Making the work of BiodiverCity visible on the local level

Planting carried out by members of the URBACT-BiodiverCity project on March 26, 2025

BiodiverCity

The learning journey of the
"BiodiverCity"
URBACT Action Planning Network
between January and March 2025

Quarterly Network Report 5
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Preface

Between **January and March 2025,** the BiodiverCity network was relatively silent regarding transnational activities, but partners were extremely active locally. After a great <u>study visit</u> **in Guimaraes** back in **October 2024** (which city was awarded as the European Green Capital 2026 one month after our study visit), where we organised the **Mid Term Review meeting,** partner cities prepared the **first drafts of the Integrated Action Plans** that were peer-reviewed **in Cieza,** Spain, during our **5**[th] **Core Network Meeting** at the end of **March.** It was the main focus of the current period. Besides this, partner cities were also active in organising **Testing Actions and BiodiverCity Festivals**, elaborated during **Spring-Summer 2025.**
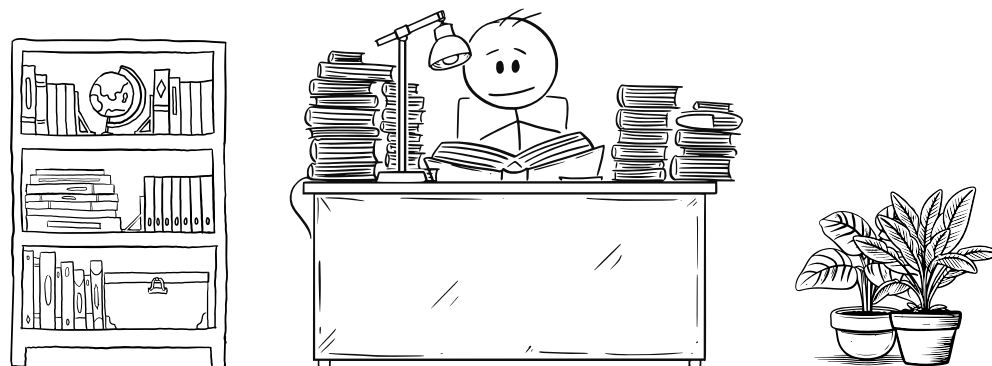
Thoughts related to the Mid Term Review: How can we maximise conditions to get the full potential of exchange and learning?

Partners shared clear messages during the **Mid-Term Review meeting**: no doubt, the project is on the right track, partners are satisfied with most segments of the network, but they also shared those thematic and methodological fields they would like to learn more about. This is clearly described in the <u>**State of Actions Report**</u>. Within the <u>second network article</u>, I summed up the most important thoughts in connection with the <u>State of Actions Report</u>, as follows.

How to measure the impact of exchange and learning?

One of the best moments of the BiodiverCity network was when an ULG member from Veszprém conducted a serious **desk research for Poljčane** related to their local challenges on erosion of the riverbank, and he presented these nature-based solutions for the Slovenian ULG. It was great witnessing such an engagement moment, but what if the network inspires a "weaker" partner who submits, for example, a proposal and gets funding for a green infrastructure project based on this inspiration? It would also be a clear added value, not only locally but to the BiodiverCity network as well. So, how to measure the impact of exchange and learning?

While many partners want to learn more about engagement, many of them do not take the chance provided by BiodiverCity, and do not organise interactive **Urbact Local Group** (ULG) meetings with team-building moments, training and capacity-building events included, to provide personal benefits for often voluntarily working ULG members. If ULG members do not feel themselves and their inputs appreciated and valued, it is not a surprise that they often become less cooperative. The more interactive the ULG, the more committed the members are to implementing the actions. Sharing ownership is a key point here, and it was again explained during the MTR based on three mini-case studies provided by partner cities.

Size indeed matters!

In **June 2024** BiodiverCity partnership went to <u>Limerick</u>, Ireland, to analyse the **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBI)** Limerick City and County Council prepared in 2023. Partners found that such a comprehensive (but not long at all) strategy on **green and blue infrastructure** is key, simply because it paves the way for several new policies targeting green infrastructure and biodiversity, and very few partners have such an overall framework. Although the possibility was open to all partner cities to create a similar strategy within the URBACT project as an IAP, none of the partners will do that. Is it a failure? Well, there are several reasons behind this, and partners can draft great action plans independently from this, but it is also certain that such a framework strategy would be needed in many partner cities, and they missed this chance now.

