

European Platform for Urban Greening

Case Study Finland



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FOREWORD The Answer is Green

Today over 55 percent of the world's population live in cities and by 2050 it is expected that nearly 70 percent of global citizens will live in urban areas. The question is, what will those urban areas and cities look like and what will our experience be like living in them?

The reality of a changing climate is here. Around the world we are seeing and experiencing the impacts of extreme weather conditions including heat waves, wildfires and droughts, poor air quality, flooding and tropical storms. As these effects of climate change take their toll on our urban and rural environments, affecting everything from infrastructure, plant and animal life, to our mental and physical well-being, what we need are immediate solutions that respond to new climate realities.

The challenge is to re-imagine cities and urban life quickly enough to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, while adapting to the effects that can't be averted.

Thanks to the quickly evolving field of Urban Greening, this great re-imagining is within reach. In fact, it is happening right now. Cities globally are transforming to become greener and more sustainable, but in order to keep pace with the needs of tomorrow we must continue to innovate, share our knowledge and develop our practical skills today.

Urban Greening, as it is coming to be more broadly understood, is key to the evolution of our urban life. It is a dynamic field that is widely applicable and not only provides abundant economic opportunities, but it gives us a real chance to make cities more liveable and equitable in the 21st century. Without a doubt, the answer to our question is green.



INTRODUCTION What Is Urban Greening?

Up until now, Urban Greening has most commonly been used to refer to public landscaping projects that create a mutually beneficial relationship between city dwellers and their environment, such as the installation of parks and tree-lined streets. However, the scope of Urban Greening today goes far beyond these types of green spaces.

Creative and exciting initiatives including living buildings, indoor landscaping, vertical gardens and green roofs are becoming increasingly sought after by city planners and private developers, particularly as their multitude of benefits become ever more apparent.

Aside from beautifying our cities and improving our well-being, these new green initiatives are helping urban areas have a positive environmental impact and are an essential part of reaching our climate targets. For example, green installations like vegetative roofs or vertical gardens absorb harmful amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere while improving pollution by pumping vast amounts of oxygen into the air.

More greening in the urban environment also creates new habitats for wildlife that had previously been displaced and boosts biodiversity to create thriving eco-systems. It helps to cool cities, prevents flooding and above all, ensures a healthy living environment.

If adaptation is an essential part of our response to climate change then the Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) offered by Urban Greening must become more widely adopted.

As innovations in Urban Greening continue to transform our cities, so too do the professional opportunities, skills and expertise associated with it. Our ability to harness the experience, knowledge and best practices in this field will be fundamental to our successful adaptation to climate change and in the future, greening will be an essential part of a liveable city.





Examples of Urban Greening

- Vegetative green roofs
- Living green walls and vertical gardens
- Indoor landscaping
- Flowering plants in urban areas
- Creating favourable habitats for pollinators
- Hydroponic plant growth
- Biodiverse gardens
- Rain gardens
- Urban vegetable patches and boxed gardens
- Circular water management
- Sustainable irrigation systems
- Rainwater capture
- Green building design and maintenance
- Eco-friendly machinery for landscaping

Why is it important?

Adaptation is an essential part of our response to climate change. As such, Urban Greening is a critical field, because it offers tangible solutions and benefits for climate adaptation while combating carbon emissions. In order to meet climate targets, we must start by removing Co2 from the atmosphere and Urban Greening initiatives have an exceptional impact towards this aim.

Benefits of Urban Greening

- Improves the quality of life for people living in urban environments
- Creates economic benefits, including new jobs and sustainable infrastructure
- Supports existing wildlife and protects biodiversity in cities and urban centres
- Creates new habitats to sustain wildlife and encourage pollinators
- Improves the aesthetics of urban spaces, making them greener and more appealing to the eye
- Provides eco-friendly solutions for improving air quality and oxygen levels
- Combats excess pollution by capturing carbon dioxide
- Improves mental health and physical well-being of urban populations
- Provides immediate solutions for adapting to climate change
- Reduces noise pollution in urban areas
- Creates a cooling effect in cities through green buildings
- Helps prevent flooding

European Platform for Urban Greening

Creating impact by connecting all aspects of Urban Greening on one platform.

The European Platform for Urban Greening is the first platform of its kind in Europe and it is fast becoming a world-class reference point for all aspects of Urban Greening.

Funded by the European Commission, the Platform aims to increase the knowledge and skills required to address biodiversity, climate adaptation and well-being in urban areas and to broaden the expertise in Urban Greening practices among students and professionals.

The Platform brings together educational institutions from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Romania, and Spain, that are working together with leading industry partners and governments to form a network of Centres of Vocational Excellence across Europe.

Having commenced in January 2021, these Centres of Vocational Excellence have identified the regional priorities that need to be addressed in order to advance curriculum and training in the field of Urban Greening.

By intensifying collaborations within regions and between countries, the expertise and challenges faced by different climates represented across the Platform can be shared to boost the pace of innovation and create better training and impactful green solutions everywhere.

Each Centre of Vocational Excellence has outlined actionable initiatives that will address their top priorities; exciting projects are already underway for the year ahead. "Public-private partnerships can catalyst a skills ecosystem that is required for a thriving, future-proof society. With the Centres of Vocational Excellence on Urban Greening we aim to contribute to the green transition we are currently embarking on."

- Jan Jeronimus, Project Leader, European Platform for Urban Greening





Shared Priorities Across Centres of Vocational Excellence

- Raising greater awareness about Urban Greening
- Recruiting for the new Green Labour Market
- Creating meaningful opportunities for knowledge transfer
- Developing high-quality curriculum and educational activities



CASE STUDY

Finland

Finding economically beneficial solutions that meet the needs of industry.

