Impact Evaluation Strategy

European Platform for Urban Greening

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Contents

European Platform for Urban Greening in Short

The European Platform for Urban Greening (EPLUG) "*aims to increase the knowledge and skills required to address biodiversity, climate adaptation and well-being in the urban, green living environment and to broaden the expertise among professionals in Europe*".

With this in mind, the consortium has developed a 4-year running project (October 2020 – September 2024) involving 15 partners from six European countries with Dutch *Stichting Wellant* as the lead. Among the partners, 6 are VET schools, 6 are private business enterprises, and the remaining 3 are private associations. Furthermore, 11 associated partners including government, sector and private associations etc. support the project.

The work of the EPLUG project is encompassing 9 work packages covering the following activities:

1. Survey Analysis for current project partners' demands and capacities regarding the skills ecosystem on urban green landscaping;
2. Project Management for a quality project implementation in line with the European Commission requirements;
3. Quality Monitor for the correct implementation of the project activities (quantity and quality);
4. CoVE and PoVE Creation for the establishment of the regional CoVEs and the European PoVE;
5. Knowledge and Skills Transfer between the staff members of each CoVE as well as all project partners' staff members through the PoVE;
6. Educational Activities for the VET students and business employees;
7. Dissemination to share the outcomes of the project with a wider target audience;
8. Impact Evaluation to assess the quality of the project results;
9. Follow-up to make the current project sustainable after the lifespan of the project.
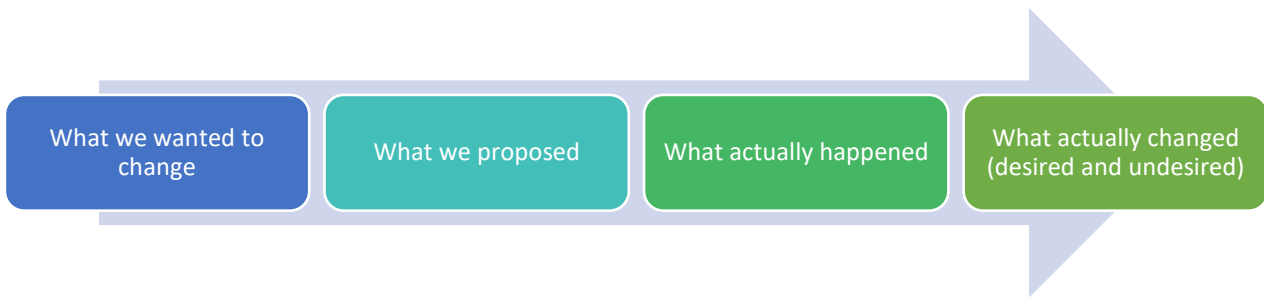
In general, the EPLUG project is supposed to make an impact:

- On participants and participating organizations, during and after the project lifetime;
- Outside the organizations and individuals directly participating in the project, at local, regional, national and/or European levels.

Thus, the partners foresee impact on students, VET staff members, business employees, governmental policies, and society in general.

On Impact Evaluation

An impact evaluation – in our context – is supposed to provide knowledge on the impact produced by our project. As such, it is more than just a description of what happened during the project; it is more than just ticking off whether this or that activity or product were delivered as promised. Rather, an impact evaluation should present the project results (i.e. specific activities, intellectual outputs, new organizational structures, etc.) in a context, which explains the causal relationship between intention and result. The focus must be on *changes* caused by the implementation of our project, which means that our evaluation should be willing to discuss intended as well as un-intended results:

| What we wanted to change | What we proposed | What actually happened | What actually changed (desired and undesired) |

As other types of evaluation, impact evaluation can be carried out as part of the project implementation (on-going or *formative evaluation*). Or it can be done as a sort of concluding analysis by the end of the project (*summative evaluation*). According to the EPLUG project design, we must do both. By doing so, we use the major advantage of formative evaluation, which is, that we will learn from our results – successes as well as failures – and make use of them, while there is still time to do so.

What (exactly) are we going to evaluate?

According to the project description, the consortium expects the following long-term impact of the project:

- To provide a space for VET schools, companies and policy makers at the local/regional level to identify current needs in the field of urban green landscaping (Centres of Vocational Excellence or CoVEs) (WP1, 4);
- To provide space for various CoVEs to learn from each other including a knowledge exchange among VET staff and employees (Platform of CoVEs) (WP4);
- To create a training and experience centre to tackle learning needs within the skills ecosystem, specifically on vertical green landscaping (WP5);
- To co-create relevant, innovative and attractive curriculum (learning outcomes) on biodiversity, climate adaptation and well-being in the urban, green living environment to be used by VET schools to address the current needs within the skills ecosystem (WP6);
- To strengthen the full green education column from primary education up to and including research universities (WP6);
- To facilitate translating scientific findings into practical conduct for green professionals all over Europe (WP5);
- To improve the relevance and image of VET programs on urban green landscaping in order to attract more future students through an active dissemination strategy (WP6, 7);
- To inspire other regional skills ecosystems on urban green landscaping and to expand the PoVE beyond its network and the time frame of the project (WP9).

Regarding the expected short-term impact, this is largely a reflection of the overall project plan including the detailed work packages and their results as described in the project application. In the project description, the consortium has delivered an overview of expected results of each work package and defined the relevant indicators for the fulfillment of each task:

Expected results	Target groups	Indicator
Survey for partners' experience and needs (R1.1) Inputs provided by all project partners (R1.2) Analyses results (R1.3) Overview of connections between survey and other WPs (R1.4)	Partner organizations within the consortium; skills ecosystem on Urban Green Landscaping	- Survey filled in by all project partners as well as associates - Action plan with minimum 10 items at an input for the other WPs - All project partners to confirm that the content of the survey is relevant to their organisation - Results of the survey shared with at least 100 relevant organizations
Profile description of Steering Committee + Overview of members of the Steering Committee (R2.1) Online workspace (R2.2) Project Contract + Guidelines (R2.3) 4 PoVE/European meetings (R2.4) Minimum 36 CoVE/National meetings in each country (R2.5) EC-reports (R2.6)	Partner organizations within the consortium	- Number of applicants for Steering Committee - Number of documents shared in online workspace - All project partners to confirm the content of the project contract and guidelines - All full members present at the PoVE meetings; while the quality has been rated by 80% satisfaction - All full members present at the CoVE meetings; while the quality has been rated by 80% satisfaction - EC-reports score is minimum 75%
QAS (R3.1) IFL (R3.2) BoA (R3.3)	Partner organizations within the consortium	- All full partners to approved the QAS - All reported feedback through IFL have been reported and responded to; while the satisfaction rate of its settlement is 80% - All BoA inputs have been reported and responded to; while the satisfaction rate of its settlement is 80%
6 CoVEs (R4.1) 1 PoVE (R4.2) 6 MoUs (R4.3) 1 MoU between all CoVEs (R4.4)	Partner organizations within the consortium; skills ecosystem on Urban Green Landscaping	- All full partners to approve the content of the CoVE MoU's and PoVE MoU through signing them - Satisfaction rate of 80% by the full partners on the content of the CoVEs and PoVE roadmaps - All intentions of interest regarding CoVEs or PoVE on Urban Green Landscaping responded to
Reports from each CoVE on the curricula needs for the skills ecosystem on urban green landscaping (R5.1) 4 trainings for VET teachers (R5.2) More than 100 good practices, examples, relevant documentation shared through the internal online platform (R5.3) 2 External trainings offered to VET school teachers (R5.4)	Partner organizations within the consortium; skills ecosystem on Urban Green Landscaping; VET staff member	- All full partners to confirm that the curricula needs are useful for them - At least 100 VET teachers participated in the trainings, while they evaluate the training as useful for their support to implement new innovative teaching - Usage of the documents shared on the internal online platform, while minimum 80% of the partners rate the materials as useful
A set of curricula learning results related to vertical green landscaping (R6.1) An innovative curriculum for students and employees in the field of urban green landscaping (R6.2) An innovative experience center (R6.3) A virtual and blended learning method (R6.4)	Partner organizations within the consortium; skills ecosystem on Urban Green Landscaping; VET staff member; business employees; VET students	- All VET schools part of the project consortium to rate the curricula learning results as relevant for their students/Life Long Learning programs - All full partners to confirm that the experience center is useful for their staff, students and/or employees - Minimum 100 students/employees have participated in the new (virtual/blended) learning; while their satisfaction rate is 80%
Dissemination Strategy (R7.1) An implemented Dissemination Strategy (R7.2) A brochure (R7.3) 6 public events (R7.4)	Partner organizations within the consortium; businesses; VET schools; policy makers; governmental organizations; possible future students	- Minimum of 300 people reached during the public events, while 80% of the audience members rated the event as useful or relevant to them - Minimum of 100 contributions to the public online platform - Minimum of 100,000 people reached through the online publications, posts, newsletters, and other online communication materials - All partners contributed proportionally to the implementation of the dissemination strategy - Minimum of 1,000 brochures disseminated - Minimum of 6 policy recommendations reported - Increase of students intake in urban green landscaping programs
An impact evaluation strategy (R8.1) An implemented impact evaluation (R8.2) Overview of objectives and indicators met or not (R8.3)	Partner organizations within the consortium; skills ecosystem on Urban Green Landscaping	- All indicators that are mentioned in the other WPs will be evaluated in WP8
A follow-up strategy for CoVEs and PoVE (R9.1) Implemented follow-up strategy for CoVEs and PoVE (R9.2)	VET schools; policy makers; governmental organizations	- A minimum of 10 interested parties in joining the PoVE or creating their own CoVE on urban green landscaping - A minimum of 4 project proposals or initiatives that cover a time framework after the 4 years of this proposal

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Expected short-term impact

It is the validity of these expectations to short-term and long-term impact – and the realization of them –
the evaluators are going to test.

KEQs – Key Evaluation Questions

We will be able to establish an idea of the progression of the project impact during the project period by
collecting data related to short- and long-term impact indicators. Based on this formative evaluation, the
project partnership should be able to adjust the project plan, enforce new ideas, remove activities that
don't appear successful etc.

But we also have to reach a more formal final conclusion to the question of EPLUGs deeper or permanent
impact. Such a conclusion must await the completion of the project plan – or at least a situation, where
most of the project activities have been carried out and reported. As a minimum, this summative impact
evaluation should come up with answers to the following key evaluation questions (KEQs):

1. What is the quality of the project design/content?
2. How well was the project implemented and adapted as needed?
3. Did the project produce the intended results in the short, medium and long term? If so, for whom,
   to what extent and in what circumstances?
4. What unintended results – positive and negative – did the project produce? How did these occur?
5. What were the barriers and enablers that made the difference between successful and disappoint-
   ing project implementation and results?
6. How valuable were the results to service providers, clients, the community and/or organizations
   involved?
7. To what extent did the project represent the best possible use of available resources to achieve re-
   sults of the greatest possible value to participants and the community?
8. Are any positive results likely to be sustained? In what circumstances?

* * * * *

On Methodology

Usually, "impact" is considered something more complex and definitive than "outcome" or "result". The
latter, we can document by checking our project description and compare it with what was done during the
project implementation. The notion of impact, however, is much more fluid, but often integrates an idea of
change, i.e. that something has changed more fundamentally – because of the project.

These changes may be rather difficult to detect or document, but a good starting point will be the common
survey of the EPLUG partners' experiences and needs (i.e. WP1). We suggest that we use this analysis as a
sort of baseline study, and that the impact we are evaluating should be any changes in this respect fostered
by the project.

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These changes will be visible in terms of e.g. new organizational structures (CoVEs and PLoVE), new ways of cooperation (knowledge and skills transfer on the local, national and European level), new educational activities (new curricula for students and adult learners), new and more structured dissemination activities, etc. Off course, more specific *indicators of change* should be developed during the process.

The impact evaluation will base itself on the following (rather traditional!) evidence:

- Project description, project plan and the survey analysis of WP1
- Project records and material re: WP4, WP5, WP6 and WP7
- Interviews with key staff involved in WP4, WP5, WP6 and WP7
- Questionnaires to be filled-in by participants in WP6
- Observation of implementation in WP6 and WP7

But also, when it comes to *evidence of change*, we recommend that a creative approach is developed and applied.

The methodology for collecting data can be summarized like this:

Method	Comments
Desk research	1.Tool to collect existing information 2. Identification of the sources of information 3. Understanding the scale of a phenomenon 4. Definition of the scope of research 5. Identification of the channels to use 6. Implementation of the research 7. Synthesis of results
Individual interviews	1. Useful to observe change 2. Collect opinion and information 3. Selection of the interviewees 4. Planning the interview 5. Selection and training of interviewers 6. Course of the interview 7. Analysis of results
Group interviews	1. Useful to observe changes 2. Selection of participants 3. Defining the interview topics 4. Choice and training of facilitators 5. Analysis and report on results 6. Risk of dominance of majority of opinion
Questionnaire surveys	1. Tool to observe changes 2. Collect diverse information, opinions but also facts 3. Designing the questionnaire 4. Sampling 4. Pre-test or pilot 5. Administration of the questionnaire 6. Codifying the data 7. Interpreting and disseminating the results
Case studies	1. In-depth study of an action in a natural setting, drawing on a multitude of perspectives 2. Illustration of a general situation 3. Study of good or bad practices 4. Study of certain key aspects of an intervention 5. Study of the effects of an initiative 6. Component of a multiple case study carried out in view of generating an overall assessment

Evaluation processes and time plan

We propose that the impact evaluation is carried out in three separate, but partly overlapping processes:

- The first process focusses entirely on *short-term impact* and the relevant data collection in this respect (April 2021 to August 2024)
- The second process is dedicated to the expected *long-term impact* including the necessary data collection (April 2021 to August 2024)
- The third process puts the attention to a thorough *analysis of changes* caused by the project activities (January to September 2024)

Put into a simple schedule, the time plan for the impact evaluation looks like this:

	Data collection on short-term impact	Data collection on long-term impact	Analysis of change
2021			
April			Baseline study available: Survey analysis of WP1
May			
June			
July	Data collection	Data collection	
August			
September			
October			
November			
December			
2022			
January	Status report 1		
February			
March			
April			
May			
June			
July	Data collection	Data collection	
August			
September			
October			
November			
December			
2023			
January	Status report 2		
February			
March			
April			
May			
June			
July	Data collection	Data collection	
August			
September			
October			
November			
December			
2024			
January 2024	Status report 3		
February			
March			
April			
May	Data collection	Data collection	Analysis
June			
July			
August			
September			EPLUG Impact Evaluation (final)

The expected WP8 results

T8.1 Create impact evaluation strategy and tools

R8.1 An impact evaluation strategy

In this project proposal, the consortium of partners defined the aim and objectives of this project.

During T8.1, the lead partner will develop the assessment of the impact of the project on the participating partners (businesses, VET schools, governmental institutions, networks, etc.) as well as the target audience (teachers, students, business employees, etc.). This will measure the quality of the outputs from the activities within WP 1, 4, 5 and 6 and the effect of the Dissemination Strategy (WP 7).

A list of indicators has been drafted to measure the short term and long term impact regarding the WP tasks and outputs, as well as the aim and objectives, as indicated earlier in this proposal.

In order to analyse the impact and progress of the project, is important to note that the project partners will use the survey (WP1) as a starting point with which the final outcomes will be compared to.

T8.2 Implement impact evaluation strategy (by all partners)

R8.2 An implemented impact evaluation

Various tools will be used to evaluate the impact of this project, such as (online) questionnaires for the partners within this consortium, as well as the participants (VET staff, business employees and students) in the educational activities and the attendees of the public events. Pre- and post- training self-assessments will be implemented, as well as assessment by the trainer/teacher. Reviews by the Board of Advisors will be done as well. Furthermore, interviews with key actors in the skill ecosystems on urban green landscaping will be organised.

Employees and students that did not participate in educational activities will be followed through a reference group to compare the impact of the activities on the participants with those that did not join in.

Statistics will be monitored of all the dissemination activities as well in order to assess its impact.

Furthermore, the following tasks (T) will be implemented during WP8.

These are directly connected to the results (R) in VI.2 of this WP. T8.2-8,3 will be part of the implementation of the Dissemination Strategy, as created in T8.1:

T8.1 Create impact evaluation strategy and tools

- Draft impact evaluation strategy and tools (by lead partner)
- Collect feedback from all partners
- Finalise impact evaluation strategy and tools (by lead partner)

T8.2 Implement impact evaluation strategy (by all partners)

- Organise questionnaires for partners
- Organise questionnaires for participants in trainings and teaching, as well as pre- and post-training self-assessments by the participants and assessment by the trainer/teacher

- Organise assessments of non-participants and compare results and participants
- Organise interviews with key actors involved
- Organise reviews done by the Board of Advisors
- Keep track on dissemination outcomes

T8.3 Analyse results of impact evaluation and compare with indicators and aim/objectives

Who should be involved?

During the project lifetime, many people will be involved in the various activities, and almost all will develop their own impressions and opinions on the effects of the project. It is important to "harvest" this collective knowledge and experience in a systematic way, so that it is brought to the project as an asset.

Further, taking into account the vast resources, which the project allocates to impact evaluation, we find it important to involve all partners as much as possible in the process. That is project staff from VET schools and business partners; students and business employees, who participated in training activities; representatives of organizations and associations, who make use of the CoVEs and the PoVE, etc. etc. We strive for a situation, where the evaluation activities become truly participatory in order to make the evaluation an integrated part of all project activities. Only by doing so, we can establish a situation, where the evaluation results become useful, not only after, but also during the project – not only for other future projects, but also for EPLUG itself.

Resources

As stated above, the EPLUG consortium must strive for an impact evaluation based on participatory principles by involving as many participants and participating organizations as possible. This is reflected in the allocation of resources to the impact evaluation, which indicates that all partners have substantial time at their disposal for the impact evaluation:

Partner no.	Partner name	Staff days	Specific roles and concrete tasks
1	Stichting Wellant (NL)	23	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
2	De Koninklijke Ginkel Groep (NL)	9	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
3	Ahlmanin koulun saatio (FI)	23	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
4	VRJ Group (FI)	9	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
5	Green Academy Aarhus (DK)	32	Lead partner: coordinator of WP 8
6	OK Nygaard (DK)	11	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
7	Federacion EFAS CV La Malvesia (ES)	23	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
8	Paisajistas de Mediterraneo – Paimed (ES)	9	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
9	Vyssi odborna skola a Stredni zemedelska skola (CZ)	23	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
10	ITTEC s.r.o. (CZ)	9	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
11	Liceul Tehnologic Cezar Nicolau (RO)	17	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
12	Terrano Construct SRL (RO)	7	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
13	WorldSkills Romania (RO)	17	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
14	Stichting Platform Beta en Techniek (NL)	3	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
15	European Landscape Contractors Association (EU)	8	Provides inputs for the impact evaluation and implements it
	Total	223	

This must imply, that the overall structure of the impact evaluation should be developed by the partnership in common – with the WP leader taking responsibility for timekeeping, documentation and writing processes – whereas most of the day-to-day evaluation activities (e.g. questionnaires and interviews) should be done by the partners and supported by the WP leader.

For further instruction, please see the report template on MS Teams.

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Further reading

- Paul J. Gertler et al.: *"Impact Evaluation in Practice."* 2nd edition. World Bank Group, Washington 2016.
- Patricia Rogers: *"Overview of Impact Evaluation".* UNICEF, Florence 2014.

Links

- https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/information/evaluations/impact_faq_theor_en.cfm
- https://www.erasmusplus.nl/en/impacttool-strategicpartnerships#impactHeading
- https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/impact_evaluation
- https://www.euroguidance-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/3.-Presentation-Impact-assessment_final_Euroguidance-Network-Meeting.pdf

Work Package 8

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Status: Final