Contrary, in **May 2024**, we organised an online session with partners related to the local progress made based on transnational inspiration. Veszprém's **<u>climate adaptive grassland management</u>** (later on awarded as <u>URBACT Good Practice</u>) was so inspirational that most partners will include it in the local journey somehow (e.g. part of the testing action or included in the action plan). Well done, great success! Transferring smaller, more concrete practices often seems more realistic...

Doing more or doing less?

It is also a great success that some partners voluntarily do some extra work. For instance, Guimarães has started to prepare its own City Biodiversity Index, while Limerick organised a bioblitz in the frame of the global City Nature Challenge 2025.

Partners identified the following methodological fields they would like to learn more about. The ten questions can be grouped within two major fields as follows.
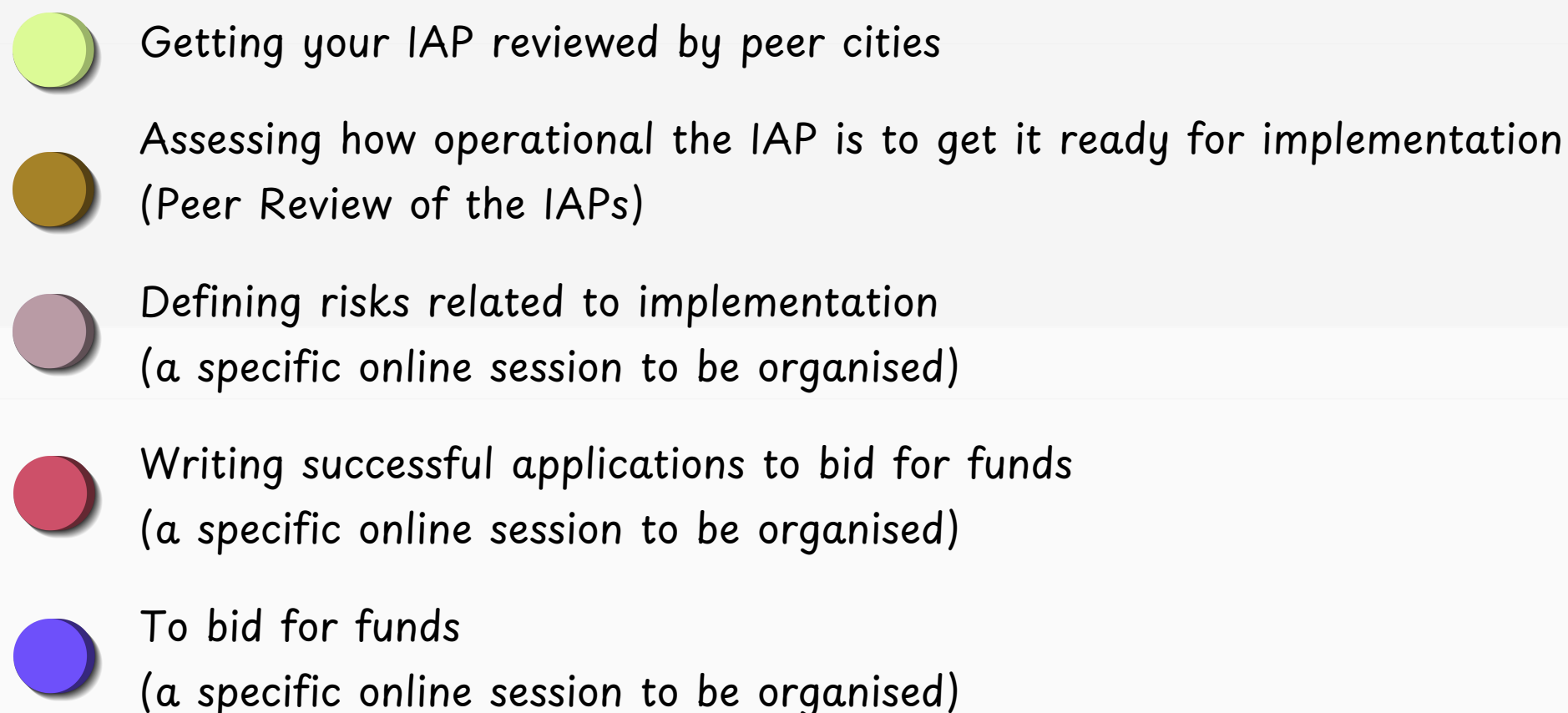
Group A

with more important fields for capacity building:

- Re-organising governance for IAP delivery and maintaining involvement of stakeholders (a specific online session to be organised)

- Aligning specific objectives and results indicators (Peer Review of the IAPs and a specific online session to be organised)

- Setting up an efficient monitoring & evaluation framework (Peer Review of the IAPs and a specific online session to be organised)

- Designing sound and robust funding strategies for the IAP (a specific online session to be organised)

- Identifying relevant funding sources for the IAP (Cieza as case study using LIFE funding to achieve its goals)

Group B

where the need for further capacity building is not so significant

Getting your IAP reviewed by peer cities

Assessing how operational the IAP is to get it ready for implementation (Peer Review of the IAPs)

Defining risks related to implementation (a specific online session to be organised)

Writing successful applications to bid for funds (a specific online session to be organised)

To bid for funds (a specific online session to be organised)

Within the current period, an **online meeting** was organised on **17 March 2025** about "Re-organising governance for IAP delivery and maintaining involvement of stakeholders".

Online

Together with colleagues from Guimarães and Vratsa (Cities4CSR Action Planning Network), as well as Veszprém (Global Goals for Cities), partners successfully participated in URBACT Action Planning Networks before; we were searching for answers to this crucial question.

We touched upon core questions like:

- Who drafted the IAP? External or internal?
- How to activate ULG in the long run?
- What happened to the IAP after the project closure?
- Who is responsible for the completion of tasks?

The case of Eger (HU) within the SURE APN was also highlighted as its IAP had a significant impact on influencing the selection of the target area within the Structural Funds project later on.

As a good practice, Guimarães's **Une Platform** was mentioned since it was born within the **Cities4CSR URBACT APN** and based on the action plan created in that network, the platform is fully operational now. Guimarães's Une Platform was reused in Santarém do Pará (Brasil).

Reorganising governance for IAP delivery and maintaining the involvement of stakeholders

About

Guimarães Une platform aims to foster **perfect partnerships between social organizations and Companies** in the Guimarães.

Through an algorithm designed specifically for this purpose, the Guimarães Une platform creates the **ideal connections between those looking for and those who want to offer**, so that connections become a reality in the shortest possible time.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Guimarães une

COMPANIES

The global organisation, **The Nature of Cities**, invited me to contribute to its regular online roundtable, this time about the **Nature Restoration Law.**

Read the <u>full</u> article!

BiodiverCity's publication is on the website of The Nature of Cities!

The first EU-wide legislation for **large-scale ecosystem restoration** was adopted in August 2024, with legally binding, time-bound targets for all relevant ecosystems. The EU Nature Restoration Law was celebrated as a game changer in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change impacts. However, its adoption was highly controversial, and proponents raised concerns about ecosystem targets being watered down for the law to pass.

This roundtable explores diverse perspectives on putting the EU Nature Restoration Law into action, considering global developments at CBD COP16 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. It includes policymakers and policy think tanks, landscape architects, representatives of landowners, local and national authorities and city planners, ecosystem restoration practitioners and scientists, youth representatives, and business voices.

On behalf of the BiodiverCity network, I raised a core question related to the quality of urban green spaces in the mirror of the Nature Restoration Law: It's not only the size that matters: the case of **quality of urban green spaces** in the light of the EU Nature Restoration Law.

Join the Berlin Urban Nature Pact to promote biodiversity in your city!

The **Berlin Urban Nature Pact** is an alliance of cities to implement global biodiversity goals locally. Signatory cities will implement targeted and visible actions, projects, and processes by 2030.

The Pact, initiated by Berlin, seeks to **halt and reverse biodiversity loss** to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet in cities worldwide by 2030. It builds on the 2020 Edinburgh Declaration and the 2022 Montreal Pledge and focuses on implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and renewed Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity (2023-2030). The easy-to-read and simple Pact was created through eight consultation workshops in 2022/2023 with dozens of interested cities across the globe.

The Berlin Urban Nature Pact was introduced to BiodiverCity partners during an online meeting, and an article was also published on the BiodiverCity website.
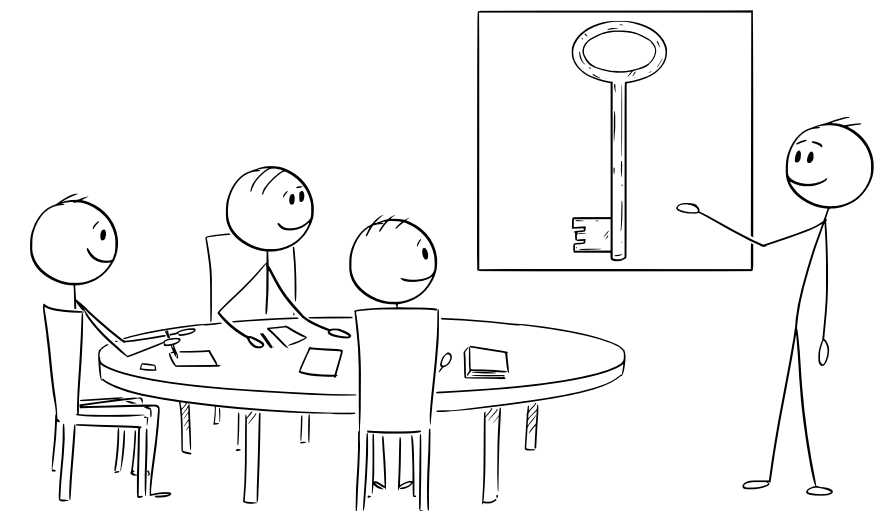

BERLIN URBAN NATURE PACT

Peer Review
of the draft Integrated Action Plans

BiodiverCity achieved an important milestone **in Cieza** (ES), during the **5th Core Network Meeting on 25-27 March 2025**. After working on different questions on how to draft a **comprehensive IAP** and hopefully gaining lots of inspiration, during the Cieza meeting, in line with the URBACT rules, partners jointly checked each others' draft action plans, the main tool to make partner cities more liveable based on the lessons learnt gained within the project.

The IAP is not a report about the URBACT experience, it is about defining a clear vision linked to the local challenges and, based on that, a clear intervention logic with clear objectives and actions being coherent with the challenges set.

Each city checked two draft IAPs by using a Peer Review Sheet (a tailored format of the Coherent Checklist, published on the URBACT Toolbox, previously shared with partners). Although it has scores, the peer review is not a competition. It is about discussing whether the action planning process is on the right track in the mirror of the URBACT journey. Partners also used the Integration Evaluation Grid to check the integration aspects.

Partners did a wonderful job! First, the peer-reviewed city made a short (5 minutes) presentation about the main directions of its IAP, while the visualisation of the intervention logic was presented (for the audience who had not read the given draft IAP). Then, relevant peers shared their comments and remarks in 10-10 minutes, and last, but not least, there was an open debate including comments of the lead expert.

