**BiodiverCity: capital of biodiversity**

**Measuring biodiversity in the city and accounting related ecosystem-services to verify, design and scale up Nature-based Solutions**

Project proposal of Municipality of Dunaújváros, Hungary, to the Action Planning Network [call](https://urbact.eu/get-involved) of URBACT IV.

**1. Background**

We all depend on nature for our food, air, water, energy and raw materials. Nature and biodiversity make life possible, provide health and social benefits and drive our economy. Nature is also our best ally in tackling the climate crisis. Conservation of nature is now (finally) an integrated part of the European (and global) development agendas, because nature is essential for human existence as well as for well-being. Unfortunately, in the EU and worldwide, we’re currently destroying nature faster than ever. Ecosystems and services they provide are under pressure from urban sprawl, intensive agriculture, pollution, invasive species and climate change.

As part of the European Green Deal, the [biodiversity strategy for 2030](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en) is the EU’s plan to put biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030. It contains specific commitments and actions to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems, building on existing nature laws.

Urbanization is both a challenge and an opportunity to manage ecosystem services globally. Green urban spaces, from parks and gardens to green roofs and urban farms, provide a wide range of benefits for people and the planet. They provide vital space for physical and mental wellbeing and a very important habitat for nature, including for birds and pollinators. Green space helps reduce air, water and noise pollution, provides protection from flooding, droughts and heat waves and much more. While protection of some urban green spaces has increased, green spaces often lose out in the competition for land as the share of the population living in urban areas continues to rise. The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 aims to reverse these trends, and to protect and restore our precious urban ecosystems.

As part of the Biodiversity Strategy -  in order to bring nature back to cities and reward community action - the Commission called on European towns and cities of at least 20,000 inhabitants to *“..develop ambitious Urban Greening Plans”* including *“measures to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens; urban farms; green roofs and walls; treelined streets; urban meadows; and urban hedges.”*

In line with the EU Strategy on Biodiversity 2030, cities should increase their protected and green areas, and thus utilise better the ecosystem services they provide. However, in a city the pressure on decision-makers on how to use the space is huge. This is why global organisations clearly recommend using hands-on tools to measure and monetarise ecosystem services.

According to the UN Environment Programme Convention on Biological Diversity:

* Rich biodiversity can exist in cities.
* Biodiversity and ecosystem services are critical natural capital.
* Maintaining functioning urban ecosystems can significantly enhance human health and well-being.
* Urban ecosystem services and biodiversity can help contribute to climate-change mitigation and adaptation.
* Increasing the biodiversity of urban food systems can enhance food and nutrition security
* Ecosystem services must be integrated in urban policy and planning.
* Successful management of biodiversity and ecosystem services must be based on multi-scale, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder involvement.
* Cities offer unique opportunities for learning and education about a resilient and sustainable future.
* Cities have a large potential to generate innovations and governance tools and therefore can – and must – take the lead in sustainable development.

Many cities are taking action in Europe. Signatory cities of the Green City Accord – established to support the implementation of EU Strategy on Biodiversity 2030 - are engaged in making considerable progress in conserving and enhancing urban biodiversity, including increasing the extent and quality of green areas in cities and halting the loss of and restoring urban ecosystems.

Dunaújváros (ca. 42.000 inh.) is internationally known as a typical socialist new city was built in the 1950ies on the territory of the former village called Pentele. Definitely less people know even in Hungary, that among major cities in Hungary, Dunaújváros has one of the biggest proportion of green areas related to the size of the city - that’s also the result of early socialist urbanisation.

The leadership of the city is pretty much committed to urban biodiversity as it has not only many, but all types of urban green spaces: smaller, unused and often abandoned urban green spaces between prefabricated housing estates, parks, urban grasslands, compact, but degraded urban forest bounding the city from the industrial zone, semi-natural floodplain forests, Nature 2000 territory (HUDI20034) along the Danube consisting of valuable floodplain areas accompanying the water-course as well as islands that are important both from the aspect of conservation and landscape protection perspective.

**2. What is URBACT and why is it appropriate to these goals?**

The URBACT IV Programme is part of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective of the Structural Fund policies for the period 2021-2027. URBACT’s mission is to enable cities to work together and develop integrated solutions to common urban challenges, by networking, learning from one another’s experiences, drawing lessons and identifying good practices to improve urban policies. URBACT IV will build the institutional capacity of cities needed to implement territorial strategies, it directly contributes to Policy Objective PO5 in particular: a Europe closer to citizens, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

The current call aims at creating 30 Action Planning Networks. The main objective of Action Planning Networks is to improve the capacity of cities to manage sustainable urban policies, and more specifically, to improve the capacity to design integrated urban action plans in cities. Action Planning Networks are expected to support an organised process of exchange and learning among peers, with a view to improving local policies through concrete action planning.

Please find attached the summary of the current call.

**3. Project activities**

If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it! The added-value of the envisaged URBACT network:

* The Greening Plan: increasing the territory of urban green areas will be a kind of obligation based on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, this is an important factor from political point of view as well. From this perspective, the action plan to be elaborated within URBACT, could be (partly) the greening plan required by the EU Biodiversity Strategy.
* Measuring biodiversity: behind the EU Biodiversity Strategy the Green City Accord has been established, tackling biodiversity, but using only three indicators related to counting biodiversity. Many international organisations recommend to measure biodiversity in a more complex way. The UN City Biodiversity Index offers biodiversity measurement based on the cities’ biodiversity conservation efforts against their own individual base­lines (in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy): native biodiversity, government and management of biodiversity. An URBACT network can be good to “test” the city biodiversity index, using more indicators, and demonstrate the importance of biodiversity in the city.
* Involvement of stakeholders and awareness-raising. For a city it can be important to see „how much” e.g. an urban park or a more natural habitat costs based on ecosystem accounting. According to the literature, there are many methods for ecosystem accounting, but some literature clearly recommends to use those ones that are based on deep involvement of stakeholders, not models purely monetizing biodiversity. URBACT prioritises the work with local stakeholders, thus this process can be ideally started and elaborated in the URBACT network, accompanied with awareness-raising actions.
* The action plan can be also about preparing the ground for the installation of nature-based solutions.
* Establishment of a European prize “The Biodiversity Capital of Europe”. URBACT is “soft”, but good in positioning a theme on European level. Biodiversity issues have been hardly tackled by the programme and launching a European initiative on nominating Biodiversity Capital each year, would be a meaningful and strong impact on European level.

**4. Partnership**

The **Municipality of Dunaújváros** intends to work with all sized European cities that are committed to increase the territory and the quality of urban green spaces and biodiversity, to draft a greening plan, to measure biodiversity in a more complex way, to account ecosystem-services together with stakeholders, and to prepare nature-based solutions.

**Project timeline**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2023** | **2024** | **2025** |
| **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| Project preparation | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Submission of the application: 31 March 2023 | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Approval of the project: the Monitoring Committee decides on networks’ approval by the end of May 2023 (estimated date).  |  | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Activation Stage |  |  | X | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Stage 2 – Planning Actions |  |  |  |  | X | X | X | X |  |  |  |  |
| Stage 3 – Preparing/Getting ready for Implementation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X | X | X |  |
| Stage 4 – Finale |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |