



URBAN NATURE PLANS +

**Governance structures:
Experiences from cities**





Governance structures

This short brief addresses governance structures when implementing urban nature plans.

The Urban Nature Plan+ (UNP+) project supports cities in developing effective Urban Nature Plans (UNPs). This short brief focuses on challenges, enablers, and best practices across one of four critical topics related to implementing a UNP: **governance structures**. The others are engaging stakeholders in plan design, navigating conflicting policy agendas, and securing financing.

Key messages:

1. **Institutionalise Participation with Formal Mandates:** Combat organisational inertia by establishing a formal mandate (such as a legal regulation or advisory board) to ensure transparency and sustain the co-creation process over the long term, regardless of political changes.
2. **Form a Cross-Departmental Task Force:** Counter siloed planning by setting up a dedicated interdepartmental working group. This 'silo busting' approach ensures all city offices, from transport to housing, are aligned on the Urban Nature Plan's objectives from the outset.
3. **Appoint a Single Point of Accountability:** Ensure the Plan's success by assigning clear departmental ownership and leadership. This prevents a diffusion of responsibility, secures dedicated resources, and drives implementation more effectively than fragmented oversight.
4. **Leverage Third-Party Facilitation:** Engage trusted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to serve as an effective bridge between the council and the community. This enabling factor is particularly useful for fostering buy-in and reaching marginalised groups.
5. **Embed Adaptive Learning into Governance:** Use tools like Reflexive Monitoring to continuously track the performance of your governance structure. This real-time feedback loop ensures the system can evolve and improve its effectiveness in addressing ongoing challenges.

This short brief is based on [Jelliman et al. \(2024\) Topic I - Conflicting policy agendas](#). See full report on the UNP+ project website for more details: <https://urbannatureplans.eu/>



Topic Overview

Step 2 of the Urban Nature Planning (UNP) process focuses on establishing a working structure. Working structures may take many forms. Some UNP+ partner cities have a single department or team responsible for the development of a UNP and some cities create a multi-department working group to create the plan. Once the plan has been made, cities also take different approaches to delivery. Again, the responsibility for delivering on the plan may sit with one department or team, or the objectives in the plan may trickle into multiple departments to implement. The working structure can shape both the development and delivery of plans in the UNP+ partner cities, with clear responsibility and coordinated action being crucial to their success (Sarabi et al., 2019).

Challenges identified by UNP+ cities

Siloed working

Ideally, objectives and plans will be established in an integrated manner to create as many co-benefits and mutual wins as possible, and then delivered in a way that continues to try and maximise the opportunities for co-benefits and reduce the requirement for trade-offs (Sarabi et al., 2019; Collier et al., 2023). Developing plans in silos can result in more friction and potential tradeoffs during implementation, which is sometimes the case among UNP+ partner cities and others (Sarabi et al., 2019).

Burgas challenge: A formal structure to facilitate interdepartmental collaboration and goal achievement is currently lacking. Colleagues typically connect on an ad-hoc basis as needed. This arrangement makes the coordination of cross-departmental activities more challenging.

Belgrade challenge: Interdepartmental cooperation, particularly between construction and urban planning departments, is significantly hindered by a lack of communication. This is evident in the challenges posed by development pressures on green spaces. Despite regulations mandating a minimum percentage of green space requirement for new housing projects, weak enforcement and monitoring often lead to non-compliance. In addition, Belgrade's 20 secretariats, each with their own strategies, operate in silos, limiting coordination and hindering the effective implementation of city-wide goals. However, the Draft Green Infrastructure Strategy (DGIS) proposed a new organisational unit within the Secretariat of Environmental Protection to deal with all aspects of the preservation and development of green infrastructure. A new unit should be established in 2025 and will be responsible for the implementation of the Strategy, cooperation with other relevant institutions, new initiatives, and applying and implementing projects through various funds and partnerships. Moreover, the Action Plan of the DGIS proposed the integration of green infrastructure topics in the realm of work of several other institutions: the Secretariat for Education and Children's Welfare, the Secretariat for Utilities and Housing Services, the Secretariat for Urban Planning and Construction, the Secretariat for Inspection, Supervision and Communication, etc. Finally, the Action Plan envisaged that in 2026 a delegated green infrastructure expert needs to be engaged in the team of the Department of the Main Urban Planner, as well as in the Urban Planning Committee.



Riverside, Belgrade.

Image Credit: Maja Jovanovic / City of Belgrade

Disconnect between plan creators and delivery teams

Some UNP+ partner cities face issues when a nature plan isn't connected to a single specific department. This can create a diffusion of responsibility and reduce the level of agency, which is needed to ensure the plan is effectively implemented. In this case there also may not be a budget connected with implementing a plan, instead relying on portions of multiple budgets. Whilst it's often seen as a positive thing that a plan is connected with multiple departments; it can sometimes also have the effect of making the plan carry less weight as it doesn't have a single department taking responsibility for driving it forward (Vandergert et al., 2022)

Barcelona challenge: Plan Natura was developed by a small team within a single department. Other departments, such as architecture, are responsible for implementing on-the-ground projects aligned with the plan's objectives and actions. Although other departments were involved in the creation of the plan Natura, they may feel that it isn't "their" plan and so not buy into it as much as if it were a plan created by people from multiple departments. A plan being jointly created and owned might lead to greater buy-in from those departments. Barcelona staff highlighted that the successful implementation of the plan hinges on adequate human resources. A dedicated department would streamline the process. However, the current team of seven is overburdened, juggling both regular duties and plan implementation. Budgetary constraints further limit the possibility of hiring additional staff, hindering the plan's effectiveness.

Decentralised & disjointed biodiversity monitoring

In some of the UNP+ partner cities, a challenge can arise by not having all biodiversity monitoring data available in one place. Different teams and departments may be doing bits and pieces of ad-hoc biodiversity monitoring. If it is not coordinated, it is impossible to know if the monitoring being done in one team is useful and complementary to the monitoring being done by another team. Without a centralised place to access and analyse all data, it is impossible to understand biodiversity on a city-wide scale and make informed decisions about biodiversity actions based on this (Dumitru, A. 2022). This can be improved by establishing a local record centre and biodiversity partnerships crossing administrative boundaries (Gaia & Jones, 2019).

Mannheim challenge: While effective indicators exist for soil protection, air pollution control, small-scale monitoring, and tree monitoring, a central registry for species occurrence data remains absent. Mannheim recognises the need for a comprehensive data strategy to address this gap. Currently, data management is fragmented across various departments, limiting accessibility and awareness. The city's ongoing data strategy aims to establish standardised data collection, management, and accessibility practices.



Burgas challenge: Data management, collection, and inventory are not centralised. Instead, these responsibilities are distributed across multiple departments. For instance, the Ecology Department focuses on the ecological aspects of green infrastructure, while the Construction Department handles data related to infrastructure projects. The European Projects and Programs department manages EU-funded projects, which may include green and blue infrastructure initiatives. This fragmented approach can hinder efficient data sharing and analysis.

Belgrade challenge: Belgrade developed the Green Areas GIS database, maintained by the Public Utility Company “Belgrade Greenery”: <http://gispublic.zelenilo.rs/giszppublic/Map> but it is not regularly updated, it does not map any urban nature on privately owned land, and it insufficiently maps biodiversity indicators. The Draft Green Infrastructure Strategy plans “Measure 2.1. Establishment of an integrated green infrastructure planning system based on relevant information bases”, and certain donor funds are expected for this work. It should encompass the development of a digital database of City green infrastructure, the unification and synchronisation of available information on the quality of the environment and endangering factors, as well as the creation of thematic studies for improvement of the structural and functional features of the elements of green infrastructure. A comprehensive mapping and GIS tool which is publicly accessible may help to bring all of the information together to be viewed and analysed.

Coordination challenges

The involvement of multiple districts, departments, and agencies in managing urban nature highlights its significance in UNP+ partner cities but also introduces considerable coordination challenges. The complexity of aligning roles and responsibilities across these entities can impede effective implementation and monitoring, particularly for tasks that require specialised expertise (Sekulova and Anguelovski, 2017).

Barcelona challenge: The extensive involvement of various districts, departments, and agencies in Barcelona's urban nature management, while indicative of its importance, poses significant coordination challenges. This complexity can hinder effective implementation and monitoring, particularly for tasks requiring specialised knowledge, such as fauna monitoring. To overcome these challenges and ensure the long-term health and quality of urban nature, strong interdepartmental collaboration is essential. This collaboration can help streamline processes, share resources, and maintain consistency, even without additional funding or personnel.

Paris challenge: To ensure the plantation of 170,000 trees promised by 2026 by Mayor Hidalgo, the Green Spaces and Environment department has set up a task force to collect data from all relevant departments and private owners. Having an endorsement by a senior official can make a big impact on delivery success. This is an important coordination and technical challenge to ensure communication between GIS tools and other monitoring systems from Green Spaces, Public Works and Mobilities, Sanitation, Housing departments and private developers. The result of this monitoring is communicated to elected officials



and made publicly available on the city's website for all Parisians to follow the delivery of projects.

Enabling factors identified by UNP+ cities

Clear responsibilities

City authorities, including in the UNP+ partner cities, have found it important that any plans or action plans lay out which departments and teams are responsible for delivery and monitoring (Sekulova and Anguelovski, 2017). This ensures that everyone knows who should be doing what and who they might need to be involved in the area of responsibility. However, it should also remain adaptable to enable participation from other stakeholder groups (Vandergert et al., 2022).