Who are the partners?

Ahlman School Foundation VRJ Group

With over 100 years' experience, Ahlman is a private vocational college dedicated to meeting the needs of its community. Ahlman prides itself on upholding strong Finnish values and championing the development of its rural businesses, including promoting local produce. The college offers vocational education in specialised areas of the green sector including, agriculture, floristry, and nature and environmental based services.

In establishing Finland as a Centre of Vocational Excellence in the field of Urban Greening, Ahlman has formed a partnership with VRJ Group, Finland's leading construction enterprise offering



building services related to land and water construction, renovation, landscaping, environmental building and municipal engineering,

Together this team is focused on addressing the educational needs of the rapidly changing green sector and finding innovate, immediate and economically beneficial solutions that keep pace with the demand for industry best practice when it comes to climate adaptation, biodiversity and health and well-being.

"We need to change the way we approach our work and co-create educational courses for the specialised skills and training our workforce needs to meet today's rapidly evolving climate adaptation demands." - Henrik Bos, Managing Director of VRJ Group

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Project Highlight

Nature-Based Solution Green Structures

In collaboration with students, easily accessible Nature-Based Solution (NBS) Green Structures, that benefit local biodiversity and support the ecosystem, are being built on the grounds of the Ahlman School. These Green Structures are used as a teaching tools, are often the focus of short courses and can be used to disseminate information about Nature-Based Solutions. Ahlman's NBS Green Structures are examples of what a dense and compact city should have; structures such as these should be close to every building, home and workplace.

Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience. Such solutions bring more diverse nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.



The Nordic Climate

The climate of the Nordic region is generally characterised by humid, cold winters and mild, humid summers. Spanning an Arctic polar zone in the northern part of the country to a more temperate climate in the southern part, Finland has an intermediate climate. Known for its snow and freezing temperatures over the winter months, Finland is developing innovative strategies to adapt to its changing environment, including managing excess water coming from melting snow.

Features:

- USDA Hardiness Zone 3b 8a
- Long winter dormancy
- Short growing season
- Water management

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Their Top Three Priorities

Communication

It is a priority across Finland to create more opportunities for open communication and joinedup thinking when it comes to Urban Greening and implementing Nature-Based Solutions. It is crucial to share information not only around best practices but also lessons learned, for example, between the construction sector and green industry professionals. By creating open channels for communication and opportunities to share practical experiences, initiatives in Urban Greening can advance at a more rapid pace. Faster dissemination of knowledge and information across Europe and internationally will help the sector evolve and will go a long way in communicating the economic benefits of Urban Greening solutions to private investors and government bodies alike.

Specialised Short Courses

To meet the current needs of industry in Finland, it is a priority for vocational educators to co-create new specialised short courses that keep professionals up-to-speed with the latest training in areas such as soil biodiversity and water management. Whether targeted to the general public, students, educators or industry professionals courses must address the skills and knowledge that are needed right now in order to have the greatest impact.

Fast & Flexible Training

With the rapid advances in the Green Sector, it is a priority to make training both fast and flexible. Bearing in mind the various educational levels and professional development stages of those undertaking training, teaching methodologies must be targeted and approachable. "Climate change is changing everything, and new skills are needed in the Green Sector so that we can transform urban green spaces towards more sustainable and diverse environments. The Green Sector needs a renaissance to restore its value. We are no longer planting plants; we should be creating urban ecosystems." - Kaisa Koskelin, Project Manager, Ahlman School Foundation



THE YEAR AHEAD

Initiatives for 2022

Bio-gardening Course

A Bio-gardening Course has been piloted in 2021 with students and industry professionals alike. This course offers training and education that responds to the quickly evolving needs of industry and covers local issues in biodiversity management, urban ecology and new approaches across the Urban Greening sector in Europe. Students will learn to identify habitat types and understand the effects of plant stratification, while also learning to take account of soil quality and water management, ensuring ecological sustainability and nutrient cycles.

Ambassador Program

Biodiversity Ambassadors will be identified to initiate key activities that push the Urban Greening and Biodiversity agenda forward. For example, these Ambassadors will work with schools to provide educational talks and encourage the creation of 'Biodiversity Clubs' that

help students learn about Nature-Based Solutions. Ambassadors will coordinate informative site visits that showcase the latest Urban Greening projects and work together to lobby government to create legislative changes that support investment and best practice.

Highlight Events

Key to raising awareness around the benefits of Urban Greening will be the creation of a national Urban Greening Day that will run alongside the annual EU Green Week. Events that highlight the latest trends and industry innovations such as rain gardens, decaying wood gardens and vegetated roofs will be incorporated and presented at Ahlman campus garden.



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Summary of Activity

In the past year, partners of the European Platform for Urban Greening have created partnerships and knowledge exchanges that are having real-world impact across the continent. Their activities have resulted in the implementation and planning for a wide range of green initiatives, highlights of which include:

- A Bio-gardening course
- A Biodiversity course
- An Interior Planting & Landscaping Course
- A European Qualifications Framework Workshop
- Virtual courses and exchanges
- An Ambassador Program
- Activation of a Lobbyist Group
- The creation of an Urban Greening Day
- 'The Value of Green' campaign
- An Ideas Competition
- Youth engagement activities and internships
- Summer camps
- Study abroad trips
- The creation of blended and micro-learning resources
- The co-creation and development of new curriculum
- Short course qualifications in Urban Greening and Landscaping
- Public relations and events
- Media and social media campaigns
- Public lectures and workshops
- Seminars and video conferences
- Planting vegetable gardens in schools
- A Basic Skills Toolkit for best practices in Urban Greening
- An Atlas for Professions and Competencies in Urban Greening
- An Atlas of Emerging Trends in Urban Greening



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