Greening Cities Partnership

Urban Nature Strategies

A policy readiness
self-assessment
guide

URBAN
AGENDA
FOR THE EU

Self-
Evaluation
Tool

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Executive Summary

Urban areas across Europe are embracing urban greening and biodiversity as essential components of sustainable development and climate resilience. New EU policies, from the European Green Deal to the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (*European Commission, 2021*) and the Nature Restoration Regulation (*European Parliament and Council, 2024*), call for ambitious action to "bring nature back" into cities, towns and suburbs. In response, local governments are developing Urban Nature Plans (*European Commission, 2023*) to integrate parks, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions into urban planning. However, the scope and quality of these plans vary widely. Many urban areas face challenges in ensuring their strategies are comprehensive, well-integrated with other policies, and effective in delivering biodiversity gains and climate benefits.

This **Urban Nature Policy Readiness Self-Assessment Guide** helps city policymakers and planners critically evaluate and strengthen their urban nature plans or strategies. It provides a structured framework to *assess a plan's robustness and readiness* across key dimensions – from ecological coverage and community engagement to monitoring, governance, and financing. By using this self-assessment, city teams can identify gaps or weaknesses in their approach, avoid common pitfalls, and pinpoint opportunities for improvement. The goal is to ensure that urban nature is positioned at the core of urban development agendas, rather than treated as an afterthought.

This report contains the full self-assessment guide in a clearly formatted table, along with guidance on how to use it. An Executive Summary outlines the context and purpose, and subsequent sections provide an introduction to the guide's value and intended audience, its alignment with other frameworks (such as EU guidance and ICLEI/IUCN initiatives), examples of European city best practices, and step-by-step advice for facilitating the self-assessment process. The diagnostic itself covers eight dimensions of urban nature policy readiness with targeted questions. By completing this assessment, cities as well as towns and suburbs can better prepare effective Urban Nature Plans that are ambitious, inclusive, and aligned with European objectives, ultimately accelerating the transition to greener, healthier, and more resilient urban environments.

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1. Introduction:
Why urban nature policy readiness matters

In recent years, cities have increasingly recognised that nature is not optional, it is a foundational element of urban sustainability, liveability, and resilience. Urban nature (parks, green spaces, urban forests, wetlands, green roofs, etc.) delivers multiple benefits: it enhances biodiversity, provides ecosystem services (like flood control and cooling), improves public health and well-being, and contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation. As a result, integrating nature into city planning has moved from the margins to the mainstream of urban policy.

European policy drivers are pushing this green shift. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 calls on all cities with over 20,000 inhabitants to develop "ambitious Urban Greening Plans" (now termed Urban Nature Plans) to restore and create biodiverse urban spaces. Likewise, the new EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR), particularly Article 8, mandates Member States to restore urban ecosystems and ensure access to quality green space for all urban residents. At the same time, initiatives like the EU Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral Cities by 2030 encourage cities to include urban greening and nature-based solutions in their Climate City Contracts as strategies for carbon sequestration and climate resilience. Together, these drivers underscore that every city needs a coherent strategy for urban nature.

However, developing a robust Urban Nature Plan is not straightforward. Cities are at different stages of readiness: some have comprehensive biodiversity or green infrastructure plans, while others are just beginning or updating piecemeal greening actions. Existing plans vary in scope, depth, and integration. Their effectiveness often depends on available resources and local capacity – leading to uneven outcomes. Common challenges include: ensuring plans cover the full urban ecological footprint (beyond administrative boundaries), aligning with other sectoral plans (climate, mobility, land-use), securing political and cross-departmental buy-in, engaging communities, setting measurable targets, and finding sustainable financing. Without a critical look at these factors, even well-intentioned strategies may fall short of their potential.

Urban nature policy readiness refers to how prepared and well-designed a city's plan or strategy is to achieve its greening and biodiversity goals. This involves having clear vision and targets, strong governance and stakeholder support, integration into broader urban policies, and practical implementation pathways (including funding and monitoring). Assessing readiness is important both for cities starting to formulate a plan and for those with plans already in place to identify gaps and areas for improvement. This is where the Urban Nature Policy Readiness Self-Assessment Guide comes in.

2. Value of the self-assessment guide: purpose and benefits

The self-assessment guide presented in this guide is designed as a strategic framework to support city policymakers and planners in strengthening their urban nature plans or strategies. It is *not* a prescriptive checklist of requirements, but rather a reflective "tool" that adds value in several ways:

▷ **Critical Evaluation:** It prompts users to *critically evaluate the scope and quality* of their urban nature plan or project. By systematically reviewing key dimensions (such as ecological coverage, public engagement, and policy alignment), city teams can gauge how comprehensive and ambitious their approach is.

▷ **Identifying Gaps and Weaknesses:** The guide helps *identify weaknesses or gaps* in existing approaches. For example, a city might discover it has strong greening projects but lacks clear targets, or that it engages citizens well but hasn't secured long-term funding. Recognizing these gaps is the first step to addressing them.

▷ **Avoiding Common Pitfalls:** By reflecting on questions that often get overlooked, users can *avoid common pitfalls* in urban nature planning. The guide highlights issues like cross-jurisdictional coordination or regulatory enforcement–aspects that, if neglected, can hinder a plan's success.

