



Climate adaptive grassland management in Veszprém, Hungary (Photo: VVI Kft., Veszprém)

Embedding nature in urban planning

**Integrated Action Plans of the BiodiverCity
URBACT network**

URBACT



Co-funded by
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Interreg

BiodiverCity: community-based approaches to foster urban biodiversity and nature-based solutions

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The BiodiverCity partnership in Limerick (Photo: Limerick City and County Council)



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1. INTRODUCTION



How not to manage urban biodiversity...
(Cieza, Spain) / Photo: Ferenc Albert Szigeti

[BiodiverCity](#) is an URBACT action planning network, co-funded by the EU in the [URBACT Programme](#). Between 2023 and 2025, the 10 BiodiverCity partner cities studied and worked on the different aspects of urban biodiversity as well as nature-based solutions (NbS), and based on transnational exchange and learning, they prepared integrated action plans (IAP) together with local stakeholders (URBACT Local Group - ULG) to tackle the most pressing local issues.

The partners: Cieza (ES), Dunaújváros (HU) as Lead Partner, Guimarães (PT), Limerick (IE), Poljčane (SI), Sarajevo (BIH), 's-Hertogenbosch (NL, shortly: Den Bosch), Siena (IT), Veszprém (HU) and Vratsa (BG).

This report, prepared by Marieke Muilwijk as ad-hoc expert and Ferenc Albert Szigeti as network expert, summarises the 10 IAPs co-created by BiodiverCity partner cities with their ULGs. The 10 IAPs were assessed by using a template, tailored based on the Self Assessment Tool for IAPs of the [URBACT Toolbox](#), and the assessment summary table is a key attachment of this report.

The purpose of this document is to 1. explain the steps that helped partners to draft the IAPs and 2. reflect on the network's journey, distil key learnings from the assessment of the IAPs. These learnings can be useful feedback for the URBACT team, future URBACT networks and experts.

The greatest feedback regarding the success of the network is that even very experienced cities like Guimarães, which was awarded the European Green Capital 2026 during the project and Siena, which was awarded Green Leaf 2027 at the end of 2025, found this project useful. Another achievement is that many partners (NL, ES, PT, IT) prepare or plan to prepare local regulations as part of the IAP, and not “only” various projects they propose. Last, but not least, it turned out in December 2025 that Cieza will receive significant ERDF funding to continue its frontrunner work to make Cieza more biophilic. This huge success is partly due to their participation in the network.

There are 5 IAPs (Guimarães with 107,5 points, Veszprém with 104,5 points, Limerick with 104 points, Cieza with 102 points, and Siena with 99 points out of 110 points as maximum score) with very high thematic standards, meeting all URBACT requirements and recommendations. They are innovative and comprehensive plans in terms of using and combining the most novel and effective policies and tools regarding green and blue infrastructure and climate action, and they are also well-written. They are excellent to promote in the URBACT community!

There are 2 IAPs (Den Bosch - 92 points, Poljčane - 83 points) with similarly great content, but lower scores because of the lack of some key information requested from IAPs (e.g. no action planning details in the case of Poljčane, and very limited reference on the co-creation process in the case of 's-Hertogenbosch).

Dunaújváros, the LP itself, represents a separate category as the “biggest surprise”. It has significantly lower scores (60,5), the quality of the IAP is definitely lower, but it seems there is enough potential to continue their work on improving the biodiversity in their urban area.

And unfortunately, there are 2 IAPs (Vratsa with 54,5 points, Sarajevo with 54 points) that “failed the exam”. Besides many smaller and bigger issues explained in the assessment sheets, this is mainly because these IAPs do not propose any actions other than the Testing Actions (so tested within and paid by the BiodiverCity network). Within both IAPs, there are good and highly relevant topics mentioned, but strangely, no actions are formulated based on the challenges and these topics already identified.

Regarding the last three IAPs, it is worth mentioning that since these cities still face major ERDF or other investments (at least in theory) in the future, and their green assets are great, a well-written IAP should have perhaps the biggest potential and impact locally, among the partner cities.

2. STEPPING STONES TO COMPREHENSIVE BIODIVERCITY ACTION PLANS



Corbally meadow in Limerick (Photo:
Limerick City and County Council)

2.1. Overview of the BiodiverCity network and the IAPs in the mirror of the Baseline Study

BiodiverCity is an URBACT action planning network gathering ten partners to explore and deepen the relationship between biodiversity and the urban environment. The original project slogan (*measuring urban biodiversity and accounting related ecosystem-services to verify, design and scale up nature-based solutions*) has been shortened and transformed into: *community-based approaches to foster urban biodiversity and nature-based solutions*.

However, the concept has just slightly changed. The BiodiverCity partnership builds on the awareness-raising potential biodiversity conservation provides in terms of communication and engagement of residents, especially in urban areas, where it is easier to reach people. The other assumption behind the project is that knowing how nature works might effectively pave the way to co-design nature-based solutions as climate action. The focus has shifted from a more scientific approach (accounting for ecosystem services) to a joint understanding of the importance of nature-inclusive cities and co-designing nature-based solutions. In a nutshell, the focus has shifted from “science” to “engagement”. All the work partners made, enabled communities to understand and thus plan robust nature-based solutions, while the action planning process and related dissemination and pilot activities also fostered pro-environmental behaviours.

Urban biodiversity, as well as nature-based solutions, are novel themes within the URBACT Programme; only very few networks have dealt with them, while urban biodiversity is also new in the European policy arena.

The 10 BiodiverCity partner cities have jointly learnt that successful management of urban biodiversity must be based on multi-scale, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder involvement. Nature-based solutions provide a realistic vision for cities where the built environment, social structure, and natural capital can co-exist in harmony. From sustainable urban tree management and wildflower meadows through nature-inclusive buildings, and from constructed wetlands to bird-friendly policies and community engagement, the IAPs highlight those thematic fields where cities can enhance urban biodiversity (therefore, inspired by Limerick’s Biodiversity Officer as well as the LP’s newly established Urban Biodiversity Office, the Network Results Product was titled as “Welcome to the Urban Biodiversity Office! - An Urban Biodiversity Guidebook for cities to transform their relationship with nature.

Among the several and varied themes partner cities found crucial locally, the Network Roadmap (within the [Baseline Study](#), prepared at the beginning of the project) defined the following core themes relevant in each partner city, and they are reflected in the IAPs as follows:

Core Theme	Level of Uptake (1-5, where 5 is the best)
<i>Communication and engagement</i> to raise awareness and change the mindsets of residents. Green space stimulates identity and community spirit efficiently - they are great tools to mobilise citizens. New, biodiversity-driven green spaces might be advocates of the mindset change required.	<i>Uptake Level in the network: 5</i> <i>Uptake Level in the IAPs: 4</i> This topic was used as a horizontal theme during exchange and learning activities, and most partners planned actions tackling this theme; however, perhaps not taking the full potential of this theme.
<i>Community-based approaches to valorise/measure ecosystem services.</i> Monetising the value of nature can be a strong awareness-raising tool, and citizen	<i>Uptake Level in the network: 4</i> <i>Uptake Level in the IAPs: 3</i> Measuring ecosystem services as such, has been softened in the project. It is rather a scientific issue; therefore, more

science can also be powerful, while the organisation of local bioblitz events can be a strong basis to refer to ecosystem services. It is challenging to measure the value of something priceless, but in cities, the most important thing is to be able to convey in very plain language the benefits that ecosystem services have for society, in such a way that citizens can understand and internalise.	attention was paid to citizen science as an engagement tool, and for example, bioblitz was one of the “stars” regarding this theme, many partners plan it. Yet, few IAPs deal with measurement directly.
<i>Integrated strategy on green and blue infrastructure</i> (GBI). In line with the EU recommendations, cities should work on integrating nature-based solutions into urban planning. One way to do that is to create an integrated strategy on green and blue infrastructure.	<i>Uptake Level in the network: 5</i> <i>Uptake Level in the IAPs: 2</i> Some partner cities have such a GBI strategy; the majority do not. It was a great opportunity for partners to prepare a GBI strategy, as the IAP, inspired by Limerick, partners visited in the beginning, where this topic was well demonstrated and discussed. Unfortunately, none of the relevant partners took the opportunity to make something “big”.
<i>Urban Greening Plan</i> : when the project started, it was planned that the EU Commission would call all European cities of 20,000 inhabitants or more to develop ambitious Urban Greening Plans.	<i>Uptake Level: N/A.</i> This theme was not really tackled during the project (so not relevant in the IAPs) as there was no information available from the EU. In Cieza, we demonstrated in detail how the related action, the Green City Accord, works.
<i>Residential programmes</i> . Most of the urban green space is often owned privately. Therefore, it is crucial to launch local programmes specifically targeting residents to transform their green areas more biodiverse and resilient.	<i>Uptake Level in the network: 5</i> <i>Uptake Level in the IAPs: 2</i> A case study was dedicated to this still super-relevant theme, but only a few IAPs deal with that.
<i>The pollinator-friendly city concept</i> . Many of the partner cities are interested in this topic, and many of them have already started to implement such a concept.	<i>Uptake Level in the network: 5</i> <i>Uptake Level in the IAPs: 5</i> Many partners already had a practice in this field, but the topic was also discussed several times, and well covered within the IAPs.
<i>Green roofs, green walls, and shading green</i> . They are core elements of the urban green infrastructure with a high potential in terms of water retention. The question for the partnership is not dedicated to technical issues but related to how to use local regulations as a driver of building green rooftops, green walls, rain gardens, and other types of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUD).	<i>Uptake Level in the network: 5</i> <i>Uptake Level in the IAPs: 2</i> Despite the various case studies and articles, as well as the importance of the topic, unfortunately, only a few IAPs tackle green roofs and green walls, as well as blue infrastructure.

This is not about value judgment in most cases. It is normal and interesting to see that quite some partners have prepared actions that they had not foreseen at the beginning, ideas that are therefore not mentioned in the Baseline Study. *Yet, the lack of “blue measures” and actions targeting green roofs and green walls is a missed opportunity.*

Besides the above core themes, three novel, global initiatives were also identified in the Baseline Study, allowing partners to join them within the framework of the BiodiverCity network, if possible:

Theme	Progress made
The <i>City Biodiversity Index</i> : the most comprehensive index related to urban biodiversity, prepared by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It is a self-assessment tool for cities to benchmark and monitor the progress of their biodiversity conservation efforts against their baselines.	Preparing such an index seemed perhaps too complex for an URBACT project. <i>Guimarães</i> has been working on the index and included it in the IAP, while <i>Limerick</i> included it in Action 1.4 (start using it in the future).
<i>City Nature Challenge</i> : a global movement of organising bioblitz events.	<i>Guimarães</i> and <i>Siena</i> have been participating in this global bioblitz event for years, and within the project, they shared their experience. Although some partners indicated their interests, finally only <i>Limerick</i> joined in 2025 (while some other partners indicated to would join, but finally they did not do that).
The UN Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework encourages the private sector to invest in financial schemes regarding biodiversity, amongst others, the so-called <i>biodiversity credits</i> .	This innovative financing tool was presented during Core Network Meeting 1, but since it is more relevant for conservation organisations, the network has not dealt with this topic afterwards.

Bioblitz in Siena (Photo: Municipality of Siena)



2.2. How the BiodiverCity network organised exchange and learning

The network largely followed the methodology and roadmap described in the [Baseline Study](#). BiodiverCity has developed an extensive plan for capacity building and knowledge exchange around the transnational and local challenges to support the development of the IAPs and to accelerate their implementation and uptake. The exchanges happened at the transnational level with the partners, other networks and URBACT experts, and at the local level with the ULGs. The main tools for knowledge exchange and capacity building included: 1. Transnational Meetings; 2. BiodiverCity Café online meetings; 3. ULG Meetings.

Transnational Meetings

Seven bigger (personal) meetings were organised ([Core Network Meetings](#)). This meeting structure originally followed the thematic blocks of the WWF's One Planet City Challenge, but finally the network had 7 meetings as partners asked to separate the meeting originally planned to Cieza and Guimarães within the same trip.

Name of the meeting	One Planet City Challenge tackled	URBACT topic tackled	Thematic Outcome
Core Network Meeting 1: 13-16 November 2023, Den Bosch	Measure, valorise and engage - essential first steps to become BiodiverCities.	Ready for actions - having mutual agreement around the focus of the network's exchange and learning activities, as well as the methodological framework for local activities.	The finalised Baseline Study, including the Network Roadmap First article
Core Network Meeting 2: 15-19 April, 2024, Dunaújváros & Veszprém	From vision to community leadership through the integrative approach	Integrative approach explained in a separate workshop	BiodiverCity case study 1 : Making nature-based solutions visible and promoting soil life through deep mulch gardens in Veszprém BiodiverCity case study 3 : Climate-adaptive grassland management in urban environments BiodiverCity case study 5 : Tools to activate residents to transform their private gardens into biodiversity oases Article about Dunaújváros
Core Network Meeting 3: 12-13 June 2024, Limerick	Lead by example: from small-scale actions to an integrated green-and blue strategy.	Peer Review of Testing Actions planned	BiodiverCity case study 7 : Get to know Ireland's first Natural Play Area! BiodiverCity case study 8 : Innovative tools and methods to foster sustainable and biodiverse maintenance of public green areas (based on the masterclass) Article about the sponge city concept Article on Limerick's GBI strategy

