



JUSTNATURE 8TH PROJECT MEETING IN ESSEN HIGHLIGHTS PROGRESS TOWARD A JUST, LOW-CARBON EUROPE.



JUSTNature partners after the 8th Joint Project Meeting, on October 8th 2025.

At the 8th Joint Project Meeting of the EU-funded JUSTNature initiative, held in Essen, Germany, in early October 2025, partners from across Europe gathered to review the project's achievements and chart the path forward for equitable, climate-positive urban transformation. Hosted by RWI - Leibniz Institute for Economic Research, the meeting marked a pivotal moment as the project enters the final phase, focused on measuring impact, replication, and policy integration.

The event kicked off on October 7th, with an online talk by Prof. Dr. Sonja Gantioler, former JUSTNature project coordinator, who shared insights on her attendance to the annual NetworkNature event in Brussels, during which she represented the project. New project leader, Jessica Balest (EURAC Research), together with Silvia Zanolin (EURAC Research) then took the floor, officially welcoming the Consortium to the **last Joint Project Meeting**. They presented the plans for the last remaining months of the project, including milestones to be achieved and steps to be taken also beyond the end of the project's life.



It was then the turn for the usual updates from each of the Work Package teams, who shared news from the past months, reflections on the overall progress made, and contributions towards maximizing JUSTNature's impact. First, an overview of the project's data management plan and the **key exploitable results (KERs)** related to the data monitoring & evaluation framework. Afterwards, insights on the project's implementation diaries and tasks related to the green interventions in the City Practice Labs (CiPeLs).

City representatives shared evidence of **tangible impacts** in their CiPeLs. In Szombathely, Hungary, the city's open corridor along the Gyöngyös River has become a thriving green public space maintained by neighbours and professionals alike, and the schoolyard of Dési Huber István primary school a lively and green leisure space for schoolchildren and teachers. Both sites showcase how local communities can steward nature through shared responsibility. Leuven's (Belgium) modular green installations at the Constantin Meunier street have resulted in improved use of public space and a boost in biodiversity in the area, while the greening of the city's central prison's yard has secured access to green space for the inmates. Gzira, Malta, is in turn redefining urban microclimates through citizen science, green walls, and smart traffic systems to reduce pollution and heat stress. Other highlights included the gender-sensitive redesign of inner courtyards in Munich (Germany), where access to open green spaces has been improved in the city through the interventions at the St. Anna school and the Bellevue di Monaco cultural centre. In the Italian CiPeLs, Merano revitalized a neighbourhood park turning it into a biodiversity hotspot, and Bolzano developed a high biodiversity green roof with PV panels in the city centre. Chania's (Greece) vertical garden not only greened a dense, concrete-dominated area, but also improved its air quality and thermo-control capabilities.



The day continued with a session dedicated to **ethics considerations** in NbS projects. By presenting several ethical dilemmas that can potentially arise in citizen participation processes, the project's Ethics Committee created a space for reflection among project partners. They suggested trigger questions such as:

- How do I understand my role in the project? How does this role influence the way I view issues of ethics and research integrity?
- What is one ethical dilemma I have noticed during the project, or a risk I can imagine? What happened here, or might happen? What was (or might be) the impact?
- What ethical dilemma or risk did you write about? What might happen if no action is taken? How might you deal with this issue?

After group discussions and a sharing session, one key conclusion emerged: ethics is everyone's business!



The Essen meeting emphasised **co-governance and inclusivity** throughout the entire project's life, mentioning how cities can share decision-making power with residents. *"We've seen remarkable progress in citizen engagement,"* said Dr. Beatriz Kauark Fontes from Technical University of Munich (TUM). *"Many partners have advanced from consultation to genuine collaboration, where communities now help shape long-term environmental policy."*

The Work Package 7 team reported progress on its upcoming **Handbook on Co-Governance Capabilities**, offering tools for European municipalities to embed participation, justice, and social equity in climate action. They also guided an interactive session titled *Resources and Action Mapping: Linking Individual Capacities to Wider Change*, during which city representatives had the opportunity to reflect on the main changes they've observed in their personal agency and individual capacities related to co-governance and notions of justice. In exchanges among themselves and with other projects partners, they focused on how they now perceive their ability to influence positive change within the structural conditions of their municipalities and work environments.



The meeting's second day featured presentations on digital tools and sensor-based monitoring on one hand, and the project's Entrepreneurial Activation Process and business plans on the other one. There was also time to focus on the communication and dissemination activities, particularly in view of the project's ending. At this stage, sharing our achievements, maximising our impact, and ensuring the replication of our learnings and actions are central to **securing the legacy** of JUSTNature.

Looking ahead, the Consortium aims to scale its findings through the Nature-Building Cities Helix, a Europe-wide innovation network that connects cities, SMEs, and policymakers to mainstream just, low-carbon solutions. *"The transition must be fair,"* noted project coordinator Jessica Balest, *"environmental quality—clean air, cooling green spaces, biodiversity—cannot remain privileges for the few. They are rights for all."*

Discussions also revolved around the **JUSTNature Final Conference**, to be held in Brussels on the 10th and 11th of February 2026, which will bring together experts, policymakers, community representatives, and innovators to celebrate the outcomes of years of collaborative work on just and nature-based urban transformations. The inspiring work carried out by the cities will be showcased alongside the project's key achievements, lessons learned, and real-world impacts from across Europe. Participants will have the opportunity to engage in interactive discussions, explore innovative tools and solutions for sustainable city planning, and connect with international peers who share a commitment to environmental justice and urban resilience.



The 8th and last Project Meeting closed with reflections on the broader European Green Deal agenda. By linking social inclusion and environmental restoration, JUSTNature is proving that Nature-based Solutions can serve both people and the planet, laying the groundwork for cities that are climate-resilient, economically viable, and socially just. Several partners expressed interest in developing “JUSTNature 2.0,” **building on the strong results and positive outcomes of the project**, not only in terms of NbS implementation, but also in the personal synergies and collectively gained knowledge. Here’s to making it happen together!



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