

From leading by example to visions, and from an integrated green- and blue infrastructure strategy to Testing Actions

The learning journey of the “BiodiverCity” URBACT Action Planning Network
between April-June 2024



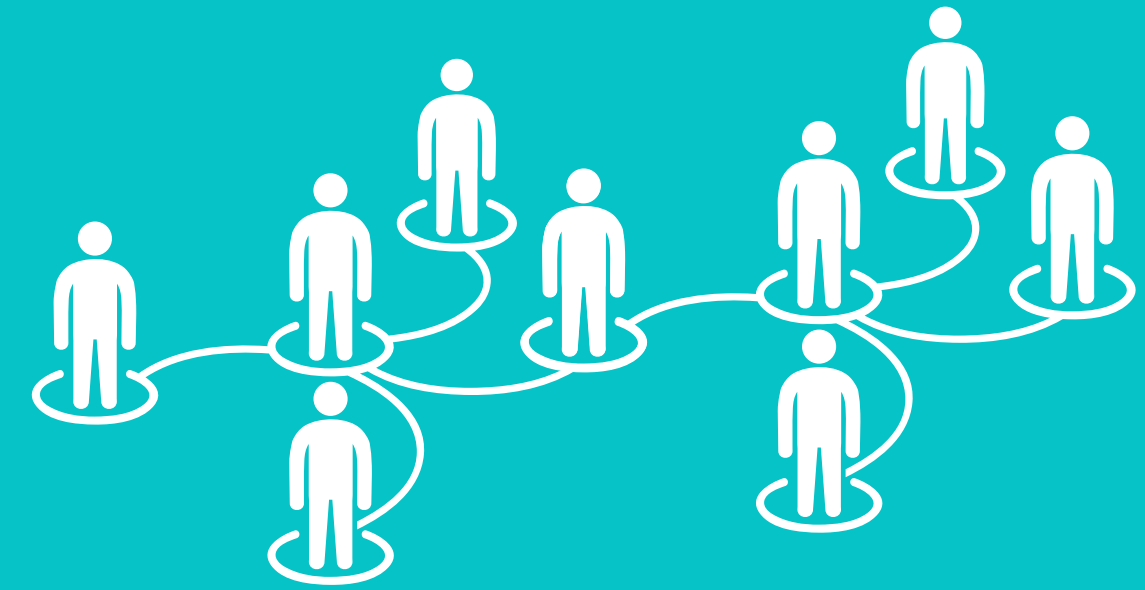
Quarterly Network Report 2
Ferenc Albert Szigeti

Within the period we explored the topics below. Read the report to get to know them!



#1. Two Core Network Meetings held!

From vision to community leadership through the integrative approach – this was the motto of the first one held on 15-19 April 2024, in Dunaújváros & Veszprém, Hungary.



During the meeting, we:

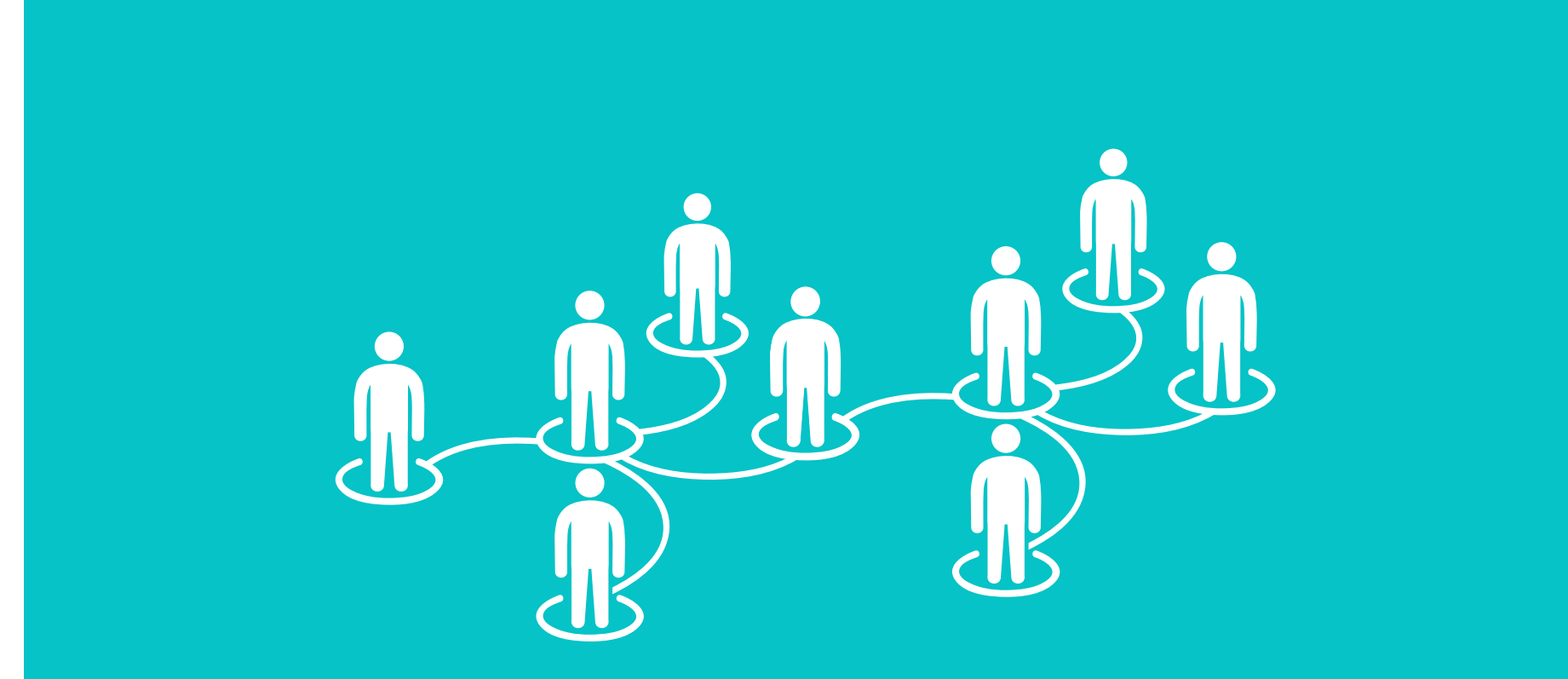
- Helped partner cities understand and use the integrative approach needed for an efficient action-planning process.
- Helped partner cities plan a community-sourced activity – a biodiversity-focused community festival - along with the action planning process.
- Focused mainly on public and private green areas in the city.
- Showcased some – hopefully innovative - issues related to the sponge city concept.
- Helped the host cities to find potential solutions related to their local challenges by sharing participants' observations and knowledge.



Lead by example: from small-scale actions to an integrated green- and blue strategy – this was the motto of the second core network meeting held on 12-13 June 2024, in Limerick, Ireland.

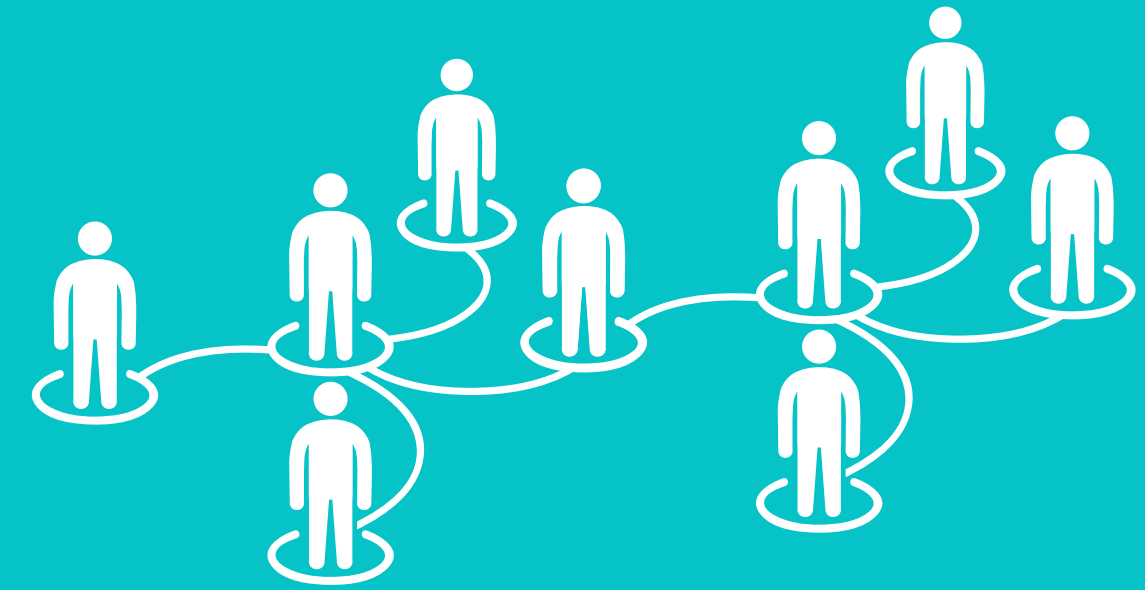
During the meeting, we:

- Helped partner cities understand the importance of Limerick's comprehensive strategy related to green and blue infrastructure.
- Helped partner cities plan efficient Testing Actions that might launch a snowball effect locally.
- Focused on relevant thematic issues in many partner cities: green rooftops, green walls and other built green solutions, and biodiversity-driven park maintenance.
- Showcased challenges and solutions in Limerick.
- Helped the host city to find potential solutions related to their local challenges by sharing participants' observations and knowledge.



Both meetings consisted of:

- **Walkshops:** exploring and analysing target areas by using a questionnaire and a method called Photo Safari. Later, participants' observations were shared with the host partners via presentations.
- **Bring your expertise!** We try to use the knowledge of the international groups by organising good practice presentations directly to the ULG.
- **BiodiverCity Academy:** this is when external speakers or URBACT experts highlight some core themes!
- **Study Visits.** In Veszprém we covered climate adaptive grassland management and using deep mulch gardening in urban areas. In Limerick, we explored what a Natural Play Area looks like. Participants' tasks were to capture the knowledge (via a Learning Grid) and share it with their ULG later.
- **Management and communication:** when the partnership will discuss the important questions and future activities.



#2 Be inspired with us!

Hereby we are sharing some inspirational good practices, articles and case studies produced within the network or beyond.



How does a “sponge city” work?

In the early 2000ies, Western and Northern European cities faced **heavy rainfalls** causing huge damage in the dense urban fabric. Since then, new housing estates have been built in frontrunner cities **without using grey infrastructure** to collect rainwater, and **water retention** has been an integrated part of urban development. In [this article](#), our Lead Expert explains the **key lessons and challenges** since droughts experienced in the last years almost everywhere in Europe make the theme more essential than ever. Just like the BiodiverCity partner cities – many of them deal with blue projects as well.

