and set-up of our guideline “Working with an integrated approach”.

The workshop started with a plenary introduction to Citychlor, the “integrated approach” and a case-study from the city of Stuttgart. Then the participants were divided into three smaller mixed groups. Each group had all four nationalities and a mix of experts with different backgrounds (spatial design, area development and environmental) in it. These mixed groups rotated and all had to visit a “planet”, a “people” and a “profit” room. Here, their task was to discover and discuss the relevant environmental, social and economical issues, the challenges and the possible solutions. In this way, all participants had to leave their own comfort zone and known field of experience and look at it from a different perspective. This process of mixing and shifting perspectives opened up doors towards new worlds and for some participants led to new insights, but it also showed that different actors really speak different (professional) languages. Even in this small community several examples of Babylonian misunderstanding could be noticed. Investing in understanding and
learning to speak each others professional “language” is a must. Only then it will be possible to build bridges between the different stakeholders in sustainable urban development and really achieve a successful integrated approach.

During the afternoon, participants addressed all important issues and placed them systematically on large flip over’s, thus making a “map” of important issues and potential solutions. This gives important directions and “building blocks” for the next steps in the project.

Some examples of the harvest:

- Organize public discussions on visions, projects and the interaction between both; make area development a co-production;
- Remediation is all about creating value: show this value, make it explicit. Try to harvest these created values, i.e. by means of taxes;
- Private investors will avoid risks: lower the threshold by means of public funds and/or assurances;
- Investing in understanding and speaking each others “language”, understanding the interests of other stakeholders and at least understanding their definitions is a must. Only then it will be possible to build bridges between the different stakeholders in sustainable urban development;
- Develop remediation strategies that support the desired functions in the area;
- Be creative with the adoption and adaptation of laws.

These aspects will now be researched and elaborated further in more detail, mainly by means of in-depth interviews and literature research. The newly formed cross-national and interdisciplinary network will be very useful to give direction to our final product: A guideline for an integrated approach.

By the end of 2012 the content of the final guide should be finished. The results will be presented at our final conference May 16 &17, 2013 in Ghent Belgium. For further information visit our website: www.CityChlor.eu