



URBAN NATURE PLANS +

**Conflicting policy agendas:
Experiences from cities**





Conflicting policy agendas

This short brief addresses conflicting policy agendas when implementing urban nature plans.

The Urban Nature Plan+ (UNP+) project supports cities in developing effective Urban Nature Plans (UNPs). This short brief focuses on challenges, enablers, and best practices across one of four critical topics related to implementing a UNP: **addressing conflicting urban policy agendas**. The others are engaging stakeholders in plan design, applying governance structures for biodiversity and restoration, and securing financing.

Key messages:

1. **Challenge Fragmented Responsibility:** Avoid making the UNP a plan without a home or budget; relying on portions of multiple budgets can create a diffusion of responsibility and weaken implementation and accountability.
2. **Integrate Policies to Bust Silos:** Actively combat siloed planning (where departments work in isolation) by ensuring that biodiversity objectives are explicitly embedded in diverse city strategies, such as housing and transport plans.
3. **Establish a "Policy as a Hub":** Utilise one strategic plan (like Burgas' PIRO) to connect and synchronise objectives from all other city plans, making the city's activities more coordinated and maximizing co-benefits.
4. **Prioritise Nature with Strong Commitment:** Counter the risk of nature objectives being overlooked by making them explicit. Clearly stating ambitious targets for urban nature in a number of official policies ensures biodiversity is prioritised as a land use interest.
5. **Leverage Nature's Value for Buy-in:** Overcome policy objective tensions by quantifying and communicating the full range of benefits nature can bring (e.g., cost savings from reduced flood risk or air pollution reduction) to secure buy-in from non-environmental departments.

This short brief is based on [Jelliman et al. \(2024\) Topic 1 - Conflicting policy agendas](#). See full report on the UNP+ project website for more details: <https://urbannatureplans.eu/>



Topic Overview

The UNP+ cities have a range of policy agendas and plans, and inevitably there are some tensions between these. Steps 1 to 4 of the UNP process focus on ensuring the creation of a plan that has set goals and is developed collaboratively, co-productively, and with the backing of long-term political commitment.

Challenges identified by UNP+ cities

Nature policies are not linked to a department

Some UNP+ partner cities face issues when a nature plan isn't connected to a single specific department. This has been observed to create a diffusion of responsibility and reduce the level of agency needed to ensure the plan is effectively implemented. In this case, there may also not be a budget connected with implementing a plan, instead relying on portions of multiple budgets. Whilst it is often seen as a positive that a plan is connected with multiple departments, it can sometimes also have the effect of making the plan carry less weight, as it doesn't have a single department taking responsibility for driving it forward (Frantzeskaki and Bush, 2021).

Paris challenge: Not every plan has a responsible department articulated or a budget. This can make it difficult to know who must be engaged from certain departments to develop complementary plans and achieve co-benefits. However, some plans are designed to be implemented by more than one department. The activities of all departments should be in alignment with the biodiversity plan. One way this can be seen is through the work of the budget and finance department, who take biodiversity impacts into account during public tendering processes.

Barcelona challenge: There is no specific department for implementing the Natura Plan. The plan is being implemented by several departments with separate budgets (biodiversity, projects, parks, and gardens). One team was responsible for the development of the plan and then multiple departments with their own budgets and other priorities were responsible for the implementation of the plan, which can be a risk to the plan's successful implementation.

Policy objective tensions

The UNP+ cities have many plans and many policy objectives. Conversely, they do not have infinite funds, human resources or land available, so compromises and trade-offs are a common occurrence. Different plans and departments have different objectives which are sometimes in competition with each other. Ideally, objectives and plans will be established in an integrated manner to create as many co-benefits and win-wins as possible, but there are inevitably situations where trade-offs and zero-sum situations arise, an issue which arises in other cities across Europe (Hölscher, 2023).

Paris challenge: Different plans have different objectives which can often generate lively discussions between departments who are competing for use of the same public space and resources to meet their objectives. Tensions between policy objectives can also lead to



tensions between departments as they compete, which can lead to reduced cooperation between departments, reducing mutual wins.

Mannheim challenge: Mannheim sometimes experiences conflicting objectives, such as the need for public spaces for events versus the desire for greening measures, which can complicate strategic alignment. As a major European transport hub and a city with the second-largest inland port, Mannheim confronts the challenge of harmonising urban development, including housing construction and infrastructure expansion, with the preservation of the environment and biodiversity. In densely populated areas, limited access to green spaces exacerbates the contentious issue of implementing biodiversity-friendly measures.

Many policies with many interaction points

UNP+ partner cities have reported that ideally, objectives and plans will be established in an integrated manner to create as many co-benefits and mutual wins as possible and then delivered in a way that continues to try and maximise the opportunities for co-benefits and reduce the requirement for trade-offs. However, it can be difficult to understand all the objectives and plans in enough detail to achieve this. This is due to the large number of plans a city may have and the even greater number of interaction points between those plans. Having a full understanding of all the interaction points is necessary to maximise co-benefits, but in practice, this is hard to achieve due to the enormity of the task of understanding all the interaction points in detail and the time it will take staff to do this, especially in departments where biodiversity is not a core duty (Collier et al., 2023). UNP+ cities have also highlighted how it is important to understand and demonstrate the range of benefits nature can have in helping to meet a wide range of policy objectives beyond those most immediately connected with nature. To best achieve this however a good understanding of the objectives of other plans and how nature can support those objectives is needed.

Paris challenge: There are a lot of plans and policies so it can be a challenge to understand all policies that impact the work and how they complement and contradict each other. Mapping of policy interactions is currently underway, but it is a large task to undertake due to the number of policies and interaction points.

Barcelona challenge: The city is working simultaneously on many plans, programmes and policies related to nature, climate and public space (Nature Plan, Tree Plan, Climate Plan, Play Plan). They all share the same goal of increasing greenery. It can be a challenge to put all the plans into context and understand all the policies that are to be implemented and how they align with or differ from each other.



Jardí de la finca de Muñoz Ramonet & Parc Natural de Collserola, Barcelona.
Image credit: Barcelona city authority

Absence of biodiversity as a cross-cutting objective

In some cases, challenges can arise in the UNP+ cities because biodiversity as an objective is not sufficiently represented across objectives, plans and strategies and so other objectives take priority, an experience other cities also face (Bush et al., 2023).

Burgas challenge: Although Burgas has legislation prioritising urban initiatives, the topic of urban nature and biodiversity is not consistently addressed or integrated across all city departments and their plans.

Belgrade challenge: While Belgrade has integrated urban nature and nature-based solutions into its planning process, the city lacks specific legislation or institutional mandates to prioritise these initiatives.



Stari Dvor (The Old Palace), Belgrade.
Image credit: Maja Jovanovic / City of Belgrade



Siloed planning

UNP+ partner cities highlight the impact of siloed working of departments at both the planning and implementation stages. Because of siloed working, mutual wins are missed. Whilst developing a plan in silo may seem more straightforward for the cities and avoids having to make compromises, the chances of necessary trade-offs during implementation increase when plans are developed in silos (Collier et al., 2023; Sarabi et al., 2019).

Belgrade challenge: The city's 20 secretariats each possess well-defined strategies, however, these strategies are not effectively coordinated for implementation across different departments resulting in missed opportunities and tensions.

Enabling factors identified by UNP+ cities

Silo busting

To maximise the chances of biodiversity being integrated across multiple departments and that it gets the necessary attention required for effective implementation, it is important to work collaboratively. This means that the greatest number of co-benefits can be achieved, by aligning and synergising the development and implementation of plans by the various city departments. This is something experienced by the UNP+ cities and other cities alike (Sarabi et al., 2019).

Paris enabling factor: Engaging all relevant departments across the city administration in the development and implementation of urban nature plans is essential for success. Paris highlights the importance of cross-departmental cooperation. To ensure the next Biodiversity Plan aligns with the city's priorities, Paris has organised workshops ("Comité Biodiversité" aka "CoBio") involving elected officials from a range of departments and specialised NGOs in the field of biodiversity and urban nature (fauna, flora, mediation, gardening etc.) and is reflecting on how to mobilise these stakeholders more frequently (given existing HR capacities).