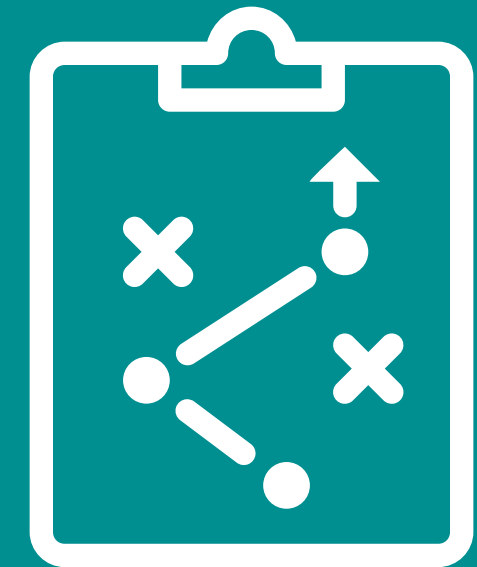
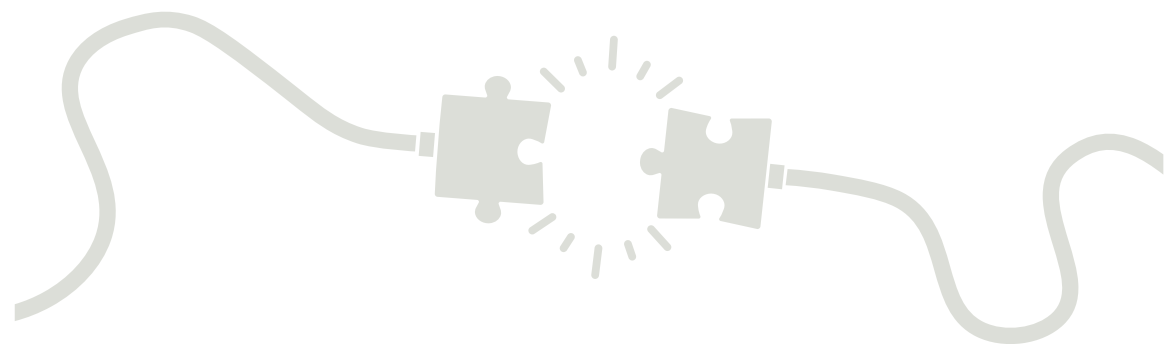


Limerick's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

Preparing for the **2020 Green Leaf Award** inspired Limerick City and County Council to make a **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy** (GBI, 2023), which includes a range of actions to work with communities to contribute towards opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity and inform policy. This comprehensive GBI strategy was explained in detail during the Core Network Meeting 3, simply because such a well-structured strategy can be relevant for all partner cities, it is a great start to think about the sustainability of green infrastructure in a city.

In a nutshell: this is a good GBI strategy because it explains the **benefits or ecosystem services** GBI assets can deliver to residents, visitors and the entire ecosystem (linked to both physical and mental well-being).

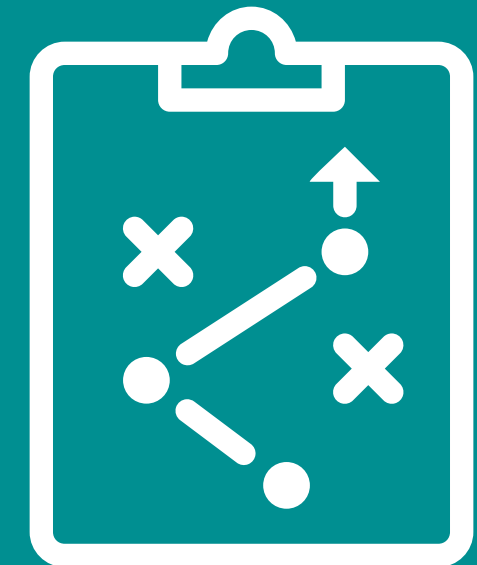
Furthermore, it intends to make a **corridor connecting green and blue areas** and besides the creation of high-quality, attractive, and functional places, it targets the negative impact of habitat loss and climate change at the same time.



Limerick's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

The **evidence base** for the multi-functional benefits of GBI is constantly evolving, thus besides the benefits for biodiversity, climate change and health, a good GBI strategy always targets benefits for the economy as well. Limerick's GBI strategy focuses on four key challenges and identifies four spaces (overlapping each other):

- 1 **Health Challenge** - Improving health and well-being outcomes – creation of 'Healthy Spaces'
- 2 **Climate Challenge** - Climate adaptation – creation of 'Resilient Spaces'
- 3 **Biodiversity Challenge** - Ecological improvements – creation of 'Wilder Spaces'
- 4 **Economic Challenge** - Recreation, income generation and regeneration – the creation of 'Destination Spaces'.



