

Network Article 1

SpongeMeasures

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Building the climate resilient landscapes of tomorrow by integrating and connecting “sponges”

Across Europe, communities are experiencing an increasingly familiar pattern: Intense rainfall causes devastating floods, only to be followed weeks or months later by prolonged droughts. While these events appear opposite, they are symptoms of the same challenge: our landscapes have gradually lost their natural ability to absorb, store and slowly release water.

This challenge is at the heart of **SpongeMeasures**, an URBACT Transfer Network bringing together municipalities from across Europe to learn how working with nature can help communities become more resilient to climate change.

A Good Practice born to deal with the “hydrological extremes paradox”

Every URBACT Transfer Network begins with a Good Practice. SpongeMeasures builds upon the experience of **Püspökszilág**, a small municipality in northern Hungary that has spent nearly two decades responding to increasingly frequent flash floods and summer droughts working with a variety of partners, stakeholders, and funding schemes.

Rather than relying solely on conventional grey infrastructure, the municipality adopted a different philosophy: restoring the landscape's natural sponge function through small-scale **Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM)**, including log dams, retention ponds, swales and infiltration features. These interventions slow runoff, increase groundwater recharge, reduce flood peaks and improve biodiversity, while creating healthier and more resilient landscapes. Over time, the approach evolved beyond individual interventions into an integrated model combining technical planning, stakeholder engagement, governance and long-term monitoring. This

comprehensive approach led URBACT to recognise Püspökszilágý as a Good Practice with strong transfer potential across Europe.

Different places, one shared challenge

Although every partner municipality of SpongeMeasures has its own geography, governance structures and climate conditions, they all face the consequences of climate change by having to deal with either too much water and too little water.

The SpongeMeasures Transfer Network brings together:

- Razkrižje (Slovenia)
- Plav (Montenegro)
- Velykyi Bereznyi (Ukraine)
- Târgu Secuiesc (Romania)
- Vilamarxant (Spain)
- Nuovo Circondario Imolese (Italy)

Each partner joins the network with different priorities. Some seek solutions to flash floods. Others focus on drought resilience, groundwater recharge, agricultural sustainability, biodiversity restoration or more integrated territorial planning. Together they recognise that restoring natural water cycles offers opportunities far beyond water management alone.

One main principle: Transfer is not about copying

During the discussions of the City Visits that took place between February and April 2026, all partners of SpongeMeasures realized that the exact solutions implemented in Püspökszilágý may not be applicable in their settlements and all have agreed that “transfer” does not mean “replication”. The experience of Püspökszilágý will not simply be copied from one municipality to another. Instead, partners will work together to understand the principles behind the Good Practice and adapt them to their own environmental, institutional and social contexts.

The network recognises that successful sponge landscapes depend not only on technical measures but also on governance, collaboration, community participation and long-term commitment. Throughout the project, municipalities will exchange knowledge, visit each other's territories, engage local stakeholders and co-develop Transfer Plans that reflect local needs while drawing on shared experience. Exact solutions will be inspired by Püspökszilágý but will be identified using field visits,

catalogues, literature, databases, and after careful consideration with the local team, community and experts.



SpongeMeasures partner cities will explore a wide range of water management solutions, being inspired and learning from the example of the Lead Partner city of Püspöckszilágy in Hungary.

The transfer process will guide partner cities through five interconnected dimensions: **Mindset, Design, Governance, Implementation, and Stewardship**, providing a structured framework to collectively explore and adapt the seven core elements of the SpongeMeasures Good Practice. Together, partners will develop a shared understanding of how to plan, govern, implement, monitor, communicate, and sustain Natural Water Retention Measures, while strengthening community resilience and adapting the approach to their own local contexts.

A journey towards more resilient landscapes

Over the coming years, SpongeMeasures will become much more than a knowledge exchange project. It will serve as a living laboratory where municipalities collectively explore how Natural Water Retention Measures can help restore the sponge function of landscapes and strengthen resilience to floods, droughts and climate change.

The network aims to demonstrate that even small interventions, when strategically planned and connected across a catchment, can generate significant environmental, social and economic benefits. At the same time, it seeks to build a

transferable methodology that could support more municipalities in adopting integrated, nature-based approaches to water management.

Through SpongeMeasures, partner cities will learn, again, how to live with water, towards a future embedded in nature.