▷ **Enhancing Integration:** The self-assessment encourages cities, towns or suburbs (represented by their local authorities) to *enhance integration* of their nature plans with other policies and strategies. It brings attention to aligning urban nature objectives with climate action plans, land-use plans, mobility strategies, and more, fostering a holistic approach to urban sustainability.

Ultimately, using this guide leads to more robust, well-integrated, and impactful urban nature plans. It ensures that nature is not treated as an isolated topic, but is woven into the city's overall development agenda. Cities can use the results of the assessment to prioritize improvements, whether that means setting up better monitoring systems, strengthening partnerships, adjusting policies, or seeking new funding sources. In short, the self-assessment adds value by providing a *structured reflection process* that improves the plan's quality and the city's readiness to implement it effectively.

Note: The guide is meant to be flexible and adapted to each city's context. It does not cover country-specific legal requirements or unique local circumstances and users should incorporate their local knowledge and regulatory conditions as they assess each dimension. The emphasis is on prompting critical thinking and dialogue within the city team, rather than producing a "score".

3. Intended audience and usage guidance:
who should use this guide and how

This guide is intended for local government officials and stakeholders responsible for developing, updating, or implementing urban greening and biodiversity strategies. The primary audience is city policymakers, for example: municipal environment or sustainability departments, urban planners, climate adaptation officers, parks and green space managers, and other relevant department heads. It is also useful for project managers of urban greening initiatives, cross-departmental working groups on nature and climate, and partners such as local NGOs or academic experts involved in urban nature planning.

When to use the self-assessment: Cities, towns of suburbs can apply this guide at various stages:

▷ **Before or during plan development:** If a city is *drafting a new Urban Nature Plan*, the self-assessment can serve as a guiding checklist to ensure all crucial elements are considered. It can spark discussions early on about what a good plan should include (e.g. clear targets, community input, multi-level alignment).

▷ **Reviewing an Existing Plan:** If a city already has a nature plan or related strategy, the guide can be used as a *health check* or gap analysis. This is especially useful if the plan is being updated or if the city wants to benchmark its plan against emerging best practices and EU expectations.

▷ **Periodic Reflection:** The guide can be revisited periodically (e.g. annually or mid-way through implementation) to assess progress in strengthening the plan's components and to adjust actions as needed. It thus supports an adaptive management approach.

How to use the guide: The self-assessment is best used in a collaborative workshop setting. We recommend convening a small group of key stakeholders to fill out the assessment together, rather than one person doing it alone. This group could include representatives from various municipal departments (environment, planning, finance, health, etc.), political leadership (a deputy mayor or council member for environment), and possibly external stakeholders like local environmental

organizations or experts. By bringing diverse perspectives, the discussion around each question will be richer and more objective.

Participants should review the city's current urban nature plan, strategy documents, and relevant data beforehand so they come prepared. During the session, go through each of the dimensions and questions in the guide. For each question, the group should honestly determine whether the criterion is met (**Yes**), partially met or in progress (**Partially**), or not met (**No**). It's important to have an open, constructive dialogue as the aim is to learn and improve, not to assign blame for any "No" answers. The group should also capture brief **comments or evidence** to explain the reasoning, and list **actions or next steps** for improvement, especially for any gaps identified.

The output of this self-assessment process will be a set of noted strengths to build on and clear action points to address weaknesses. City leaders can then incorporate these actions into their planning process, for instance, by revising the Urban Nature Plan, initiating new projects or policies, allocating budget for certain measures, or seeking external support where needed. Used this way, the guide becomes a living "tool" that supports continuous improvement in urban nature policy-making.

(For detailed facilitation tips, see Section 6.)

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4. Alignment with key frameworks:
Relation to EU & global initiatives

Urban nature planning does not happen in isolation; it is supported by, and contributes to, a broader ecosystem of frameworks and initiatives at the European and international levels. This self-assessment guide has been developed to complement and align with these existing frameworks, ensuring coherence and avoiding duplication. Below we outline how the guide relates to key guidance from the European Commission, ICLEI, and IUCN.

4.1 Urban Nature Plan Guidance (European Commission)

The European Commission, under the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, has introduced guidance for cities on preparing Urban Nature Plans (UNPs) (formerly known as Urban Greening Plans). This guidance, co-developed by Eurocities and ICLEI, provides a comprehensive roadmap with 10 actionable steps for integrating nature into urban spaces. The steps cover the entire planning cycle: from securing political commitment and establishing cross-departmental working structures, through to co-creating with the public, setting a long-term vision and targets, implementing actions with funding, and finally monitoring and evaluating progress. It emphasizes that an Urban Nature Plan is a long-term,

collaborative framework embedded in all aspects of city development (mobility, health, climate, etc.), rather than a standalone document.

This self-assessment guide is closely aligned with the spirit of the EU's UNP guidance. Each dimension in our checklist reflects elements of a strong Urban Nature Plan as highlighted by the Commission's framework. For example, questions on political commitment, multi-sector collaboration, public participation, and monitoring echo the official guidance's recommended steps. Local authorities that use our self-assessment will essentially be checking how well their plan measures up against what EU guidance. By identifying areas where a plan might fall short (for instance, maybe the plan lacks integration with climate policy or doesn't have measurable targets), local authority officials can address these gaps in order to meet the expectations of EU policymakers and funding programs. Ultimately, the guide supports local administrative units in fulfilling European commitments, like the Biodiversity Strategy's pledge and the Nature Restoration Law requirements, by ensuring their local plans are up to standard and ambitious.

4.2 Programs and resources

The following indicative initiatives feed into urban nature planning capacity:

▷ **UrbanByNature:** This is ICLEI's facilitated capacity-building program for urban nature and nature-based solutions. Through a series of modules and city exchanges, UrbanByNature guides cities in planning and implementing nature-based solutions step by step – from diagnostics and visioning to implementation and monitoring. The self-assessment guide here aligns with UrbanByNature's ethos by encouraging reflective diagnostics and stakeholder engagement as a starting point. Cities who have gone through UrbanByNature or similar programs will find many familiar themes in this guide (like cross-sector collaboration and participatory approach).

▷ **Greening Cities Partnership** (Urban Agenda for the EU): The very context of this guide is the Greening Cities Partnership (GCP), an Urban Agenda partnership that brings European cities together with the European Commission to advance green urbanism. One of the GCP's objectives has been to develop practical tools (such as this self-assessment) to help cities progress. ICLEI, as a partner in GCP, ensures that the guide reflects on-the-ground experiences of cities.

▷ **CitiesWithNature:** ICLEI in collaboration with partners also co-founded the CitiesWithNature platform, a global initiative where cities register their commitments and actions for nature. While not a planning guide per se, it provides a

community and recognition for cities taking action. Our self-assessment can help cities organize their internal efforts which they might later report on platforms like CitiesWithNature.

In essence, such resources and this self-assessment are mutually reinforcing. Lessons from ICLEI-led city projects inform the questions we ask, and using the self-assessment can prepare a city to engage more deeply with programs or similar networks. The informal, practical referencing style in this guide mirrors ICLEI's own approach, focusing on actionable guidance rather than theory. City officials can be confident that by following this guide, they are in line with the latest thinking and best practices advocated by city networks and their partners.

4.3 IUCN Tools for Urban Nature

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has increasingly turned its attention to urban areas, developing tools and metrics to help cities value and conserve nature. One notable contribution is the IUCN Urban Nature Index (2023), a new framework for measuring the ecological performance of cities. The Urban Nature Index provides a set of standardized indicators (across themes like green space, biodiversity, ecosystem services, connectivity, etc.) that cities can use to assess and track their progress in becoming more nature-positive. By reporting on these indicators, city leaders gain quantitative insight into how well their urban ecosystem is functioning and where to target improvements.

While the IUCN Urban Nature Index is focused on outcomes and impact measurement, our self-assessment tool is focused on policy readiness and planning processes. The two are complementary: the self-assessment helps ensure a city has a strong plan and enabling environment for urban nature (which should lead to better outcomes), and the IUCN Index can later be used to gauge if those outcomes are being achieved (e.g., is biodiversity actually increasing, is green space per capita rising, etc.). Cities aiming for excellence might use the self-assessment to strengthen their plan, then adopt IUCN's indicators to monitor implementation results over time.

In addition, IUCN has produced guidelines on nature-based solutions (NbS) and emphasizes the importance of integrating biodiversity in urban planning. For instance, IUCN's global standard for Nature-based Solutions (2020) can guide cities in designing interventions that have measurable benefits for ecosystems and society. Our guide implicitly supports those principles by urging cities to consider biodiversity gain, ecosystem services, and innovation (see questions in the assessment about native species, ecosystem processes, and innovative practices).

By aligning with IUCN's perspective, this guide encourages a science-based and globally informed approach. Cities using the self-assessment are not only aligning with European policy, but also tapping into international best practices championed by organizations like IUCN. This can be valuable if a city seeks international recognition (such as IUCN's urban conservation awards) or

collaboration on urban biodiversity initiatives.

In summary, the self-assessment helps lay the groundwork (policy and planning readiness) upon which IUCN's tools and metrics can build to track success and drive continuous improvement in urban nature outcomes.

"This self-assessment guide is closely aligned with the spirit of the EU's UNP guidance. Each dimension in our checklist reflects elements of a strong Urban Nature Plan as highlighted by the Commission's framework."

Friedrich-List-Platz

Bee stop in Leipzig (DE): Many cities have installed green roofs on bus stops to boost biodiversity, retain rainwater and cool streets. The initiative has been implemented in several European cities, including Utrecht (NL, Leipzig (DE), Malmö (SE) and Helsingborg (SE).

5. European city best practices: Examples of urban nature planning

Many European cities have already begun pioneering comprehensive urban nature plans and greening initiatives. These examples serve as inspiration and learning opportunities for other cities. Below are a few best-practice highlights that illustrate what effective urban nature policy and implementation can look like in practice:

Paris Biodiversity Plan
Paris, France

Paris has implemented an ambitious **Paris Biodiversity Plan** *(Paris City Hall, 2018)* which set concrete targets for increasing green spaces and biodiversity in the dense city. A key success factor has been the establishment of interdepartmental working groups bringing together staff from urban planning, transport, environment, and other sectors to ensure that nature is integrated into all policies (e.g. turning unused city land into micro-parks, green rooftops on public buildings, etc.). The city also runs extensive public outreach, such as annual "Citizen Biodiversity Days," to involve residents in actions like planting and species monitoring. Paris's experience shows the importance of strong political commitment (the plan is backed by the Mayor and Council) and breaking silos within the city administration to mainstream nature across departments.