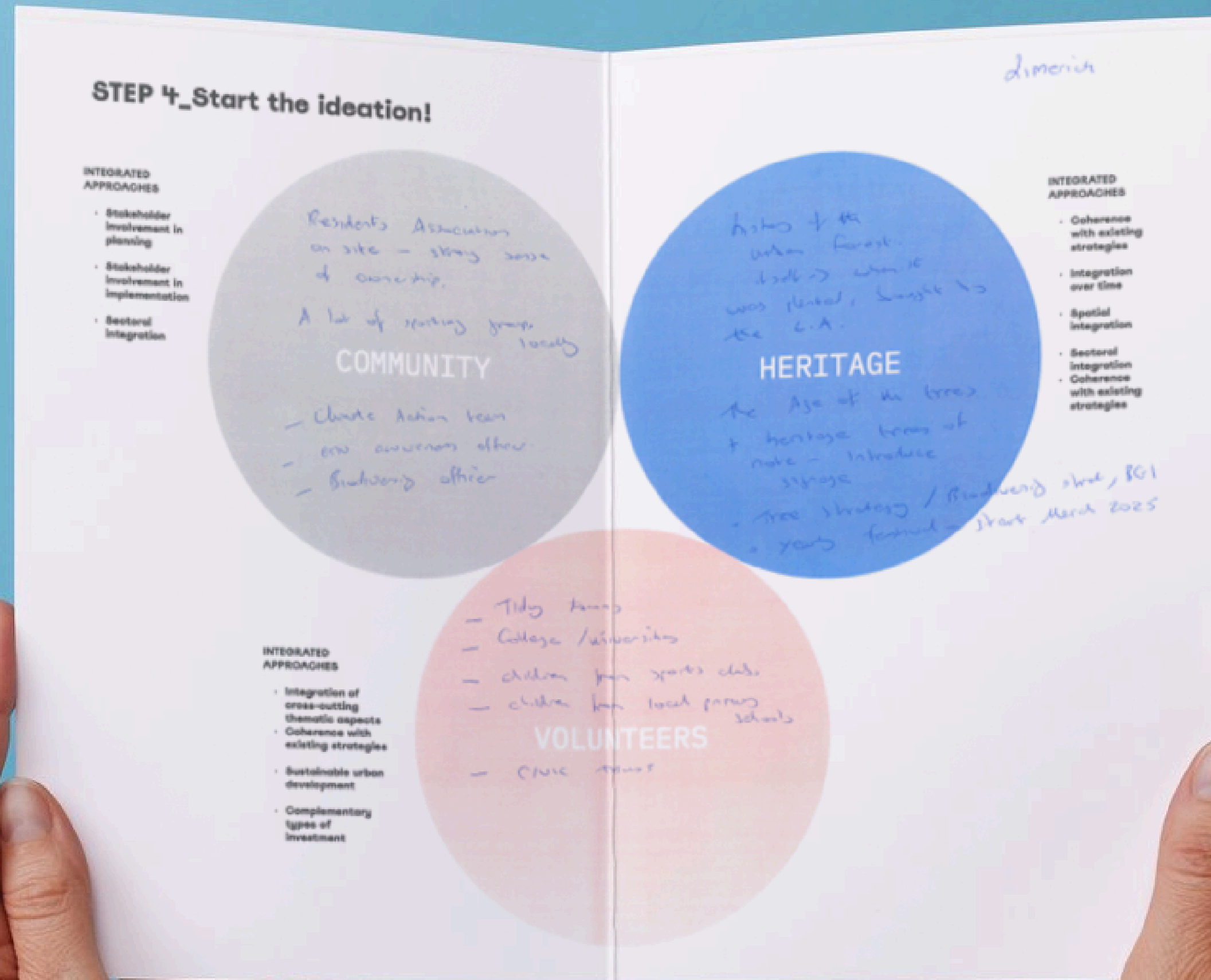
Read the [full strategy!](#)



Start organising a BiodiverCity Festival

*This is how we highlighted the
Integrated Approach:*

One of the URBACT principles is the integrated approach to sustainable urban development which promotes a holistic view that considers the **physical, economic and social dimensions** of urban development from a sustainable perspective.



Start organising a BiodiverCity Festival



Building on emotions during a biodiversity festival is crucial
© Ferenc Albert Szigeti



Considering the other two principles of the programme, **participation and action learning**, we went through the different aspects of integration during the **Core Network Meeting 2** by starting to organise a community festival tackling biodiversity, based on the model of **Budapest100**, an URBACT Good Practice.

This festival can tackle trees, shrubs, parks and gardens, and involved volunteers should talk not only about ecological benefits, but cultural, historical, and economic values linked to the green infrastructure.