The René-Dumont Tropical Agronomy Garden, Paris.
Image credit: Pascal Bonneau

Mannheim enabling factor: To reduce siloed working Mannheim created a Local Green Deal group. An Interdepartmental group focussed on the local implementation of the European Green Deal and the EU Mission 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030. The group works closely together to develop and implement plans addressing issues such as climate change and biodiversity, maximising mutual wins where possible.

Policy integration

UNP+ cities reported that it can be effective to embed elements of biodiversity into a range of city plans, rather than only having biodiversity mentioned in one stand-alone plan. If biodiversity is mentioned in other strategies such as housing or transport, and at regional/interregional levels, this can help mainstream biodiversity as part of city planning (Collier et al., 2023).

Barcelona enabling factor: Urban nature is promoted through various municipal strategies, including the Tree Master Plan, Climate Emergency Action Plan, Urban Agriculture Strategy, and Hands-on Green Participation department initiatives. Key departments involved are Biodiversity, Hands-on Green Participation dept, Projects dept, and Green Space Conservation dept. All plans share the same commitment (increasing the greenery to 1m² per resident by 2030) agreed at the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in December 2015. A climate-change adaptation measure that would be equivalent to 160 new hectares of greenery. This target was promoted by the Barcelona Climate Commitment 2015, the government measure “Urban Green Infrastructure Promotion Programme 2017-2030” and subsequently with the Climate Plan 2018-2030 (now the Climate Emergency Action Plan 2030).



Mannheim enabling factor: By integrating social and environmental justice into technical strategies, Mannheim is creating more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Although biotope network planning traditionally focuses on urban outskirts, partnerships between nature conservation organisations and farmers are expanding ecological connectivity within city limits.

Valuing the wide range of benefits of nature

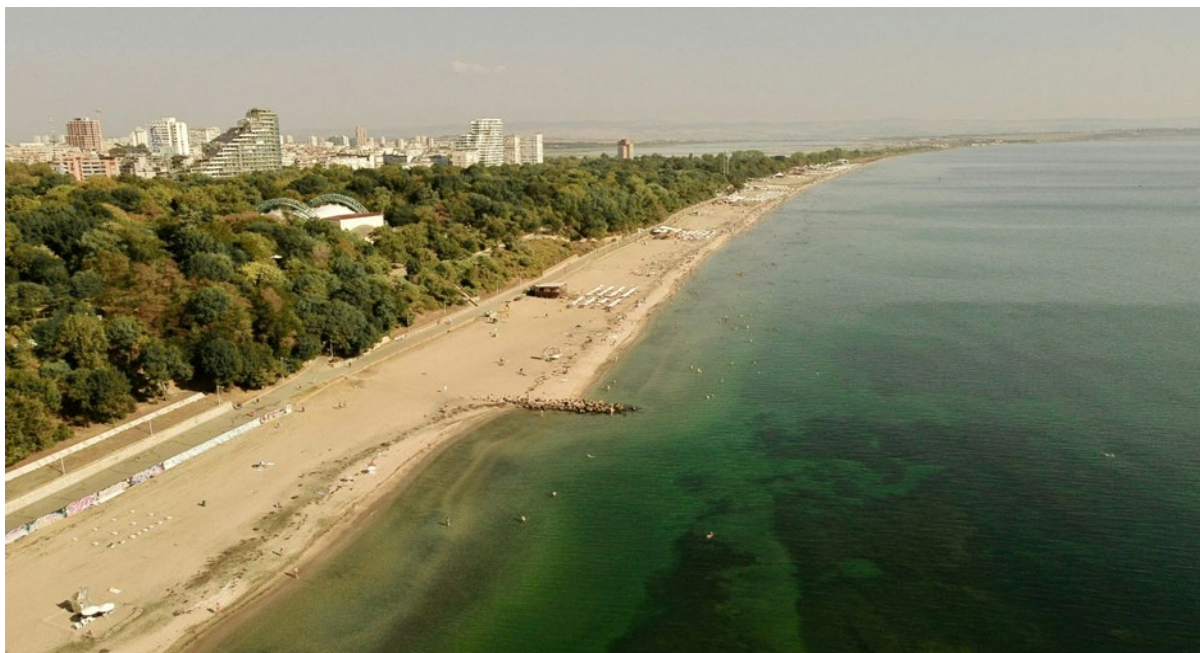
Sometimes UNP+ cities as well as other European cities attempt to ensure nature is included in a range of plans such as in transport and housing by clearly communicating the benefits biodiversity can bring to those areas including potential cost savings (Hölscher, K., 2023). For example, having biodiversity objectives in a housing strategy could then generate targets for the inclusion of Sustainable Urban Drainage systems, which will both be beneficial for biodiversity and for reducing flood risk at properties and creating a more liveable neighbourhood for citizens. Cost savings can also be realised through the integration of biodiversity objectives, such as the reduction in the intensity of mowing and green space management (Toxopeus and Polzin, 2021).

