



**BETWEEN NOVEMBER 12TH AND 14TH 2024, THE JUSTNATURE CONSORTIUM MET IN GZIRA, MALTA, FOR THE SIXTH PROJECT MEETING AND FOURTH COLLABORATIVE CIPEL WORKSHOP.**



The JUSTNature Consortium in Malta, during the first day of the 6<sup>th</sup> Joint Project Meeting, on November 13th 2024.

The JUSTNature project partners met in Gzira, Malta, in November 2024 to celebrate the 6th Joint Project Meeting and 4th Collaborative CiPeL Workshop. Representatives from six JUSTNature cities together with partner organisations spent three days of productive collaboration in the island, reviewing the project's progress, sharing insights on the implementation process and collectively planning the way forward. The event was hosted by the regional partners Research Innovation Unit and University of Malta.

## **DAY 1**

The three-day event kicked off in the morning of November 12th, when the consortium was welcomed by the **Mayor of Gzira, Mr. Neveille Cechtuti**, and by the **Executive Secretary of the Gzira Local Council, Ms. Mandy Farrugia**, who highlighted the importance of the JUSTNature project's mission. With an emphasis on fairness in urban transformations, Ms. Farrugia stressed the need to recognise all communities –no matter their size– to ensure a future for everyone: “justice in sustainability is essential, not an option”, she said. In that, she commended the consortium for the work conducted in the JUSTNature project.



#### 4TH COLLABORATIVE CIPEL WORKSHOP

The **4th Collaborative CiPeL Workshop**, led by our colleagues from Prospex Institute, started after the opening speeches. Focused on the **Entrepreneurial Activation Process (EAP)**, the workshop began with a presentation by EURAC Research on engagement with the private sector and harnessing of the EAP. **Nature-based Solutions (NbS)**, as explained by Chiara Pellegrini, are not only a key solution to environmental and humanitarian challenges stemming from nature loss, but their **market demand** is also expected to double by 2030, according to recent research. This creates a compelling case for private sector involvement in their deployment: firstly due to growing demand, and secondly because **collective action** is essential. Achieving a just transition to low-carbon cities for everyone requires as many stakeholders as possible at the table. Pellegrini explored the different roles that private entrepreneurs can fulfil in NbS implementation, providing thus an array of options for entrepreneurial activation.

Afterwards, the City Practice Lab (CiPeL) representatives from Leuven (Belgium), Munich (Germany), Szombathely (Hungary), Chania (Greece), Gzira (Malta) and Bolzano (Italy) were invited to pair up in groups and collectively reflect on the following questions:

- What role can your municipality play in supporting local businesses to promote the growth of Nature-based Solutions in your CiPeL?
- Given your municipality's dependency on national and regional policies, what is your scope for developing independent strategies and plans?
- What is a next step you could take to begin engaging the private sector in upscaling and growing NbS?
- What do you expect from the 5th Local Stakeholder Workshop (LSW) regarding private sector engagement?

Finally, the session concluded with presentations from the city of Leuven and the city of Merano, during which their local entrepreneurial activation processes were shared with the other project partners.

The second session of the CCW4 was led by Viktor Bukovszki from ABUD. It evolved around the use of **Nature-building Communities (NbC)** to enhance EAPs. Here, CiPeL representatives gathered in groups again, and were introduced to an exercise that they will carry out themselves with local parties during the upcoming **Local Stakeholder Workshop 5 (LSW5)**. In preparation of the workshop, there was also a presentation on **power dynamics**, thinking to enhance EAPs. The last morning session, in charge of the project coordinator Sonia Gantioler (EURAC Research) was precisely dedicated to

presenting theory on power dynamics and exploring ways to turn that theory into reality in the context of the EAP, having the LSW5 in mind. The use of **sentiment analysis** was explored, and Gaventa's power cube methodology was explained. Understanding that both decisions are made and people have power to engage in different spaces, at different levels and in diverse forms was one of the session's key points. It was the starting point of a final work group exercise, during which city partners discussed about the spaces that their communities need to fully participate in NbS activation, as well as the capabilities they might need to do so.



In the afternoon, the consortium received two **external experts**: Dr. Mario Balzan, senior lecturer and founder of Ecostack Innovations, and artist, educator and architect Tom van Malderen. Having experience in both nature-based solutions and nature-based design, Balzan and van Malderen provided **outside-in perspectives on EAP**, and took part in the fourth session of the day: Fine Tuning LSW5 Plans. Throughout this activity, and with the aftermath of the previous sessions, each of the CiPeL partners created plans for the upcoming LSW workshops, to be organised by them in the coming months. They presented their plans to both the external experts and the other city partners, with space for feedback from all parties. It was an enriching exchange of ideas, feedback, proposals and suggestions!



The day wrapped up with an open discussion moderated by Prospex Institute. All participants were invited to share final reflections arising from the day's workshop, including challenges identified, stories of success, and other relevant experiences. The conversation centred on the maintenance of the implemented NbS in the CiPeLs, noting the following messages as key consideration points:



- Storing indicators and data at the city level: This ensures that the performance and management of NbS and NbC can be effectively monitored, with the support of the adequate policies.
- Securing funding for efficient maintenance: Adequate financial resources are crucial for upkeep, and engaging the private sector at this stage can provide valuable support.
- Ensuring long-term sustainability: Maintaining NbS over time guarantees their continued benefits, amplifying the project's overall impact.
- Raising community awareness and fostering ownership: Highlighting the benefits of NbS maintenance encourages community involvement, creating a shared sense of responsibility and commitment to their care.