Start organising a BiodiverCity Festival



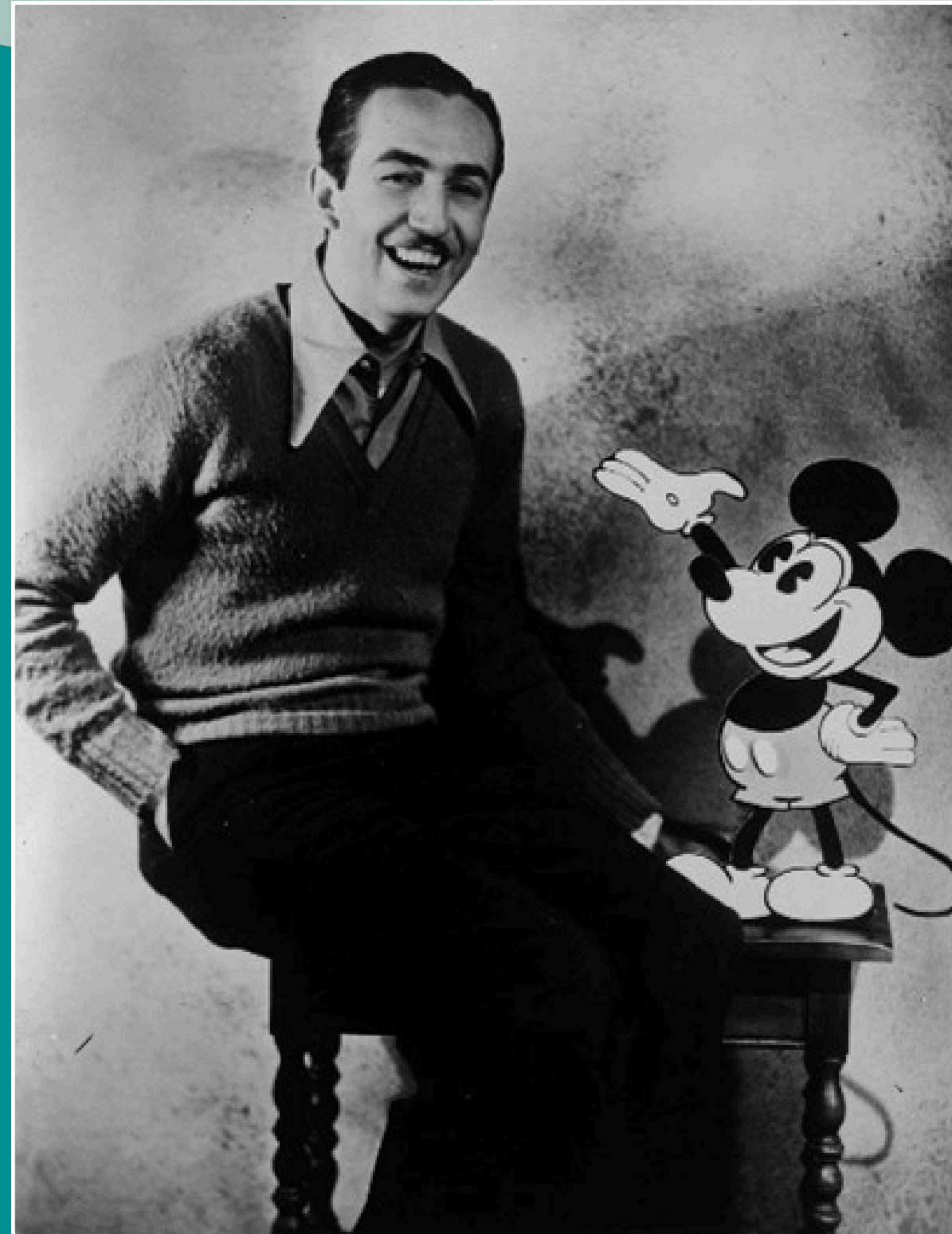
Have you tried apitherapy?
© Ferenc Albert Szigeti



Some partners will organise a **Tree Festival**, others have a broader focus on **urban biodiversity**, some will organise a **long picnic table** as a separate event, and others will embed the festival into an existing event. Whatever they will organise mostly in spring 2025, these actions will consist of “instawalks”, storytelling linked to monumental trees, bird observation, guided walks with experts to talk about climate action, biodiversity canoe trips, herb tours, habitat restoration with volunteers and several educational activities.

The **Disney Creativity Strategy** is a way of organising our thinking to be better able to achieve goals or dreams. Many of our great plans come to nothing because of how we think (“Oh, my idea is too brave”, “I do not have time for that”) rather than because our plans are too stretching. The Disney Strategy helps to think the ideas through in a strategic, simple, but systematic manner making things **clear, manageable and practical**. By holding different roles (e.g. “critic” citizen, “planner” NGO representative) partners helped each other to fine-tune the ideas for Testing Actions.

Explore the Testing Actions (mini pilot projects) BiodiverCity partners intend to organise! We analysed the plans in Limerick within a Disney Creative Strategy Workshop.



Among the ideas we heard:

- Pop-up greenery to find solutions for shadowing in Mediterranean pedestrian streets
- Systematic actions for pollinators
- Measuring biodiversity with local communities on urban meadows
 - Train the technicians, appoint ambassadors and create a “BiodiverCity” network
 - Testing urban bee-keeping
 - Educating citizens through community composting
- Highlighting ecological connectivity among urban areas
- Finding nature-based solutions for a meandering river

Public Park 2.0 - Biodiverse Urban Green Space Management



Check the [PPT](#) of the Lead Expert highlighting so many interesting tools from the practice of Budapest and beyond.

When we talk about **nature-based solutions in cities**, we often tend to mention “new places” such as green rooftops, green walls, rain gardens and ponds. But “**restoring**” **natural or modified habitats** is also a nature-based solution. Public parks are the window to nature for many people, and due to climate change, it is time to view urban parks differently as well since their management has to adapt to the changes. In addition, building on the significant awareness-raising and innovation potential of cities, public parks are great places to nurture citizens and communities to understand, valorise and measure biodiversity and related ecosystem services and foster pro-environmental behaviours.

Does your city have a tree and park cadastre highlighting ecosystem services of trees? Do you have Miyawaki forest in public areas? Do you know what is the difference between a bee pasture and an (urban) wildflower meadow? Do you use pesticides in public green areas? Do you have community composting in public green areas? Does your city use organic waste locally? Have you heard about hedgehog hotels? Do you have orchards in parks? And what about shrubs? Do you use branches cut off or fallen to form a natural hedge?

Tools to activate residents to transform their private gardens into biodiversity oases

During **BiodiverCity Café session 4 on 9 May 2024**, we explored the experiences of the **Municipality of Hegyvidék**, district 12 of Budapest, presented by the Lead Expert.

Very often the most urban green area is owned privately. In the shadow of the ecological crisis, it is thus crucial to engage residents and local companies, nurturing them to more pro-environmental behaviours and using more biodiversity-driven approaches in their gardens making them more resilient to the negative impacts of climate change too. The Municipality of the 12th District (Hegyvidék), as the **greenest district in Budapest**, has a huge responsibility to maintain the greenery, to properly communicate with the residents and to raise their awareness of environmental issues. The **Green Office** was established in 2016 as one of the departments of the municipality and its massive, ever-growing Residential Programme was so inspiring for the 10 partner cities of the **BiodiverCity URBACT Action Planning Network**, that a **case study** has been made based on that.