Natura 2030
Barcelona, Spain

Barcelona's **Natura 2030 Plan** *(Barcelona City Council, 2021)* exemplifies a highly participatory approach to urban nature planning. The city undertook broad community engagement, including neighborhood workshops, online idea platforms, and collaboration with local environmental NGOs, to co-create its plan. They used digital tools (like Decidim, a civic participation platform) so residents could propose and vote on greening ideas. The result is a strategy that reflects community priorities, such as creating "green axes" through the city and enhancing urban green coverage per inhabitant. Barcelona also invests in data-driven analysis: it mapped all existing green and blue spaces and assessed ecosystem health, which helped identify areas of the city most in need of greening. By combining data with citizen input, Barcelona ensures its plan is both evidence-based and community-supported.

Paris Biodiversity Plan – 2025-2030 Summary

FREIRAUM MANNHEIM²
GRÜNE BÄNDER
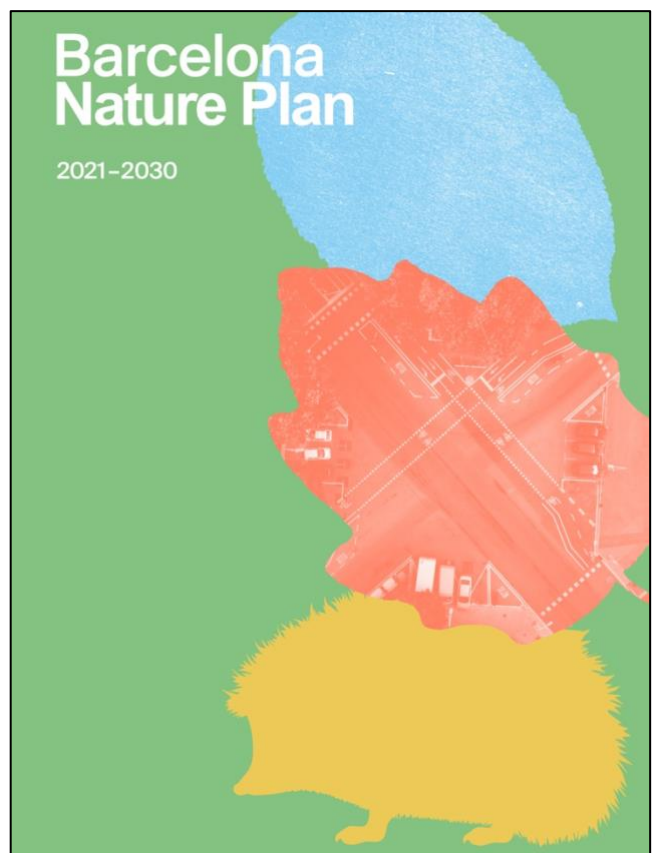BLAUE STRÖME

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Barcelona Nature Plan
2021–2030

Open Space Strategy 2030
Mannheim, Germany

The city of Mannheim has shown leadership by explicitly linking its urban nature goals with its broader urban development and climate strategies. Through its initiative "**Freiraumstrategie Mannheim 2030**" - **Open Space Strategy 2030**, *(Mannheim City Council, 2020)* - Mannheim set clear indicators and targets – for example, every resident should have a green space within a 5-minute walk, and increasing tree canopy cover by a certain percentage. The city secured formal political commitment: the City Council adopted the strategy and allocated budget to it, and the Mayor regularly reports on progress. Mannheim's approach underscores the value of measurable targets and institutional buy-in. The city also monitors progress via a public dashboard and encourages citizen science (residents using an app to report biodiversity sightings), illustrating a robust monitoring & evaluation practice.

Urban Greening Plan
Burgas, Bulgaria

A mid-sized city on the Black Sea coast, Burgas is emerging as a best practice by leveraging European funding and projects to advance its urban nature agenda. Burgas developed an **Urban Greening Plan** *(Burgas Municipality, 2023)* as part of participating in EU initiatives (like the GoGreenRoutes project and the Urban Nature Labs). They focused on creating green corridors linking city parks with natural wetlands around the city, which not only

boosts biodiversity but also provides recreation and helps manage flood risks. Burgas managed to integrate these nature projects into its official city development plan, which gave them longevity and coherence. Importantly, the city tapped EU funds and public-private partnerships to finance these actions, including building a "health park" near the hospital district to improve well-being. The lesson from Burgas is that even with limited local funds, a city can be bold in its greening efforts by aligning with EU priorities and attracting external resources, all while framing nature as a solution for urban health and resilience.

Green Infrastructure Strategy
Belgrade, Serbia

In Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia (a candidate for EU membership), urban nature planning is taking shape through a **Green Infrastructure Strategy** which is integrated into the city's master plan. One innovative aspect is that Belgrade is updating its zoning regulations to mandate green elements (like a minimum percentage of plot area for greenery in new developments) and protect existing natural assets. They are working across governance levels coordinating with national authorities on an urban forestry program and with neighboring municipalities on regional greenways. Belgrade's case highlights multi-level governance and regulatory alignment: by ensuring the city's nature objectives are enshrined in law and linked with higher-level policies, the plan's provisions become enforceable and durable. It also reflects how a city can align with European trends even before joining the EU, positioning itself as a

leader in urban sustainability in its region. Each of these examples demonstrates pieces of the puzzle that contribute to a successful urban nature policy: high-level commitment, cross-sector integration, public participation, evidence-based planning, measurable targets, innovative financing, and supportive regulations. While no city has a "perfect" model that fits all, the experiences of these cities provide practical insights.

