

URBAN NATURE PLANS +

Short Brief



**Why are urban
nature plans
important?**



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URBAN NATURE PLANS + Introduction



This short brief provides an entry point to better understand why urban nature plans are valuable and how they are different to existing urban greening policies.



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In the UNP+ project, we are striving to make urban nature the norm, not the exception. By working with cities, we aim to halt biodiversity loss and enhance urban ecosystems, fostering healthier and more resilient communities.

A primary goal for the UNP+ project is to develop a Capacity Building Programme (CBP) that facilitates Urban Nature Plans (UNPs) in cities across Europe in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy call for all cities over 20,000 inhabitants to do so.

Why are urban nature plans important?

Urban Nature Plans (UNPs) serve as an overarching framework articulating, formalising, and showcasing the commitment of local governments to promoting and protecting biodiversity and urban nature as well as green infrastructure and nature-based solutions (NbS).



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Insights from a city: Paris



Paris is a city where urban nature thrives within its dense urban fabric. The city boasts 531 parks and gardens, two extensive forests (Bois de Vincennes and Bois de Boulogne) and over 100,000 street trees. By 2026, Paris has committed to planting an additional 170,000 trees and adding 100 hectares of public green spaces. But Paris faces significant challenges in its quest to integrate more green space. As an ultra-dense city, finding and creating space for nature, mobility and affordable housing requires innovative solutions. The city also needs to adapt its flora to climate change and attract workers to the greening of the city.



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Urban nature, from parks and gardens to green roofs and urban farms provide a wide range of crucial benefits for people for physical and mental well-being. They also provide opportunities for business and a habitat for nature. They increase quality of life, reduce air, water, soil and noise pollution, provide protection from flooding, droughts and heat waves, and provide access to nature for city dwellers enabling them to reconnect with nature.



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Terms and Concepts for UNPs

Urban nature from a general perspective refers to the blue and green areas present in cities. Green infrastructure refers to strategically planned and managed networks of natural and semi-natural areas. The term urban green Infrastructure is suggested to consider the network of natural and semi-natural areas and nature-based solutions (NbS) in and around cities. NbS are deliberate interventions that are inspired or supported by nature. NbS in the context of cities focuses on using green and blue (and grey) infrastructure – in other words, urban nature that is purposefully created, maintained or managed to provide multiple benefits for humans and the environment.

While protection and development of urban nature has increased, they too often still lose out in the competition for land as the share of the population living in urban areas continues to rise. UNPs, properly integrated as part of the urban planning process, can help to reverse these trends.



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Improving the quality and quantity of urban nature in cities can have substantial benefits, not only through reversing biodiversity loss, but also by enhancing the crucial services that urban ecosystems provide:

- Urban nature plays a key role for climate change adaptation helping to address the urban heat island effect and protect against flooding, while also contributing to reducing emissions and capturing carbon.
- Urban nature has an aesthetic value and provide space for recreation, social exchange, educational purposes and reconnecting people with nature.
- Urban nature helps reduce and remove different types of pollution by filtering air particles, purifying water and reducing noise. This can improve human and environmental health and well-being.
- A well planned local/regional/national green infrastructure network can strengthen the connectivity between artificial, natural and semi-natural areas – linking for example, forests, agricultural landscapes, wetlands – supporting wider biodiversity targets.



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Existing urban greening policies

Introducing urban nature plans

Dedicated plans that imply different aspects of greening (including climate adaptation strategies, green infrastructure strategy).

Holistic overview integrating all relevant strategies, policies and non-governmental actions for a clear framework of biodiverse urban nature (including green space).

Planning focus on recreational benefits of urban nature for people (for example providing recreational spaces and parks, access to green space and planning standards per capita).

Recognizing the importance and multiple co-benefits of urban nature for people and nature.

Sectoral planning with limited collaboration with other departments.

Cross-departmental planning and mainstreaming based on the integrated management system.

Focus on individual parks and gardens to the detriment of creating green corridors of green spaces.

Connectivity as a core aspect of planning.

Focus on green infrastructure functionality to the detriment of biodiverse ecosystems.

Focus on integrating biodiversity and green space into multifunctional green infrastructure solutions.

Focus on headline vision to the detriment of clear actions and measurable results.

Results-oriented planning through the development of quantitative and qualitative targets and actions.

Citizen engagement or participatory planning processes may be used to different degrees and the process might occur in different phases of the decision-making process.

Centred around co-creation processes for stakeholder engagement from the beginning of the planning process, collaborative governance schemes and social innovation.

Do not focus on addressing challenges related to racial or socio-demographic injustices.

Encourages an approach of environmental justice, utilizing NbS planning to reduce social inequities.



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