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Learning process evaluation report, including options for durable institutionalisation

Authors : Dr. Rik DE VREESE (EFI)

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Summary

This report evaluates the co-design and co-learning workshops, and the knowledge exchange mechanisms (task forces, city tandems, international thematic workshops) implemented during the CLEARING HOUSE project, and sketches pathways towards a continuation of these learning events beyond the CLEARING HOUSE project life. The local co-design and co-learning workshops in the European CLEARING HOUSE case studies have been well evaluated by attendees who filled out an evaluation survey after the workshops: the workshops have been evaluated as interesting, relevant and well-organised, and the attendees indicated that they learned a lot. However, respondents had hoped to see more concrete examples and hands-on tools and guidelines for implementing urban forests as nature-based solutions in their daily practice. Also the city tandems, task forces and international workshops ? together forming the CLEARING HOUSE Learning Architecture ? have been well attended (almost 1000 people reached) and have been positively evaluated. With regards to the city tandem and the in-person international workshops, however, the question raises which mode is the most efficient way to facilitate mutual learning and knowledge exchange: in-person, hybrid or digital, also taking financial costs and environmental footprint into account. The report ends with pathways to continue the knowledge exchange beyond the CLEARING HOUSE project life. Prospective instruments include the European Forum on Urban Forestry, the Community of Practice and Pilot Fund for NBS under development with Metropolis, NetworkNature, the International Initiative for R&I on Urban Forests as Nature-based Solutions in the Greater Bay Area, and the UGPplus project.

Approval

Date	By
2024-08-06 16:15:39	Dr. Rik DE VREESE (EFI)
2024-08-06 16:16:02	Dr. Rik DE VREESE (EFI)

Learning process evaluation report and options for durable institutionalisation of the CLEARING HOUSE learning architecture (D3.7)

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KEYWORDS

Sustainable urban development, trees, forests, biodiversity, urban regeneration, green infrastructure, capacity building,

ABBREVIATIONS

UF-NBS: Urban forests as nature-based solutions

NbS: Nature-based solutions

KEY DEFINITIONS

Urban forests: tree-based urban ecosystems that address societal challenges, simultaneously providing ecosystem services for human well-being and biodiversity benefits. Urban forests include peri-urban and urban forests, forested parks, small woods in urban areas, and trees in public and private spaces.

Urban forestry: the practice of planning and management of urban forests to ensure their health, longevity and ability to provide ecosystem services now and in the future.

Nature-based Solutions (NBS): Nature-based Solutions (NBS) are defined as *"actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, which address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits"*. (IUCN, 2018)

Urban forests as nature-based solutions: UF-NBS are a subset of nature-based solutions, which build on tree-based urban ecosystems to address societal challenges, simultaneously providing ecosystem services for human well-being and biodiversity benefits. UF-NBS include peri-urban and urban forests, forested parks, small woods in urban areas, and trees in public and private spaces. UF-NBS comprise every measure a city can take to address urban development challenges by deploying tree-based ecosystems. (European Forest Institute, 2018)

Urban tree(s): usually long living woody organism including woody shrubs, usually single stemmed, with the potential to grow at a site in an urban or peri-urban area. This includes roadside trees, trees in squares, parking areas, or in parks and private gardens. Urban trees appear as individual trees, or as groups of trees.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Author	Partner	Description
1.0	10/02/2024	Rik De Vreese	EFI	First and final version
1.1	01/08/2024	Rik De Vreese	EFI	Amendments made following comments by the external reviewers in chapter 4.

REFERENCE

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1   Introduction

The aim of this report is to develop pathways for sustaining the knowledge exchange and learning mechanism developed during the CLEARING HOUSE project, based on an evaluation of the local and Sino-European co-design activities (Task 3.1), and the international thematic workshops, the task forces and the city tandem (both under Task 3.2). These activities have been part of the Collaborative Learning Work Package in CLEARING HOUSE.

The pathways have been further developed in the final version of the Exploitation Plan (D5.10), the relevant parts of this exploitation plan are re-iterated in this report.

2   Local and Sino-European co-design and co-learning events

The co-design events in the case study cities have been heavily impacted by the measures taken to limit COVID-19 infections. The impact included delays, transferring the meetings from physical to online (or hybrid) events, and a lower number of respondents showing up in comparison with events organised before the pandemic.

The **Sino-European co-design workshop** was aimed at jointly developing the research programme for phase 2 of CLEARING HOUSE. This event took place in hybrid mode on 25 June 2021, including CLEARING HOUSE case study cities and researchers. As this event was very specifically focussing on developing the research agenda, and is less related with the CLEARING HOUSE learning architecture, we will not discuss this event further.

CLEARING HOUSE has been able to organise at least 3 **local co-design and co-learning events** per European case (Table 1). In China, where most of the COVID-related restrictions have only been lifted in Spring 2023, it has been impossible to organise local co-design events (also because of the limited funding for the CLEARING HOUSE research in China). Every event included between 5 and 75 participants, depending on location, topic, sanitary regulations and targe groups.

Table 1. Overview of the local co-design and co-learning events in the CLEARING HOUSE case studies in Europe

Case study	Date	Topic	Target group
Barcelona	24/03/22 (AM)	Llobregat values: strengths and opportunities	Local associations
	24/03/22 (PM)	Environment and mental and physical health	Research institutions
	27/10/22	Ecosystem services in the Vall Baixa del Llobregat	Local and regional administrations
	05/11/22	Final public event: guided tour to the metropolitan section of the Llobregat river, with Joan Pino, CREAF	Open to all participants: Local associations, research institutions, Local and regional administrations
	Online (mail)	Cartography of ecosystem services in the Llobregat	Regional administrations
	Online (mail)	Evaluation of results. Identification of spaces of opportunity	AMB+CREAF

Brussels	12/10/21 & 13/12/21	Developing an action plan for "street parks" in Woluwe Saint-Pierre	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations
	03/02/22	3rd codesign workshop Brussels	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations
	15/02/23	Workshop on Greening Initiatives in the Vlaams-Brabant case area (Leuven)	
	18/09/23	Co-design workshop Tervuren	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations, interested citizens
	04/10/23	Co-design workshop Hoeilaart	
	20/02/24	Training session on urban forestry solutions	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations
Gelsen-kirchen	09/09/21	Two themes: - Protect urban forests and green infrastructure sustainably! - Ecosystem services of urban forests and (street) trees	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations
	15/09/23	Rheinelbeforest (Gelsenkirchen Ueckendorf) - Street tree improvement and street tree scenarios (marteloscopes), citizen participation projects	For experts – city administration, scientists, colleagues, biologists, politicians
	16/09/23	Greenlab HUGO (Gelsenkirchen Buer) - Citizen participation projects, Smart City model project with citizen participation, Future workshops	For the public – citizens, NGOs, politicians, neighbours, kids…
Krakow	13/10/21	Field trip to the Drwinka River Park	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations, business, academia and education
	14/10/21	Defining actions, activities and means for Drwinka River Park	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations, business, academia and education
	13/10/22	Codesign workshop in Kraków River Parks	Local and regional administrations, civic organisations, business, academia and education
	14/09/23	Geosurvey on the perception of river parks, case study of Drwinka River Park	
	13-14/10/23	Codesign workshop in Drwinka River Park	
Leipzig	11/11/21	Benefits and trade-offs of methods for green space assessments in Leipzig	Local and regional administrations
	17/01/22	Screening the requirements for accessing a perception study in the city of Leipzig	Local and regional administrations
	27/10/23	Co-design workshop on "Strengthening local actors in dealing with the consequen-ces of climate change for urban trees"	13 participants from administration, academia, and civil society

After every event, a link to the CLEARING HOUSE evaluation survey has been distributed to the participants. A minority (65 participants) responded to the survey. About 51% of the respondents are female, 45% identified as male, and 4% preferred not to indicate their gender. Regarding age, most

participants were 35 to 49 years old (40%), followed by the age group 50 to 67 (35%) and 18 to 34 years (22%).Two participants (3%) were over 67 years.

Table 2 provides an insight in the background of the participants. The main backgrounds indicated were "member of the public administration" (n=28) and "expert in the field of urban or green planning/management" (n=20), followed by "scientist, researcher, student" (n=11) and "interested citizen" (n=10). Ten people indicated an "other background". Only two representatives from the public sector participated, and one expert in engineering. Overall, this indicated a balanced representation of citizens, members of the administration and experts – with a slight overrepresentation of experts. Unfortunately, we were not able to go beyond the inner circle of "usual suspects", with only few private partners and engineers involved.

Table 2. Background of the co-design and co-learning workshop participants (note that some participants indicated multiple backgrounds)

Category	Number	Ratio
Interested citizen	10	15.38 %
Member of an NGO or civil society organisation	8	12.31 %
Member of an international network or organisation	1	1.54 %
Member of the public administration	28	43.08 %
Politician	2	3.08 %
Student/Scientist/Researcher	11	16.92 %
Expert in the field of urban/green planning/management or landscape architecture, nature-based solutions, urban forests or urban green spaces	20	30.77 %
Expert in the field of health, recreation and/or well-being	1	1.54 %
Expert in the field of engineering	1	1.54 %
Private sector	2	3.08 %
Other	11	16.92 %

Overall, the workshops have been evaluated (see Table 3) as relevant (78% of the respondents scoring 4 or 5 out of 5), clear (69% scoring 4 or 5 out of 5), effective to reach their goals (69% scoring 4 or 5 out of 5), and reaching the expectations by the respondents (71% scoring 4 or 5 out of 5). Also the practical organisation and approach of the workshops has been well perceived (see Table 4; over 67% of respondents scoring 4 or 5 out of 5 for guidance and recommendations, time management, format and visual presentations, methods, social interaction, approachability of and knowledge by the presenters),

Table 3. Appreciation of the co-design and co-learning events by the respondents to the evaluation survey

	Not at all (1)	2	3	4	Extremely (5)
Was this event relevant to you?	0,00%	1,54%	20,00%	41,54%	36,92%
Was the aim of the event clear to you?	0,00%	4,62%	26,15%	43,08%	26,15%
Has this event achieved its objective?	0,00%	4,62%	26,15%	43,08%	26,15%
Have your expectations for this event been met?	0,00%	3,08%	24,62%	41,54%	30,77%

Table 4. Appreciation of the practical organisation and the approach to the co-design and co-learning events

	Very bad (1)	2	3	4	Excellent (5
Guidelines and recommendations	0,00%	0,00%	32,31%	43,08%	24,62%
Timely delivery	0,00%	1,54%	9,23%	44,62%	44,62%
Format and visual presentation of deliverables	0,00%	0,00%	23,08%	33,85%	43,08%
Organisers' knowledge of the topic	0,00%	1,54%	4,62%	27,69%	66,15%
Workshop methods	0,00%	1,54%	24,62%	35,38%	38,46%
Availability of the team	0,00%	1,54%	20,00%	27,69%	50,77%
Social interactions	1,54%	9,23%	20,00%	27,69%	41,54%

The events scored a bit lower for reaching the expectations and for being enriching to the respondents, but still the overall majority scored these aspects with a score of 3 or more (see Table 5). The lowest scoring was for learning about new methodologies (37% scoring under 3/5), and consideration of using the new tools (32% scoring under 3/5). This is not so surprising, as the CLEARING HOUSE tools were either not yet existing (for the co-design events), or only in the conceptual phase (for the co-learning events). Interestingly, even with the events being organised before the final outputs were ready, 75% of the respondents indicated that they discovered new aspects that they would like to apply themselves.

Table 5. Have respondents' expectations been met and was the event enriching to them?

	Not at all (1)	2	3	4	Very much (5)
I learned a lot about UF-NBS	1,54%	18,46%	47,69%	21,54%	10,77%
I have established new contacts	6,15%	20,00%	46,15%	18,46%	9,23%
The discussions were inspiring	0,00%	3,08%	23,08%	43,08%	30,77%
I discovered new aspects for my own research/work	6,15%	18,46%	35,38%	20,00%	20,00%
I learned about new methodologies	9,23%	27,69%	40,00%	12,31%	10,77%
I will consider using one of the tools and/or apps shown	9,23%	23,08%	38,46%	18,46%	10,77%
Other	4,62%	0,00%	1,54%	0,00%	1,54%

The survey also included a qualitative question, about what the respondents have been missing throughout the workshops. This information is enriched with feedback that we gathered in informal discussions at the end, and after the workshops. Attendees indicated that

- the information and approach was quite scientific, with limited concrete information and tools that are useful for practice and applicable by public administration staff and/or citizens;
- concrete examples and hands-on tools are missing;
- they expected to learn more about the biodiversity aspect, about the role of urban planning, policy and decision-making, about management of urban forests

Being asked for the most relevant aspects for urban forests as nature-based solutions, the respondents mentioned, nature-based solutions, ecosystem services, biodiversity, climate change, health, citizen involvement, ecosystem management and succession (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Word cloud based on what the respondents indicated as the most relevant for the implementation of UF-NBS (in German, Polish, Catalan and Spanish)

3 Learning Architecture: Task Forces, City Tandems and International Workshops

The Learning Architecture included

- Two City Tandems:
    o Belo Horizonte (Brazil) and Mexico-City (Mexico), including mutual visits in March 2023
    o Istanbul (Turkey) and Haikou (China), including mutual visits in December 2023
- Two Task Forces (scientific missions by CLEARING HOUSE members and related scientists to a city, with the aim to give an evidence-based advice for developing urban forests as nature-based solutions in the cities): Bogota (Colombia, March 2023) and Braga (Portugal, June 2023)
- Three international Thematic Workshops (two planned in the grant agreement):
    o Urban Forestry Days (23 – 24 March 2021) – two days of webinars on urban forestry, in collaboration between EFI, EFUF (European Forum on Urban Forestry), CLEARING HOUSE, Metropolis, IUCN, the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) and the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture, Nature and Consumer Protection of North Rhine-Westfalia (700 participants)
    o A CLEARING HOUSE session during the Brussels Urban Summit (13 June 2023, organised by Eurocities, Metropolis and OECD) - Sustaining Cities, Naturally – Urban Ecosystem Restoration through Nature-based Solutions (over 85 participants)
    o A session "Collaborative Learning on Urban Forests as NBS in China and Europe", as a side event to the World Forum on Urban Forests in Washington DC (16 October 2023) (15 participants)

These activities have been described in the following report: De Vreese, R., Alsing, K. Barroso, I., Sousa-Silva, R., Burgos Cuevas, N., Berret, G. (2024). Final Report on the Knowledge Exchange Mechanism activities (Deliverable 3.5). H2020 project CLEARING HOUSE, grant agreement no. 821242. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11104064.

The Knowledge Exchange Mechanism activities have been successful, illustrated by the high number of participants, particularly in the virtual thematic workshop in 2021. The success of the City Tandems is illustrated through planned further collaborations and exchanges between Mexico-City and Belo Horizonte, and between Istanbul and Haikou. An important aspect of the City Tandems is building the formal and informal relationships between the cities involved, and their staff. This building of trust facilitates knowledge exchange and future collaborations.

An important disadvantage of the in-person exchanges (including the thematic workshops), is the high cost in terms of time, financial resources and carbon emissions. The activities within the Knowledge Exchange Mechanisms have been conceptualised before the outbreak of the Pandemic, in an era where the possibilities of virtual meeting and digital knowledge exchange was less established. In Table 6, we compare in-person and virtual exchanges.

Table 6. Comparing virtual and in-person exchanges

	In-person exchange	**Virtual exchange**
Audience	Limited number of selected participants, particularly at the sending end of the exchange	Broader group of people can be invited, attendees can pick specific sessions to attend
Scope and focus	Specific and detailed scope is possible; focus and programme can be more flexible, adapting to the specific questions	Scope and focus need to be defined ahead of the meeting, less flexibility to adapt to the interest and specific questions of attendees
Time investment	High time investment for travelling and attending, high time investment for preparing the visits	High time investment for preparing the online sessions, preparing the logistics and technical facilities
Financial investment	High financial investment for time, flights, hotels, meals etc.	Less financial investment for logistics, transport and catering, but higher investment for technical support and facilitation
Carbon emissions	High for flights and transport	Lower, but carbon emissions related to technical support, servers etc. should not be underestimated
Excursions	Quite easy to organise, flexible and attractive	Almost impossible to organise; alternative is video (pre-recorded or live streaming)
Personal relations	Personal relations and networks grow organically at in-person exchanges, during and between the sessions.	More difficult to build personal relations and networks.

Regarding the Task Forces, the mechanism has been particularly appreciated from both cities receiving specific evidence-based advice for their urban forests as nature-based solutions policies. It allowed the experts group commissioned by CLEARING HOUSE to provide concrete inputs within an inter-departmental exercise in both cities. However, both cities have expressed that a greater time

allocation from the experts' group would have been beneficial, but the limit imposed by the project proposal did not allow for greater involvement than three online meetings and a two days on-site exchanges. Indeed, it has to be noted that, participation from experts within the CLEARING HOUSE consortium was limited by Person Months (PMs), and participation from experts outside the CLEARING HOUSE consortium was made on a voluntary basis.

Nevertheless, this mechanism, which is similar to a technical assistance logic, has proven good results, with a review of a UF-NBS public policy development for Bogotá and specific orientations from worldwide best practices on UF-NBS as urban noises mitigation for Braga.

4 Pathways towards a sustainable institutionalisation of the CLEARING HOUSE Knowledge Exchange Mechanism

Knowledge Exchange, particularly these in the form of workshops, symposia and webinars, are traditionally included in projects. Once the project funding ends, there is a high reduction in knowledge exchange activities. To avoid this, and to keep the legacy of CLEARING HOUSE alive, we have been exploring possibilities for continuing the CLEARING HOUSE Knowledge Exchange after the end of the project. This exploration was also part of the process of drafting the final version of the Exploitation Plan, and has been discussed during the final Project Consortium meeting of the CLEARNG HOUSE consortium (Brussels, 30 November 2024).

Due to the decision to organise a joint final conference with CLEARING HOUSE and REGREEN, the institutionalisation workshop with users and stakeholders (M3.12) could not take place as planned during the final conference. An alternative solution was developed, by integrating the discussion on the institutionalisation of the knowledge exchange mechanisms with the exploitation planning process (Task 5.5). Based on the exploitation plan, the following actions are planned to continue the CLEARING HOUSE Knowledge Exchange:

- The **European Forum on Urban Forestry (EFUF)** has been established as a legal entity (international not-for-profit to Belgian law) in April 2023. The founding members of EFUF includes two persons working in CLEARING HOUSE (Rik De Vreese and Clive Davies). EFUF has played a key role in providing opportunities for disseminating CLEARING HOUSE outcomes, and for creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and networking. EFUF convenes every year in May in in-person meetings, and organises webinars and other digital events during the year. EFUF is supported by urban forestry experts, who contribute voluntarily to the EFUF events. Some CLEARING HOUSE consortium members are active in the EFI Board of Management (including the project coordinator). EFUF has signed a Memorandum of Understanding for structural collaboration with EFI (CLEARING HOUSE project coordinator). Through its communication channels, the European Forum on Urban Forestry will continue to promote the CLEARING HOUSE outcomes.
- Metropolis is developing a **Nature-based Solutions Community of Practice**, that will allow experts from cities above 1 million inhabitants to convene and to discuss and disseminate practical findings related to nature-based solutions and urban greening, a first activity has already been executed in 2023, unrelated to CLEARING HOUSE activities, more information in the following link (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcafRZHKm9w&t=5s).
- Metropolis is currently sounding out funding opportunities to setting up a **Fund for Piloting NBS in Metropolis**. The International Fund for Metropolises: Nature Based Solutions for Metropolitan territories would enable both effective development and implementation of

NBS strategies in local authorities from countries classified by the World Bank as Lower Income, Lower Middle Income or Upper Middle Income. It would be open to proposals from local authorities from metropolitan territories, cities that are hubs within agglomerations above 1 million inhabitants, and other secondary cities within the metropolitan territory of a major city. The focus of the Fund algins with Metropolis' focus (whose members are metropolitan cities or regions with over 1 million inhabitants).

- CLEARING HOUSE partners will continue to contribute to **NetworkNature** Task Forces and Events.
- EFI is partner in the **Horizon Europe UNPplus (Urban Nature Plans plus) project**, that is developing tools and training for local authorities to draft and implement Urban Greening Plans/Urban Nature Plans, in line with the proposed Nature Restoration Law. The project also includes knowledge exchange between the cities involved in the project, and other interesting cities.
- EFI is co-coordinating a training programme to over 100 cities in the project. The Urban Greening Exchanges included in UNPplus are a continued form of the city tandems in CLEARING HOUSE.
- Finally, the Sino-European collaboration will be continued under the "**International Initiative for R&I on Urban Forests as Nature-based Solutions in the Greater Bay Area**", including Guangzhou Institute of Forestry and Landscape Architecture, the Research Institute of Forestry (Chinese Academy of Forestry), the Beijing Forestry University, the Hong Kong University and Newcastle University. The initiative aims to continue the collaborative research on urban forests in Europe and China, the joint organisation of symposia on urban forestry in the Greater Bay Area, and to develop a co-learning platform for skills training and academic exchanges.

Some of these initiatives are receiving funding (NetworkNature, UGPplus), or have developed a business model that supports their continuation (EFUF). Others are still in need for funding (Metropolis Community of Practice and Pilot Fund & the International Initiative), although the probability of securing funding are considered moderate to high.

The different initiatives mentioned above, cater for diverging target groups. The initiatives by Metropolis are targeted towards Metropolis' target group, **metropolitan cities and city regions** (so cities above 1 million inhabitants). **Smaller cities** are the focus group of the UNPplus project and the EFUF events. UNPplus' capacity building programme will integrate CLEARING HOUSE outcomes and will be brought to at least 100 cities and towns in Europe. **Researchers** will be engaged through the EFUF meetings and the Sino-European International Initiative for R&I on UF-NBS in the Greater Bay Area. **Policy-makers** will be reached through EFUF, UNPplus and policy briefs being developed within EFI and UNPplus.

CONCLUSION

The activities in the CLEARING HOUSE Collaborative Learning work package have been well perceived by the attendees, and have contributed to awareness raising and extending the knowledge on urban forests as nature-based solutions. Opportunities for future continuation of the knowledge exchange have been identified, but funding is needed to be able to initiate some of the developed ideas.