Working with nature to solve societal challenges: why and how? The value and implementation of Nature-Based Solutions

29/09/2026

While we are waiting to start, discuss with your neighbour what Nature-Based Solutions are for them

#URBACTfest

urbact.eu/city-festival-2026

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29-30 September 2026 - Nicosia, Cyprus

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Today's objectives

- To distil the importance of Nature-Based Solutions
- To inspire YOU about what has already been done in some cities
- To provide with you with a realm of extra information on Nature-Based Solutions



Agenda

- Analog slido
- Nature-Based Solutions and URBACT
- Cities' inspirations
- Urban Agenda Partnership on greening cities' inspiration



On the stage today

- Marcelline Bonneau, URBACT Expert, Moderator
- Carmel Lynch, GreenPlace, Limerick City and County Council, Ireland
- Ana Pinheira, BiodiverCity, Guimaraes, Portugal
- Jolanta Reca, Re-Gen, Daugavpils, Latvia
- Mihaela Florea, Urban Agenda Partnership on Greening Cities, Romanian Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration

Analog slido

How do you define Nature-Based Solutions?

Analog slido

Has your city implemented any type of Nature-Based Solutions?

Analog slido

What do you expect from today's session?

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND URBACT

The Knowledge Hub on Nature-Based Solutions



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A definition

“solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience” (EC)



A bottom-up approach

- GreenPlace
- BiodiverCity
- Re-Gen



- URBACT Good Practices



➢ It's only the beginning!

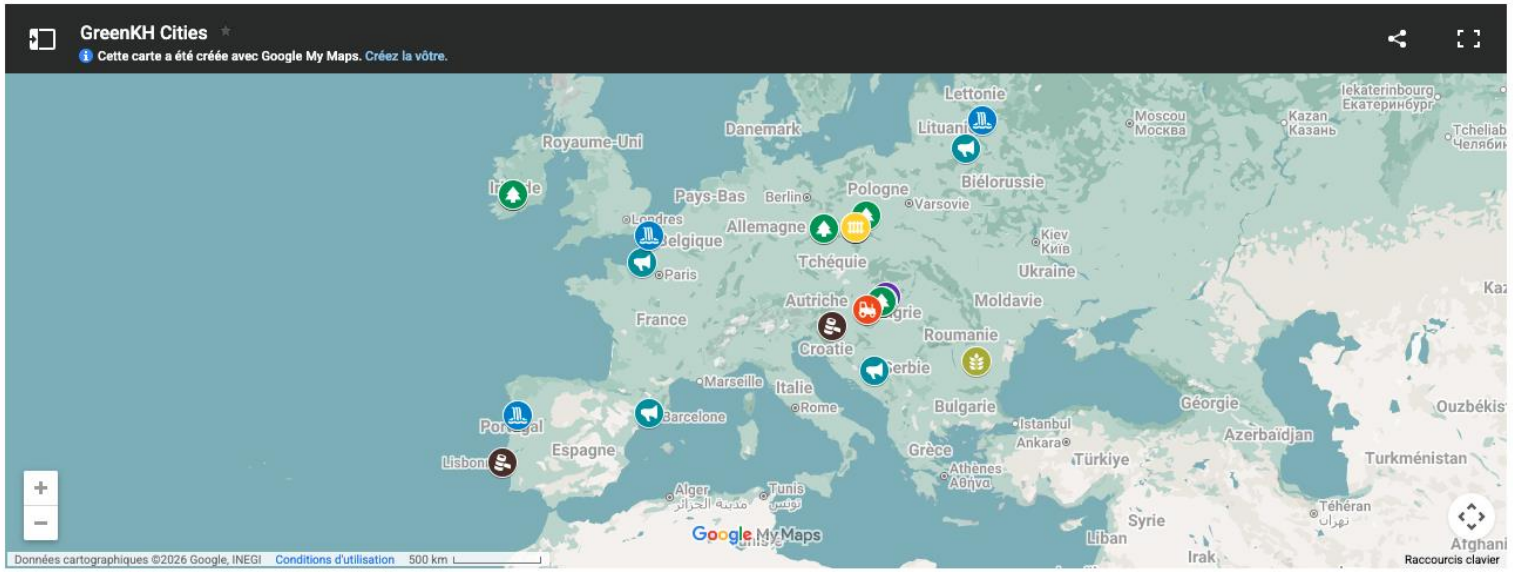
Objectives of the NbS Knowlege Hub

- To give visibility to URBACT cities
- To inspire about Nature-Based Solutions
- To provide insights into already tested solutions
- To enable contacting other experienced cities
- To share successes but also challenges



What's in it for me?