## DAY 2

### 6TH PROJECT MEETING

The second day in Malta marked the beginning of the **6th Joint Project Meeting**, during which project partners gathered for a comprehensive review of both the past six months and the project's progress throughout its three years. The event started with an introduction session by EURAC Research: Sonia Gantioler's presentation outlined an overview of the project's progress, looking at on-going and completed tasks, as well as key milestones. In view of the next REA review, an evaluation on how the Advisory Committee's latest feedback has been addressed was also carried out. In turn, Silvia Zanolin presented the main updates from the coordination work package, highlighting the effectiveness of the project's established governance scheme, and the operative work of the **Ethics Committee**, as well as the compliance of JUSTNature's **Gender Equality Strategy**. The first part of the morning concluded with an **interactive House of Commons session**. Project partners were invited to take part in an open debate on specific motions, inspired by divisive and thought-provoking statements. With only two clearly defined positions for each motion, the session provided an excellent opportunity for everyone to defend their viewpoints and persuade others to "change sides" in pursuit of a majority. The session was a true manifestation of the power of words, and brought to light how challenging and complex different governance schemes can be.

Later on, EURAC Research gave a presentation on the potentials of NbS and the JUSTPlanT Method-Kit, with a focus on **exploitation**. Our partners from ABUD and the Technical University of Crete, likewise, reported on their efforts in the **monitoring and evaluation** of NbS over their lifecycle. With a focus on the project's key exploitable results (KERs), they referred to the storage and monitoring of data from the CiPeLs, as well as the development of the Machine Learning Toolkit and the Operational Decision Support System prototypes.



The afternoon evolved around the City Practice Labs. First, Prospex Institute gave a presentation on the **facilitation of the CiPeLs**, putting emphasis on **engagement strategies** to reach a wider range of stakeholders and initiatives through the project. Once again, the related key results and impact achieved so far were introduced: among them, the creation of guidelines on power dynamics and countervailing measures was highlighted. Then, E2ARC together with ISOCARP Institute and Prospex Institute shared the latest updates related to the **implementation of NbS** in CiPeLs, including the green interventions and the exercise of **cross-learning activities** with the twinning cities. They reviewed challenges in procurement, budget variations and time management, and introduced the work strategy for the coming months.

It was also the occasion for city representatives to share the latest developments in their CiPeLs, and address both key achievements and encountered challenges. The past months were marked by **impressive advancements in the green interventions**, with the official inauguration of many of the pilot site transformations. It is rewarding to see how so many of our plans materialised! With the upcoming Local Stakeholder Workshops in mind, city partners also unveiled their plans for the coming months.



Finally, E2ARC and the University of Munich reviewed the latest results that arose from the **second cycle of the Learning Log**. After sharing insights on the activity's takeaways, there was space for a collective discussion on strategies to best address common challenges related to co-governance, empowerment, inclusivity and justice. Group tables were organised and CiPeLs were paired up to exchange.

### DAY 3

The last day of our meeting counted with a presentation of University of Munich, ABUD and ISOCARP Institute informing about the progress made on the topic of **co-governance of NbS**. The establishment of the Nature-building Communities was a highlight of the main results from the past months, and the plans for the future included the preparation of the third cycle of the project's Learning Log. Then, our partners from IES, Technical University of Crete and ABUD shared the latest developments regarding the development of the CiPeLs' **Digital Twins** (including the **Outdoor Thermal Comfort Simulation**) and the governance platform for NbS. Their session was followed by insights from Inlecom and EURAC Research, who provided an overview of the latest tasks carried out for the engagement of local entrepreneurs and businesses. In line with one of the meeting's focus points, the project's **Entrepreneurial Activation Process**, our partners shared the latest on the strategy to activate local

innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems. They also updated the consortium on the state of the development of the project's commercial ecosystem and the exploitation of key innovative results.

Later on, the University of Malta and the ISOCARP Institute, together with Crowdhelix, presented the latest, upcoming and on-going **communication and dissemination** activities. The partners also discussed the best ways in which the JUSTNature's results can be disseminated at this particular stage of the project, in which many of the green interventions have been materialised, and when the private sector's involvement is a clear objective, having both maintenance and upscaling in mind. The meeting also gave the communication team, in collaboration with the WP5, the perfect chance to interview the city representatives, in view of creating videos with **first hand testimonies** about their experiences in the JUSTNature project so far. Stay tuned to see the results!

The 6th Project Meeting concluded with an open General Assembly session, during which diverse topics were discussed. Among them, adjustments to the internal peer review process, ethics considerations, and preparations for the REA review, to take place in late November.

It was then the time for project partners to visit the **Stella Maris College**, scenario to various JUSTNature activities in Gzira. The consortium met with school representatives, who shared the experience of conducting a Tree Inventory activity with students, promoted by the local JUSTNature team. The initiative allowed for the collection of geotagged information, key for the development of Gzira's digital twin, and also set the groundwork for learning activities for students in an array of school courses. With the collected data, it was possible to calculate carbon sequestration from the air, amounts of oxygen released through photosynthesis, dust filtration, temperature changes through transpiration, and other air quality related indicators, all of which helped determine the number of trees needed to achieve carbon neutrality in Gzira. All in all, a most inspiring initiative to engage with the local student community while conducting data collection. This example of raising awareness about the benefits of urban nature provided a perfect conclusion to our Joint Project Meeting, demonstrating yet another way co-creation can engage and embrace a diversity of perspectives within the community.



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