



POLICY BRIEF 03

Increasing Community and Stakeholder Engagement in Lisbon's Nature-Based Solutions



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This Policy Brief examines Lisbon's efforts to boost community engagement in implementing Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) to safeguard the health and well-being of residents and biodiversity. The Lisbon City Council is actively promoting community involvement and emphasising the significance of co-creation for NbS projects. Despite the multifaceted challenges hindering active participation in natural solution development in Lisbon, various initiatives have been launched to address these issues. This document seeks to stimulate dialogue and facilitate the implementation of specific actions to enhance community engagement.

Key Messages

- Given Nature-based Solutions (NbS) initiatives typically offer a wide range of co-benefits beyond their primary objectives, NbS projects can bring stakeholders from various departments together, encouraging them to exchange ideas and collaborate towards common goals.
- Understanding the complexities of the municipality structure, the different stakeholder dynamics and the need for sustained engagement is vital. Addressing these challenges requires tailored approaches for different stakeholder groups and communities as well as consistent communication.
- The "Ruas Verdes" programme exemplified success in engaging communities and parishes, empowering residents to actively participate in greening urban spaces and fostering a sense of ownership. Integrating NbS within existing urban frameworks demonstrated scalability and facilitated smoother implementation and broader acceptance.



IMAGE: Paula Nicolau / Câmara Municipal de Lisboa

Advancing NbS in Lisbon through stakeholder engagement

The administrative framework of the Lisbon City Council operates within distinct silos, a common challenge faced by municipalities worldwide. This compartmentalisation often obstructs collaborative decision-making processes by erecting barriers between different departments and stakeholders. Within this bureaucratic structure, navigating numerous steps and protocols can further complicate efforts to co-create decisions effectively.

Urban constraints exacerbate these challenges, especially regarding NbS implementation in Lisbon. Limited space and existing infrastructure pose significant hurdles, requiring innovative approaches and collaborative efforts to adapt NbS to urban settings. However, despite these obstacles, NbS often have the potential to break down silos and foster transdisciplinary collaboration.

NbS initiatives typically offer a wide range of co-benefits beyond their primary objectives, such as improvements in air and water quality, enhanced biodiversity, climate resilience, and socio-economic benefits like increased property values and enhanced community well-being. Consequently, NbS projects can bring stakeholders from various departments together, encouraging them to exchange ideas and collaborate towards common goals.

By recognising and harnessing the multiple benefits of NbS, municipalities like Lisbon can leverage these initiatives to break down bureaucratic silos. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and shared goals, stakeholders can more effectively address complex urban challenges and co-create sustainable solutions that benefit both people and the environment.





IMAGE: Paula Nicolau / Câmara Municipal de Lisboa

Impactful Initiatives and Community Engagement

The CONEXUS project actively engaged local communities through workshops and participatory sessions, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among residents. To address stakeholder dynamics and mobilisation challenges, the project undertook concrete actions: it explored innovative designs to tailor NbS to urban constraints and navigated intricate stakeholder dynamics to foster agreement on NbS implementation. Additionally, the project facilitated knowledge exchange between academia, policymakers, and practitioners, leveraging expertise to develop context-specific NbS strategies for Lisbon’s urban challenges. Pilot NbS projects demonstrated tangible benefits, instilling confidence in stakeholders.

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Furthermore, these initiatives played a vital role in breaking down bureaucratic silos within the Lisbon City Council. By bringing together stakeholders from various departments and fostering transdisciplinary collaboration, NbS projects bridged traditional divides and encouraged shared decision-making processes. This holistic approach not only addressed complex urban challenges but also strengthened community engagement and ownership in sustainable development initiatives.

Challenges and Opportunities for Scaling Up

Scaling NbS initiatives citywide remains challenging due to barriers in resource allocation and stakeholder alignment. Sustaining long-term community engagement necessitates continuous involvement and meaningful participation avenues. Administrative procedures also impede financial execution, requiring tailored approaches and consistent communication to effectively address these challenges.



IMAGE: Paula Nicolau / Câmara Municipal de Lisboa

Strategies for Success and Future Directions

Prioritising scalability and adaptability in NbS initiatives is essential, tailoring solutions to fit urban constraints while ensuring feasibility and acceptance within the community. Investment in educational and awareness programmes about the importance of civic participation, along with creating flexible and accessible opportunities for involvement, can encourage greater participation.

By embracing insights from critical analysis and real-world cases, Lisbon can foster a culture of co-creation, community participation, and fair engagement, ensuring implementation and investment for sustainable initiatives in alignment with ongoing municipal strategies. Through collaborative stakeholder engagement, Lisbon can enhance its urban sustainability initiatives and contribute to carbon neutrality and climate resilience in anticipation of expected climate changes.



IMAGE: Paula Nicolau / Câmara Municipal de Lisboa

Policy Recommendations

- Educational and awareness programmes developed to inform and share knowledge about NbS (i.e. benefits, co-benefits, barriers, and challenges) with stakeholders help align NbS initiatives with community needs and aspirations and empower local residents. It is also beneficial to invest in training, exchange programmes and capacity-building to increase stakeholders' skills for co-creation.
- Next to information sharing, educational programmes, and participatory design sessions, incentives or recognition schemes help to encourage active involvement in NbS initiatives and solutions.
- Establishing platforms for continuous dialogue and co-creation between policymakers, community groups, and experts help establish collaborative governance structures and institutionalise participation. In the same vein, collaborations with local NGOs, community groups, and academia can leverage grassroots support and knowledge.
- The use of online platforms and digital tools can widen engagement, allowing diverse stakeholders to participate. The establishment of dedicated engagement platforms and forums can support concrete stakeholder discussions and idea-sharing on NbS.
- Fostering collaboration and coordination between municipal departments responsible for mitigation and adaptation policies helps bridging bureaucratic silos, ensuring alignment between mitigation and adaptation strategies to effectively address climate change.

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 867564