
Multi-level Policy Framework for Sustainable Urban Development and Nature-based Solutions – Status quo, gaps and opportunities

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In this report, Doris Knoblauch, Sandra Naumann, Linda Mederake and Ariel Carlos Araujo Sosa (all Ecologic Institute) explore the extent to which current policy frameworks support sustainable urban development and nature-based solutions (NBS).

To this end, policies at the international and EU levels were reviewed, as well as at the national, regional and local levels pertaining to the nine CLEVER Cities case studies (Hamburg, Germany; London, UK; Milan, Italy; Belgrade, Serbia; Larissa, Greece; Madrid, Spain; Malmö, Sweden; Quito, Ecuador; and Sfantu Gheorghe, Romania). Complementary expert interviews support the identification of gaps and windows of opportunities to strengthen sustainable urban development.

The analysis reveals that a variety of different terms are used across countries and from the local to international scale in policies and discourses in support of sustainable urban development, with green (and blue) infrastructure being the most frequently used. However, while many policies were shown to have strong explicit support for sustainable urban development, these often lack mandatory policy instruments.

While the reviewed policy frameworks provide a strong starting point for strengthening sustainable urban development through NBS, several challenges remain which must be overcome in order to tap this potential. Key challenges include, for example, the insufficient standardisation of NBS at the EU level, and difficulties in the mainstreaming of sustainable urban development and NBS across policies at all levels and across jurisdictional boundaries, particularly at the local level. In addition, the potential benefits of NBS for cities are still not well known to decision-makers, practitioners, the private sector and civil society. This is compounded by the slow and highly bureaucratic administrative processes, institutional inertia and the inflexibility to consider new ideas. At the local level, authorities often lack capacities and sometimes capabilities to navigate and access the complex European funding landscape or to access investments from the private sector for NBS in sustainable

urban development.

The full deliverable explaining the findings and conclusions in detail is available for download.

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Authorship

[Doris Knoblauch](#)

Sandra Naumann

[Linda Mederake](#)

Ariel Araujo

Credits

With contributions from

Maja Berghausen, Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg (Hamburg)

Martin Krekeler, Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg (Hamburg)

Mascha Menny, Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg (Hamburg)

Justus A. Quanz, Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg (Hamburg)

Peter Massini, Greater London Authority (London)

Stefano Casagrande, City of Milan (Milan)

Emilia Barone, City of Milan (Milan)

Giulia Raimondi, City of Milan (Milan)

Ana Mitić-Radulović, Centre for Experiments in Urban Studies (Belgrade)

Maria Nikolaidou, City of Larissa (Larissa)

Evangelia Giovri, City of Larissa (Larissa)

Maria Markatou, City of Larissa (Larissa)

Anastasia Synopalou, City of Larissa (Larissa)

Dimitris Mavdis, City of Larissa (Larissa)

Georgios Soultis, City of Larissa (Larissa)

Rafael Ruiz López de la Cova, City of Madrid (Madrid)

Luis Tejero Encinas, City of Madrid (Madrid)

Shoshana Iten, City of Malmö (Malmö)

Ulrika Poppius, City of Malmö (Malmö)

David Jácome Polit, City of Quito (Quito)

María Fernanda Calderón, City of Quito (Quito)

Nicolas Salmon, YES Innovation (Quito)

Delin Antal, Municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe (Sfântu Gheorghe)

Adrienne Szabaday, Municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe (Sfântu Gheorghe)

Carolina Garcia Madruga, Tecnia (international policies)

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