



# **TAKING ACTION FOR URBAN NATURE**

Citizen Engagement Handbook



Led by Durham University, NATURVATION involves 14 institutions across Europe working in fields as diverse as urban development, innovation studies, geography, ecology, environmental assessment and economics. Our partnership includes city governments, non-governmental organisations and business. We will assess what nature-based solutions can achieve in cities, examine how innovation is taking place, and work with communities and stakeholders to develop the knowledge and tools required to realise the potential of nature-based solutions for meeting urban sustainability goals.

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## What does this handbook offer?

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Citizens have much to contribute to the successful design and implementation of nature-based solutions. From consultation through to collaborative planning and active participation, citizens can become involved at all stages of a nature-based solution.

This handbook shows what municipalities and civil society organisations can do to promote citizen engagement in and through nature-based solutions. It seeks to inspire novel approaches and gives concrete suggestions for working with and towards inclusive communities.

The handbook provides hands-on advice on participation methods together with examples from nature-based solution projects around the world. It focuses particularly on citizen engagement in nature-based solutions as a means to address the needs of diverse communities.

The handbook is targeted at representatives of municipalities and civil society organisations who work to include diverse urban communities in nature-based solution planning, implementation and maintenance, as one way to address the sustainability challenges faced by cities around the world today.

*“Living in a city can disconnect us from nature, but we remain dependent on many ecosystem services: providing food to eat, water to drink, air to breathe and shelter. In fact, many cities were initially settled in places with high biodiversity values to support urban functions. As our world becomes increasingly connected and ever more complex, it is critical that policymakers and citizens work together, to better understand, value and protect the crucial relationship between cities and nature, as well as how urban nature-based solutions can facilitate more resilient urban environments. The reward and challenge are to engage citizens at different levels simultaneously: locally, within individual cities, and globally, to demonstrate wider impact and momentum. At WWF, we work with cities in circa 40 countries to address climate change and sustainability challenges; this handbook will undoubtedly prove useful for local governments, citizens and stakeholders we engage with.”*

Jennifer Lenhart, Global Lead, One Planet Cities at WWF

## Green cities for all: What are the key benefits of engaging citizens in nature-based solutions?

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Nature-based solutions are interventions for sustainability that are inspired or supported by nature. They range from localised interventions, such as urban forests or green facades, to multi-faceted strategic projects, such as for flood protection or drainage systems.

Citizen engagement is crucial for the successful design and implementation of such projects in cities. It can increase understanding of nature-based solutions, empower local communities, create greater senses of ownership, enhance urban citizenship and belonging, and help to tackle social exclusion. Thus, the benefits of citizen engagement in nature-based solutions include:

- Greater social inclusion and cohesion
- Adjustment to context and finding compromise
- Sustainability through stewardship

In order to create green cities for all, municipalities can provide financial support, expertise, a shared knowledge base and access to land and property.



## What works: methods of citizen engagement for municipalities

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Citizen engagement is key to inclusive governance and to the promotion of social justice. To reap the full benefits of citizen engagement for achieving these social sustainability goals, municipalities can use a range of tools and methods. These need to be finetuned to the specifics of each context and to different values, interests and needs. Ideally, citizen engagement leads to concrete results that reconcile different views and opinions, showing to citizens that their participation was effective.

Tools and methods that are particularly well suited to enhancing inclusion in and through nature-based solutions include:

**Future Workshops:** People from different backgrounds are brought together to debate and reconcile diverse views on a common issue.

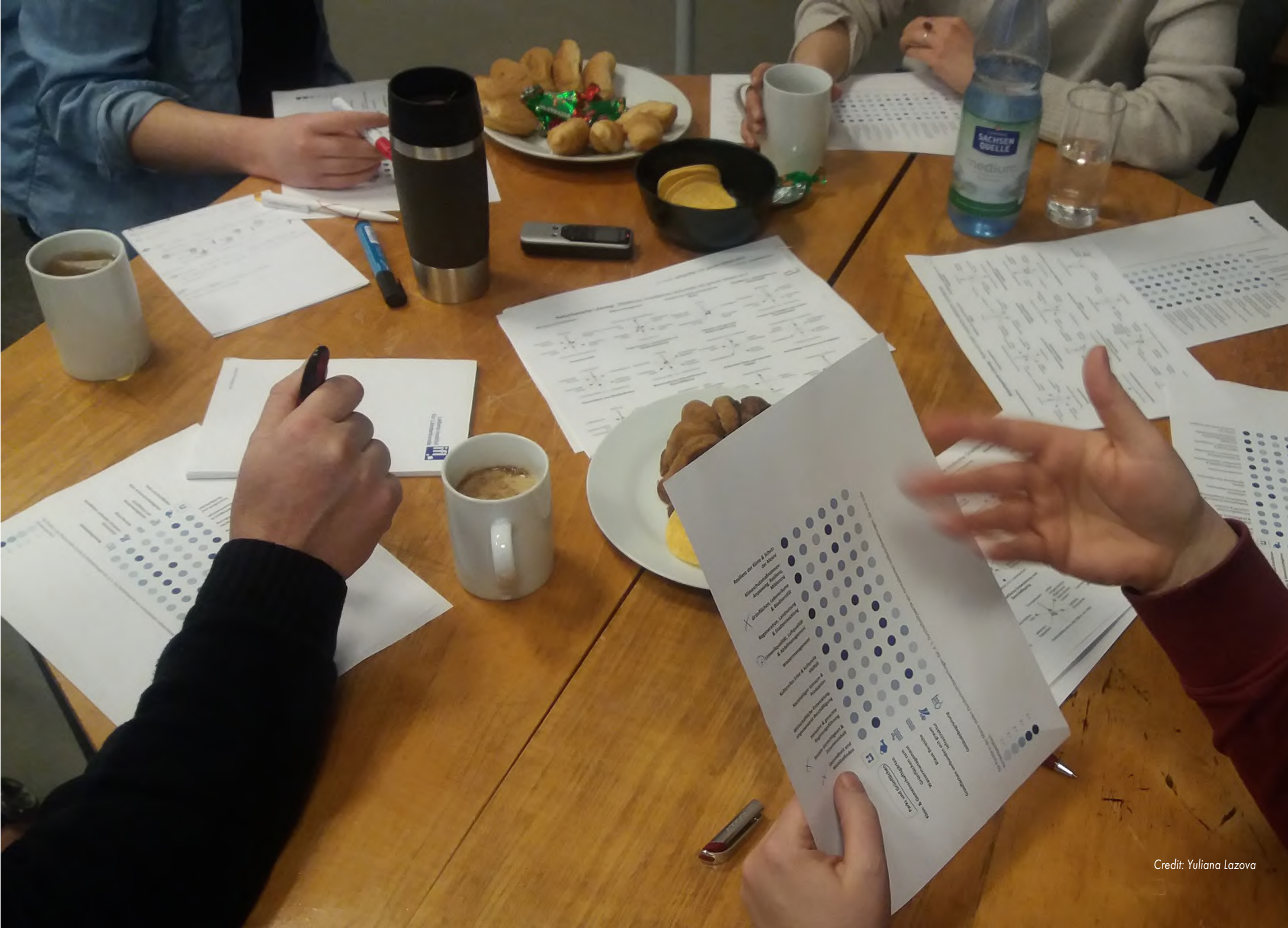
**Round Tables:** A discussion forum for decision makers and representatives of diverse sectors of society that enables inclusion of stakeholder knowledge in decision-making.

**Participatory Planning Workshops:** As a good tool to reach the goals of a concrete, predefined question, these bring together the expertise of citizens and planners.

**Citizen Panels:** Regular surveys of a large, demographically representative group of citizens that help to identify local priorities and to assess public preferences and opinion

*“So, we started to work with people. It is far more complicated and far slower but much better because of the roots that we have planted, working with people, working with this idea...”*

Researcher,  
UNAM, Mexico, Xochimilco



## Future Workshop

A Future Workshop is a good tool for tackling complex problems where many, often contradicting views, have to be reconciled. The idea is to bring together people from various backgrounds who all share an interest in a common issue.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

1. Determine workshop goals and target groups or key stakeholders
2. Prepare and send key information with an agenda to participants
3. Select two facilitators for moderating and minute taking
4. Conduct the workshop, over minimum half a day, in four phases:
  - Preparation: the conference room is prepared and the workshop introduced, including an explanation of goals and methods
  - Critique: the key issues and problems are identified and discussed critically
  - Fantasy: creative phase for blue-sky thinking, where different visions for future developments are developed (can include storytelling, participatory diagramming etc.). Small working groups are subsequently formed to refine selected ideas
  - Implementation: action plans are developed for solutions that can be practically implemented
5. Summary: a report is written by the facilitators, outlining next steps

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method is used to develop answers to practical questions and devise action plans for achieving a desired future
- Rich, qualitative data is elicited from a diverse range of stakeholders, who are knowledgeable about key issues
- A variety of tools is used, such as brainstorming, storytelling and scenario development, allowing for a cooperative decision-making process

### Key Issues to consider:

- Coordination of diaries can be complicated
- Stakeholder knowledge and expertise can vary
- The workshops require a strong and experienced facilitator
- Facilitators need to take care to involve all relevant groups and to avoid exclusions
- Contradictory views can be difficult to reconcile
- Participants may be dissatisfied if their ideas are not implemented and a workable compromise cannot be found

## Example of a “Future Workshop”: The Liberties Greening Strategy

**Where:** Dublin, Ireland

**Who:** Dublin City Council (DCC) Parks Department, landscape architects and designers, community groups and local residents

In order to design and construct new green amenities in the city centre of Dublin, the city council implemented an innovative and **socially inclusive management style**, comprising of a variety of workshops. Organised by urban landscaping and design companies, the workshops concentrated on gathering and defining different **ideas, needs** and **demands** from local citizen groups and residents. The communal meetings were promoted through leaflets and posters. They were held in local venues at times convenient to citizens (i.e. evening hours). However, while open access to the workshops promoted **inclusivity**, it also caused minor tensions due to the wide-ranging expectations of diverse participants.