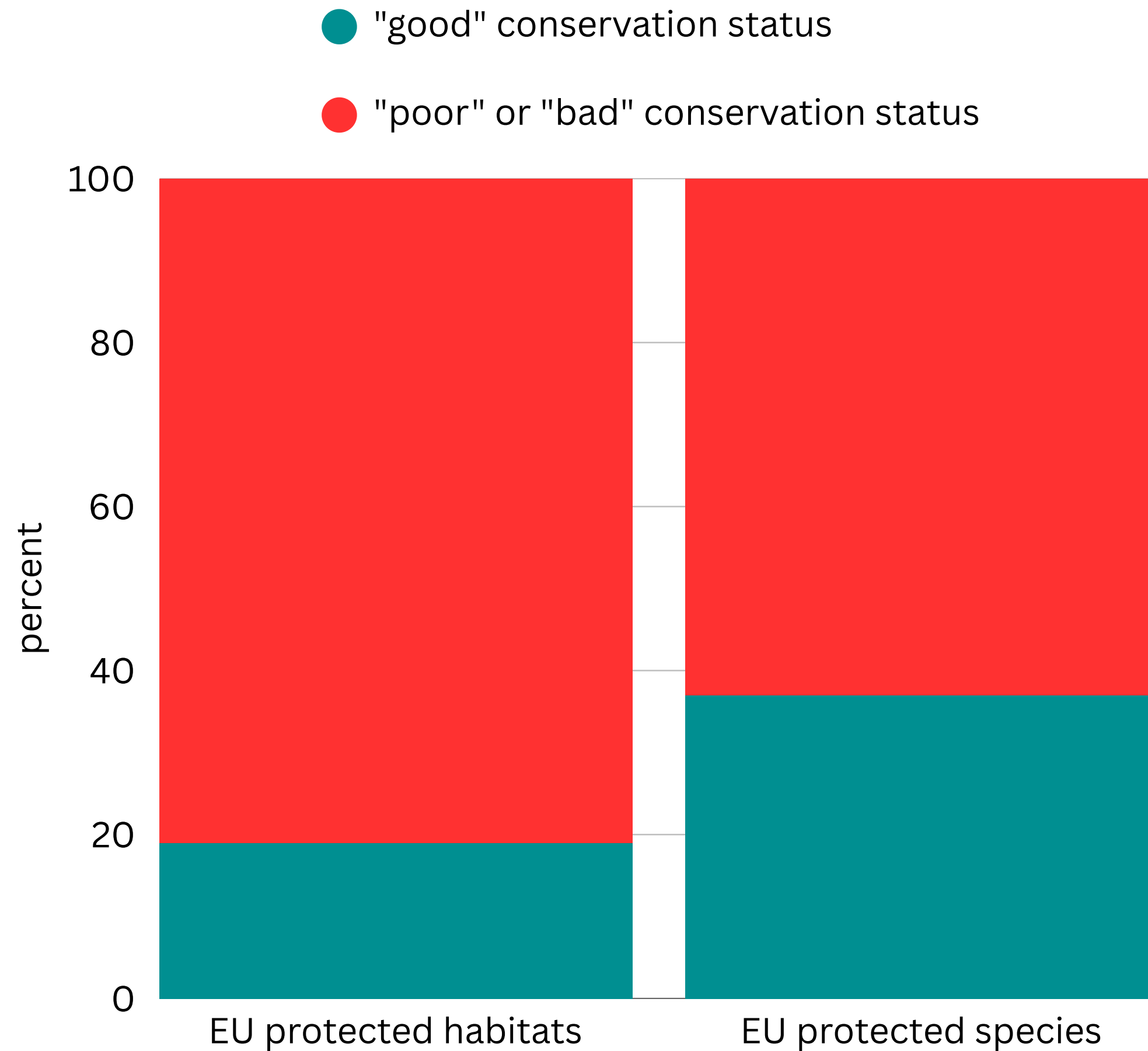## Mar Menor, the first ecosystem in Europe with legal personhood and rights

Mar Menor is the biggest coastal saltwater lagoon in the Iberian Peninsula, located near Cartagena, and La Manga del Mar Menor, occupying most of the 22 km long sandbar, separating the lagoon from the Mediterranean Sea, is one of the biggest tourist complexes of the so-called Costa Caliente. But Mar Menor has gained worldwide attention recently as the first place in Europe where a complex ecosystem has received **legal personhood based on civic activism**, following examples in New Zealand, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia.

Can it be the new standard to protect nature better?

This fundamentally new law - that means a shift from anthropocentrism to an ecocentric approach, which places ecosystems in the centre and humans are seen as interconnected with the environment - was explained to BiodiverCity partners during **Core Network Meeting 5** by **Ms Isabel Rubio Pérez**, retired secondary school teacher and spokesperson of <u>**Pacto por el Mar Menor**</u>, the platform dedicated to the protection of the Mar Menor lagoon.

El Mar Menor

Isabel Rubio Pérez
Pacto por el Mar Menor

"good" conservation status

"poor" or "bad" conservation status

Mar Menor, the first ecosystem in Europe with legal personhood and rights

This first step in Spain is essential on a continent, where 81% of EU protected habitats and 63% of EU protected species are in "poor" or "bad" conservation status.

Can it be the new standard to protect nature better?

Read the full
<u>case study</u>!