

# Strengthening urban governance for inclusive and effective nature-based solutions

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## McKenna Davis, Senior Fellow and Coordinator of Nature-based Solutions at the Ecologic Institute, discusses the importance of strengthening urban governance to enhance the uptake and inclusiveness of nature-based solutions

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Urbanisation is dramatically reshaping global landscapes, impacting the climate, straining natural ecosystems, and driving biodiversity loss. Cities both contribute to habitat degradation and face increasing vulnerability to climate change, with disruptions to ecosystem services affecting human health, social cohesion, and urban resilience. At the same time, cities are uniquely positioned to implement transformative solutions.

Nature-based solutions (NbS) offer a strategic approach to restoring urban green and blue spaces while enhancing climate resilience, air and water quality, and human well-being. However, their effective mainstreaming into policy and practice requires rethinking governance models to integrate diverse actors and adopting more transdisciplinary approaches.

The INTERLACE project, introduced on the next page, works to address these challenges by developing knowledge, tools, and frameworks to support local governments in designing and implementing more inclusive and effective NbS.

### From global agreements to local action

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The urgency to protect and restore urban green spaces through NbS is widely recognised in the context of global and regional policy frameworks. The Kunming- Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework calls for increasing the quantity, quality, and connectivity of urban green and blue spaces, and NbS are already included in 92% of national climate pledges under the Paris Agreement.

Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity highlights the need for a 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approach, ensuring horizontal and vertical coordination among local, regional and national authorities while engaging non-state actors like businesses, civil society, and researchers in decision-making.

At the European level, policies such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) provide comprehensive frameworks for integrating NbS into urban planning. The NRR mandates legally binding restoration targets to restore at least 20% of degraded ecosystems by 2030, with measures focusing on urban green spaces and tree canopy expansion.

Additionally, the EU Biodiversity Strategy calls for the development of Urban Nature Plans in all European cities over 20,000 inhabitants, ensuring biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation measures are embedded in urban policies.

Beyond policy frameworks, the European Commission is investing in cross-regional collaboration and capacity building around NbS – such as with Latin America and the Caribbean – as well as in research and innovation through programmes like Horizon Europe. Projects funded under this scheme, such as INTERLACE, aim to advance solutions to shared environmental challenges – in this case, around urban ecosystem restoration through NbS.

## **Improving NbS governance through INTERLACE**

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Despite growing policy momentum, many cities struggle to translate their ambitions into action and integrate NbS into policy frameworks and urban planning processes. The EU-funded INTERLACE project (2020-2025) has worked to help cities overcome these challenges by strengthening participatory governance and decision-making in urban ecosystem restoration in Europe and Latin America.

At the core of the project is its commitment to transdisciplinary collaboration, bridging local knowledge and scientific expertise to tackle complex urban challenges and build technical and procedural capacities in NbS governance. The lessons learned, and insights from INTERLACE have been captured in a number of resources to empower even more cities to improve their urban governance towards more inclusive and resilient cities.

The Urban Governance Atlas, for example, is an interactive database containing 250 policy instruments from 41 countries supporting NbS. The Atlas serves as a resource for municipalities and the research community to identify best practices, learn from successful models, and tailor governance approaches to their specific contexts.

Participatory mechanisms such as citizen assemblies, co-design workshops, and neighbourhood-based NbS management programmes are highlighted throughout the Urban Governance Atlas as a means to empower residents to take ownership of urban nature projects, strengthen governance legitimacy, build trust, and enhance the integration of local knowledge into decision-making.

INTERLACE also found that limited capacities and know-how on organising and implementing collaborative governance and decision-making are a common barrier. Governance fragmentation with siloed responsibilities for urban planning, environmental management and infrastructure development across different agencies and departments creates additional challenges.

The project collected lessons from the INTERLACE partner cities to overcome these barriers, focusing on how to integrate NbS into policy and planning and support the cross-sectoral integration of NbS into broader urban policies – such as climate adaptation

strategies, economic development plans, and transportation networks, as well as [approaches for co-producing governance instruments for restorative NbS](#).

## **Towards urban transformation: INTERLACE's legacy**

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The INTERLACE project's findings underscore the importance of participatory decision-making and flexible governance structures in scaling NbS across urban landscapes. By institutionalising NbS within climate, biodiversity, economic and broader policies, cities can leverage the transformative potential of NbS to address biodiversity loss and climate change while enhancing urban resilience and societal well-being.

Although the project is set to conclude in early 2025, INTERLACE's legacy will continue through the foundation the project laid for continued governance innovation and strengthened policy frameworks for more sustainable and inclusive urban development. You can explore the full wealth of resources and lessons learned from the project at: [oppla.eu/interlace](https://oppla.eu/interlace).