Credit: Panagiota Kotsila

*“Where did the greening strategy come from? I would say where it came from is grassroots community pressure, the kind of people who wanted the community garden, the kind of people who wanted a park, for green space in that area, not more buildings”*

Researcher at University College Dublin

## Round Table

A Round Table is a meeting of formal decision makers and other sectors of society and therefore a good tool to understand expectations, perceptions and needs of participants and to include their knowledge in decision-making.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

1. Select participants: 10 participants is good number to handle, more can be split into groups of up to 8 people
2. Set up an agenda
3. Select trained facilitators
4. Organize the meeting, incl. room bookings and the preparation of resources (flip charts, visuals, pens and paper)
5. Conduct the round table: arrange seating in a semi-circle, e.g. facing flip charts, to enable maximum eye contact and readability, have visually engaging materials and enjoyable activities ready in order to prompt effective discussions
6. Evaluation: throughout the meeting and after the meeting, ask for feedback. The evaluation procedure and how this information will be used should be explained

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method brings a diversity of opinions from different participants to the surface that might otherwise be marginalised
- It allows a focus on specific issues, to explore solutions, define actions and develop strategies
- It can be repeated to evaluate a project

### Key Issues to consider:

- It is more effective if stakeholders are able to read the agenda well in advance. This should be distributed through popular channels
- It is more effective if stakeholders can influence the topics and set their own emphases
- Some perspectives can be omitted, especially if only representatives of certain stakeholder groups are invited to participate

## Example of a “Round Table”: Special Plan for the Protection of the Natural Environment and Landscape of the Collserola Mountain (PepNat)

**Where:** Barcelona, Spain

**Who:** Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, Barcelona City Council, municipalities adjacent to Collserola

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The initiative was aimed at **protecting** Barcelona’s fragile peri-urban parks for both their social and ecological functions, as well as responding to the challenge of **preserving biodiversity** while providing **ecosystem services** to the nearby population. The regional and park authorities initiated a variety of public participation methods – incorporating discussions that were similar to round tables – in order to debate and discuss its planning drafts with citizens. The initiative benefited from **numerous public meetings** and workshops held in municipal premises adjacent to the park. Providing sufficient information for citizens to develop an informed perspective and to therefore participate effectively was found to be difficult, however.



*“The strategy is to say: this is land that can’t be developed further, which is already very limiting to what you can do.(...) It's not that you can do new things. It is more the few things that you can do in existing constructions, and how you can do them.”*

Anonymous; Àrea Metropolitana Barcelona

## Participatory Planning Workshop

The idea of a Participatory Planning Workshop is to bring together the expertise of citizens and planners. It is a good tool to develop answers to concrete, predefined questions and to reach specific goals.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

1. Clarify key interests: hold advance discussions with key stakeholders to identify the main interests
  - Ask about opportunities and risks for a certain area, about topics to be addressed and about expectations
2. Clarify roles:
  - Select trained facilitators
  - Citizens bring in their interests and knowledge
  - Planners have the role of advisors
  - If political representatives are present, they should only be listening
3. Conduct a site visit to get a feeling for the concerned location
4. Conduct one or more workshops, depending on the complexity of the topic
  - Discuss and collect ideas
  - Translate ideas into concrete measures by work with plans and models. The moderator leads discussions between citizens and planners to assess how ideas can be implemented
5. Present the results

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method gives planners the opportunity to expand their ideas through new input from citizens
- Stakeholders' interests can function as good basis for (e.g.) a zoning plan procedure
- A better understanding of pressing issues among all stakeholders can be fostered and the community can work towards solving problems
- The method gives the opportunity to improve citizens' understanding of planning issues and increase their acceptance of planning processes and plans

### Key Issues to consider:

- The method is not a tool for conflict resolution – diverse citizen perspectives can be difficult to reconcile
- It produces ideas rather than high quality plans
- The dialogue between planners and citizens can be difficult due to discrepancies in expertise and diverging views on what can or cannot be realistically achieved
- Citizen expectations may be disappointed

## Example of a “Participatory Planning Workshop”: Isar Plan

**Where:** Munich, Germany

**Who:** City council, water engineers, landscape architects, city planners, biologists, citizen-groups and NGOs

The Isar Plan was devised as framework to guide the process of **re-naturing** Munich’s Isar River with multi-beneficial outcomes such as reduced flood risk, improved water quality, ecological recovery of a semi-natural riverside area and provision of a recreational area in the heart of the city. Citizen’s involvement in the initiative was encouraged by a variety of public engagement methods, including **planning workshops**. Residents were invited for discussions with City council representatives and planners in order to share their opinion on the potential benefits and outcomes of the project. **Early stage communication** and promotional campaigns organised by the city council were seen as crucial for the successful implementation of the initiative.



Credit: Bernadett Kiss

*“The involvement of citizens is very important if one wants to achieve a successful project. Citizens play an important role in such projects today. We [the city administration] are there for the citizens.”*

Former project officer in the Bavarian Environment Agency

## Citizen Panel

A Citizen Panel is a large, demographically representative group of citizens that is surveyed regularly. Selected participants may also participate in workshops or other forms of in-depth engagement. It is a good tool to identify local priorities, assess public preferences and opinions, used typically by statutory agencies.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

- Regular surveys are conducted (3-4 times a year); further in-depth engagement may also be conducted, such as Future and Participatory Planning Workshops
- Not all members are invited to take part in all activities. It is therefore important to be clear about what is expected of members, and what participation will entail in terms of type of contact and frequency of involvement
- Suggested steps:
  1. Recruit participants by random sampling based on the electoral roll or postcode address file. Further participants can be recruited through purposive sampling, e.g. to ensure inclusion of socially marginalised and hard to reach groups. Panel size can range from a few hundred to several thousand people
  2. Survey: define the topics that should be investigated and design the questionnaire, e.g. as online survey
  3. Invite participants to the survey
  4. Optional: conduct further in-depth engagement such as workshops
  5. Communicate the results and how they are going to be implemented or why they are not implemented

