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of informal play opportunities, allowing children to sit on, climb on or walk on as they play. A fence planted with native woodland plants will provide good screening from the neighbouring sports pitches.



GET TO KNOW IRELAND'S FIRST NATURAL PLAY AREA!



Within the 3rd Core Network Meeting, the BiodiverCity partnership tested Limerick's first Natural Play Area, which opened in 2022 at the Castletroy Urban Greenway, within the Go Green Routes Horizon 2020 project - the easy-to-adapt tool inspired all network partners.

Limerick City and County Council created the Natural Play Area for an urban greenway incorporating nature-based solutions (e.g. rain gardens, wildflower meadows) and recycled felled trees.

The redesigned area along a new housing estate facilitates connection with nature and allows for passive surveillance. Existing dead trees were recycled into play equipment, seating, insect hotel or mulch covering the ground. Small mounds created are covered by local wildflowers, while among the mounds and along the pathway raingardens are located at low points. Play equipment, created from salvaged trees, connects mounds and creates a wide variety

Limerick City & County Council intends to use this model in the future where possible because it encourages children to engage more with nature and their natural surroundings. It is not a formal playground, but indeed a great place to get some of our connection to nature back, the connection which has been dramatically lost over the last decades. Limerick's initiative is a great experiment and very much welcomed by visiting partner cities: *"It might help engage communities"*, *"A good way to encourage people to explore urban green areas"* and *"An excellent example of a communication strategy that can be easily integrated into our action plan"*- just a few examples from their positive reactions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CITIES:

- 1** It is a great tool **to engage communities** along green issues. The problem is that because we have dramatically lost our connection with nature, residents do not know and value biodiversity-driven approaches and nature-based solutions to be used in cities and beyond. They simply do not understand the importance of green infrastructure in cities. Therefore, reestablishment of our connection with nature is an utmost priority, especially in Europe, where 81% of EU protected habitats and 63% of EU protected species are in “poor” or “bad” conservation status and a simple tool like this might facilitate this process.
- 2** It is a great tool **to raise awareness!** On the one hand, cities offer unique opportunities for learning and education about a resilient and sustainable future and have a large potential to boost innovations and governance tools, but on the other hand, billions of urban dwellers are at high or extreme risk of environmental disaster too. This can be communicated in a natural play area.
- 3** Further develop the idea along the philosophy of the so-called **motor activities park** (motorik parks), making these areas more attractive for kids and families. The motor activities park encourages physical and mental fitness with specially designed or just simply natural equipment that is suitable for all ages and fitness levels. The motor activities park provides both children and adults with the opportunity to train balance, coordination, strength and fitness whilst recharging their energy levels. Balance activities accelerate the motor and intellectual development of children. The motor skill park turns balance training into fun play.
- 4** Natural play areas are **not playgrounds**, thus less strict regulation applies, but this might vary in different countries.



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