			For a more climate-proof and biodiverse built environment: BiodiverCity_case_study on green rooftops, walls and shadowing
Core Network Meeting 4: 22-24 October 2024, Guimarães	Utilising inspiring networks - the importance of local, national and international networks of peers in helping to achieve the goals	Agreement on the Mid-Term Review	BiodiverCity_case_study_11 : Putting biodiversity first – even in a city Midterm Article Midterm Review
Core Network Meeting 5: 25-27 March 2025, Cieza, Spain	Utilising inspiring networks - the importance of local, national and international networks of peers in helping to achieve the goals	Peer review of the draft IAPs	Case Study 13 about Mar Menor, the first ecosystem in Europe to have a legal entity A chapter dedicated to trees in the Network Results Product
Core Network Meeting 6: 17-19 June 2025, Siena	Form university partnerships to achieve the goals along urban biodiversity and NbS	Storytelling to report back about Testing Actions	BiodiverCity_case_study_14 : Creating urban wildlife and green corridors for the benefit of nature and people
Core Network Meeting 7. incl. a Final Conference: 8-9 October, 2025, Dunaújváros (HU)	Highlighting co-benefits and the final event for dissemination	Peer review of the final IAPs	Current IAP Report Network Results Product

Core Network Meetings consisted of masterclasses, walkshops and workshops, capturing the learning process and formulating takeaways were done by photo safaris and learning grids.

In addition to Core Network Meetings, three smaller meetings, the so-called *Peer Learning Meetings*, were organised, where interested partners (not necessarily the entire group) discussed some specific issues important locally, while at the same time, they shared their related experiences with locals. The following meetings were organised, indicating the project outputs as well:

Name of the meeting	Thematic Outcome
25-26 September 2024, Poljčane	Article about beehive therapy BiodiverCity_case_study_9 : Urban permaculture: helping residents reconnect to nature

2-3 October, 2024, Sarajevo	BiodiverCity case study 10 : The Sarajevo process and nature-based tourism: new ways to engage people to value nature-based solutions
23-24 September 2025, Vratsa	Article about NbS as financially viable opportunities

BiodiverCity Café (online meetings)

To involve as many stakeholders as possible, to listen to external speakers, and to involve our “twin” project (GreenPlace), BiodiverCity Café online meetings were organised to link up personal meetings. The themes indicated in the next table have been selected for feeding these sessions to be organised by the Lead Expert, supported by each partner city and external actors (incl. ad-hoc experts). Besides feeding the action planning process, these online sessions have often helped with the preparation for the upcoming transnational activity, too. *Based on partners’ feedback, Café sessions were extremely useful, especially those where the network could include top EU knowledge in this way.*

Theme of the meeting	Thematic Outcome
1. NbS in agriculture (8 February 2024) held by the LE	Presentation shared
2. The Bee Path of Ljubljana and its transfer to Budapest district XII (by Hegyvidék and the LE), on 22 February 2024	Presentation shared Chapter in the Network Results Product
3. City Nature Challenge (by Elena Dionori, Siena) on 21 March 2024	BiodiverCity case study 2 : How to organise an efficient bioblitz event to map urban biodiversity and activate local communities?
4. Residential programs of District 12, focusing on untrained saplings in cities instead of pre-grown nursery trees (external speaker)	BiodiverCity case study 4 : 5+1 Reasons to plant untrained saplings in cities instead of pre-grown nursery trees
5. Understanding the Role of the Placemaking Officer and Biodiversity Officer (by Limerick), 30 May 2024	BiodiverCity case study 6 : Meet Sinead McDonnell, one of Ireland’s local authority biodiversity officers!
6. Paris Green Oasis Programme, 24 June 2024, by Joséphine BUSSIÈRE, project manager, City of Paris.	Presentation shared Chapter in the Network Result Product
7. Gender aspects in urban green space planning (10 Oct, 2024), by Marieke Muilwijk	Article published
8. Presentation of the Green Minds UIA project on 17 October 2024 (Liz Cole)	Presentation and other project materials shared
9. Learning about the Biodiversity Net Gain approach (UK), 7 November 2024 (Sarah Hawes, Bristol)	Presentation shared
10. Learning about the failed example of Budapest on using sheep in public green areas, 21 November 2024 (Hajnalka Cserna)	Presentation shared
11. Berlin Urban Nature Pact, 28 November 2024 (Sandra Naumann, Berlin)	Presentation shared Article
12. Farewell meeting: watching the Tomorrow movie (17 December 2025)	N/A

ULG Meetings

Each partner has organised at least 8 meetings with their local stakeholders. The ULGs are the cornerstones of the network. They are vital in fostering a participatory approach at the local level, ensuring that communities actively contribute to urban development. Some partners could build on existing stakeholder groups, or combine 2 different URBACT APN ULGs; others had to find participants to create a new platform. In the Network Roadmap, a plan was provided for what moments the ULG should be engaged. Tools have been given to transfer as much knowledge as possible from the Network Meetings and Café sessions to the local groups.

In the IAPs, it becomes clear that most members of the respective ULGs will stay engaged in the planned actions even after the BiodiverCity project has formally been closed.

On the local level, the organisation of [BiodiverCity Festivals](#) was the most visible action, for which the network provided ad-hoc expertise: Rita Szerencsés facilitated the local progress and supported partners to indeed organise an event together with local communities.

The Network Result Product

On 28 May 2025, the partnership had an ideation workshop linked to the so-called Network Results Product, the final outcome on the project level. The basic idea was to explain those thematic fields that a biodiversity office should work with. This is how the final output was born, which was inspired by Limerick's and Dunaújváros' related activities and titled as *"Welcome to the Urban Biodiversity Office! - An Urban Biodiversity Guidebook for cities to transform their relationship with nature". This guidebook highlights those thematic fields where cities can enhance urban biodiversity, enabling them to put biodiversity as a core organising principle of urban planning.*

The majority of the guidebook was prepared by the Lead Expert, partly based on existing case studies. In addition, the following contributors drafted the chapters below:

Elena Dionori, naturalist, environment educator and butterfly expert, collaborator at Museo di Storia Naturale Accademia dei Fisiocritici, Siena: Bioblitz: an engagement tool directly focusing on urban biodiversity

Dr Ildikó Réka Báthoryné Nagy, associate professor, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, national coordinator of the URBACT program: Wildflower meadows in the city / Climate-adaptive grassland management in urban environments; There is no biodiversity without vital habitats that attract species

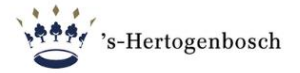
Marieke Muilwijk, independent advisor on urban planning and cultural heritage for resilient landscapes, ad-hoc expert of the BiodiverCity network: Nature-inclusive buildings / When the dense urban fabric yet has lots of free space for greening.



3. THE BIODIVERCITY IAP JOURNEY



Birds and Bats Houses



Area passports Green and Climate resilient

Gebiedspaspoorten Groen en Klimaatbestendig 's-Hertogenbosch



IAP BiodiverCity

If more than 500 m² of paving is added:

- buildings must include fauna facilities for at least three species;
- a minimum biodiversity score is required, based on a.o. the principles of sufficient food and water, habitats, safety, reproduction and connectivity for species.