Discover our case studies



Useful resources

- **Blue areas** — Learn more
- **Stormwater management solutions** — Learn more
- **Agricultural and food production** — Learn more
- **Forest and urban parks** — Learn more
- **Shrub and grassland** — Learn more
- **Grey infrastructure with green features** — Learn more
- **Governance** — Learn more
- **Community engagement** — Learn more

Forest and urban parks

- **Sustainable community (sub)urban greenspaces** — Limerick, Ireland — Learn more
- **Green and blue city transformation** — Ostrów Wielkopolski, Poland — Learn more
- **Remembering the past with green solutions** — Löbau, Germany — Learn more
- **From factories to a big park for all** — Löbau, Germany — Learn more
- **URBACT III Health and Greenspace, Connecting Health & Green Spaces** — Limerick, Ireland — Learn more
- **Mobile Tree Forest** — Limerick, Ireland — Learn more
- **Ecological park maintenance** — Budapest, Hungary — Learn more
- **Planting untrained samplings** — Hegyvidék (Budapest 12), Hungary — Learn more

Close

Sustainable community (sub)urban greenspaces

In Limerick, a brownfield site has been transformed into a sustainable, co-created linear nature park. This project is underpinned by nature-based solutions, including sustainable urban drainage systems, swales and outdoor learning opportunities, utilising sculpture and natural play areas. The park also boasts enhanced biodiversity, with the planting of native trees.

Go to case study →

Photo description: Before (2021) and after rehabilitation (2022) of the brownfield. Photo credits: Municipality of Limerick





Close

Find it easily online!

https://urbact.eu/knowledge-hub/nature-based-solutions

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Let’s give the floor to our inspiring cities!



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Sustainable community (sub)urban greenspaces

Limerick, Ireland

Carmel Lynch

GreenPlace



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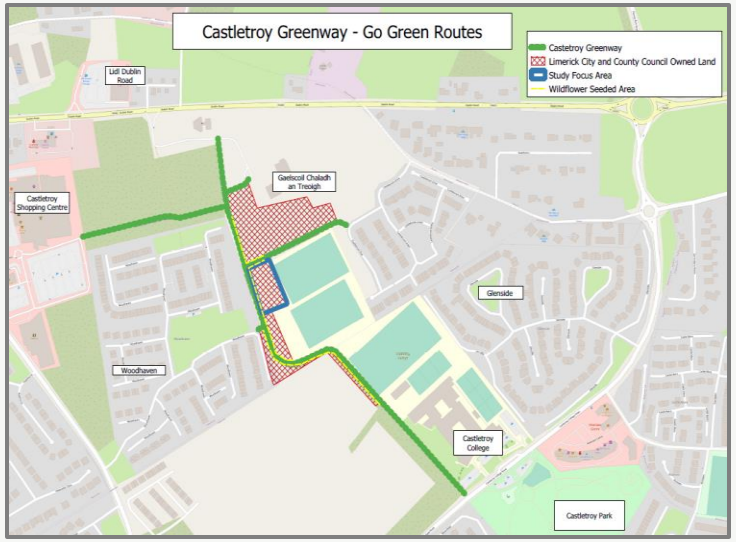
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The starting point

- Unused Brownfield Site left over from an Active Travel Project
- Site had no function
- No play area for children
- Located in high residential area
- Drainage was an issue, wet site
- Opportunity for NbS for natural play, drainage, increase biodiversity





The action

Community Engagement

- From the outset of the project: voice and decision power
- Created interest by using different themes for events, ie nature workshops, tree planting, bioblitz
- Wetland specialist to advise on design

NBS Guiding Principles

- SUDS features such as rain gardens and swales
- Recycling of all parts of three felled trees, providing seating, sculptures, play elements
- Natural re-colonisation by local flora
- Creating play opportunity through modelling of existing ground
- Improving biodiversity by native woodland and hedge planting