Urban areas using this self-assessment guide can compare their situation with such examples – e.g., *Has our city set targets like Mannheim? Are we engaging the public as much as Barcelona? Do we have the political backing seen in Paris?* – and thus identify areas for improvement. Best practices also show that progress is possible in diverse contexts (large capitals and smaller cities alike) when there is a clear vision for urban nature and a willingness to innovate.
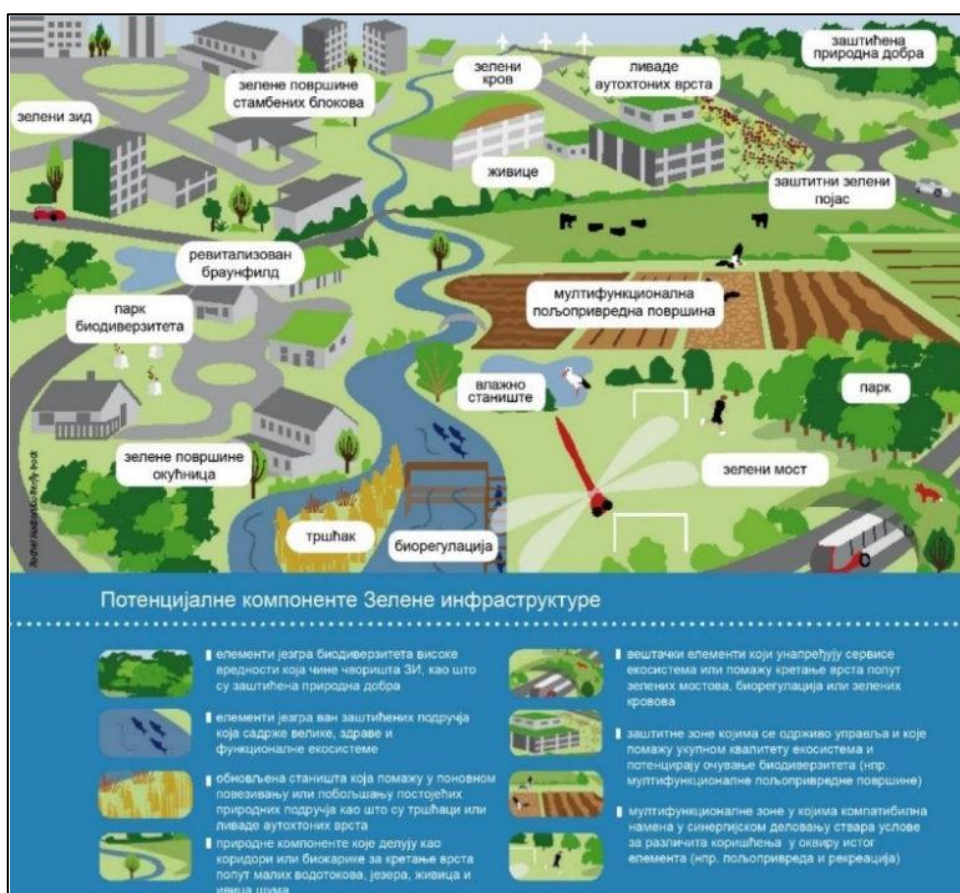
Self-assessment guide

Den Bell, Antwerp (BE): Depaved courtyard and green roofs transformed into a climate-resilient urban oasis with shade, biodiversity planting and rainwater retention. Designed by OMGEVING.

6. Step-by-step facilitation advice:
how to conduct the self-assessment

1. Planning and Preparation:

- o **Identify a facilitator:** Choose someone to lead the process. This could be a neutral facilitator (perhaps from another department, a partner organization, or an experienced planner) who can guide discussions objectively and keep the group focused. If available, an external facilitator familiar with urban sustainability can be helpful for first-time assessments.

- o **Gather background materials:** Before the meeting, compile all relevant documents and information. This includes the city's current Urban Nature Plan or strategy (draft or approved versions), related plans (climate action plan, land-use plan, etc.), any reports or data on urban green spaces and biodiversity, and policy documents (like local regulations or national guidelines on nature). Circulate these to participants in advance for review.

- o **Invite the right participants:** As noted in Section 3, involve a cross-functional team. Ensure representation from key departments (environment, urban planning, parks, finance, community engagement, etc.). Invite a political representative if appropriate (to later champion the outcomes). If the city works closely with an NGO, academic, or consultant on its greening efforts, consider inviting them for expert input. Schedule the workshop for a sufficient duration – typically 2 to 3 hours to cover all dimensions without rushing.

