

Nature-based Solutions in Small and Medium Cities

THE CHALLENGE

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED MEDITERRANEAN TOWNS AND CITIES ARE UNDER GROWING PRESSURES



CLIMATE PRESSURE

Cities are experiencing more frequent heat waves, droughts, and heavy rainfalls. Hard surfaces trap heat, stop the water cycling between air and soaking into the ground, and make urban environments more vulnerable to climate extremes.



NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Urbanisation and densification reduce natural habitats, leading to declining biodiversity, and fragmented green spaces with limited ecological value.



PUBLIC HEALTH PRESSURE

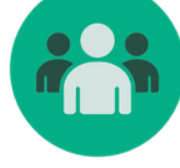
Urban heat waves, lack of greenery, and unequal access to public green spaces and tree canopy cover affect physical and mental health and weaken connections between people and nature.



But cities are also the heart of all solutions!

Urban areas offer great opportunities to bring together people, knowledge, and local potential; test new ideas, strengthen community knowledge, skills, and social cohesion, and support thriving urban ecosystems—enhancing biodiversity, improving air quality, regulating the local climate, managing water, and improving human well-being and public health.

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES HOWEVER FACE FURTHER SPECIFIC CHALLENGES



CAPACITY GAPS

Smaller cities may have limited human and financial resources to plan and manage high-quality green infrastructure and nature-based solutions; they can overcome these challenges by strengthening internal cooperation and fostering participation.



LIMITED AWARENESS

Professionals and the general public may still be unfamiliar with the benefits and visual form, and therefore hesitant to accept new types of green infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and new planting approaches. This can be tackled by increasing public awareness and strengthening capacity.

THE SOLUTION

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES THROUGH NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

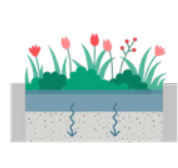
Nature-based Solutions are actions that **harness and enhance the power of natural processes to protect, sustainably manage, or restore natural or modified urban ecosystems** while addressing societal and environmental challenges.

The main goal is to simultaneously support nature conservation, environmental protection, climate adaptation, and healthy living environments while reducing reliance on technical and engineering solutions. This is why relationships and interactions between people, shared values around nature conservation, and people's connection to nature must be recognised. By bringing nature back into cities and enabling people to embrace and support it, nature-based solutions (NBS) can strengthen both urban ecosystems and communities, making cities more resilient.

EXAMPLES OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL URBAN AREAS



Street trees and urban forests



Rain gardens and permeable paving



Urban Parks, Meadows and Gardens



Green roofs and green walls

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS PROVIDE BENEFITS ON

Local environment enhancement

Improved air quality, temperature regulation, biodiversity protection, and rainwater management.

Social cohesion and public health equity

Healthier, connected and safer individuals and communities, accessible green spaces, recreation opportunities, and stronger nature connections.

Resilience savings

Reduced cooling and urban runoff management costs, increased property values, tourism appeal, and long-term resilience savings.



To achieve the listed benefits, the key is to make **SOUNDLY INFORMED STRATEGIC PLANS and COMPREHENSIVE DESIGNS**, to implement and maintain them **highly professionally and to manage and provide access to the useful parts of new green spaces accordingly and inclusively.**

THE IMPLEMENTATION

HOW CAN MY CITY IMPLEMENT MORE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS?

Following the project Baseline study, this can be achieved in two ways:

1 ON A STRATEGIC LEVEL

Through the preparation of **Urban Nature Plan**, a document that showcases the state of art – the available and gathered data on urban nature, helping cities to plan, expand, and manage nature in a strategic and coordinated way.

It provides a framework for integrating nature and natural processes in urban tissue, development and everyday land use.

Urban Nature Plan combines long-term vision, concrete actions, and adaptive management to increase nature in cities and strengthen urban resilience.

An Urban Nature Plan is a city-specific, structured and transparent planning tool that uses a pre-defined set of data to identify opportunities to protect, restore, and enhance urban nature.

2 INCLUSIVE PLANNING, MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF NEW NBS INTERVENTIONS

Through a city specific participatory process the city organises work and invites citizens and new actors into the process by:

- 1 organising the interdisciplinary working group, consisting of municipal staff, officials and public servants, including maintenance service,
- 2 organising an external expert group to expand the expertise, define designs and discuss options,
- 3 involving citizens and the potentially interested new actors like nearby businesses and property owners,
- 4 preparing the site-specific participatory plan.

RESILIENT CITIES ARE BUILT TOGETHER

Every idea, person, piece of land and extra pair of hands matters in the loop of the green infrastructure for urban resilience. From planning to maintenance, use and funding, there is a valuable role for each stakeholder in the making of new, high quality, valuable, biodiverse, accessible, usable and sustainable public green space.



1. PLAN

Strategically planning the green infrastructure as a crucial city infrastructure to build resilience and public health.



City leaders, urban and landscape planners, geographers, non-governmental organisations and local community



2. (CO-)DESIGN

Creating green spaces and proposed nature-based solutions that are functional, acceptable and manageable and respond to the local needs and challenges.



Landscape architects, engineers, ecologists, non-governmental organisations and local communities



3. BUILD AND PLANT

Well built green spaces and professionally planted trees and greenery that make the ideas of a green and resilient community real.



Contractors, suppliers, skilled workers, local community volunteers



4. MAINTAIN AND MANAGE

Taking care of new arrangements, watering and observing the progress so the plants and functions of new solutions thrive and last.



Maintenance teams, horticulturists, water managers, local community volunteers



5. USE AND ENJOY

Taken over by local people, the ones who participated in the design process and are willing to take care of it, the nearby residents and everyday users, who are the heart of the local community. Use, enjoy and respect the green spaces accordingly.



Local citizens, schools, local community groups



6. LEARN AND SHARE INSIGHTS

Observing the progress of growing and publicly reporting about it, involving locals in the observation - enabling learning about what works and how things can develop in the future, as well as sharing awareness about the importance of urban green spaces and green infrastructure for local people, nature and environment.



Researchers, experts, city team, local community, media



7. SUPPORT AND FUND

Providing funding, policies and partnerships that make new designs, new green areas and better, more nature-protective management of green spaces possible.



Policymakers, investors, funding partners and donations, expert groups, project partners