Masterplan prepared







The changes it brought

- Change in **perception** of what playgrounds can be: safe space to play, low carbon site, nature connection, social interaction, education in the outdoors & learning
- Effective **use of natural materials** for a sustainable play environment
- **Blueprint** for how open spaces can be developed and at little cost and informs play policy
- **Awareness** on climate actions and biodiversity :
    - impact on other city departments:
    - NBS concepts considered in multiple locations in Limerick.
    - Small natural play sites have been rolled out in a number of locations.
- **First-time Central Government** €100,000 fund for natural play projects in 2026








An Choill Bheag
An Choill Bheag
Growing Native Biodiverse Woodlands
LEARNING ABOUT FORESTS
A Vital Ecosystem
Woodlands are critical habitats for the health of our planet. Planting trees is vital for climate action and biodiversity protection for future generations.
An Choill Bheag
An Choill Bheag is a small biodiverse native woodland, planted by schools, colleges, community groups and Local Authorities, covering on average 20 x10m2.
It is an outdoor classroom, with space created for seating. Students and community groups are involved in the entire process including the planning, planting and care. Over time they can observe, monitor and spend time in this essential and beautiful woodland ecosystem as it grows. If space is limited, native hedgerows are planted instead.
As the little woodland matures, nature trails can be created for everyone to experience and enjoy.
Biodiversity
- Provides habitats
- Provides pollinator friendly food
-Provides corridors for wildlife
Community
- Close to home amenity
- Outdoor classroom
- Benefits health & wellbeing
- Aesthetic value
Economy
- Food
- Fuel
- Fibre
- Medicine
- Timber products
- Jobs
Ecosystem Services
- Reduce risk of erosion & flooding
- Reduce risk of climate change
- Carbon storage (sequestration)
- Filters water
-Soil fertility
Species found in An Choill Bheag
Canopy Layer: Alder, Birch, Oak, Scots Pine, Willow, Yew
Understory / Shrub Layer: Blackthorn, Crab Apple, Elder, Guelder Rose, Hazel, Hawthorn, Holly, Rowan, Spindle, Wild Cherry
Climbing Layer: Ivy, Honeysuckle, Dog Roses
Herb & Ground Covering Layer: Primrose, Sorrel, Foxglove, Native Bluebell, Wild Garlic, Fern, Ground Ivy, Wild Strawberry and many more species
Underground Layer: Mycelium
Lungs of the Earth
Woodlands and forests are often called the 'Lungs of the Earth'. Also there is a web of fungi mycelium under the soil connecting all the trees and plants together. It is the original 'World Wide Web', invisible and under our feet.
Brambles - Dris
Brambles are often part of a young woodland system, dying away as the woodland matures. They protect young trees as they grow and are an important food source for bees, butterflies, birds and other creatures.
Ivy - Eidhneán
Ivy can both grow on the ground and up trees, its pollen helps bees to sleep through the winter. It is an important winter food source for many birds and insects.
Oak - Dair
Oak trees are one of the largest and longest living broadleaf tree species in Ireland. Almost 20 species of birds and over 200 species of insects inhabit the oak. The oak tree was traditionally a symbol of strength, kingship, endurance and fertility and is often considered the King of Trees
Go raibh maith agaibh to all those involved in making this An Choill Bheag a reality. May it be a place of positivity for future generations to come. An Choill Bheag is an initiative of LEAF Ireland, the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce
www.leafireland.org
This project is Funded by:
JSG Memorial Foundation
This project is supported by:
Limerick City & County Council
GREEN ROUTES
Come and P
All ages are welcome!

Further links and references

- Sustainable community (sub)urban greenspaces
- URBACT GreenPlace network
- Horizon 2020 GoGreenRoute project
- Limerick City and Environs Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy
- Limerick Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030
- Tree Policy for Limerick

Wildlife pond

Guimarães, Portugal

Ana Pinheira



BiodiverCity

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The starting point

- The **Guimarães Pedagogical Garden** is a strategic urban-agricultural site with **500+ users**, crossed by the **Costa/Couros stream**.
- A decline in local biodiversity was observed, with knock-on effects on key ecosystem services such as **pollination**.
- The area lacked **small wet habitats** that support amphibians, aquatic insects, birds and overall ecological functionality.
- Opportunity for a **small-scale, replicable NbS** to strengthen ecological connectivity within the municipality's Green-Blue infrastructure approach.

