First of all I want thank ICLEI, for giving me this opportunity to share with you the some thoughts about the need for an urban public, green infrastructure exemplified by the inspiring story about the development of the urban green structure of the City of Stavanger, through 50 years.
A bit of background:

Stavanger is the fourth biggest city in Norway, 132,000 inhabitants, the center of an urban area of approx. 250,000 inhabitants, situated at the South West coast of Norway.

Officially founded in 1125; a bishop of English import started building the Cathedral that year, a cathedral which still remains.

Stavanger has, driven by the location close to the ocean, always had strong connections to the rest of the world, at least since we learned how to navigate the oceans.

There has been a lot of ups and downs for Stavanger: Stavanger was big in the Viking age, Stavanger was real big in the sail ship era, Stavanger was big in fisheries and canning. When those golden periods ended, it left the city pretty poor.

Today oil is our most important business, and that is going downhill these days. However the oil business has grown a very strong agglomeration of high tech. So we have started the transformation for a new reality, and see a growing success as a “Smart City.”
Stavanger has, since the adoption of her first Local Environmental Plan back in 1991, aimed at developing a public sustainable city. Holistic is a very big word, it means everything you need to take into account. And everything is pretty much.

We have been working along all the mentioned lanes for 20 years, approximately 50 different indicators on environmental issues, and have yet many roads to walk.
However, I will in my presentation concentrate on sharing with you our achievements on providing and securing green areas for outdoor recreation and play, air quality, climate, biological migration corridors, nature and landscape conservation.
Why an urban green structure?

The Lancet published April 1st this year a cross-sectional study on “Physical activity in relation to urban environments in 14 cities world-wide”.

The background for this study was the global pandemic: Physical inactivity, causing 5 mill deaths annually. They found that design of urban environments has the potential to contribute substantially to physical activity.

Stavanger does not have mountainous areas within the city, however we have them an hour drive away, and we sure use them for recreation, but only in the weekends.

It is important and attractive to have access to areas like shown in the picture for weekends and vacations. It is even more important to have access to nature experiences and outdoor physical activity in green areas in every day life, right in your neighborhood. I am sure you all are aware that there is a an overwhelming lot of scientific evidence confirming that this is important to public health and well-being.

That is why it has been so important for Stavanger to secure and give access to green areas to every citizen right in their own neighborhood.
In a Norwegian context Stavanger is the city that offers the least accessible public green areas pro capita.

So, how could Stavanger, the most densely populated city in Norway, end up offering the highest amount of way marked walks (52) and the highest amount of kilometers way marked walks or trails (408 km) in the country? It sounds not right, Stavanger being one of the smallest municipalities in Norway when it comes to land area. To understand what happened I need to start in 1965, explaining the important breakthroughs and developments through the years, ending up with the project 52 Everyday Walks.

52 Everyday Walks is the project that really presents the green opportunities to our citizens and thereby brings the green structure to life.
As early as in the 70ies we did know a lot about the effects of outdoor physical activities in green surroundings on public health. We had evidence it was good both for physical and mental well-being. It is of course a long way from knowing that to really act on it.

The City of Stavanger, has though, through the recent 51 years, developed an outstanding and attractive urban green infrastructure, a green infrastructure that provides an arena for the citizens’ everyday physical activity and nature experience, an arena of ever increasing importance for public health and well-being.

I will explain this story according to my experiences, others might have other versions. However, the result remains the same. The result of these 50 years remains as real green areas and trails throughout the whole city, also in maps, on the web and in the heads of the citizens.

The green infrastructure represents social meeting places, arenas for outdoor play, physical activity and recreation in contact with nature.
I think this is one the situation that really have nurtured the dream of a continuous green network:
A beach and a pathway in green surroundings. The urban areas are just some steps away: Just behind the trees.
Who would not wish for this kind of neighborhood?

In the following I have divided the process in three different fields:

- The Vision
- The Implementation
- The Disclosure (of the great, green secret)

Each divided in several stages.
The Vision

Stage 1: The Land Use Master Plan 1965
This is the year when the City of Stavanger got her first Land Use Master Plan according to the, at that time, new planning and building act. This was when the public, green infrastructure of Stavanger was adopted by the City Council for the first time.