Mannheim enabling factor: Mannheim recognises the importance of understanding the social, spatial, and institutional context to maximise the co-benefits which can be derived from urban nature. By leveraging these insights, informed by the Mission Statement 2030, the city can effectively identify and address barriers and opportunities to integrate urban nature into diverse development areas.

Policy as a hub

To bust silos, integrate various policy objectives and maximise the potential for co-benefits, UNP+ cities have chosen to develop a strategic plan which connects and sits above all other plans. This strategic plan sits like the hub of a wheel and attempts to bring together and synchronise objectives from all the other plans the city may have, making the city's activities more coordinated. (Hersperger, 2018)

Burgas enabling factor: Burgas' Plan for Integrated Development (PIRO) acts like the hub of a wheel, connecting and bringing together other plans and policies. It is a vital strategic plan for the Municipality of Burgas, encompassing the entire region and outlining strategies to address local needs, seize development opportunities, and foster regional cooperation. By integrating various policies and planning resources, PIRO aims to achieve sustainable improvements in the economy, society, and environment. While not explicitly focused on urban nature and biodiversity, the plan's objectives have significant implications for these areas. For instance, improving access to green spaces, enhancing connectivity between urban and rural areas, and promoting sustainable resource management can directly contribute to the preservation and enhancement of urban nature and biodiversity in Burgas.



Burgas coastline.
Image credit: Georgi Hristov

Best practices identified by UNP+ cities

Alignment and integration

Nature and the just access to nature must be integrated across the city and beyond the city boundaries. This can be achieved in different ways. The objectives could live primarily within one strategy, which was developed in coordination with other plans and multiple departments, and it could also be achieved by embedding nature and justice targets in all plans across the city's portfolio (Collier et al., 2023; Adams et al., 2023; Sarabi et al., 2019).

Paris best practice: Paris's biodiversity strategy is integrated into the city's broader planning framework. The new strategy places a strong emphasis on social justice, particularly focusing on ensuring equitable access to urban nature. By prioritising underserved areas, Paris aims to ensure that all residents can enjoy the benefits that green spaces provide. The strategy must also align with the legally binding Bioclimatic Urban Master Plan, ensuring coherence across environmental and urban planning efforts.

Strong commitment to nature embedded in policy

UNP+ city authorities have found it useful to clearly state what targets they would like to reach by working with nature. It should be made clear that nature can bring a range of benefits which help contribute to a range of policy objectives. Whether it be social or environmental objects being pursued by the city, if it's clear that working with nature is a way to reach those goals, this puts nature in a strong position and its benefits realised (Seddon, 2022).