© Municipality of Hegyvidék

5+1 reasons to plant untrained saplings in cities instead of pre-grown nursery trees



During **BiodiverCity Café session 4 on 9 May 2024**, we also explored an experimental program of **Municipality of Hegyvidék**, district 12 of Budapest, presented by **Dr. Zsolt Debreczy**, an internationally known dendrologist, co-founder of the **International Dendrological Foundation**.

The municipality of Hegyvidék developed a **tree replacement strategy** for the district, with special attention to district trees and tree rows, in collaboration with experts from the **International Dendrological Foundation**. Following the creation of the strategy, the municipality launched the **Hegyvidék Sapling and Young Tree Program** in 2019, in which it began the experimental planting of young, untrained saplings in the district instead of pre-grown nursery trees.

Read the [full case study](#) created based on this unique experiment!

Making nature-based solutions visible and promoting soil life through deep mulch gardens in Veszprém, Hungary

“How and how often do you water these vegetables?” – asks Iuri Bruni from Siena, which is a frontrunner in Italy promoting community gardens. *“No need for watering at all, even in the hot summer period and we do not use chemicals”* - says Dr Tímea Szalay, president of the **Csalán Association**, which manages the three deep mulch gardens in Veszprém.



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But she must repeat her answer three times since participants of the BiodiverCity study visit simply cannot believe it. Finally, she shows the difference: the soil under the mulch is black and wet, while two meters away, in a traditional plot, where there is no covering, the same soil is visibly much dryer (light brown). *“This is a garden where we learn how nature works sustainably...”*

Read the [full case study](#) created based on this unique experiment!

Maintenance guide



During the BiodiverCity Café session 6 on 27 June, Joséphine Bussiere, project leader explained the "OASIS" program, initiated by the city of Paris to address heatwave vulnerabilities, transforming schoolyards into green spaces accessible to vulnerable groups.



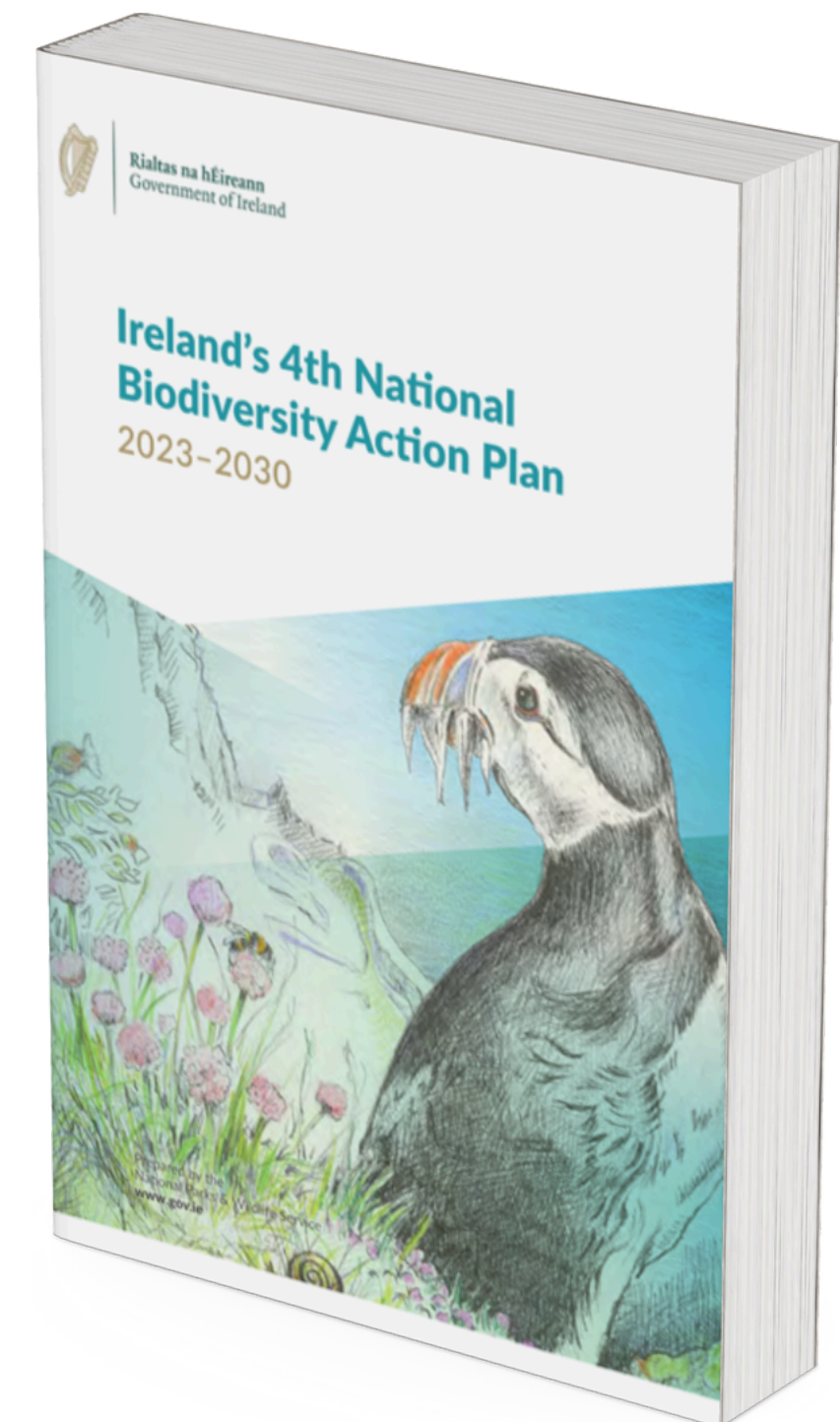
Read the [Maintenance Guide](#) prepared within the Oasis Schoolyards Programme!

