

# A no-drainer?

JV PROJEKT VH s.r.o.'s Jiri Vitek highlights the lack of Czech Republic PPPs in environmentally-friendly urban drainage...

**S**tormwater management is a modern method of draining urban areas, which easily adapts to the current climate and the degree of urbanisation. The existing conventional drainage method of stormwater being discharged directly into the sewer system or water body no longer constitutes satisfactory practice and is at odds with sustainable development.

The massive conversion of natural land into urban areas is reflected by the fact that in the past, 50% of rainwater was infiltrated and 10% discharged, whereas nowadays, 15% is infiltrated and 55% discharged. No matter who is to blame, it is evident that climate change can be characterised as freak weather conditions such as aggressive torrential rains following relatively long dry spells, which result in frequent local flooding, high water body pollution and a reduction in groundwater reserves. The situation is continually deteriorating.

An effective stormwater management solution restores the original function of the natural water cycle. By detaining the stormwater on the plot, it reduces the qualitative and quantitative load of the sewer system and water bodies. These solutions are known as decentralised drainage systems and constitute an integral part of the drained estate, which unfortunately makes building structures more costly, and developers are met with higher investment as well as maintenance costs. Since there is no stormwater charge levied in the Czech Republic, the whole issue is lacking in economic motivation.

The most common way of developing new residential areas in the Czech Republic is by property developers who purchase land, build houses, sell them and transfer the infrastructure facilities to municipalities. Once the area is developed, they neither own nor operate anything. Unless there is a municipal enforcement of stormwater management, the developers do not consider any other aspects but profit. In a milieu of widespread corruption, these contracting practices dramatically burden public service. The developers go to great lengths to circumvent all obstacles on their way to profit, the result being residential areas lacking in parks and recreational open space, leading to a decrease in the standard of living. Regardless of the social aspects, stormwater management projects providing municipal flood protection are also being neglected for the

simple fact that stormwater detention solutions 'deprive' the developers of profit generating land.

However, by implementing decentralised solutions now, future cost savings for the sewer system and river basin improvements, as well as for the construction of large detention tanks, may be obtained.

Municipal governments should look for effective ways of bringing high quality into urban development. This does not only relate to the financial benefits of EU funding, but also to improving the standard of living in urban areas, where the majority of inhabitants concentrate or will concentrate in the future. Municipal plans do not assign urban waters a deservedly high communal priority. The lack of political goodwill causes municipal governments to lose interest in taking purposeful measures to deal with urban waters. Their 'stuck-in-the-rut' approach to future scenarios does not bring any new solutions that prove sufficient even for today's issues, let alone for those ahead of us.

By striving to introduce new decentralised solutions into urban stormwater management and by channelling the developers' tendencies, a way could be found to fund these new approaches through PPPs.

However, to use the PPP potential more effectively, contracting authorities must realise their duties and responsibilities, ie. act in the current, as well as future, public interest.

The low number of implemented PPPs in the Czech Republic can be attributed to the economic crisis; however, once that is over, the interest of private investors will hopefully increase. Would it not be advisable, considering the complex preparatory process, for the contracting authorities to make an effort and start occupying themselves with visions for the future right now?

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