August 2024



The action

- Baseline **ecological survey** to establish a starting reference.
- **Community-supported construction of a wildlife pond** as a NbS.
- Installation of **nest boxes for birds and bats**.
- Creation/diversification of **micro-habitats** to increase habitat variety and ecological function.
- A hands-on **workshop** involving the URBACT Local Group (ULG), garden users and local volunteers to build ownership and long-term care.

October 2024



The changes it brought

- Increase in **native species diversity** and strong community participation.
- Demonstrated the **technical feasibility** of integrating NbS in an urban-agricultural context.
- **Living demonstrator**, showing how targeted micro-interventions can support broader ecological restoration and connectivity goals.
- Monitoring was designed as a **systematic programme** (starting Oct 2024) to track biodiversity indicators and participation metrics.

September 2025



Further links and references

- URBACT IV BiodiverCity - Integrated action plan, Guimarães
- URBACT BiodiverCity network
- Community-based approaches to foster urban biodiversity

Esplanade park



Daugavpils, Latvia

Jolanta Reča



The starting point

Before development, the area was a natural, chaotic open space without clear structure or purpose.

In 2016, Esplanade Rest Park became the first urban bike park in the Baltics.

The municipality, together with Velosolutions Latvija, LTD, aimed to create a modern space for active recreation.

August 2024



The action

A 4-hectare multifunctional park was built, including a cycling track, skatepark, skills parks and children's areas.

It is adapted for 8 different types of wheeled sports.

August 2024



The changes it brought

The park transformed the area into a vibrant, safe and inclusive destination for all ages.

It was created as a multifunctional space for youth, promoting active lifestyles and strengthening the city's modern image, while maintaining ecological quality.

August 2024



Further links and references

- Esplanade rest park
- URBACT Re-Gen network
- A Public open space

It’s time for a discussion!



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What can the Urban Agenda Partnership on greening cities bring to local authorities?



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Greening Cities Partnership



Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, Romania

Mihaela Florea

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Greening Cities Partnership

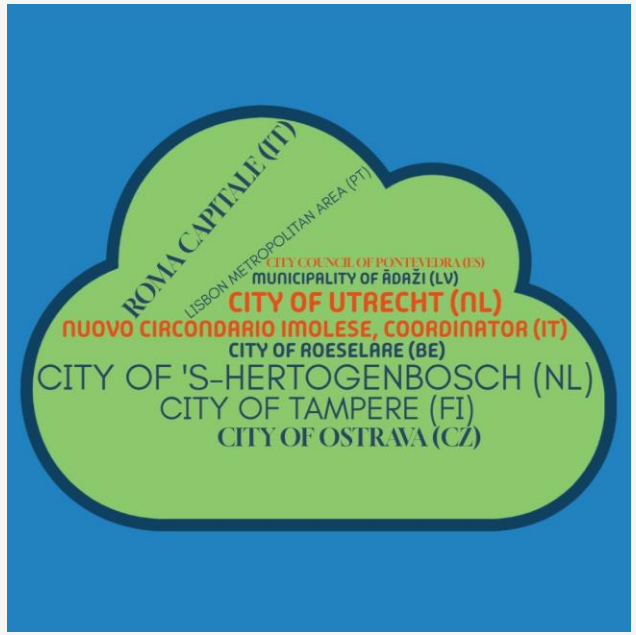
Work carried out since December 2022

Eight in-person meetings (Turin, Malmö, Brussels, Zagreb, Pontevedra, Utrecht, Krakow and Nuovo Circondario Imolese)

193+ stakeholders consulted (cities, regions, Member States, EU bodies)