2. Setting the Stage:

- o **Introduction and context:** Begin the session by reiterating the purpose of the self-assessment. Emphasize that this is a safe space for honest reflection, not an evaluation by outsiders. The goal is to learn and improve the plan collectively. If participants don't all know each other, do quick introductions and perhaps an ice-breaker asking each to share one aspiration for the city's nature agenda.

o **Explain the guide structure:** Give an overview of the eight dimensions covered in the guide (you may even display them on a slide or flipchart). Ensure everyone understands the rating options (Yes / Partially / No) and the meaning – for example, "Partially" can mean the aspect is in progress or somewhat addressed but not fully. Clarify that "No" answers are okay and expected in some areas; these will highlight where work is needed. Encourage participants to speak up if they have examples or evidence (e.g., "We did include something like this in the climate plan") when deliberating each question.

3. Going Through the Assessment Dimensions:

o **Facilitate question by question:** Take one dimension at a time (e.g., start with Bio-geographic Coverage). For each question under that category, have the facilitator read it aloud and then invite discussion. It can work well to ask first, "How would we answer this – yes, partially, or no – and why?" Let the group discuss. Different members might have different knowledge (for example, a planner might know if regional coordination exists, whereas a community officer might know about citizen engagement efforts).

o **Seek consensus or majority view:** After short discussion, the facilitator should try to gauge the room's response. If most feel it's a "Yes" (fully addressed) and no one disagrees, mark Yes. If it's clearly lacking, mark No. Often it will be somewhere in between – mark Partially if some work has been done but not fully satisfactory. It's fine if there isn't 100% consensus; the facilitator can note a majority view and any dissenting opinions in the comments.

o **Capture comments:** Assign someone (or the facilitator) to take notes in the template as you go. Under Comments, write down key points from the discussion – why the rating was given, any evidence mentioned (e.g., "Yes – plan aligns with regional eco-network map from 2021"), or nuances (e.g., "Partially – addresses water flow but not wildlife corridors"). Keep comments concise.

o **Brainstorm actions on the spot:** For each question where the answer is "No" or "Partially," ask "What can we do to improve this?" For example, if the plan lacks measurable targets (a "No" under Monitoring & Evaluation), an action might be "Define 5-year biodiversity targets and KPIs in next plan update." Write these under Actions/Next Steps. Even for some "Yes" answers, there might be opportunities ("Continue/expand current inter-city collaboration"). This turns the assessment into an action planning session as well.

Time management:
Be mindful of the time. Some questions might spark lengthy debate – which is good, but ensure no single dimension consumes the whole meeting. If a topic is too complex, the facilitator can "park" it and suggest coming back later or task a smaller group to delve deeper outside the meeting. It's important to get through all dimensions so the assessment is complete. Depending on time, short breaks can be taken between sections to keep energy up.

4. Wrap-Up and Next Steps:

o **Summarize findings:** After all questions are covered, take a few minutes to recap the main insights. The facilitator or note-taker can highlight, for instance, "We found strong points in X and Y, but we identified gaps in A, B, C." This helps ensure everyone leaves with a common understanding.

o **Prioritize actions:** Not all identified actions can be pursued at once. As a group (or in a follow-up meeting), quickly discuss which gaps are highest priority. You might ask each participant to vote for the top 2-3 actions they think will most strengthen the plan. This can create a rough priority list (e.g., "1) establish a monitoring framework, 2) secure political adoption of the plan, 3) initiate public participation forums…").

o **Assign responsibilities**: Determine who will take the lead on next steps. For example, if one action is to draft measurable targets, assign the environment department to propose those. If another is to meet with the finance department about funding options, assign a representative to set that up. Having clear owners for tasks ensures the assessment leads to tangible follow-up.

o **Documentation:** Save the filled-in self-assessment (the table with all your Yes/Partial/No answers, comments, actions). This document is a valuable reference. It can be circulated to all relevant stakeholders and decision-makers. If appropriate, also share it with external partners or funders to demonstrate the city's reflective approach and commitment to improvement.

o **Integration into planning:** Plan how the results will inform your Urban Nature Plan. Ideally, the actions identified feed directly into the next revision of the plan or into an implementation roadmap. For instance, if community engagement was weak, the city might decide to add a new section in the plan about a public participation process. If financing was lacking, the city might start preparing a proposal for an EU funding call or incorporate nature projects into the city's budget cycle.

5. Follow-Up:

o **Monitor progress on actions**: Over the next months, track the progress of the agreed actions. The facilitator or a coordinator can check in periodically with those responsible. Keeping a simple tracker is helpful.

o **Iterate as needed:** The self-assessment is not one-and-done. Situations evolve – new political leadership, new funding opportunities, emerging challenges (like a heatwave prompting interest in more trees). It can be useful to revisit the assessment in a year or two. Celebrate improvements (maybe previous "No" answers that became "Yes" after actions were taken), and identify any new gaps. This creates a culture of continuous improvement around the urban nature agenda.

By following these facilitation steps, the self-assessment exercise becomes an engaging and empowering process for the city team. It breaks down silos (since multiple departments collaborate in the workshop), builds a shared understanding of what a strong urban nature policy entails, and generates buy-in for the resulting actions. The dialogue itself can spark new ideas and partnerships – for example, the parks department might team up with the transport department to green a corridor once they've discussed it in the meeting. In short, the process is as valuable as the product: it educates and aligns stakeholders while co-producing solutions. The city emerges better equipped to deliver on its vision of a greener, nature-rich urban future.