The vision

Stage 2: Green Plan
It refined and operationalized the vison from 1965.
It stated that “Every inhabitant in Stavanger shall have access to the continuous green trail system within 500m from their homes.” It also stated that a green trail should be minimum 3 km long to count.
Green Plan lifted the green structure of the 65-plan into the fore-front, established the Green Eastern and Western Shorelines, the Centerline and the cross connections in the plan and also in the minds of many citizens, administration and politicians.
It was shortly after the City Council adopted this plan, we stopped complaining about Stavanger being the city with the least amount of green space pro capita.
We took another approach and started using the slogan: Probably the best urban green structure in the world, (Thank you, Carlsberg) however, adding on: when the Land Use Master Plan’s green structure is completed and made accessible to the public.
We found it so much easier to gain support for a possible success than for an inevitable failure.

The vision
Stage 3: Current Municipal Master Plan
The masterplan is through the years developed to a holistic plan for the development of the City, both land use and services. The urban green structure has more or less stood it’s ground through all the later revisions, although there have been set backs.

The vision
The main objectives of developing and maintaining the continuity of the urban green structure has been refined and again put into fore-front by this plan, and Dept. for Public Health has contributed by co-funding several activities concerning developing 52 everyday walks and other projects on making outdoor recreation accessible and attractive.
Now, over to implementation:
The Implementation:
Stage 1: Stokka Lake trail.
At the end of the 70thies the “Mother of all green trails” was built. All the way around our biggest lake, Stokkavatnet. There was a hard fight back then, between those who meant that the natural paths should not be tampered with, and those who thought that it was important to make the trail accessible to many. Well, the trail was built to the standard you see in the picture. The width makes it a social arena; you can walk and talk.
While before maybe 50 people made their Sunday walk around the lake, after the trail was completed, the number of round trips soon raised to more than 2000 on a bright day.

Today Stokkavatnet trail is an important and well known social meeting place, 8050m long and 2,5m wide..
The Implementation
Stage 2: Massive building of new trails and securing public green areas in development sites
This was followed by a massive building of green trails in public green corridors through the eighties: At the end of the decennium it started to become obvious that we actually had a real possibility to link all parts of the city together by green trails.
It is also important to draw your attention to the fact that there were negotiated deals on developing and securing the green structure inclusive trails as part of every bigger development area in the city, all the way up to 2006.
Implementation

Stage 3: The trail Strømvig - Breivig

Around 85-90 there were made agreements with private land owners on acquisition of space for building a green trail from Strømvig to Breivig. The trail was constructed alongside the shores and crossed over the properties of some of the most respected families in Stavanger. This agreement still makes the political majority think that every owner of a beach property must adept to similar agreements.
Implementation

Stage 4: The Green Space and Trail Project

From 91 on the idea of the continuous green trail system in the Stavanger version gained support, also from the Central Government.

Stavanger got a pilot project on acquisition and facilitating of green open space and green trails, funded 50% by the Central Government, NOK 6 mill over three years, provided the City itself put in the same. Not very much money. However, a good start and the support from the Central Government probably meant a lot more than the money indicated.

And also crucial: The Central Government demanded direct involvement of the top political and administrative leaders.

And above all: We got the first decision ever by the City Council on compulsory acquisition of green space, a narrow green corridor along a creek, it established the public, green urban structure as a recognized municipal infrastructure.