Result: action plan to support NRR targets and urban greening

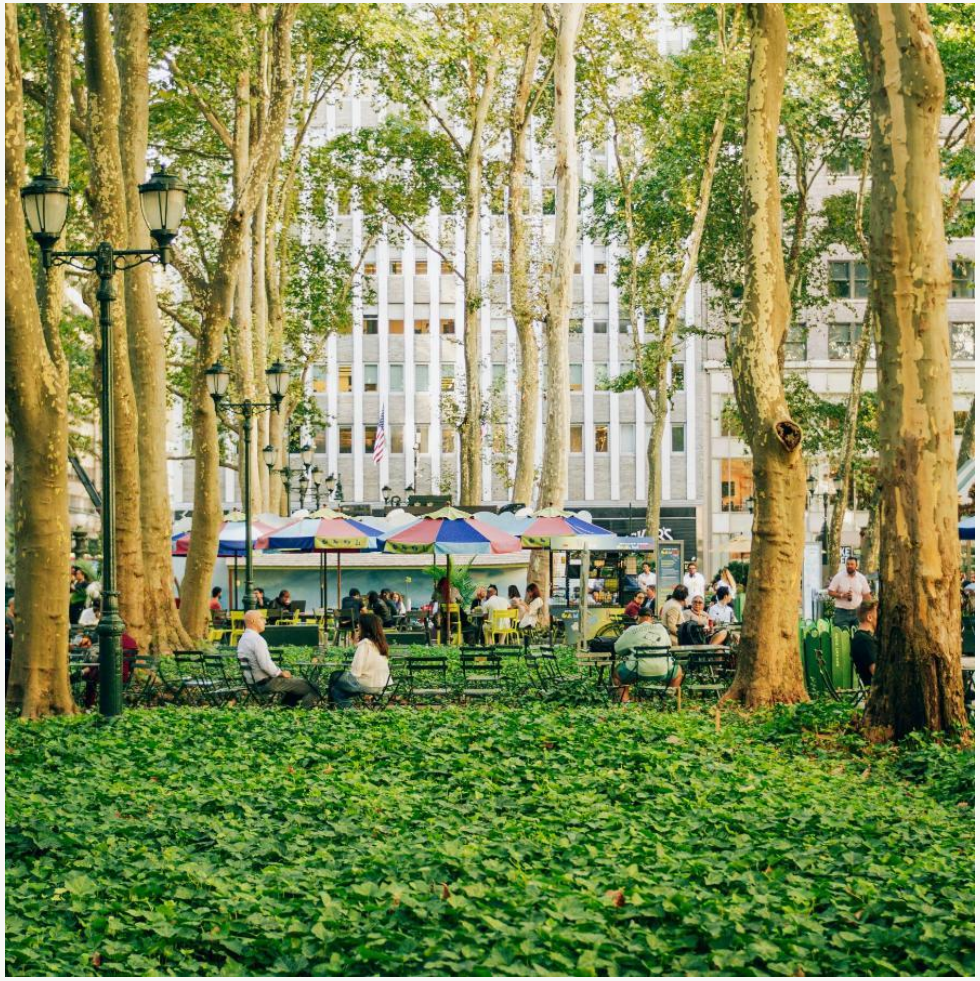
- National authorities
- Cities (Urban Authorities)
- European/ national city umbrella organisation
- Other stakeholders
- European institutions





Six Actions

- For an effective and efficient approach to address **climate and biodiversity challenges in cities**, while also linking it to the concept of **nature-based solutions**
- To continue the work of the Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions partnership without overlapping actions.



Measure → Monitor → Regulate → Fund → Innovate → Implement

1: **Methodology** for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level

2: **Indicator system** for Urban Nature Plans

3: **Policies** for achieving urban restoration targets / Urban Nature Plans

4: Strengthening structural **funding** for urban green infrastructure

5: Enhancing the use of **innovative funding** by urban authorities to green cities

6: Urban Ecosystem Restoration **Handbook**

Action 1: ESPON GILL Methodology for Quantifying the Demand for Green Infrastructure at Local Level