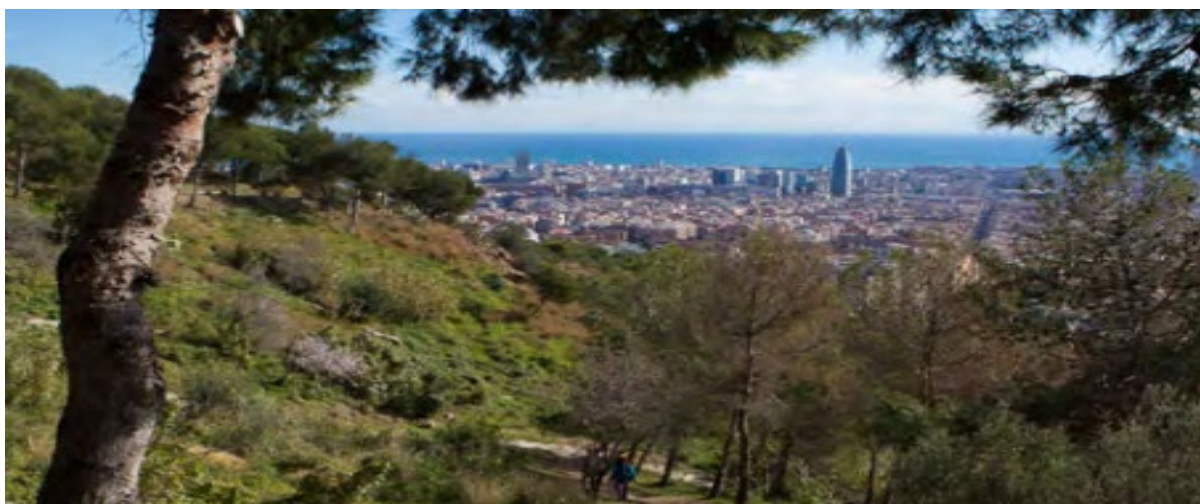
Paris enabling factor: Three key city plans, the Climate Plan, the Bioclimatic Urban Masterplan, and the Biodiversity Plan 2025-2030, are currently undergoing updates. In each of these plans, responsible stakeholders are identified for the plan's implementation.

Barcelona enabling factor: The Natura action plan designates specific leaders and internal agents for each initiative. A dedicated team of seven individuals is responsible for overseeing the three lines of action and two focus areas outlined in the plan.

Structured cooperation

It has been useful for UNP+ partner cities and other cities to put structures in place such as steering groups, task forces, and advisory boards to create vehicles for discussion, co-production and action (Vandergert et al., 2022). Without these structures, activities may take a more ad-hoc form and risk making less progress. There could also be a role for neutral partnership structures, including NGOs and national government agencies to co-ordinate plan development and link between the planning and delivery processes (Hansmann, 2016). The role of partnerships with NGOs or national agencies and mentoring may help to create bridges between departments (Whitehead et al., 2017).

Barcelona enabling factor: One of the factors in the successful development of Barcelona's Natura Plan 2030 was the establishment of a dedicated planning committee/steering group to facilitate interactions and cooperation. The committee comprised the Biodiversity Department, Hands-on Green Participation Department, Project Department and Green Space Conservation Department. The committee was created by and contained members from all of the departments related to the Plan Natura, ensuring a variety of views were included and that an effective communication forum was established.



Parc Natural de Collserola, Barcelona.
Image credit: Barcelona city authority

Best practices identified by UNP+ cities

Integrated working

Embedding biodiversity into a range of city plans, rather than limiting it to a stand-alone strategy, has created more opportunities to enhance biodiversity through various sectors such as housing and transport in cities including the UNP+ partner cities. This approach not only broadens the scope for biodiversity-related activities but can also unlock additional funding streams. To ensure biodiversity is integrated effectively across multiple departments and receives the attention it requires, a joined-up approach is essential. Aligning and synergising the development and implementation of plans across city departments and other stakeholder groups maximises co-benefits, allowing for more cohesive and impactful outcomes (Sekulova and Anguelovski, 2017; Vandergert et al., 2022).

Paris best practice: The increasing complexity of urban challenges necessitates greater interdepartmental collaboration. As citizens often expect seamless service delivery, regardless of departmental boundaries, cities must foster cooperation to effectively address these challenges. This is apparent in the Catalonia Square Urban Forest, which involved close cooperation between the Green Spaces and Environment department and the Public Works and Mobilities department. Visions at times were not in perfect alignment but by working closely together a positive path forward could be achieved. Paris exemplifies this trend with its strategic mandate, which prioritises biodiversity across multiple departments. This high-level political document, updated every six years, fosters a collaborative approach, ensuring that nature and biodiversity are integrated into the work of multiple departments. During the revision phase, working groups were organised to gather inputs from all relevant departments (public works, housing, education, sports, finance, communication) and a draft was circulated to all elected officials for further amendments and comments before introduction to City Council.

