

Thematic Seminar -
Nurturing nature for sustainable cities and regions
Implementing the Nature Directives in cities and regions: Nature-Based
Solutions for key urban challenges
- in the context of the Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)
29 May 2018 in Brussels

As foreseen in the KEP Action Plan, the Thematic Seminar 2018 will look into innovative solutions which help implementing the Nature Directives while addressing pressing urban and regional challenges like flood protection, wellbeing and health, and the protection of our natural capital for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The seminar will thus focus on this key question: *How can Nature Based Solutions in cities and in the peri-urban areas deliver on recreation and wellbeing of the citizen, whilst enhancing the quality of the 18% of Natura 2000 areas which are located in urban areas?*

Well-planned Nature Based Solutions and green and blue infrastructure¹, (such as green roofs, water retention ponds, restored flood plains as well as urban and peri-urban parks ecosystems) can enhance urban biodiversity and nature while delivering a range of ecosystem services, socio-economic benefits and solutions to urban challenges:

- They can contribute to **more resilient cities** by protecting vital infrastructures from floods, and by reducing the urban heat island effect.

E.g. in the LIFE project Green4Grey, steered by the Flemish Land Agency, Natura 2000 protection and green and blue infrastructure restoration goes hand in hand with providing key functions for the urban citizen, such as sustainable food production, natural water retention, recreation and climate regulation. Such measures were already applied in the neighbouring city of Leuven, to avoid the regular flooding of its famous campus. More info on <https://green4grey.be/en>.

- They can also help reduce **air pollution** and **health** issues (e.g. obesity and cardiovascular diseases), directly by removing pollutants from the atmosphere, as well as indirectly by promoting **active mobility** (e.g. cycling, walking) and outdoor activities.

¹ cf. definitions on <https://oppla.eu/case-studies/existing-ecosystem-based-initiatives-eu-level>

E.g. in the Berlin city case study, a metropolis rich in green spaces including Natura 2000 areas, the FP7 project Green Surge finds out that more accessible natural areas per capita were linked with less problem of overweight. More info on <https://greensurge.eu>

- Green and Blue infrastructure can contribute to improving the conditions for active mobility like cycling and walking, thanks to attractive nature-based pathways for cyclists and pedestrians within the city as well as for citizens commuting from the peri-urban areas.

E.g. the H2020 demonstration project URBAN GreenUP integrates into the urban Renaturing Plans of Valladolid, Liverpool and Izmir the development of path and cycling lanes along green corridors, thus increasing the modal shift towards cycling and walking, whilst creating new habitats. More info on www.urbangreenup.eu

- Biodiversity-rich open green public spaces across cities can provide multiple benefits in terms of **quality of life and socializing** to citizens, especially if they have been co-designed with them. There is also evidence that spending time in nature increases the sense of wellbeing and concentration.

E.g. the city of Malmö, in partnership with citizens and its Housing Company, has retrofitted the neighbourhood of Augustenborg with natural water retention measures, reducing by half the rainwater run-off, but also increasing biodiversity by 50% and enhancing the quality of life of the inhabitants.

- The creation and restoration of ecological connectivity between the city's green areas and its surrounding countryside is providing corridors and habitats for different species – participating to biodiversity conservation when enhancing key **ecosystem services**.

E.g. in Vitoria Gasteiz, wetlands have been re-created through the creation of a series of parks, which form part of the city's green corridor. These highly attractive parks have been designated as Natura 2000 areas, due to the species and habitats which populated these new natural areas. For visualising Natura 2000 areas on a European map: natura2000.eea.europa.eu

- A city with no pesticides use and with green roofs, gardens and parks with a variety of native species can be a refuge for wild pollinators like bees and butterflies.

E.g. In the Greater Grand Lyon area, different sites have been built specifically to provide food and nesting for wild bees in the frame of LIFE URBANBEES project. This would feed into a guide of land management, written with and for cities, which will offer ideas on how to ensure the presence of insect pollinators, including gardening tips. More info on <http://www.urbanbees.eu/en>

If more and more local and regional authorities are implementing such multi-benefits initiatives, exchange is needed around key issues for the local and regional authorities.

The seminar will discuss the following questions:

- How to integrate Nature Based Solutions and Natura 2000 areas into spatial planning plans and regulations, so as to maximise the benefits to people and to nature?

E.g. in the FP7 project Green Surge, the Greater Ljubljana green areas covers 3/4 of the city's surface (16.5% being Natura 2000 areas) and are concentrated mostly in the peri-urban areas of the city. These natural areas, together with the riparian corridors which connect the peri-urban areas with the historical centre, have been integrated into the spatial plan of the municipality. The strategy foresees their maintenance so as to optimise their multiple functions such as recreation, flood prevention, biodiversity and social cohesion. More info on: http://greensurge.eu/products/case-studies/Case_Study_Portrait_Ljubljana.pdf

- How NBS help engage citizen from all groups and ages in implementing innovating changes of their environment by their own means?

E.g. in Amsterdam, the 'Stichting Postzegelparken' is a foundation that establishes tiny ('postage-stamp-sized') parks on wasteland which are maintained by local people and neighbourhood organisations. More info on <https://www.oppla.eu/node/18009>

- How can NBS help in resolving conflicts between urban development, recreation and nature protection?

E.g. the LIFE+ project SCALLUVIA is refining the visitor's management plan with a clear zoning, so as to enable the Natura 2000 areas that are part of Schelde Estuary, in the peri-urban areas of Antwerp, to be both protected and enjoyed by the people of the city. More info on <http://scalluvia.eu/scalluvia-4/>

- How to finance the setup and management of these green solutions? How can they create jobs?

E.g. the H2020 project NATURVATION has analysed 1000 NBS case studies across 100 European cities for their project cost, financing sources, method of management and monitoring, including how citizens are involved. More info on: www.naturvation.eu/atlas

- How would these living solutions change public procurement and public spaces management practices?

E.g. the H2020 demonstration project GrowGreen is developing innovative public procurement and partnerships to deliver new Nature Based Solutions. The city of Manchester works with the housing company "Keepmoat" to deliver elements of the green infrastructure master plan, as part of a commercially viable development. The city of Bologna is developing tender documentation related to future projects in its "Benicalap" district which will contain criteria to improve green infrastructure. More info on <https://growgreenproject.eu>