Moerman Park, Roeselare (BE): Former parking area transformed into a climate-adaptive green-blue park. The design reduces heat stress, creates habitat for urban flora and fauna, and uses sponge landscapes to retain stormwater and strengthen drought resilience. Designed by OMGEVING.

7. Diagnostic self-assessment guide: The policy readiness checklist

Below is the core self-assessment checklist for Urban Nature Policy Readiness. It is organized into eight thematic dimensions that are critical for a robust urban nature plan or strategy. Under each dimension, a set of diagnostic questions is provided. City teams should review each question and mark the status as Yes (fully addressed), Partially (addressed to some extent or in progress), or No (not yet addressed) in their context. Space is provided to add brief Comments (for notes, evidence, or context) and to list Actions / Next Steps / Opportunities that arise from the discussion.

How to interpret the dimensions:

1. **Bio-geographic Coverage** – ensuring the plan's spatial scope and ecological context are appropriate (looking beyond city limits where needed).

2. **Priority-Setting for Nature & Biodiversity** – the extent to which the plan gives clear priority to enhancing nature (no net loss, net gain of green space and biodiversity) and sets goals for it.

3. **Monitoring and Evaluation** – mechanisms to track progress, with targets, indicators, data, and adaptive management.

4. **Citizen Participation** – involvement of residents and communities in planning, implementing, and monitoring the urban nature initiatives.

5. **Multi-Level Governance** – collaboration across municipal departments and with external stakeholders (neighboring cities, regional/national bodies, etc.) to support the plan.

6. **Planning Coherence** – alignment of the nature plan with other city plans and policies (climate, mobility, housing, etc.) to ensure synergies and avoid conflicts.

7. **Regulation & Policy Alignment** – how the plan fits with and leverages regulatory frameworks and possibly introduces new policy tools or incentives to support urban nature.

8. **Financing the Plan Implementation** – the financial strategies in place to realize the plan's goals, including budgets, funding sources, and innovative finance.

7.1. Bio-geographic coverage

Dimension: Bio-geographic Coverage	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
Does the plan align with the broader ecosystem functional area, or is it restricted to municipal administrative boundaries? *(Is your urban nature plan considering the whole ecological region, e.g., watershed, bioregion, beyond just the city limits?)*	○	○	○		
Does it account for cross-jurisdictional ecological processes, such as water flows, habitat connectivity, and climate resilience? *(For example, does the plan recognize that wildlife corridors or floodplains cross city borders and plan accordingly?)*	○	○	○		
Are there mechanisms in place for inter-municipal collaboration to address ecological challenges beyond the city limits? *(Have you established any formal or informal partnerships with neighboring municipalities or the region to coordinate green initiatives?)*	○	○	○		

In the tables, you may tick the appropriate Yes/Partial/No box for each question. "Comments" can include relevant details or references (e.g., "Yes – covered in 2022 Green Plan, p.10"), and "Actions/Next Steps" should capture any follow-up needed. The table is quite extensive; it can be split by section if needed for easier reading.

7.2. Priority-setting for nature and biodiversity gain

Dimension: Priority & Agenda Setting for Nature/Biodiversity	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
Does the plan consider preventative measures to avoid loss of existing green and biodiversity-rich areas? *(e.g., measures aligning with Article 8 of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation to prevent net loss of urban green space.)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does the plan prioritize an increase of nature and urban green areas as a clear goal? If yes, does it quantify or estimate how much impact will be created? *(For instance, setting a target like adding X hectares of green space or increasing green cover by Y%.)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does the plan prioritize a net gain in biodiversity (not just green space)? If yes, does it measure or estimate how many species or habitat types the plan will support or restore?	◯	◯	◯		
Does the plan identify specific strategies for native species in flora and fauna? (Are there actions to protect or reintroduce native plants and animals, control invasives, etc., tailored to local ecology?)	◯	◯	◯		

7.3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Dimension: Monitoring & Evaluation	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
Does the plan define clear, time-bound, and measurable targets for ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions? *(e.g., "By 2025, restore 100 hectares of wetlands" or "Plant 5000 trees in 3 years" with timelines.)*	○	○	○		
Are nature- and biodiversity-specific key performance indicators (KPIs) established to track progress effectively? *(Do you have metrics like % tree cover, # of pollinator species, air quality improvements attributable to green spaces, etc. in place to gauge success?)*	○	○	○		
Are data collection and reporting mechanisms in place to ensure continuous assessment and adaptive management? *(Is there a system or team for monitoring these KPIs regularly, and reporting findings to decision-makers or the public?)*	○	○	○		
Does the plan promote the use of innovative monitoring tools, such as remote sensing, citizen science, or digital dashboards? *(For example, using satellite imagery to track green cover change, or apps for citizens to report wildlife sightings.)*	○	○	○		

7.4. Citizen participation

Dimension: Citizen Participation	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
Were citizens actively engaged in the co-creation of the nature plan, ensuring inclusivity and local relevance? *(Did the planning process involve public consultations, workshops, or co-design sessions with residents, including marginalized groups?)*	○	○	○		
Does the plan outline structured mechanisms for ongoing public involvement, including feedback loops during implementation of nature-based solutions? *(For example, citizen committees, regular forums, or an online platform for community feedback as projects roll out.)*	○	○	○		
Are there participatory monitoring and evaluation processes allowing citizens to contribute to assessing progress and fostering local ownership of nature-based solutions? *(e.g., citizen science programs, community monitoring of tree planting survival rates, etc.)*	○	○	○		
Does the plan recognize and incorporate traditional, indigenous, or community-led ecological knowledge? *(Has the city engaged with any local traditional knowledge holders or community groups to include their insights on managing local natural areas?)*	○	○	○		

