

5 Takeaways & Recommendations

1 Lack of knowledge and experience of nature-based solutions (NBS) remains a major challenge across many departments from urban planning to public procurement. A culture change is needed with buy-in to NBS principles at all levels to support changes required in public procurement processes. Embedding NBS in policy can act as a powerful alternative delivery route for stimulating NBS delivery and economies. At a practical level, a gap was identified in translating research into practice. Existing public procurement instruments are not always well suited for NBS.

Tender processes need to shift from:

- A 'best cost for the solution' approach to a 'best solution for the cost' approach;
- A product-based to process-based approach (e.g. a system that allows for co-creation rather than specific designs) and this needs to be recognised by all city authority procurement teams;
- Delivery-based to delivery & stewardship based tenders to ensure NBS ownership.

Recommendations:

- Sustained investment in raising awareness and subsequent demand for NBS – from political level through initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors to specific awareness-raising actions for different public sector departments, for businesses and for communities.
- Develop in-house training courses on NBS for public procurement introducing a standardized vocabulary recognizable across the EU, and to provide procurers with tools to evaluate tenders based on sustainable procurement criteria.

Difficulty finding skilled suppliers: while skilled suppliers may be found at the national or international level, international public procurement procedures add complexity and act as a deterrent. Cities identified skills gaps at the local level. The nature of NBS means that finding local suppliers for maintenance and stewardship in the long term is of high importance. Cities also experience a lack of innovation among suppliers. The built environment sector often remains conservative and options to integrate NBS in infrastructure or buildings projects are not even considered by developers/consultants. 'Off-the-shelf' solutions often do not work and adapted solutions are needed for local contexts.

Recommendations:

- Support upskilling through trainee schemes, and providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning from industry leaders in general;
- Mainstream the use of innovation procurement procedures to support start-ups and provide opportunities to develop emerging ideas/creativity and innovation. This includes identifying and raising awareness of procurement approaches that promote innovation and improve the market interest in NBS.

The **Connecting Nature Enterprise Platform** is a pioneering platform that supports the growth of the nature-based economy in Europe and beyond, by connecting demand with supply.

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3 Institutional and legal barriers: the lack of regulations for NBS leads to an increase in perceived risks, in particular reputational risk, compared with standard 'grey' solutions. This can lead to difficulties in securing financing. This links with the barrier on the lack of evidence of the impact of NBS; there is a lack of 'hard' evidence to support the multi-functional additional impacts of NBS.

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness and support the use of Key Performance Indicators for NBS as set out in the Handbook on Performance and Impact Evaluation of NBS (2021) compiled by an EU Taskforce.
- Ensure political buy-in and the adoption of policies that explicitly refer to NBS projects.
- Continue to support pilot NBS demonstration projects. These have proven to be successful ways of raising awareness, demonstrating impact and securing community and political buy-in (e.g. Agile Piloting in Forum Virium Helsinki).

Challenge in community engagement: the involvement of local communities in NBS is important but it is difficult to provide for this engagement in the procurement process. Community engagement in the maintenance or stewardship phase is particularly important but there is a lack of knowledge and experience with different modes of collaborative governance between the public sector, communities and in some cases the private sector.

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness of good practices and case studies of community engagement and governance. A Community Engagement group on the Connecting Nature Enterprise Platform has been set up to meet this challenge.
- Involve young people of these communities which play nowadays a major role in promoting sustainable solutions

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Platform: Join our [community of nature-based organisations](#) leading the adoption of NBS in cities and regions across Europe.

Webinar: "[How do we activate the construction sector in mainstreaming NBS?](#)"
24 February 2021 at 15.00-16.30 CET

Webinar: "[Accelerating Innovation and Start-ups in the Nature-Based Economy](#)"
25 March 2021 at 12.30-14.00 CET