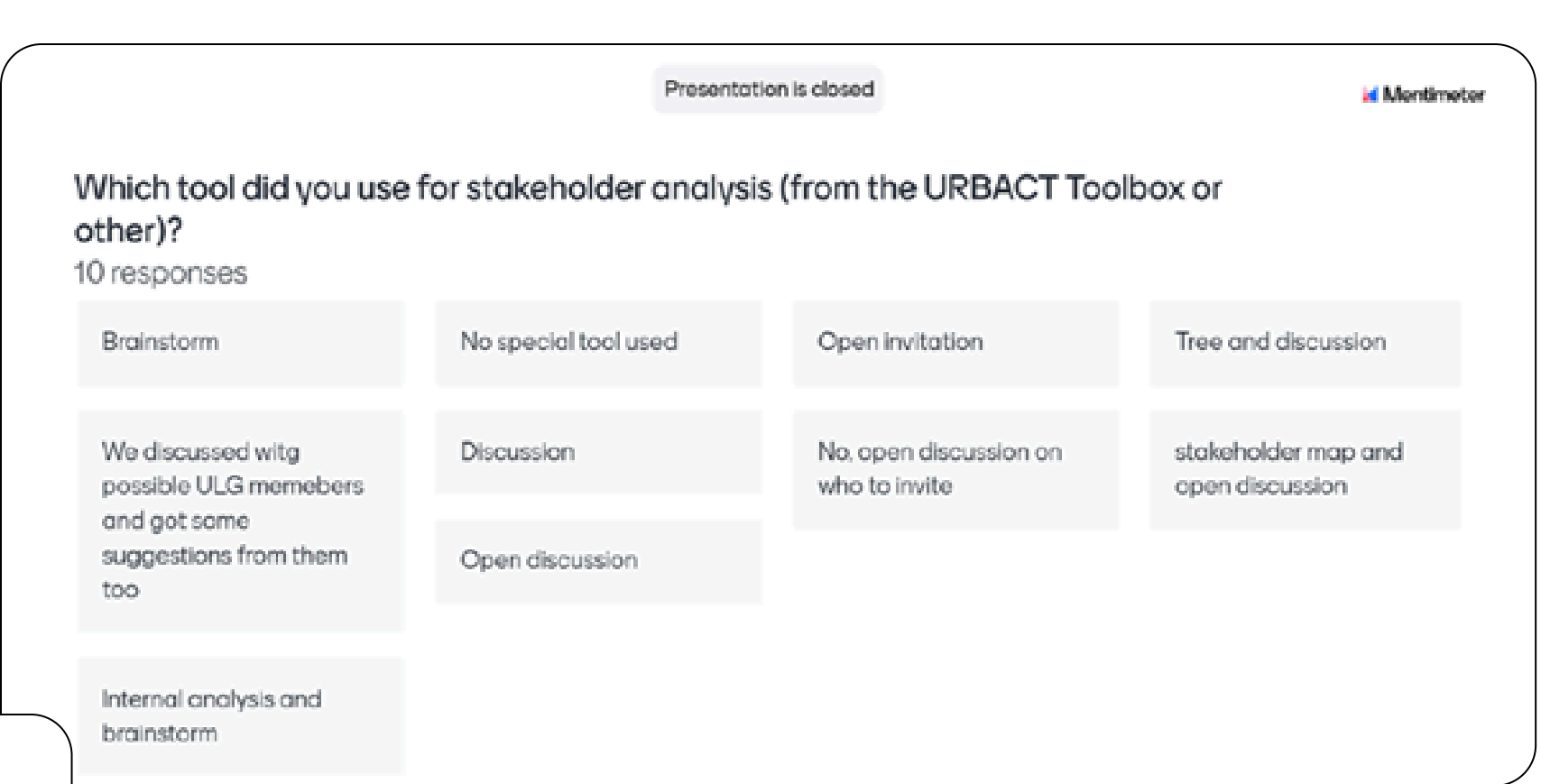
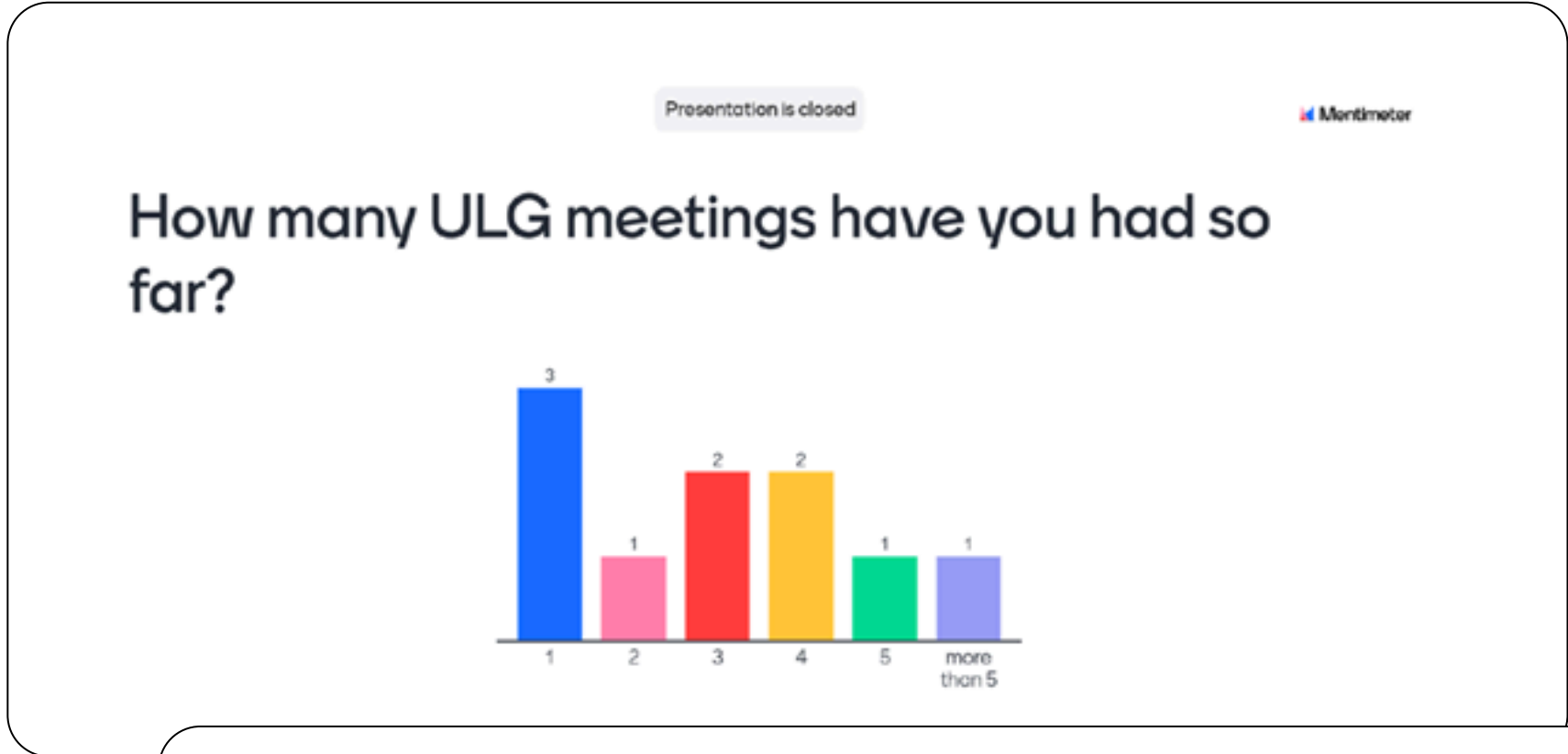
We have met the first Biodiversity Officer of Limerick City and County Council.