Fauna towers



Biodiversity Art



Bats



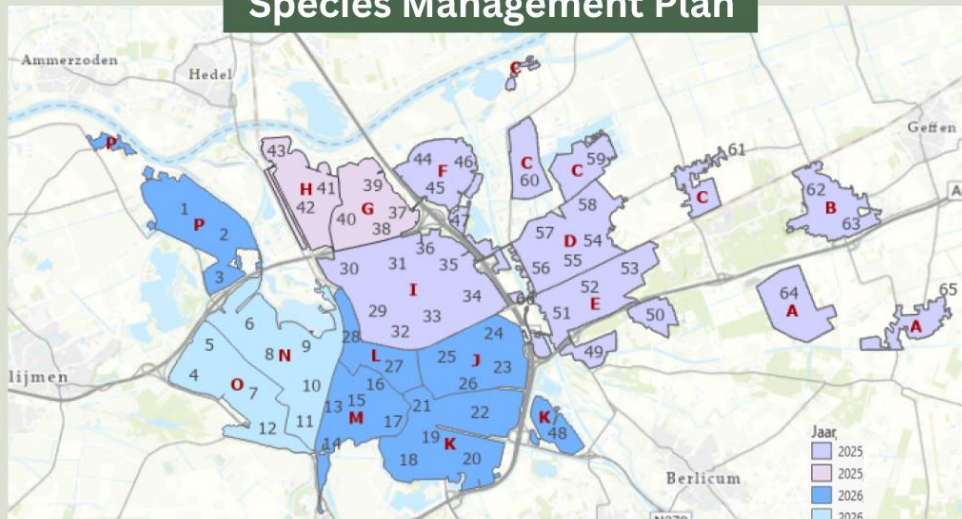
Swifts



House swallows



Species Management Plan



The action planning journey started in 2023, during the URBACT University, one of URBACT’s flagship events. It provided concrete tools and methods to develop integrated and participatory approaches for the design and implementation of urban policies. The Newspaper of Tomorrow (“A long awaited biodiversity inclusive park has opened”), created by participating BiodiverCity partners, was used as a “mission statement” for the project implementation. After the city visits, made by the Lead Expert and partly by the Lead Partner, the Baseline Study described learning needs and working methodology in detail. Besides thematic inputs from personal and online meetings described above, the following steps helped partners in the action planning process directly.

- » A workshop during Core Network Meeting 2, dedicated to the integrative approach, elaborated together with Rita Szerencsés, ad-hoc expert.
- » On 23 May 2024, an online meeting was organised dedicated to the local progress made by partners (ULG, IAP) in the mirror or transnational activities.
- » As a result of the above meeting, the Lead Expert recommended a table of contents for the IAPs, which was updated later, after the first peer review in Cieza.
- » During Core Network Meeting 3 (June 2024), Limerick provided a great example of what a GBI strategy looks like, and together with Marieke Mulwijk, ad-hoc expert, a workshop dedicated to the Testing Actions was held.
- » In September 2024, bilateral discussions were organised with all cities to check local progress.

Obligatory aspects of integrated approaches

Aspects of integration	Description	What is the current situation?	How can progress be made?
Stakeholder involvement in planning	The full range of stakeholders (considered horizontal and vertical) are engaged in identifying priorities and potential solutions		
Coherence with existing strategies	Actions and objectives are aligned and complementary providing strategies in place at city, regional, national or European levels		
Sustainable urban development	Actions address all three pillars of sustainable development in terms of economic, social and environmental objectives		
Integration over time	Planning relevant actions in the short, medium and longer terms and considering necessary order in implementing actions		
Stakeholder involvement in implementation	The full range of relevant stakeholders (horizontal and vertical) are engaged in implementing planned actions		

Optional aspects of more integrated approaches

Aspects of integration	Description	What is the current situation?	How can progress be made?
Sectoral integration	Addressing the full range of policy sectors of activity, including infrastructure, transport, employment, education, green spaces, housing, culture...		
Spatial integration	Coherence of actions at different spatial scales from site specific, through neighbourhood and city-wide		
Territorial integration	Coherence and complementarity of actions and policies implemented by neighbouring municipalities		
Multi-level governance	Actions are planned coherently at different levels of governance, covering local (district, city), regional and national levels		
Integration of cross-cutting thematic aspects	Including gender, climate climate change and environment		
Complementary types of investment	Balancing the need for both 'hard' (physical) infrastructure and 'soft' (human capital) investments		
Options all available funding	Seeking to use the full range of funds available to support the implementation of planned actions, from EU funds to private local sources		

Aspects of integration (above) and the first plans regarding the focus of the IAPs (on the right)

What is the shared vision of your IAP?

10 responses

protect nature
citizen science
green issues
community engagement
blue issues
engagement
nothing yet
passion
nbs

Presentation is closed

Mentimeter

- » During the Core Network Meeting 4 (22-24 October 2024), in Guimarães, the partnership had a poster session dedicated to the planned IAPs and agreed in the Mid-Term Review, including concrete steps to be made related to the needs identified in connection with the action planning process:

Needs Identified	Concrete Steps Planned
1. Re-organising governance for the IAP delivery and maintaining the involvement of stakeholders	Experienced URBACT cities to highlight their practice in CNM5.
2. Identifying relevant funding sources for the IAP	CNM5 (Cieza case explained) + online session dedicated to financing schemes (LE).
3. Aligning specific objectives and results indicators	Peer Review of the final IAPs + Ad-Hoc Expert involved for a specific session.
4. Designing sound and robust funding strategies for the IAP	Online session dedicated to financing schemes and funding strategy.
5. Setting-up an efficient monitoring & evaluation framework	Peer Review of the final IAPs + Ad-Hoc Expert involved for a specific session.
6. Writing successful applications to bid for funds & To bid for funds	Dedicated online meeting (LE)
7. Assessing how operational the IAP is to get it ready for implementation	Peer review of the final IAPs
8. Defining risks related to implementation	Online meeting with an Ad-Hoc Expert.

- » In connection with point 1, an online meeting, held on 17 March 2025, was dedicated to Re-organising governance for IAP delivery and maintaining involvement of stakeholders. Experienced partners and the Lead Expert made presentations about the impact of previous IAPs.
- » During Core Network Meeting 5 (25-27 March 2025, Cieza) the partnership had a massive peer-review session linked to the draft IAPs. The methodology, prepared by the LE, was based on groups: each city had to read and evaluate two IAPs, based on a common template. In addition, the Masterclass was partly organised around points 2, 4 and 6.
- » On 14 May 2025, the Lead Expert had an online presentation and workshop related to points 3, 5, and 8.
- » The peer-review of the final IAPs occurred during the Core Network Meeting 7. The partners worked in pairs to exchange as much information about one another's IAP in order to be able to present the other's plan to the group. It was interesting to see that there was animated discussion between the members of the same city as well. The self-assessment tool that all partners had filled out beforehand, paved the way for an honest exchange about how the IAP was being perceived. In fact, the use of the self-assessment tool turned out to generate an internal peer-review. And this was exactly what we had hoped for. The fact that a playful technique was introduced made that the partners paid close attention to the presentations. And as it was not the partner city itself who presented, different aspects of the IAPs were highlighted. Achievements that are normal to one partner and hardly ever mentioned, were highlighted by their peers. For instance, the "green standard" for urban expansion that is applied by Den Bosch. This is an approach that could help Guimarães in the future. The use of citizen science (research conducted with participation from the general public) is not perceived in the same way amongst the partnership. In some cities it is regarded as reliable, in other countries it isn't official enough to be used for national data bases. The partners shared their experiences, helping one another how to

introduce monitoring using a citizen-friendly application. Or for example the commitment of inhabitants and other non-governmental stakeholders on the long term. In Siena, they established a fruitful connection building on a series of past participatory projects. For partners without such a basis it is no surprise if in the first year the community engagement is not perfect. It takes time and partners should learn not to be afraid of “trial and error”.

- » As a final step, ad-hoc expert Marieke Mulwijk and network expert Ferenc Albert Szigeti assessed all IAPs.

3.1. The focus of each partner's IAP and the link with the broader network theme

The IAPs clearly responded to specific local challenges within the spectrum of the themes of the project. As a result, all IAPs had their own specific focus. Though many partners touched on some similar ideas, their overarching plans were unique to their locations, challenges, culture, and communities, which made it difficult to thematically group the IAPs.

Initial challenges and plans were transformed throughout the course of the project, due to the local and transnational learnings and exchanges. In most cases, the IAPs were enriched with more actions inspired by their peers.

A common element of final IAPs is to increase urban biodiversity (some specific segments or through a more comprehensive approach) with the active involvement of the community to renew the relationship between people and their environment. The better elaborated IAPs tackle all of this within an inclusive, connected, and resilient urban green network. Creating urban green corridors is an utmost priority recommended by all related EU policies and strategies.

More successful IAPs provide coherence between planning, governance, and community action in the given cities, ensuring that the ecological transition is rooted in both long-term institutional vision and active civic participation.

Climate adaptation is also tackled by many IAPs, which is great, since improving urban biodiversity is also about climate action due to mutual co-benefits, high diversity green areas can provide. *However, the blue aspect has not been really tackled*, only in a few, more sophisticated IAPs. The following table shows the vision or main objective behind each IAP:

Cieza	Renaturalise Cieza by promoting nature-based solutions that improve the quality of urban life, improve biodiversity, and foster a more inclusive and coordinated urban governance model. By integrating biodiversity into planning, monitoring and education, and by actively engaging citizens, schools, associations and the agricultural sector, the city seeks to build a renewed relationship between people and their environment. This transformation will contribute not only to climate adaptation and ecological health, but also to social well-being, equity in access to green spaces and a long-term culture of environmental stewardship
Dunaújváros	To significantly increase urban biodiversity with the active involvement of the community, to combine the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity with the environmental awareness and active participation of the population.
Guimarães	Promote a resilient urban ecosystem by strengthening connectivity and improving habitats within a radial area around the urban core.
Limerick	A Limerick whose inhabitants understand and appreciate the variety and importance of the biodiversity that call urban green spaces home.

Poljčane	The IAP envisions it as a “pollinator-friendly municipality,” where green spaces are revitalised with native flowering plants, mowing regimes are adjusted to support biodiversity, and public areas become living classrooms for ecological education. In this future, bees are not only pollinators but also ambassadors of sustainability—bridging nature and people, tradition and innovation, community and governance.
Sarajevo	By 2027, Sarajevo will be a model of urban biodiversity where green spaces foster peace, education, and ecological resilience.
's-Hertogenbosch	To create an inclusive, connected, and resilient urban green network. To achieve this, the plan sets out four strategic goals: improving equal access to green and cooling spaces across all neighbourhoods, restoring ecological connectivity within and around the city, embedding biodiversity and climate adaptation into municipal governance, and fostering long-term community ownership of urban nature.
Siena	Transform Siena’s green valleys into a connected, accessible, and socially vibrant ecological network — a system that bridges the historic city and its surroundings while fostering inclusion, wellbeing, and biodiversity conservation.
Veszprém	By 2030, Veszprém - while preserving its natural and built heritage - will flexibly adapt to changing environmental conditions, significantly increase its water retention capacity and further improve the quality and functions of green spaces, involving urban communities in planning, decision-making, implementation and maintenance, to improve the sense of belonging and quality of life of city residents.
Vratsa	The main objective of the Integrated Action Plan is to address the challenge of biodiversity loss in the urban environment and the insufficient provision of ecosystem services. Through targeted actions, the plan seeks to introduce and scale up green infrastructure, restore degraded habitats, and promote community engagement in environmental stewardship.

3.2. Innovative character of the IAPs vs. challenges and missed opportunities

Urban biodiversity and nature-based solutions are relatively *new in the EU policy arena* (e.g. ICLEI just made an office dedicated to urban biodiversity) as well as in the URBACT Programme and also at the city level. Therefore, understanding the topic took time, and defining actions took even more time. However, it is a pity that none of those partners, having no GBI strategy, took the chance provided by the URBACT Programme to at least lay down the basis of a city-wide GBI strategy (NB: Limerick’s related strategy, studied by the network, is not a very heavy document). Yet, *most IAPs are part of the climate action, not just a “nice to have” policy tool*, which is also a great achievement.

In connection with this, Cieza’s IAP shall be mentioned: it describes institutional fragmentation as a challenge, and it sets actions to *promote interdepartmental integration and institutional innovation* to efficiently manage urban biodiversity, applying a coordinated and data-driven approach, incl. a training workshop for politicians. Spreading the knowledge across municipal silos was mentioned by more partners in the Baseline Study; unfortunately, not all of them used a similar approach to Cieza.

In general, a *strong IAP finds its right “place” among the various existing local strategies, creating added value locally in the mirror of the strategic background of the city*. The IAP should be a game-changer this way, but not because it is a huge action plan with hundreds of actions. The best, most coherent IAPs are relatively small and made by those cities that have basic strategies dealing with green infrastructure.

One of the biggest achievements is that *4 partners (Cieza, Den Bosch, Guimarães and Siena) planned local regulations along the different projects as actions*. This is important since they might have a serious impact (e.g. changing the ways of mowing the lawn on public green spaces and using wildflower meadows instead). In addition, Dunaújváros opened the country's first municipal Biodiversity Office, funded by a LIFE project, but inspired by the BiodiverCity network.

BiodiverCity IAP actions are mostly innovative; even the two weakest IAPs have actions (though, as Testing Actions) completely new in the appropriate countries.

Since BiodiverCity IAPs are local and thematically specified, thus, they target mostly local municipal funding with realistically small budgets foreseen.