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method is used to detect problems, expectations and what citizens are willing to accept
- The results can support decision-making processes of the City
- It supports citizen engagement in the community as citizens see that their opinion is appreciated
- The City administration has the opportunity to explain their perspective, procedures and reasoning to citizens

### Key Issues to consider:

- The design of the questionnaire requires knowledge and experience in order for it to be representative
- The design of the survey needs to be clear and use colloquial language
- It is possible to use an online survey open to all citizens – in this case, it is important to make sure all sociodemographic groups are represented
- There is a risk of self-selection, as those who have time, expertise and/or a strong interest in the topic are more likely to respond
- Barriers to participation also affect who takes part in follow-up engagement

## Example of a “Citizen Panel”: Urban Forest Strategy (UFS)

**Where:** Melbourne, Australia

**Who:** City of Melbourne, urban landscapes agencies and citizens

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The Urban Forest Strategy is a central part of an innovative overarching policy framework of the City of Melbourne, underpinning the City's aim to create healthy ecosystems for people and nature. Citizen review-councils for the UFS consultation phase were composed of demographically representative panels. These co-governance forums provided an opportunity for the City of Melbourne to pro-actively use place-based storytelling to engage individuals, and the community as a whole, in a discussion on urban re-naturing and climate resilience. Key place-based drivers included technical knowledge and local values.



Credit: Shutterstock.com

***“Participatory approaches are not without challenges, in tempering the input of powerful voices and interests, and in managing stakeholder expectations by clearly defining the boundaries within which input and participation is sought.”***

Team Leader

## What works: methods of citizen engagement for civil society organisations

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Civil society organisations often provide the 'missing link' between municipal governments and their citizens. This is particularly so where participatory processes are not yet well established or common practice. A vibrant civil society is also, however, a reflection of the diversity of interests that jostle for attention in urban sustainability politics. It is a sign of a healthy democracy.

The roles of civil society organisations can range from lobbying for change to providing specialist expertise and education as well as initiating, facilitating and supporting bottom-up projects with organizational support structures, knowledge, advice, advocacy and routes towards funding and innovative finance. In some cases, civil society organisations are also able to secure land rights that are crucial for the long-term success of citizen-led initiatives. In addition to providing structural support through resources and expertise, civil society organisations can use the following tools and methods to support citizen engagement in nature-based solutions:

**District Forums:** Focused on improving the situation of a specific area, these forums provide longer-term organizational structures that help include citizens from those areas.

**Appreciative Inquiries & Public Spirit Workshops:** These methods centre on identifying valuable community resources and on finding ways to multiply positive aspects. They motivate and connect citizens to find solutions for complex challenges.

**District Based Community Work:** Based on the principles of professional social work, this method aims to enrol local residents in improving the living conditions in disadvantaged areas. It includes alliance building with a broad range of key community actors.

**Environmental Education:** Knowledge about natural environments and sustainability is used here to equip citizens with the skills and expertise that they need to participate in society as agents of change

*"When you come here, just the contact with nature, the simplest thing, teaches you something every day. You get involved, and you realize how much you are connected to this thing and how simple and beautiful life is."*

Cultivator, Athens, Municipal Urban Gardens



## District Forum

District Forums provide a formal organizational structure that enables interaction between residents of a specific urban area and experts, municipal officers, planners, NGOs and other stakeholders. They are a good tool to improve the situation in a certain area of the city over the longer term and consist of citizens in areas that residents themselves have identified as requiring action to solve local problems. They are thus different from planning districts designated by municipalities.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

The working principle of District Forums is long-term cooperation between citizens and the City administration

They can include:

- Working groups on different topics: the City administration is represented in these by nominated contact persons
- Planning groups: here, the representatives of the working groups discuss strategies for further work
- Plenum: a public meeting of all working groups, open to new participants, which meets around 4 times a year
- Public events: these are held on topics of special public interest; local politicians and the City administration are invited

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method is used to initiate self-organised, civic discussion and action, create a new public sphere, and enable a new social culture through exchange
- The expertise of local experts and citizens can be integrated in planning
- Through this method, communication in the district can be improved
- Conflicts of interest can be articulated and thus dealt with
- Participants can gain practice in public debate

### Key Issues to consider:

- District Forums are not legitimised by election, but by citizens' commitment: they cannot represent "the public"
- Budgets can vary and are a matter of discussion
- The City administration needs to be able to moderate / interact with the forum – this requires special skills
- There can be conflicts in cases where citizens' initiatives have other opinions than the forum

## Example of a “District Forum”: East Boston Greenway

**Where:** Boston, USA

**Who:** Friends of East Boston Greenway Trust, Boston Natural Areas Fund, City of Boston, Conrail, Massachusetts Highway Department EPA

The East Boston Greenway is a **multi-use pathway** and **linear park** built on a former rail corridor in a historically low-income, multi-racial neighbourhood with few public green spaces. It was the result of a bottom-up **grassroots action**, involving the formation of a Friends of the East Boston community organization. The action partly embraces the tenets of the **district forum** method in fostering communication between the community, City council and private firms. The creation and continued maintenance of the Greenway is credited to the organization, which continues to steward the interest of the project – and its community – at the local and city levels.