Mannheim best practice: The city of Mannheim has established a Local Green Deal group. An Interdepartmental group focussed on the local implementation of the European Green Deal and the EU Mission 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030. The group is closely

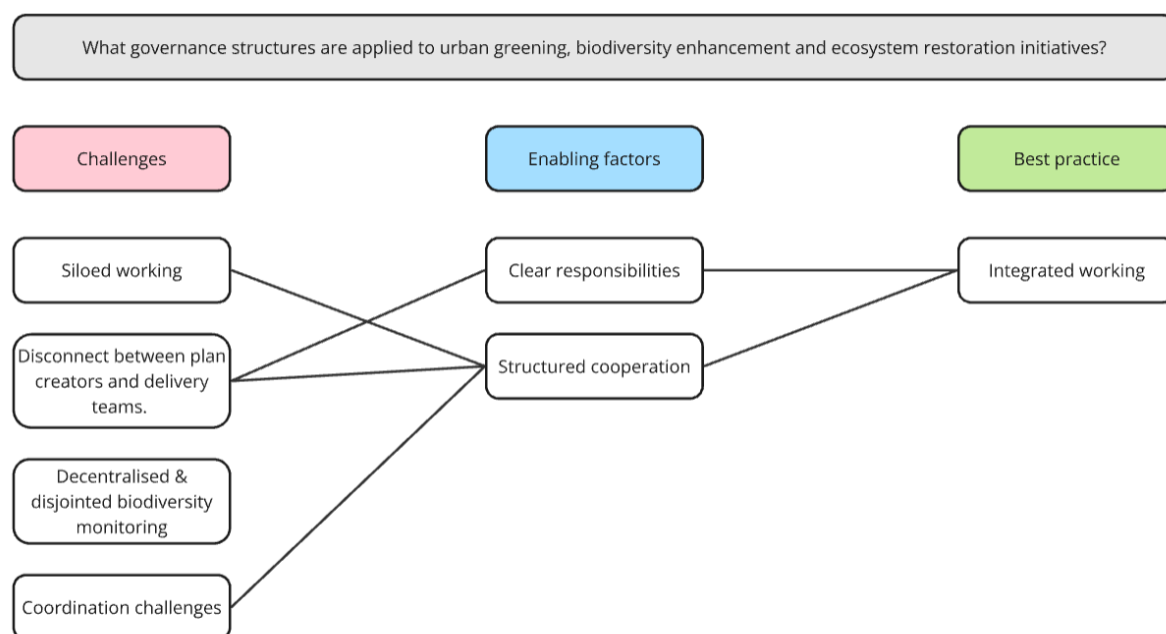


connected to many departments of the city's administration and can therefore speed up processes and provide better support to citizens in their projects. The group also engages with other NGOs and stakeholders beyond the city administration.

Barcelona best practice: Some of the actions included in the plan are closely related to the promotion of cooperation and the improvement of governance. Firstly, through the approval of a local law on the conservation and promotion of biodiversity in all public works. Secondly, by promoting training on green and biodiversity for the entire staff of Barcelona City Council. Lastly, by creating three transversal work teams: Green and health, biodiversity conservation and green city model.

Conclusion

In the Figure below all of the challenges, enabling factors and best practices experienced by the UNP+ partner cities related to this topic have been laid out. Links have been drawn from challenges to enabling factors, where the enabling factor may be key to overcoming the particular challenge. Best practices are linked to enabling factors where specific enabling factors may be required for the establishment of a best practice.



Some key lessons can be learnt from the experience of the UNP+ partner cities:

- Siloed working is a common challenge which can increase departmental friction points and missed mutual wins which could be reached through the integration of objectives and delivery.
- Fragmented biodiversity data storage and management can make it difficult to evaluate biodiversity across the city.
- A lack of formal coordination structures can lead to inconsistent implementation.
- Multiple departments handling different elements of a plan may dilute accountability and hinder effective implementation.



- Successful approaches rely on well-defined roles, still open to the input of other stakeholders.
- Establishing formal structures such as steering committees or task forces can foster cooperation across departments and the involvement of wider stakeholders and partners, leading to more cohesive and impactful outcomes.
- Integrating biodiversity goals into various city plans, not just standalone strategies, ensures greater coordination and can unlock additional funding and resources.



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CEUS

MANNHEIM²



PARIS



Contact information:

Email | hello@urbannatureplans.eu

Website | Urbannatureplans.eu

Twitter | [UNPplus](https://twitter.com/UNPplus)

LinkedIn | [UNPplus EU](https://www.linkedin.com/company/unpplus-eu)



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