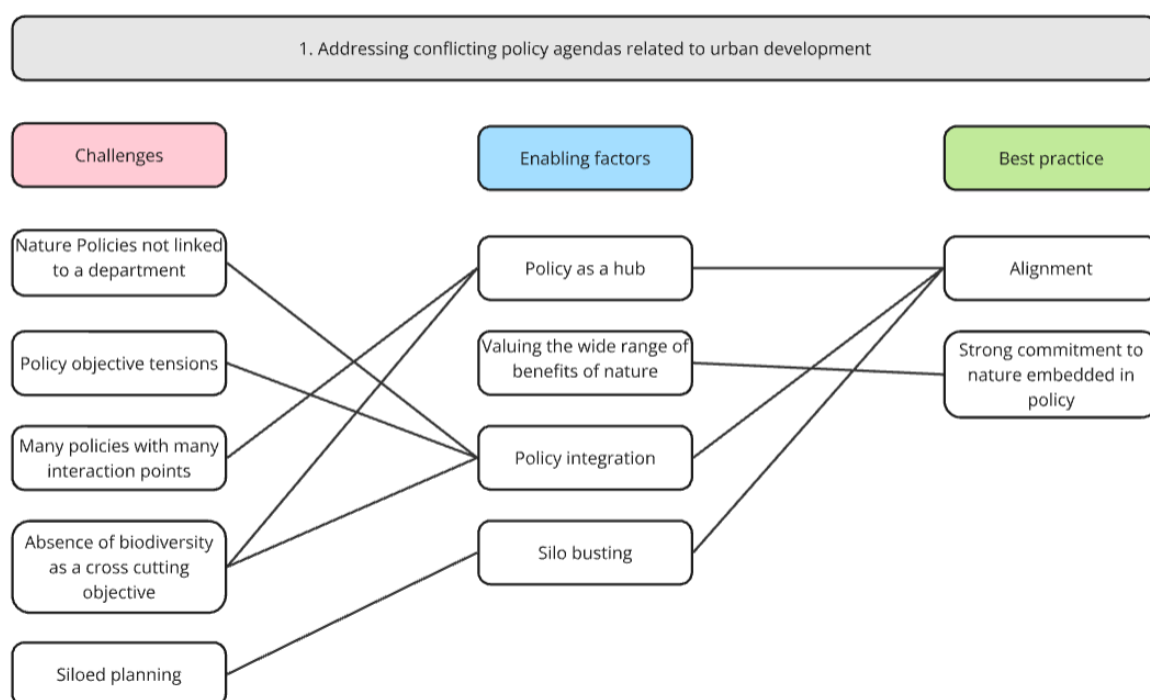
Barcelona best practice: Barcelona's Plan Natura sets the ambitious goal of maximising social and environmental benefits from urban nature. Recognising the importance of equitable access to green spaces, Action 9 specifically focuses on addressing the needs of



underserved areas. The Green Model, a key component of the plan, provides a detailed analysis of green space distribution and identifies opportunities to address inequalities in access to green space. Barcelona assesses green space distribution and accessibility at a city-wide scale. This information is invaluable in allowing them to understand where access is comparatively low, and an area should be targeted to maximise the equitable provision of environmental services. By prioritising social and environmental justice, Barcelona aims to create a more sustainable and inclusive city for all.

Conclusion

In the Figure below all of the challenges, enabling factors and best practices experienced by the UNP+ partner cities related to this topic have been laid out. Links have been drawn from challenges to enabling factors, where the enabling factor may be key to overcoming the particular challenge. Best practices are linked to enabling factors where specific enabling factors may be required for the establishment of a best practice.



Some key lessons can be learnt from the experience of the UNP+ partner cities:

- Urban nature planning is often hindered by fragmented responsibilities, conflicting priorities, and limited resources.
- Competing objectives, such as infrastructure development versus green space preservation can complicate alignment. Although those other objectives can be a vehicle for including biodiversity, for example requiring investment in nature alongside the building of a new road.
- Without clear departmental leadership, biodiversity goals may lack accountability and sufficient funding.
- Cities should try to ensure that the Nature Plan is aligned with other city priorities to maximise cohesion and co-benefits and minimise trade-offs .
- Embedding biodiversity across plans can help maximise co-benefits and ensure urban nature initiatives contribute to sustainable, equitable urban development.



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