On 30 May 2024 during the BiodiverCity Café session 5 network partnership discussed with Sinead Mc Donnell, who fulfils this brand-new position delivered at all local councils in partnership with the Heritage Council of Ireland.

Among others the **BiodiverCity Officer**:

- Prepares, manages and implements a Local Authority Biodiversity Action
- Establishes a County Biodiversity forum
- Facilitates the implementation of government initiatives about biodiversity
- Advises the Local Authority on biodiversity-related issues and the Authority's obligations to protect biodiversity;
- Works with Local Authority staff to assist in advancing the restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems and support ecosystem services within the Local Authority Area
- Assists Local Authority departments in integrating biodiversity into their actions and policies, for example through training, supporting information dissemination
- Promotes new biodiversity initiatives based on best conservation practice
- Works with Local Authority projects and provides advice to colleagues on the management of ecological resources such as urban woodlands, wetlands, parks, verges, wild flora grasslands and open areas in a biodiversity-friendly manner
- Raises awareness of biodiversity, natural capacity and ecosystem services and issues affecting biodiversity in the Local Authority, including climate change with a broad range of groups.





On 23 May 2024, BiodiverCity partner cities met to discuss the local progress in the mirror of transnational activities...

...The key messages:

- 1 The majority of the partnership has already analysed local problems and challenges but has not set the objectives of the IAP yet.
- 2 Although the URBACT Toolbox is explained, known and welcomed, very often ULGs prefer open discussions instead of using concrete workshop techniques.
- 3 Study visits and online BiodiverCity Café sessions are very inspirational. Veszprém's climate-adaptive grassland management is perhaps the most popular tool that has been explored so far, while most partners, inspired by Siena and Guimarães intend to apply for the 2025 City Nature Challenge.
- 4 More sessions focusing on local progress is needed.



We have tested Ireland's first Natural Play Area!



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Within the **3rd Core Network Meeting in Limerick**, we visited a site created between a newly built housing estate and a sport field, in a typically underused green area. The mini hills, created by machines, are connected by beams and other chunks of the enormous, dried-out trees once standing here. The beams and tree chunks are excellent tools for balancing. The dead trunks provide space for spectacular sculptures. Unused parts of the field hosts wildflower meadows.

It is not a formal playground, but a great place to get some of our connection to nature back, the connection which has been dramatically lost over the last centuries. Limerick's initiative is a great experiment and very much welcomed by visiting partner cities.



THE KISS OF THE SUN FOR PARDON
THE SONG OF THE BIRD FOR MIRTH
ONE IS NEARER GOD'S HEART IN A GARDEN
THAN ANY PLACE ELSE ON EARTH
IN FOND MEMORY OF
KATIE (CIS) SMYTH 1897 - 1995
WHO AS A LABOUR OF GREAT LOVE FOR
THIS CATHEDRAL AT THE AGE OF 97 YRS
STILL TENDED THIS FLOWER BED
HAVING DONE SO FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YRS