As for the structure and organisation of the IAPs, the ones with higher scores obviously better meet the URBACT standards, and some of them act as good examples. For example:

- » How Veszprém reflected on risk assessment.
- » How Siena used baseline indicators and included horizontal principles in strategic goals.
- » How Limerick tackles SDGs, and includes measurement as well as horizontal principles into strategic goals.
- » How Guimarães used “Action Readiness Level” for its actions.

The IAP process also encountered several challenges. It took time and effort for the whole team to understand all the topics of BiodiverCity. Involving local experts who could restate the same aspect but with a local context gave more clarity to partners, and international experts brought interesting insights and inspired the partnership. *The project was successful in terms of harvesting and embedding the knowledge gained through transnational exchange and learning, yet not all the partners reflected them in the IAPs.*

The most significant challenge partners faced during the ‘learning journey’ is perhaps the lack of measurement in the IAPs. Or perhaps better to say that this aspect has been transformed to a more citizen-science or community engagement focus from an originally planned, more scientific point of view. Limerick can be mentioned here as a good example, by embedding measurement both in the Testing Actions and the IAP, as well as Siena, which used baseline indicators in the IAP. However, it is worth mentioning that it was clarified both in Guimarães and Siena that a comprehensive urban biodiversity and NbS approach needs scientific monitoring and training for staff and other departments! All in all, completing the IAPs, all partners reached a high understanding of the complexity involved in delivering BiodiverCity, but not all of them took the full potential of the theme.

Funding is usually one of the biggest challenges for URBACT partners regarding the IAP. It was also mentioned by BiodiverCity partners during the Mid-Term Review as a challenge (though not the most pressing one), and the network reflected on this request. However, in the final IAPs, this challenge is not very relevant anymore, as most of them are about very local actions, requesting money from the local authority only. An APN project is not aimed at finding money elsewhere, so no surprise that hardly any ERDF or ESF funding is mentioned.



3.3. The integrated approach of IAPs and how the thematic focus of the IAPs reflects the integrated approach

The majority of the BiodiverCity IAPs give a clear picture of the relevance of different integration aspects; however, many of them are not relevant as IAPs target the improvement of urban green spaces on a local, even a superlocal level.

Stakeholder involvement in planning. Most cities explained how local stakeholders were engaged in identifying priorities and potential solutions and contributed to the preparation of the IAP. However, Veszprém has to be highlighted, as its IAP development process is explained along with the various ULG meetings, ULG members are named and concrete tools are also mentioned. So, the HOW is very well explained, not just the WHAT. A similar approach was used in Guimarães. The fact that many partners do not mention the ULG members by name makes the reader a bit suspicious about the depth of the co-creation process.

Coherence with existing strategies. Planned actions and objectives are aligned and complementary to existing strategies in place at the city, regional, national or even European levels. Due to climate change, improving both the quality and the quantity of urban green spaces is a priority. In the best IAPs, not only is a specific chapter dedicated to the policy context, but each action consists of a reference to relevant urban strategies. The way Limerick's IAP tackles even SDGs is a good practice to be shared.

Sustainable urban development. Due to the specific focus of the IAPs, environmental objectives are automatically tackled, but there are rather limited implications towards economic issues. The only thing which is mainly highlighted in Limerick's IAP is the reduced maintenance costs (which should be highlighted in many other IAPs). As for social goals, they are covered to some extent in most IAPs; however, a very limited number of actions have been defined regarding equal opportunities in the use of public green space.

Integration over time. Most IAPs concentrate on short and medium terms.

Stakeholder involvement in implementation. This was a crucial question during the Midterm Review: for whom do we prepare the IAP? The IAPs have a strong focus on municipal actions; thus, not too many external stakeholders are mentioned as responsible for planned actions.

Sectoral integration. Due to the focus of the IAPs, this aspect is less relevant; however, it was mentioned in the project that planning NbS needs strong cooperation from different authorities and experts (landscape architects, conservationists, different engineers, urban planners, etc.), and municipalities are the best-positioned bodies to orchestrate. Cieza's IAP shall be mentioned at this point: it describes institutional fragmentation as a challenge, and it sets action to promote interdepartmental integration and institutional innovation to efficiently manage urban biodiversity, applying a coordinated and data-driven approach, incl. a training workshop for politicians. Siena has to be also mentioned: the IAP "stands at the intersection of several strategic trajectories that are shaping Siena's ecological transition. More than a planning document, it functions as a strategic connector, aligning and complementing the city's ongoing initiatives".

Spatial integration. More advanced IAPs tackle the topic of urban green corridors as a key topic, recommended by all major policy guidelines. In some cases, the existing strategies have already tackled this (i.e. Limerick). Unfortunately, not all IAPs propose such a holistic aspect. A good and interesting example is Den Bosch, which has shifted the focus of the IAP during the project from one specific spot to more general issues and the entire city, including references to urban green corridor and setting action to propose regulation!

Territorial integration. Although most IAPs focus mostly on a super local level, in cases where the green corridor is tackled, relevant actors (e.g. neighbouring municipalities) are to be involved.

Multi-level governance. Actions are mostly planned coherently at different levels of governance, but the majority of the actions cover the local (district, city) level. Where this question would be very relevant (i.e. Sarajevo due to its multi-level municipal system), less cooperation is visible.

Integration of cross-cutting thematic aspects. In line with the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025), integration of the gender perspective into all other policies is as important as direct integration of the theme. Although the so-called "eco gender gap" (women are more likely than men to care for green issues) seems to be disappearing as the effects of climate change hit us dramatically, the safety of urban (green) spaces is an important factor regarding green infrastructure planning, as highlighted by the [Gender Equal Cities Guidebook](#) as well as by Marieke Mulwijk, who gave a masterclass on this issue. Most BiodiverCity partners took the theme of gender equality seriously, both in forming their ULGs and in the planned actions. Digitalisation can also be directly used concerning green issues: in mapping biodiversity and green areas, for example, or fostering participation of residents through the use of participative platforms, just like Sarajevo does. The use of digital monitoring applications has been tested by several partners with great success. They will integrate its use in future biodiversity monitoring activities. One of the main reasons is that the inhabitants can use the apps as well, not only helping the municipalities with the monitoring, but increasing their "green engagement" at the same time. The best result can be found in the IAP of Siena as it integrates the URBACT cross-cutting themes of digital transformation and gender-equal policy-making not just as afterthoughts, but as essential dimensions of a deeper ecological transition. Digital is also an integrated part of Limerick's IAP. The entire work of the network supports green transition, meaning a shift towards economically sustainable growth and an economy that is not based on fossil fuels and overconsumption of natural resources. Both the LE and local experts held a masterclass in Siena.

Complementary types of investment. Balancing the need for both 'hard' (physical/ infrastructure) and 'soft' (human capital) investments. As the improvement of green infrastructure with local communities is the main topic, most partners correctly planned both soft and hard actions. The best example is perhaps Poljčane, which refers to resources/funds such as private sector partnerships and sponsorships, as well as volunteer engagement and community co-investment.