*“With no one agency solely responsible, the community has been and will continue to be the common denominator; envisioning the greenway, gathering and increasing support, and being a catalyst for collaboration, as well as an active and contributing partner with the city administration and other public agencies.”*

Former leader of local open-space advocacy organization

## Appreciative Inquiry & Public Spirit Workshop

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a good tool for identifying valuable aspects of a topic, to assess which resources a community has access to and to see how positive aspects can be multiplied. It can be conducted through a range of methods, including one-to-one interviews and group discussions. Public Spirit Workshops can build meaningfully on an initial process of appreciative inquiry. They are a good tool to connect citizens based on intrinsic motivations to find solutions for complex challenges. It is a project approach that needs a longer period, from six months to up to two or three years.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

1. Define the topic
2. Gain a better understanding of the key issues: in an appreciative interview, discover what is valuable to participants
3. Envisage: develop new ideas based on interview analysis and shape a vision, using creative materials that support active learning
4. Realise the vision
5. Optional: connect to a Public Spirit Workshop
  - A Public Spirit Workshop also focuses on appreciation of different perspectives and gives the opportunity to discover common interests, discuss constructively and build action teams
  - All participants are viewed as experts, there are no speakers invited
  - The implementation of the approach depends on the wishes and resources of those involved
  - Actions are planned collectively and implemented within the social, regional and temporal framework of the Public Spirit Workshop; results are reflected upon and celebrated

### Chances/Opportunities:

- AI and Public Spirit Workshop are used to promote a sense of optimism and action as well as to increase self-initiative and agency
- AI increases the mutual understanding between stakeholders
- In marginalized communities, AI first determines what is valuable and existing and thus strengthens self-awareness
- Public Spirit Workshops also increase social contact, flows of information and collaboration

### Key Issues to consider:

- An AI-organizer should have an appreciative attitude and be trained in the method
- AI can require much time in order to understand all perspectives and values
- The organizer of a Public Spirit Workshop needs to be free from bias

## Example of an “Appreciative Inquiry & Public Spirit Workshop”: Water Forest

**Where:** Mexico City, Mexico

**Who:** Conservation International Mexico with approx. 115 partners ranging from governments, civil society organizations and local communities

The Water Forest initiative is concerned with developing and implementing a **regional forest conservation strategy** for the protection of water and other ecosystem services essential to the inhabitants of the metropolitan regions of Mexico City, Toluca (State of Mexico) and Cuernavaca (State of Morelos). The initiative follows the principles of **creativity, inclusivity** and **long term planning**. One of the main challenges of the initiative has been to engage wide-ranging groups of stakeholders in order to realize the common environmental goals. Meetings and workshops therefore have emphasised the need to encourage local communities to take on **leadership** and **stewardship** roles in support of conservation activities, as part of the continuing vision of the Water Forest.



Credit: Andres Luque-Ayala

*“The challenge is how [...] to design the formula to bring all these different key players together. [...] But more important than having money is knowing where you want to go. And also to make sure that you have the support from the community, at the community level, which at the end of the day is the deciding factor.”*

Water Forest Project Director

## District Based Community Work

The aim of District Based Community Work is to improve the living conditions in disadvantaged residential areas with the help of local residents. It is based on the working principles of professional social work and includes alliance building with a broad range of key community actors, including residents' organisations, local employers and training agencies. Community work in the district functions as an intermediary between life in the district and public institutions.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

- Focuses on the concerns of individual people or groups in the district
- Supports self-help and self-initiative: nothing is done without the consent of those affected, citizens are encouraged to improve their living conditions
- Uses local resources, incl. communal spaces and residents' skills and expertise
- Cross target group activities that appeal to as many citizens as possible
- Uses competences from other sectors and search for points of contact for integrated projects
- Cooperates with and coordinates between different stakeholders
- Encourages participation through, for instance:
  - door-to-door calls
  - surveys on specific topics
  - district festivals or cultural events
  - citizens' associations or parents' councils
  - regular group meetings

### Chances/Opportunities:

- Open up discussion on topics of interests in the neighbourhood and bring people together
- Increase self-initiative and agency
- Motivate citizens to undertake actions and projects seeking answers to practical questions (e.g. future of an urban area)

### Key Issues to consider:

- It relies on the participation of active, inquisitive or committed people
- It is not successful in residential areas with a high percentage of demoralised people who have come to terms with their situation or are just waiting to leave the neighbourhood as quickly as possible
- It is not useable as a short-term method as it needs a long-term process to achieve agreements between people with different interests

## Example of “District Based Community Work”: Food for Good

**Where:** Utrecht, The Netherlands

**Who:** Foundation De Wending, service users, community members

Food for Good is an **organic community garden** providing social care to **vulnerable people** with support needs. The garden is much more than simply a place for producing and harvesting fruit and vegetables – it is a **therapeutic environment**, allowing people to connect with themselves and with the natural environment, and to improve their **employability skills**. A community work method underpins the initiative with service users being encouraged to take a shared responsibility of the garden – which simultaneously contributes to enhanced social cohesion and neighborhood aesthetics. Active participation was ensured through **training**, workshops and overall maintenance of the garden. The organizers are also exploring the potential of **commercial activities** in order to co-finance the initiative



*“To assist these very vulnerable people, you really need professionals, [...] We decided to stay on the project, focusing on the health care element and expanding our commercial activities, with the idea that after three years, the project should be able to run by combining health care and commercial activities.”*

Co-founder of Food for Good

## Environmental Education

Environmental Education takes on varied forms, but principally teaches how natural environments function and how humans can manage behaviors and ecosystems sustainably. It is a good tool to equip citizens with the knowledge that they need to act and to participate in society as agents of change. It integrates disciplines such as biology, chemistry, ecology, geography and physics.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

Citizens of all demographics are engaged with in a number of ways:

1. Involvement in observing, measuring, classifying, experimenting, and other data gathering techniques – Citizen Science
2. Based on this, participants discuss, infer, predict, and interpret data about environmental issues
3. As a result, participants develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and have the skills to make informed and responsible decisions

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method is used to create awareness and understanding about environmental issues that lead to responsible individual and group actions (positive environmental behavioural change)
- It focuses on processes that promote critical, ethical, creative thinking; problem solving; effective decision-making skills
- It develops skills and commitments to act independently and collectively
- It does not advocate a particular viewpoint

### Key Issues to consider:

- It is important that participants get in touch with nature, otherwise topics remain too abstract and opportunities for agency are lost
- Organizers need to take care not to impose their political opinions on participants or patronize them

## Example of “Environmental Education”: Cape Town Environmental Education Trust (CTEET)

**Where:** Cape Town, South Africa

**Who:** Cape Town Environmental Education Trust (NGO) and the City of Cape Town

CTEET is a non-profit **environmental education organization** that seeks to improve both the inclusiveness of urban nature reserves and the effectiveness of **biodiversity conservation** by connecting nearby disadvantaged and racialized communities with municipally-owned nature reserves. Environmental education and **employment growth paths** are at the heart of the initiative. Through a variety of fun activities, children learn about the **spiritual, ecological** and **economic** value of nature conservation, while adults are offered **job skills training**. Successful implementation of the initiative relied on focusing on the intersection of **social and environmental spheres**, engagement with **local community needs** as well as **partnership** between local government and civil society.



*“The problem with some of the reserves is [that nearby low income communities] might not feel part of them because they are locked out of that particular site. [CTEET tries to] create that passion for that particular site and for the value of that vegetation type.”*

Education and Training Manager

# What works: methods of citizen engagement for municipalities

Access to urban nature and the opportunity to actively participate in planning, designing and maintaining green spaces in the city are directly related to issues of social justice. Nature-based solutions that engage citizens from marginalized groups hold the potential to improve access to key resources and to create stronger feelings of belonging. They offer opportunities for hands-on participation, acquiring new skills and connecting with others in public spaces. Participation in nature-based solutions can also empower marginalized groups to seek more of the resources required to challenge deep-seated exclusions. Two approaches that are particularly helpful for reaching those who are hardest to reach are:

**Advocacy Planning:** Specialists with expertise in planning processes are employed here to advise and assist citizens in representing their interests.

**Community Organizing:** Enabling citizens to constructively shape their own city, citizen organizations are established, for example in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, to stand up for citizens’ own interests.

The needs of different groups are diverse, however, and there are some common pitfalls to full inclusion into nature-based solutions that include, for instance the following issues:

| Form of exclusion            | Exacerbated by:                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gender                       | Insufficient safety features and amenities that are not accessible to all                                                                                                                           |
| Children, youth and families | Insufficient and/or non-stimulating play opportunities; inaccessible paths; insufficient safety provisions; insufficient amenities (e.g. baby changing and breastfeeding areas; accessible toilets) |
| Disability                   | Poor accessibility (including cost, reach and accessibility of public transport); lack of provision for different groups of disabled users                                                          |
| Ethnic minorities            | Poor consultation and missed opportunities for cultural diversity in landscape design; stigmatization and lacking facilitation of interaction                                                       |
| Social status                | Entry fees and high degrees of commercialization                                                                                                                                                    |



## Advocacy Planning

Advocacy Planning is a good tool for long term planning. Citizens' advocates (specialists experienced in the planning process) advise and assist them in representing their interests in formal processes.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

- An advocate has to be independent and at the same time able to negotiate with all participants
- One-sided financial dependencies should be avoided, for example through the use of intermediary organizations
- The represented groups can be encouraged to take initiative through cooperation with District Based Community Work
- Suggested steps:
  1. Advocate planners work with disadvantaged groups to develop plans which incorporate and preserve their specific needs and interests
  2. The plans are then presented in front of a planning committee that considers the various pros and cons of different plans (several advocate planners represent different constituencies, including the municipal citywide perspective). The central aspect is the use of values as well as facts in making planning decisions
  3. Everyone learns: The central task is the production of communication
  4. After full and informed discussion based on reasoned argument the committee comes to a decision

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method is used to support citizens that are less used to articulating their interests in public or socially disadvantaged groups
- It can be used to create alternative plans
- Better understanding of pressing issues can be fostered so that the community can work towards solving problems
- Citizens' understanding and acceptance of planning issues, processes and plans can be improved and power imbalances can be mitigated

### Key Issues to consider:

- It can be time consuming and entail high financial costs
- A challenge could arise from wrongly recognised aims and objectives which result in counterproductive effects
- Conflicts could be reduced to issues that can be addressed in practice – they could thus be marginalized and citizens patronized
- Advocates could work in favour of financing agents and lose citizens' trust
- It could contribute to the polarization of conflicts and threaten the communication between participants

## Example of “Advocacy Planning”: Atlantis Water Fund Pilot Project

**Where:** Cape Town, South Africa

**Who:** The Nature Conservancy, City of Cape Town

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This Pilot Project is a **water supply strategy** aimed at water conservation by removing water-thirsty invasive plant species, providing **economic opportunities** and establishing a **scientific, financial** and **governance basis** in order to justify the expansion of the pilot project into a broad program. Advocating the economic development of low-income communities by **offering jobs** and supporting the creation of **small businesses** through **skill development** was part of the overall planning of the initiative. In particular, the initiative concentrated on career development for women from local communities. Promotion of the **intrinsic value of nature** and stewardship was seen as essential throughout the skills development and training processes.