Dimensions	Enabling factors Supportive policies, funding, and stakeholder engagement approaches that can accelerate GI adoption	Barriers Regulatory constraints, financial limitations, and lack of expertise that can hinder progress
Institutional and organisational	**Multi-level governance structures** (such as the NCI Nuovo Circondario Imolese) facilitate coordinated planning and technical capacity. European and national legislation provide a guiding frameworks for local policy, while specific local regulations, such as health resort zone protections in Sopot or phased comprehensive plans in Tampere, can embed measures to support GI (such as minimum green area percentages).	A primary hurdle is the **lack of a formal legal definition** for GI at the national level, with only references to the EU 2013 GI strategy, which leads to inconsistent interpretations. Additionally, fragmented and decentralised responsibilities across different departments or entities often slow down the standardisation of GI approaches.
Engagement and coordination	**Inter-municipal structures** and **metropolitan coordination** allow for shared priorities and large-scale projects. Locally, cities can employ **participatory planning processes**, including participatory budgeting, where residents directly fund local greenery as part of street design projects.	**Institutional silos** prevent effective collaboration between city departments (infrastructure vs. environment). The large number of involved parties often leads to coordination challenges, and there is a recurring risk that GI delivery remains "project-by-project" rather than integrated.
Political	**Strong political will/mayoral** leadership are crucial for prioritising GI initiatives. Some cities aim to be "green leaders" by proposing to categorise GI as "critical infrastructure" to match the status of energy or transport networks.	In land-use decisions, **economic investment** is frequently preferred over natural capital, leading to zoning that allows construction on green areas. Furthermore, GI often lacks systematic embedding in all planning, remaining limited to specific, visible sites rather than city-wide implementation.
Socio-cultural	There is a **strong public demand** for recreational spaces, playgrounds, and aesthetic well-being. In some regions, legal frameworks like "Everyman's rights" support recreational access to nature, while civil society organizations actively lobby for more green space.	**Resistance** often comes from the agricultural sector and private developers who are reluctant to transfer productive land to GI. Cultural preferences for "manicured" greenery, with low ESS provision, over natural, ecological units can also hinder biodiversity goals.

The methodology is one of the deliverables of and was developed as part of the ESPON GILL project by a consortium made up of the following companies:

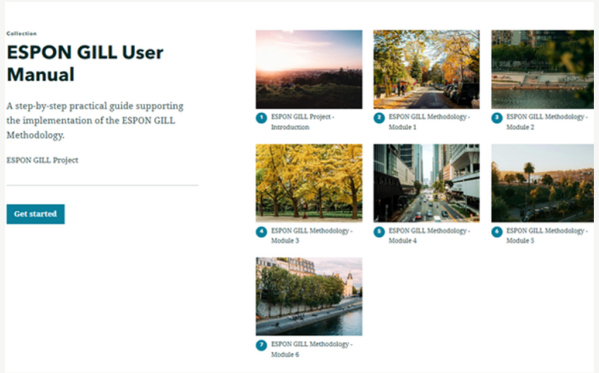
tecnalia EFI IUE Institute for Urban Excellence

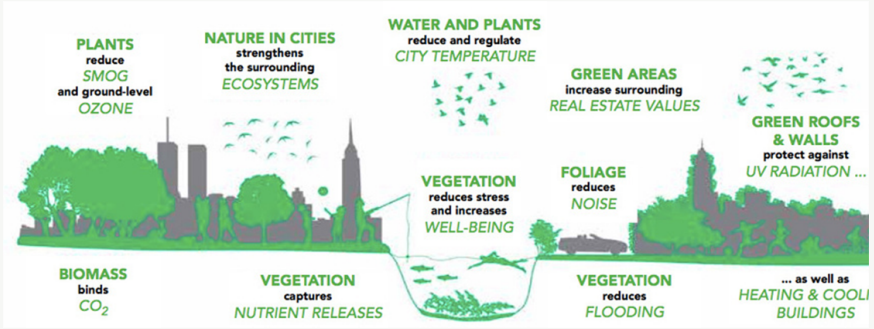
OBJECTIVES:

- Deliver an **evidence-based, scientifically robust, scalable, and user-friendly methodology** to guide policymakers and practitioners in quantifying the demand for green (and blue) infrastructure at the local level.
- To **map the gap** between ecosystem service supply and human/ecosystem needs.
- To tell where nature is "working" for the city, and **where the city needs more nature** to "work" for it.