Mobilising all available funding. Most partners intend to use local, municipal funding, some of them, mainly more experienced partners, like Cieza (where a case study on this issue was presented) and Guimarães, also mentioned EU funds (e.g. ERDF or direct EU funding like LIFE). Having a focus on urban biodiversity does not necessarily need finding money elsewhere, so it is OK that hardly any ERDF or ESF funding is mentioned.

3.4. How the IAPs were born and what experiences fed them at the local level

The key platform for the IAP production was the ULG, of course, but partner cities worked differently, and experiences with the ULG have varied among the partners. All partners established their ULG at the beginning of the project, and collaboration with the ULGs has been reported as successful, including creating value to the project and the IAP development process. However, only a few partners named ULG members in the IAP, and not all partner cities explained the IAP development process accurately.

Working together is always a significant challenge, and within the network, the *more efficient ULGs were small, having smaller, more informal, but indeed more efficient meetings, while Sarajevo, for example, used a city-wide citizen platform (Decidim) to circulate ideas.*

Partners experienced that once ULG members understand the project objectives, they can easily join in and collaborate, highlighting the importance of clearly communicating project objectives to enable more engagement from the groups. *But open communication is often not enough to maintain their interests: ULG members shall feel appreciated and motivated. The first can be achieved if the production process is truly based on co-creation, while the latter can be boosted by local training and the possibility to participate in transnational events.*

The Testing Actions are also great to boost ownership and dedication. It was a key topic during the Midterm Review, and indeed in some cases these pilot actions are not only in line with the goals of the IAP, supporting

the validation of IAP actions this way, but hopefully work as an “urban acupuncture”, creating a snowball effect (e.g. testing urban beekeeping in Veszprém, organising bioblitz in Den Bosch, creating a microhabitat as a biodiversity hotspot in Guimarães). However, it is also true that some partners reported that the time invested in coordinating the Testing Actions took time away from working on their IAPs in the very low URBACT budget.

The organisation of BiodiverCity Festivals also had a positive outcome: engagement of so many inhabitants who have not been involved in “green” activities before.

The self-assessment tool that all partners had filled out before the assessment of the final IAPs paved the way for an honest exchange about how the IAP was being perceived. In fact, the use of the self-assessment tool turned out to generate an internal peer review. And this was exactly what we had hoped for.

The fact that a playful technique was introduced made the partners pay close attention to the presentations. And as it was not the partner city itself that presented, different aspects of the IAPs were highlighted. Achievements that are normal to one partner and hardly ever mentioned were highlighted by their peers. For instance, the “green standard” for urban expansion is applied by Den Bosch. This is an approach that could help Guimarães in future. Or, for example, the commitment of inhabitants and other non-governmental stakeholders in the long term. In Siena, they established a fruitful connection, building on a series of past participatory projects. So it is no surprise that in the first year, the community engagement is not perfect. It takes time, and partners do not have to be afraid of “trial and error”.

3.5. The added value of transnational network activities reflecting the tools and solutions applied in IAPs

Almost all IAPs describe in detail the absolute success of transnational exchange and learning, providing concrete details of which good practices inspired the appropriate IAP the most. Regarding the most useful initiatives, Veszprém’s climate adaptive grassland management, Guimarães’s biodiversity focus in urban development manifested in a dedicated office, bioblitz events from Siena, Limerick’s Natural Play Area and Cieza’s Biophilic City approach (sustainable urban tree management) have to be highlighted, while BiodiverCity Café sessions were also often mentioned (especially the ones with Hegyvidék and Paris). It is also worth mentioning, proving the added value of transnational exchange, that less experienced partners, like Dunaújváros, inspired some more experienced partner cities.

The best example (the riverbank issue of Poljčane) of intensive and productive exchange and learning has been explained in an [article](#), too, as follows.

Transnational dialogue within the URBACT BiodiverCity network created a clear added-value not only for the Slovenian town Poljčane, but also on the national level – reported mayoress of Poljčane, Petra Vrhovnik.

A core local challenge in Poljčane (SI) is to prevent regular riverbank erosion along the still freely meandering Dravinja river, which area, within the territory of Poljčane, is protected by [Natura 2000](#) and national regulations. Locals have already tried plenty of solutions, including the use of willow and woven fences, since living willow has been used as a method of controlling riverbank erosion for centuries. But due to the strict protection of the natural landscape, they have not received permission from national authorities so far.

Ferenc Albert Szigeti, BURST’s Lead Expert of the network explained that although the Natura 2000 directive links up local legislation, and the measurement of the potential impacts on the habitats and protected species of a planned intervention is rather country specific, using traditional, natural techniques such as the willow or woven fence on the riverbank or the riverbed should be in line with Natura 2000 principles and actually these [techniques](#) are used in many protected areas across Europe. And more importantly, these

natural solutions would not disturb the nesting area of Alcedo at this, which was often among the reasons why the relevant governmental bodies denied permissions.

Because 50 % of the water volume in the river comes from the hillsides, [Natural Water Retention Measures](#) can be effective tools to slow down and retain water on the hillside, pointed out by Mr Miklós Toldy, an active ULG member from Veszprém. What's more, river restoration as a topic was also discussed in the network, for example, in [Guimarães](#), where a demonstration site next to the Landscape Laboratory, showcasing different methods, has also been visited by partners.

Not independently from the many attempts locals have made to convince decision-makers to start using alternative – and cheap – NbS interventions, the Ministry of Environment of Slovenia has finally applied the above-mentioned techniques as a [pilot](#) (check the photos from page 13) to decrease invasive alien species on the riverbank at other sections of Dravinja. As a result of the pilot project, the Municipality of Poljčane is now allowed to implement similar structures on several meanders in its territory to control erosion.

3.6. IAPs' link with the starting position explained in the Baseline Study

The Baseline Study was prepared on city visits as well as deep interviews; however, the potential IAP topics partners reported at that time were only indicative. That is absolutely fine! Actually, it is interesting to see that quite some partners have prepared actions that they did not foresee at the beginning of the project, ideas that are not mentioned in the Baseline Study, and some partners completely shifted their IAP focus during the project implementation. That can be regarded as an important factor in the success of the project, since it means that new ideas inspired partners. As mentioned in the introduction, the fact that some partners not only prepared actions, but also managed to prepare policy improvements, is the biggest added value of the network. Another positive outcome is the engagement of so many inhabitants during the Testing Actions and especially during the BiodiverCity Festivals, people who have not been involved in “green issues” before. A further added-value of the BiodiverCity network is that a cross-sectoral approach has started to find its way; some partners have managed to “contaminate” their colleagues from other departments with the “green-virus” and planned actions to tackle this theme. So, let's see how original ideas regarding the content of the IAP have changed in the mirror of the final IAPs:

City	Vision or Main Objective of the final IAP	Plans for the IAP from the Baseline Study
Cieza	Renaturalise Cieza by promoting nature-based solutions that improve the quality of urban life, improve biodiversity, and foster a more inclusive and coordinated urban governance model. By integrating biodiversity into planning, monitoring and education, and by actively engaging citizens, schools, associations and the agricultural sector, the city seeks to build a renewed relationship between people and their environment. This transformation will contribute not only to climate adaptation and ecological health, but also to social well-	Potential IAP focus: the city intends to improve the green infrastructure in four ways: 1. increase the canopy cover on streets; 2. improve biodiversity in parks and gardens; 3. renaturalisation of schoolyards; and 4. restoration of the riparian forest along the riverbank. The IAP will focus on these issues (all or some of them). Aspects concerning biodiversity, SUDs and awareness-raising will be important elements of the IAP. <i>Comment: the IAP reflects all these topics.</i>

	being, equity in access to green spaces and a long-term culture of environmental stewardship.	
Dunaújváros	To significantly increase urban biodiversity with the active involvement of the community, and to combine the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity with the environmental awareness and active participation of the population.	<p>Potential IAP focus: 1. planting climate resilient plants, 2. awareness-raising of residents; 3. creation of a tree registry; 4. biodiversity-driven biomass and park management.</p> <p><i>Comment: the IAP does not consist of actions related to the tree registry and biomass, but other topics are covered.</i></p>
Guimarães	Promote a resilient urban ecosystem by strengthening connectivity and improving habitats within a radial area around the urban core.	<p>Potential IAP focus: several directions have been identified: 1. improving the connectivity of biologically significant areas; 2. an action plan focusing on integrated water management (retention) or residential programs.</p> <p><i>Comment: the partner used the IAP to tackle point 1.</i></p>
Limerick	A Limerick whose inhabitants understand and appreciate the variety and importance of the biodiversity that call urban green spaces home.	<p>Potential IAP focus: demonstrating the importance of different habitats in an urban setting for biodiversity by using community-based approaches to valorise ecosystem services. It is also foreseen to measure/document species on site and develop actions to enhance the areas further as a habitat.</p> <p><i>Comment: the IAP is fully in line with the directions explained in the Baseline Study.</i></p>
Poljčane	The IAP envisions it as a “pollinator-friendly municipality,” where green spaces are revitalised with native flowering plants, mowing regimes are adjusted to support biodiversity, and public areas become living classrooms for ecological education. In this future, bees are not only pollinators but also ambassadors of sustainability—bridging nature and people, tradition and innovation, community and governance.	<p>Potential IAP focus: the planned IAP will focus on 1. implementing NbS in the town centre; 2. converting grasslands into pollinator-friendly areas; 3. implementing NbS along the Dravinja river, mainly to prevent landslides; 4. preparation of an Urban Greening Plan.</p> <p><i>Comment: a significant progress was made regarding point 3, thanks for the exchange and learning, point 4 is not relevant anymore. The IAP is a combination of points 1 and 2.</i></p>
Sarajevo	By 2027, Sarajevo will be a model of urban biodiversity where green spaces foster peace, education, and ecological resilience.	<p>Potential IAP focus: nothing decided yet, but a GBI strategy would have the biggest added value for the city. An IAP (or a specific section of an overall strategy) specifically focusing on tools protecting people from air pollution would also be powerful.</p> <p><i>Comment: as explained in the introduction, this IAP does not have</i></p>

		<i>actions. For such an ambitious vision, a city-wide GBI strategy would have been important.</i>
's-Hertogenbosch	To create an inclusive, connected, and resilient urban green network. To achieve this, the plan sets out four strategic goals: improving equal access to green and cooling spaces across all neighbourhoods, restoring ecological connectivity within and around the city, embedding biodiversity and climate adaptation into municipal governance, and fostering long-term community ownership of urban nature.	<p>Potential IAP focus: creating a community along a rewilding process.</p> <p><i>Comment: this city has completely changed the focus of the IAP, from a specific site and topic to a city-wide plan (it was discussed with the LP and LE, of course).</i></p>
Siena	Transform Siena's green valleys into a connected, accessible, and socially vibrant ecological network — a system that bridges the historic city and its surroundings while fostering inclusion, wellbeing, and biodiversity conservation.	<p>Potential IAP focus: having a new document focusing on nature-based solutions, perhaps restricted in some areas, or an action plan focusing on awareness raising related to ecosystem services, including a new local regulation related to the maintenance of green areas with an approach on biodiversity.</p> <p><i>Comment: the holistic goal of the IAP has remained the same, but actions listed are realistically planned.</i></p>
Veszprém	By 2030, Veszprém - while preserving its natural and built heritage - will flexibly adapt to changing environmental conditions, significantly increase its water retention capacity and further improve the quality and functions of green spaces, involving urban communities in planning, decision-making, implementation and maintenance, to improve the sense of belonging and quality of life of city residents.	<p>Potential IAP focus: most likely it will be related to blue infrastructure and awareness-raising.</p> <p><i>Comment: the initial goal was less well determined, but the final IAP is a very comprehensive document.</i></p>
Vratsa	The main objective of the Integrated Action Plan is to address the challenge of biodiversity loss in the urban environment and the insufficient provision of ecosystem services. Through targeted actions, the plan seeks to introduce and scale up green infrastructure, restore degraded habitats, and promote community engagement in environmental stewardship.	<p>Potential IAP focus: it has not been decided yet, but focusing on NbS in planned investments would have added value.</p> <p><i>Comment: as explained in the introduction, this IAP does not have actions.</i></p>

4. SUMMARY



Juan XXIII Avenida in Cieza, in 2015 and 2025): before and after the local pruning policy has changed (Photo: Municipality of Cieza)



According to the participants, BiodiverCity was a great, interesting and inspirational network, dealing with a relatively new topic within the URBACT framework. Exchange and learning activities clearly made an added-value to local policy making in most cases, and most IAPs found the “niche” among the many strategic documents partner cities have regarding green infrastructure. The network was new in many terms – even in Vratsa, where the IAP has been underscored, the Testing Action was the first Miyawaki forest in Bulgaria. And it is always exciting to deal with something new. The majority of partners indeed put lots of energy into creating a comprehensive and meaningful IAP, and indeed, most of them clearly have the power to open the eyes of locals: without nature in the city, climate actions cannot be powerful, and urban biodiversity is not only a nice-to-have policy, but an efficient engagement tool, enabling residents to plan nature-based solutions as part of the climate action.

The best manifestation that BiodiverCity has created an added-value locally is that Cieza will receive significant ERDF funding to continue its frontrunner work to make Cieza more biophilic. This huge success is proven to be partly due to their participation in the network.

As closing words, however, we should travel to Guimarães, the Green Capital of Europe 2026, where José Fonseca, the coordinator of the best performing Green Brigade of Guimarães in 2024, gave the BiodiverCity partnership the following answer, when a participant asked him about the secret behind the high level of engagement in the city.

“The secret is the continuity. I have been volunteering for 10 years now...”