*“What we do is we train them, and then we spawn them off to become independent. And then the mentor is still on site, as long as we have funding. But this team of women will now become a small business on their own. (...) They are from the local community, and they are now going to go and change something”*

Louise Stafford, Director Water Funds South Africa, The Nature

## Community Organizing

Community Organizing is a good tool for citizens to constructively shape their own city. It is a method to build citizen organizations, for example in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They are brought together and supported to stand up for their own interests.

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### Key Steps and Measures:

1. Listen and evaluate: relationship work is central to finding committed citizens and develop their skills. These key persons lead the organisation and determine its goals. An organizer supports and trains them
  - The organizer leads personal interviews with those affected or with key people in the district to learn about them, their values, interests, problems and wishes
  - Interviews are followed by meetings: representatives of different groups (clubs, churches, mosques, etc.) and interested people get to know each other and build trust. Interview results are presented
2. Define and investigate: identify problems, develop solution strategies
3. Actions and problem solving: plan actions and execute them
  - Central strategy: demand personal responsibility from those who are part of the problem
  - Deal democratically with resistance
4. Evaluation: reflect on the process and decide if and how further work can be done

### Chances/Opportunities:

- The method is used to change power relations: people do not feel powerless and meet decision-makers "at eye level"
- It is used for long-term changes in society, especially in favour of a stronger democracy
- If the organizer empowers the key persons to be able to solve their problems, the organization can last a long time and be successful

### Key Issues to consider:

- To be independent, it is central to find other financial sources than the City
- The main impulse is the self-interest of those engaged in the organization, therefore everybody needs to get what they want at some point for the organization to be sustainable

## Example of “Community Organizing”: Indigenous Nature-based Solutions

**Where:** Winnipeg, Canada

**Who:** Spence Neighbourhood Association, City of Winnipeg, Inner-City Aboriginal Neighbours, community members

The initiative was aimed at tackling **systemic poverty**, **violence** and **unhealthy lifestyles** through the development of **vacant green spaces** for the benefit of inner-city communities. One of the more ambitious aspirations of the initiative is the creation of a socially innovative and sustainable Healing Village, planned and governed by indigenous people. The process involved promotion of **community organizing** in order to establish **neighbourhood associations**, as well as promotion of individual and collective responsibility for the land. **Close cooperation** between municipality, community groups and indigenous leaders was seen as the key factor in the successful implementation of the method and the initiative as a whole.



*“We are led by the residents, residents are indigenous people. [...] We are so grounded in the people here. We have good engagement, we have good relationships. [...] We talked to the residents, we knocked on every door, surveying what people want to see happening and then we do consultations to narrow down what to do, what’s feasible, and we develop a full plan for the neighbourhood”*

Executive Director, Spence Neighbourhood Association

## What works: some general issues to consider

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In addition to choosing appropriate tools and methods, the following measures can be helpful for insuring inclusive and effective citizen engagement. They can be applied across all of the tools and methods described in this handbook:

- Invest plenty of time in relationship and trust building. This is time consuming but lays a sound foundation to build upon.
- Engage at eye level and value the skills and knowledge that people bring, using methods of engagement that are respectful and appreciative of different contributions. Be wary of biases in the organisers' team. Spot and be aware of hierarchies and self-interested groups amongst participants.
- Offer non-conditional opportunities to participate and ensure continued, ongoing support.
- Accept and be prepared for fluctuating levels of engagement.
- Have projects and interventions overseen by a combination of professionals and volunteers from different sectors.
- Get trained in conflict management and counteract the marginalisation of dissenting voices.
- Mix social groups rather than isolating the disadvantaged and most vulnerable, while keeping in mind cultural differences.
- Provide and/or offer support with access to funding (private, public and crowd funded) and comprehensive information, including legal expertise.
- Secure long-term access to communal spaces and publically owned land.
- Provide opportunities for hands-on participation and direct engagement, e.g. in green space development and maintenance or via plant donation and adoption schemes.



## Want to Learn More?

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### Naturvation Tools

URBAN NATURE ATLAS: <https://naturvation.eu/atlas/>

The Urban Nature Atlas (UNA) was created as part of the Naturvation research project to provide a comprehensive database of nature-based solutions in Europe, including 1000 nature-based solution cases from 100 European cities. Launched in 2017 as an online platform, the UNA is an interactive database that allows users to examine how nature-based solutions have been implemented under different urban conditions. The cases include a range of examples of citizen engagement.

### NATURVATION INDEX:

The Naturvation Index, developed by the Naturvation project, is an integrated assessment tool that aims to enable cities and communities to understand the potential of nature-based solutions for sustainability in cities. The Naturvation Index enables users to (i) explore the potential of nature-based solutions to meet different policy priorities and urban sustainability goals; (ii) examine how nature-based solutions can contribute to addressing multiple sustainability goals in specific places and communities; (iii) evaluate the progress towards sustainable development goals that is being achieved by working with urban nature.

### Useful Links

#### Future Workshop

Lauttamäki, Ville 2014: Practical Guide for Facilitating a Futures Workshop. Finland Futures Research Centre; Turku School of Economics, University of Turku.  
Change the World n.d.: Future Workshop.

