



Citizen engagement for Nature-based Solutions

Citizens are key actors in the development and implementation of Nature-based Solutions (NBS). The contribution from citizens, their ideas, active engagement and stewardship make a difference in achieving positive impactful results for liveable and resilient cities.



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Carrying out successful citizen engagement processes to transform cities and help them become more resilient through the use of NBS, are some of the main ambitions of the GrowGreen project. Engaging citizens requires not only informing them about the importance of NBS for improving their quality of life, but also generating enthusiasm and involvement to benefit from their ideas in the transformation process and in their future management.

The lessons learnt from the GrowGreen citizen engagement are incorporated into [the Green Cities Framework](#), and through the Green Cities Training Programme these experiences will be shared with other cities. The Green Cities Training Programme has two objectives:

1. Engaging citizens around local Nature-based Solutions projects.
2. Engaging citizens in the development and implementation of a city-wide strategy for Nature-based Solutions.

This factsheet will highlight the methods and lessons learnt from citizen engagement activities during the planning and implementation of NBS in the GrowGreen cities: Manchester, Valencia and Wroclaw.

More detailed information can be found in the report: [GrowGreen Citizen engagement for Nature-based Solutions](#).

Methods for Citizen Engagement

GrowGreen has used the following approach for citizen engagement, developed by [Paisaje Transversal](#).

The “**Listen and Transform**” method focuses on a collaborative process that pursues several objectives.

- **Listen** to citizens through information collection and analysis tools. This allows for recognition of their needs to optimise the potential of each site and neighbourhood.
- **Transforming** the environment in a collaborative manner involves defining strategies, actions, and projects that improve the quality of life of people living in the area and encourages cooperation and co-responsibility as well as promoting commitment to the development of the area.

The **Dissemination, Citizenry, and Participation** method creates citizen involvement for both the development and implementation of NBS projects.

- **Dissemination** refers to transparency and visibility, both of the project locally and globally to inspire upscaling of NBS.

- The **Citizenry** component refers to strengthening community identity, providing opportunities for citizen participation, education and information sharing.
- **Participation** through active engagement of stakeholders in the planning, design and development phases of the proposed NBS projects, strategies and their management.



Citizen engagement in GrowGreen cities – lessons learnt

Manchester West Gorton Community Park



Manchester's West Gorton Community Park demonstrates several NBS which aim to manage rainwater, caused by flash flood events and road runoff. The citizen engagement activities for the West Gorton Community Park ranged from access to information, to consultation, and decision making. These activities were organised into three distinct

phases: 1) Baseline community engagement, 2) Concept design community engagement, and 3) Sketch design community engagement.

Citizen engagement was organised by the Groundworks charity who had existing links to the community, which suffers high levels of deprivation. The community were involved in planting and a number of activities such as 'seeing is believing' an online [tour of the site](#). This helped build trust and reduce scepticism around the project.

Young people were a key focus; ensuring their inputs and ideas were incorporated into the process and to understand how to reduce anti-social behaviour in the park in the long term. Therefore schools and youth groups were a key stakeholder for engagement activities.

Educating and engaging citizens on of climate change in relationship to the project proved challenging. This was due to the fact that citizens did not have previous knowledge about climate change and felt that flooding was not an issue in the area. Therefore, engagement should first focus on health and wellbeing benefits, opportunities to play, and other 'fun' aspects to open the conversation and build the relationship. Issues surrounding climate change were gradually introduced to people. Furthermore, the language around nature-based solutions can be difficult to understand, therefore terminology and explanations were simplified and visual aids were used.

Vertical ecosystems and other nature-based solutions in Benicalap, Valencia

Valencia's demonstration project aimed to tackle heat stress. The project is located in the Benicalap-Ciutat Fallera neighbourhood of the city, which has high levels of unemployment, an ageing population and deteriorating infrastructure. The participation process was designed to engage citizens in the development of a series of nature-based solutions demonstration projects. The process was structured around the 'Listening and Transforming' methodology developed by Paisaje Transversal.

A number of citizen engagement actions took place in public spaces to communicate the intentions of the pilot projects to the local residents in an innovative way. For example, visual messages, and painted floor signs were used in Benicalap's public spaces (Figure 1) to explain the location of the projects and the environmental improvements they would create. The signs also acted as a demonstration of how the residents' engagement had been acknowledged and put into action as a result of their participation in the project.



Figure 1. The visuals in public spaces in Benicalap, Valencia

A mobile app was developed to engage local people with their new nature-based solutions and to make them aware of local plants and wildlife. The app makes it easier for people to identify the flora and birds that are part of the neighbourhood's local biodiversity.

One important lesson learned was that listening to the concerns of the community regarding the wider public space helped to highlight the



problems mutually identified. This made it easier to demonstrate the use of NBS and how they could be used to rectify these problems. For example, a winning project from the Collaborative Green Initiatives Contest highlighted the neighbourhood secondary school, in particular how hot it gets due to a lack of shade. As a result of this engagement a shaded structure was built alongside the implementation of the vertical wall.

Wroclaw - Downtown area and Great Island Nature-based Solutions

There are a number of Nature-based Solutions demonstration sites implemented across the Olbin district of Wroclaw located in the southwest of Poland. The Olbin district, is a dense urban area that ranges from wealthy to socially deprived. In order to ensure inclusivity in the design and implementation of the NBS, the concepts were co-designed with a wide group of stakeholders during a series of workshops held with citizens. In total eight workshops were held one for each demonstrator plus the green street.



A number of citizen engagement techniques were used in the workshops, the most successful technique highlighted was the use of photo maps. The photo maps were helpful in two ways; Firstly, they gave the citizens an overview of the entire area which helped in the identification of what they preferred in each location. Secondly, they helped the designers when incorporating NBS and citizen's suggestions into their designs. Alongside the use of posters, the team received over 130 proposals from residents providing the opportunity to engage with the opinions of citizens who were unable to attend the workshops. The final designs were publicly exhibited in the local library, successfully demonstrating the final plans for NBS implementation.

However, there were several barriers encountered in the implementation of NBS. Citizens, for example, raised concerns about the health and safety of installing green walls and rain barrels, for attracting vermin. These concerns were addressed, and once the demonstration projects had been completed citizens were happy to have them, and have since seen their benefits.

Where to find more information?

[Naturvation Handbook for Citizen Engagement](#)

[Citizen Engagement 101 – A guide for local governments](#)

[Nature-based solutions to address global societal challenges](#)

[Smarter engagement: Harnessing public voice in policy challenge](#)

[Guidelines for co-designing and co-implementing green infrastructure in urban regeneration processes](#)
by proGireg Horizon 2020 project

[Madrid, Amsterdam and Milan: Three cities putting citizen participation at the heart of climate action](#)
by Climate KIC



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