7.5. Multi-level governance

Dimension: Multi-Level Governance	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
Was the nature plan co-developed with key municipal departments to ensure a cross-sectoral approach? *(Did departments like transport, health, education, etc. contribute to the plan's development, indicating internal buy-in and integration?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does the plan align with regional, national, and EU-level policies on nature restoration and biodiversity? *(Have you checked consistency with higher-level strategies, such as national biodiversity plans, EU Biodiversity Strategy/Nature Restoration targets, etc.?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Were external stakeholders (e.g., neighboring municipalities, regional authorities, academic institutions, private sector, NGOs) involved in the development process? *(Beyond local authority departments, did the planning process consult or partner with other cities, universities, businesses, or NGOs for broader perspective and support?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Are there formal collaboration agreements or governance structures to support long-term coordination? *(For example, an inter-city working group on green infrastructure, a regional urban ecology council, or MoUs with other entities to sustain collaboration over time.)*	◯	◯	◯		

7.6. Planning coherence

Dimension: Planning Coherence	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
How does the plan integrate with existing local policies, strategies, and regulatory frameworks related to ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions? *(Is your urban nature plan embedded in or referenced by the city's master plan, climate adaptation plan, health strategy, etc.? Does it complement them?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does it align with climate neutrality, climate adaptation and resilience plans to create synergies across urban policies? *(For instance, are tree planting or green infrastructure initiatives coordinated with climate action for heat reduction or flood management?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does it align across sector-specific targets and plans (energy, mobility, housing, infrastructure) to create synergies? *(Have you ensured the nature plan supports objectives in other sectors – e.g., using green corridors to enhance mobility routes, or green roofs to aid energy efficiency – and vice versa?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Are there gaps or conflicts with other plans that need to be addressed? *(For example, a transport plan that might remove trees for road widening – has such a conflict been identified and resolved? Or any policy that inadvertently harms urban nature?)*	◯	◯	◯		

7.7. Regulation & policy alignment

Dimension: Regulation & Policy Alignment	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/ Opportunities
How does the plan contribute to existing biodiversity protection and ecosystem service regulations? *(Does the plan help fulfill any legal requirements or standards – e.g., national laws on protected areas, air quality standards through greenspace, etc.?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Are there legal instruments or enforcement mechanisms ensuring compliance with the plan's provisions? *(Has the city adopted any ordinances, zoning laws, or penalties/incentives that reinforce the implementation of the urban nature plan?)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does the plan propose new policy innovations or incentives (e.g., green zoning, biodiversity credits, nature-positive building regulations)? *(Is the city exploring cutting-edge ideas like requiring green roofs via building code, offering tax breaks for landowners who create community gardens, or developing a biodiversity offset scheme for developers?)*	◯	◯	◯		

7.8. Financing the implementation of Urban Nature Plans

Dimension: Financing Implementation	Yes	Partially	No	Comments	Actions/Next Steps/Opportunities
What funding mechanisms are in place to support the plan's implementation? *(e.g., dedicated municipal budget allocations, tapping EU funds or grants, private sector investment, public-private partnerships)*	◯	◯	◯		
Are there financial incentives for businesses, developers, or citizens to contribute to urban greening efforts? *(Such as subsidies for green roofs, awards for biodiverse gardens, development incentives for including green space, etc.)*	◯	◯	◯		
Does the plan explore innovative financing models, such as green bonds, biodiversity offsets, or payments for ecosystem services? *(Is the city utilizing or planning to utilize emerging finance tools to fund nature projects – e.g., issuing a municipal green bond, implementing a scheme where developers pay into a "nature fund" for compensation, etc.)*	◯	◯	◯		

Using the results

Once this table is filled out, the city's urban nature planning team will have a clear overview of areas of strength and areas needing attention. The checked responses give a snapshot of readiness: a column with mostly "Yes" indicates confidence, whereas "No" highlights gaps. The comments capture understanding and context (important for institutional memory), and the listed next steps form a concrete to-do list for improving the plan.

City leaders should integrate these insights into their work plans. For example, if Citizen Participation was mostly "No/Partial," a priority might be to launch a community engagement program or partnership. If Financing scored low, perhaps assign staff to explore funding opportunities or include nature projects in the next budget cycle. In some cases, the actions will be quick wins (like organizing an interdepartmental meeting to improve Multi-Level Governance coordination), while others are long-term (like developing a biodiversity monitoring system).

This self-assessment guide is intended to be a living document. Keep it updated as actions are completed or as conditions change. Over time, a city can track its progress toward full readiness – ideally moving those "Partially" and "No" answers to "Yes." Achieving all "Yes" is an ambitious goal, but even moving step by step will significantly enhance the effectiveness of your Urban Nature Plan. In doing so, the city not only aligns with EU and global best practices but also maximizes the benefits of urban nature for its residents and the environment.

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