#### Round Table

ShanAshton, Dimitris Riggas; de Angelis, Kylene & Graf, Christine 2010: How to plan, organize, perform, evaluate and document roundtables.

#### Participatory Planning Workshop

Jisc 2014: Planning a participatory workshop

#### Citizen Panel

Involve n.d.: Citizens' Panel

#### District Forum

TQSOI (Table de quartier sud de l'Ouest-de-l'Île) Community Council n.d.: Our Approach

#### Appreciative Inquiry & Public Spirit Workshop

Champlain College n.d.: Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

The Center For Appreciative Inquiry 2016: What is Appreciative Inquiry (AI)?

#### District Based Community Work

Twelvetreets, Alan 1991: What is Community Work? In: Community Work. Practical Social Work.

#### Environmental Education

ENEC (European Network for Environmental Citizenship) 2018: Education for Environmental Citizenship

EPA (United States Environmental Protection Agency) 2018: What is Environmental Education?

#### Advocacy Planning

Marker Feld, Marcia & Baron Pollak, Patricia 2010: Encyclopedia of Urban Studies: Advocacy Planning

Woodroffe, Jessica; Esplen, Emily & Smee, Sharon 2011: Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit: Introduction to Advocacy Planning. Womankind Worldwide,

#### Community Organizing

Minority Rights Group International 2019: Community Organizing: The Community-based Advocacy

# URBAN NATURE – A MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSE



Explore our  
Massive Open Online  
Course (MOOC) on  
nature-based solutions  
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Our course combines both technical knowledge and the social sciences to better understand nature-based solutions in a holistic perspective.

Nature-based solutions have the potential to provide multiple benefits across a range of sustainability challenges facing cities and urban areas.



Meet a team of researchers and practitioners from countries across Europe and the world who will provide insights, findings and practical experiences of nature-based solutions.

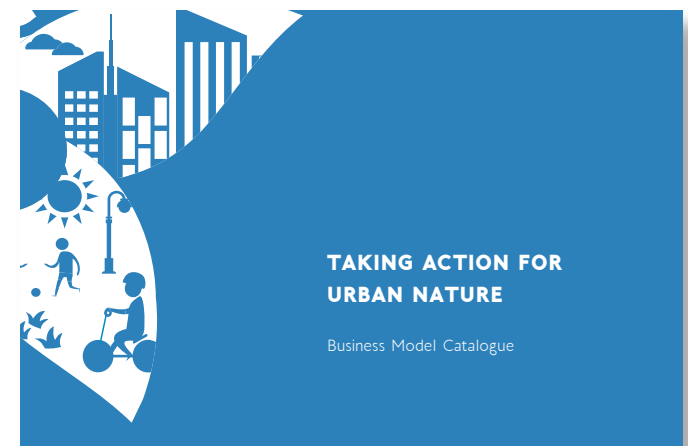
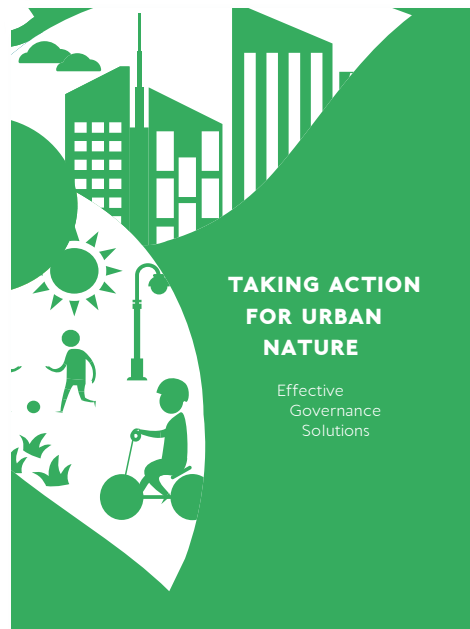
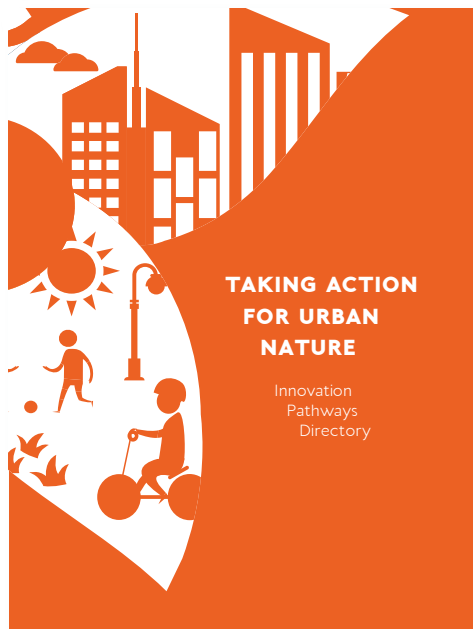
The aim of our course is to create an online learning community on nature-based solutions that connects the key themes of nature, cities and innovation.



# Taking Action for Urban Nature

Working with nature-based solutions can offer cities new ways of meeting their goals for sustainable development. Putting these solutions into practice often requires municipal governments, businesses, not-for-profit organisations and community groups to work together and develop new approaches. These NATURVATION guides have been prepared using fifty-four examples from eighteen cities working with nature to identify the innovation pathways, governance arrangements, business models, and citizen engagement approaches that can work to support action for urban nature. They are designed to support cities and their partners take forward their ambitions to work with nature for biodiversity, climate change and sustainability.

To download our guides, please visit: [www.naturvation.eu](http://www.naturvation.eu)





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