



Kazan Kremlin and Kazanka River
Photo by Rafael Mukhametdinov

Kazanka Strategy: Creating Russia's Largest Urban Riverpark

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Kazan, Tatarstan's capital city and one of the most vibrant Russian million-plus cities, is known for its business-friendly environment, high speed of development and active scientific research. Since 2015, under the curation of Natalia Fishman-Bekmambetova, advisor to the president of Tatarstan, Kazan has been pioneering a public spaces renovation programme, which saw the renovation of more than 400 parks around the entire Republic. The programme, by its scale and participatory methodology, became a standard for Russian cities.

As a continuation of the programme, the city set itself an even more ambitious mission: adoption of an ecological strategy that aims to become the new guiding tool for the capital city's development for the next five to ten years. In 2019, under the direction of Fishman-Bekmambetova, the Kazanka river strategy was launched and piloted by urban design studio Orchestra Design, in collaboration with city departments, ministries of the Republic of Tatarstan and key public stakeholders.

The river strategy began with a "mobilisation" process that identified and involved more than 100 local experts, community leaders and stakeholders. A participatory online platform was launched (www.kazanka.tatar) where citizens could locate their suggestions and report issues on the map. More than 600 contributions were submitted and analysed. The participatory process was also present in social media with over one hundred posts (@kazanka.tatar) and partnerships with local press extending the reach

of the mobilisation process. The combination of an online and offline visual presence of the strategy was important to diversify the profiles of contributors, and to mobilise the energies of potential future stakeholders and local associations.

In 2020, the strategy was officially approved and set into implementation by the President of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, and Mayor of Kazan, Ilsur Metshin.

Why Kazanka?

Kazanka river flows for 22 km through the heart of Kazan, with about 500,000 people living within a 15-minute walk from the river, but with almost no access to it. Over the years, major pieces of infrastructure created barriers along the river; concrete embankments were created and slowly but steadily private

developments were encroaching on the natural areas. Many Kazan citizens were crossing the river by car every day without being much aware of its presence.

As a response, the aim of the strategy is to create the largest connected ecosystem of river parks in the country, with the creation of 12 new parks, 150km of pedestrian and cycling paths, and over 1,500 ha of accessible and protected green territories. "Eco-gates" designed as eco-parking with basic facilities will allow visitors to comfortably access the park. An iconic 42km walking and bike trail called "from Blue Lakes to Volga" will be the symbol of this new continuity.

These territories will not only become new recreational destinations; the ambition is to utilise their potential to become an economic and educational resource for the sustainable development of Kazan,

through the support of green technologies, eco-tourism and recreation.

The influence on city health has also been assessed using methodologies approved by the World Health Organization. The implementation of the strategy will potentially lead to a 13.4% decrease in annual mortality in the city and save up to \$20 million USD of health expenses for the city. In the time of pandemic, making accessible natural territories has never been more important to encourage a healthier lifestyle and "breathing spaces" for all.

The 12 parks of Kazanka: One Common Mission through Different Identities

The 12 new river parks will increase the amount of square meters of parks per citizen fivefold. Each park will have its own cultural identity and



Manzara (Park No. 2.)
Image Credit: Orchestra



different embankments will have unique character, but they will share a common mission: to protect natural assets and reinforce the connection between citizens and nature through eco-education, educational signages, a variety of recreational opportunities in nature supported by park services and cultural programs.

Facing the Kremlin, park Manzara (panorama in the Tatar language) will boast the best views of the historical center through a system of piers and an amphitheatre integrated within an existing dam structure and within natural areas. The park will preserve the old birch grove surrounded by anti-flooding canals made in the times of Peter the Great. The piers will tell the story of the changing panorama and how it evolved throughout the city's history.

The Su Alany (water field in Tatar) wetlands park, on what is now a polluted swamp, will undertake

a slow ecological remediation program, which will host a combined university research and visitor centre. The park will offer the possibility to put on rubber boots and explore the safe areas of the swamp, as well as to walk along the wooden paths to discover the swamp's rich wildlife.

The 5 Rivers Park is the largest park of the strategy, at over 600ha – it will be a natural park that will allow visitors to get away from the city, only 30 minutes from the center. The park will invite visitors to spend a day walking or biking along the meanders of the river and its four tributaries. This will be a perfect destination for school camping and out-of-school classes as well as family week-end retreats.

Ecological Actions: Identify, Protect, Monitor and Clean

Kazanka and its adjacent territories are a complex ecosystem of underwater

springs, wetlands, small streams, and lakes, as well as ancient trees, rare plants and birds. One of the strategy's first steps was to identify and map all these natural assets with the collaboration of local ecologists.

The biodiversity map resulting from this collaboration will be used as a base for educational materials as well as navigation in the parks. Ecological research is a first step and provides the basis for each of the park's projects to make sure that every park project preserves the ecosystem and creates the opportunity for people to learn from the project to take care of the park.

In order to legally preserve the natural territories, the official borders of the park were legally adopted, including 660 ha of land listed as a natural reserve. In the process, a large residential project on protected area was officially canceled, preserving 20 ha of land; a symbolic win and a signal that ecology is becoming an important driver for the Tatarstan capital.

The strategy also set the base to launch a participatory water-monitoring system that will help to identify unknown sources of water pollution. Data will be made accessible to the public and the progress in the identification and removal of sources of pollution such as stormwater run-off or illegal discharges will be monitored. The strategy offers a more complex set of tools to clean the water, moving away from the old approach that included only on mechanical cleaning stations.

Kazanka as a Platform for Green Tech

The strategy was an opportunity to go beyond a pure urban planning with the aim of becoming a platform of opportunities for innovations and collaborations between startups, universities and the city. The first step is the organization of a large green tech event around Kazanka in 2021 bringing together startups from the whole country and national and international experts with the support of the Russian-French initiative Dialogue de Trianon.

Eco-tourism as an Emerging Economy

Beyond green technologies, the Kazanka strategy has revealed real economic potential for eco-tourism in Kazan. It is estimated that 5.7 million visitors will visit Kazanka parks every year, approximately 20% of them tourists. The ecological tourism will offer opportunities for visitors

to participate in a whole set of natural activities like eco-camping, sports in nature, forest bathing (from the Japanese tradition of Shinrin Yoku), bird-watching and guided walks.

The development of eco-tourism will also be supported by private investments in a number of hotels, camping sites, ecological and touristic centres. The extensive mobilisation campaign around the Kazanka strategy attracted the attention of investors and established a dialogue platform. A Kazanka Manager was appointed at the end of the study to be the point of contact between potential investors and the city to facilitate discussions.

A Strategy as a First Step: a Future Federal Model of River Parks

Following the official approval of the strategy, a series of implementation seminars took place between relevant public stakeholders: city administration,

republic ministries and the author of the strategy. The delicate transition between a strategy and concrete implementation projects will be further ensured by a Kazanka team.

The ambition now is to create the first National River Park and to create a specific federal model for preservation and evolution of river territories within large cities in Russia. This would recognize the particularities of such territories and the necessity to put in place flexible planning tools and legislation at the federal level. More importantly it would encourage the development of know-how, which can benefit other Russian cities.

Resources:

Development Strategy Kazanka: From the Blue Lakes to the Volga. <https://kazanka.tatar>.

Orchestra Design. <https://www.orchestra-design.com/ru>.



Plan Map Porttion from Development Strategy Kazanka