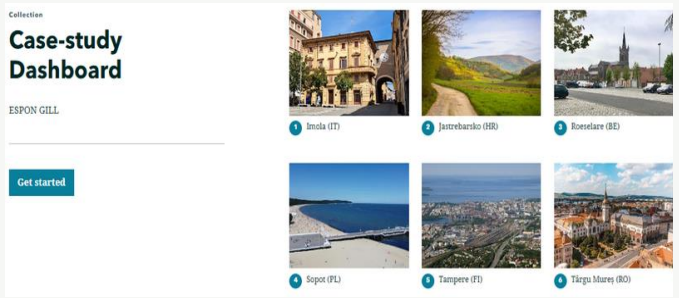
Action 1: ESPON GILL Methodology for Quantifying the Demand for Green Infrastructure at Local Level

1 Online User Manual





2 Case Studies Dashboard



The **online User Manual ESPON GILL** provides the users with an interactive online resource that is more practical and accessible than a traditional static document.

Technical Resources

GENERAL ANNEXES

- *ESPON GILL Glossary*
- *Enablers and barriers*
- *Repository of good practices*

ANNEXES FOR METHODOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

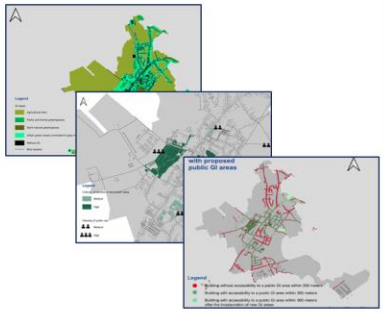
- *Overview of EU policies / legislation*
- *List of available European data sources*
- *List of data requirements for the ESPON GILL Methodology development*
- *Trigger questions for challenges identification*
- *List of tools to support spatialization of GI demand, GI provision, and GI unmet demand*
- *ESPON GILL GI types*
- *ESS evaluation factsheets*

The methodology was tested in six cities: **Imola (Italy)**, **Jastrebarsko (Croatia)**, **Roeselare (Belgium)**, **Sopot (Poland)**, **Tampere (Finland)** and **Târgu-Mureș (Romania)**.

Action 1: ESPON GILL Methodology for Quantifying the Demand for Green Infrastructure at Local Level

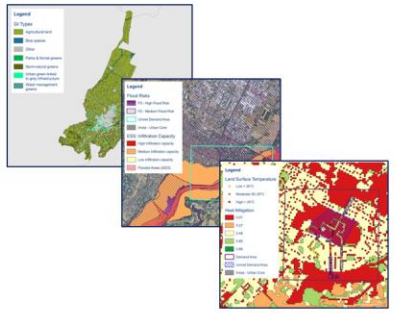
Imola - *Italy*

- *Challenges: Public Access to GI / Landslides*
- *3-30-300 methodology*
- *Prioritisation with local team*



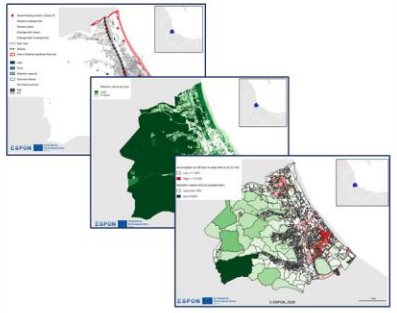
Imola - *Italy*

- *Challenges: Flood risk / Heat Stress*
- *Modelling with INVEST*
- *Urban and landscape scales*



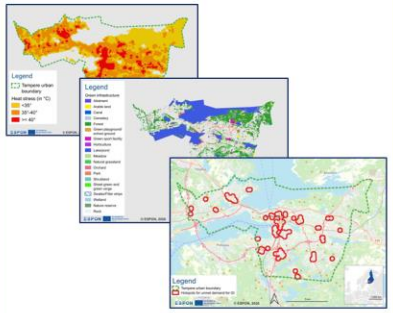
Sopot - *Poland*

- *Challenges: Urban stormwater retention*
- *Modelling with INVEST*
- *Data multisource approach*



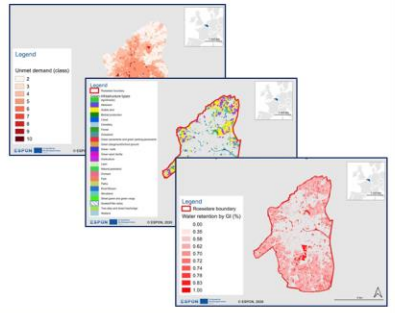
Tampere - *Finland*

- *Challenges: Flood risk / Heat stress*
- *Use of EU data (OSM)*
- *Already covered with GI*