What makes this a bit unusual is that the City Council was dominated by conservative parties, parties that traditionally defended private property strongly. But there were strong local political reasons why this happened.
Implementation  
Stage 5: Karistø  
Towards the end of the 90ies we got a new demonstration of the political priority on trails and continuous public green space. At a section of the shoreline along Hafrsfjord there were 55 residential properties bordering the sea. A very narrow brim along the shore, 2 – 3 m wide, was some 10 year earlier zoned for recreational purposes; a trail along the shore.  
When we started preparing for acquisition of the grounds to build the planned trail, the Mayor soon got visitors; the 55 property owners and their lawyers threatening with lawsuits. Somehow the property owners in the row behind the 55, and the row behind them, and so on, became aware that the longed for trail might not ever be a reality. It was now or never, they might never gain access to the sea if it did not happen now. Two weeks later a little delegation paid a visit to the Mayor, carrying 1100 signatures in favor of the trail.  
Well, the trail was built, limited some places to a width of 1m. The compensations took however a new direction.  
Of course the owners got compensated for the land itself, but what really set a new standard was the “hardware” we delivered: Moving of boathouses, new boathouses, stonewalls, wooden walls, new piers etc. The cost really hit the roof, it was as expensive as if it was an ordinary road for cars!  
Anyway I think again that this demonstrates how political important the public green network and the trails had become in Stavanger.
The Implementation

Stage 6: The Green Space Acquisition and Facilitation Project 2001 - 2001 was the upstart of the political initiated project for acquisition and facilitating of green public space. There were still a lot of different properties, zoned as green public space, on private hands. Areas where it was very difficult to get voluntary agreements on building of trails and opening up to public use.

The Governmental Environment Department and the Directorate of Nature Management gave much support, both in words and in funding the first years. The project has solved many challenging issues, issues which are essential to give people possibilities for nature experiences, social meeting places and recreation in their neighborhood, and creating the continuous trail and green space structure. Before we started the project, less than 30 % of the inhabitants had access to the trail system within 500m from their homes. Now we are close to the goal.

Because many of the zoned trails and green spaces were narrow green corridors between the sea and residential areas, the negotiations were challenging and there were often strong conflict of interest. The political leadership’s determination has been crucial to solve those conflicts. Most of them were solved through negotiations, some few of them though, were solved only in court.
The Disclosure

Stage 1: Green trail map for Stavanger

Around 2003 it became quite clear that the city actually might succeed in creating a continuous green trail network within reach for everybody maximum 500m from their home.

The challenge was how to make the citizens aware of this fact in a way that inspired them to take advantage of the new opportunities.

In 2006 we issued a map, a green trail map for Stavanger, to make people take advantage of the emerging green trail network. It was distributed to every household in Stavanger.

However, people stuck to the trails they were used to.

We had obviously failed in this context.
The Disclosure

Stage 2: 52 Every Day Walks

After testing several round tracks, average length 8 km, many discussions in the “recreational group” at the Department of Parks and Streets, studying way marking systems from many countries, we ended up on a concept of way marking 52 different round tracks, one for each week. The project 52 Every Day Walks was born. **But how should we get this happy message out to the citizens?**

A chat with the local branch of the Norwegian Rambler Association (Stavanger Turistforening) gave the solution: They would definitely work with us on this project: They developed a new way marking system, provided voluntary hosts for every trail, and provided the way marking itself. They offered their red T as a part of the system. The red T enjoys very high credibility in Norway as a way marking sign in the high mountains. So in communication this meant a real flying start.

From the start of 2012 walks was launched, one each week. And it soon became very popular to walk the walks, we have got a lot of new walkers in Stavanger, and they walk longer distances.
Mapping of walks.

On the web you find the maps in three versions: Pdf, google and gpx.
There is a walk for every occasion
Together the walks cover the whole city and bring you to all the secret places
They are walks through the green Stavanger
They are walks through Stavanger’s history
They are walks in your neighborhood
They start at your own doorstep
They are strengthening the feeling of identity
They are strengthening the public health
They have become social meeting places
They are inspiring a lot of new walkers
They are real everyday walks
Some few words on success criteria:

Stavanger has made it. Stavanger has through 50 years developed and made accessible a continuous green structure which runs like a cobweb through the whole city. More than 98% of the citizens have access to the trails within 500m from their home.

I hope I have shown that this is a result of a planned and deliberate development. That there have been some thoughts behind, and that, at crucial moments, there have been set political clear goals and exercised extraordinary political determination and courage. And also that there has been a competent administration that has implemented the agreed goals.
However, most of all:
Without a burning commitment from political leadership, voluntary organizations and municipal administration, no (walk) way.
Thank you for listening!