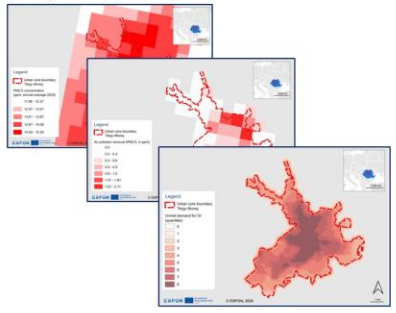
Roeselare - *Belgium*

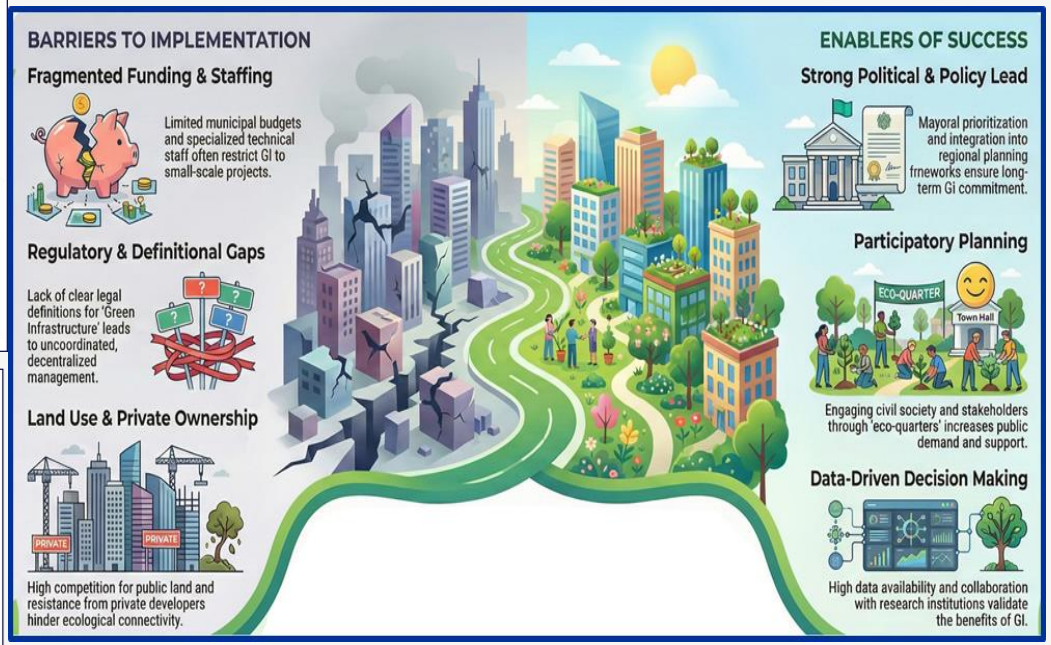
- *Challenges: Flood risk / Heat stress*
- *Identification of opportunities-pocket Parks*
- *Map of combined risks*



Târgu Mureș - *Romania*

- *Challenges: Air pollution / Fluvial flooding / heat stress*
- *Compatibility of scale*
- *Map of combined risks*





Compiled analysis
In relation to seven main components
Extracted from case studies discussions

Further links and references

Action 1: Need for green - Methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level

Action 2: Indicator system for Urban Nature Plans

Action 3: Policies for achieving urban restoration targets / Urban Nature Plans

- Urban Nature Strategies: A self-assessment guide
- Monitoring and evaluation of the nature-positive urban strategies

Action 4: Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure

- Position paper
- Financing guide
- Guidebook



Action 5: Enhancing the use of innovative funding by urban authorities to green cities

- Repository

Action 6: Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook

Complete webinar series on Nature Restoration Regulation is available here.

If you want to dig into Nature-Based Solutions



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Links

- Check the Nature-Based Solutions URBACT Knowledge Hub
- Check the outputs from the Urban Agenda Partnership on Greening Cities
- Check interesting practices from GreenPlace, BiodiverCity and Re-Gen



Thank you very much for your attention and enjoy the rest of the UCF!



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