# Insights from Mannheim!

October 14 - 16 2025

UNP+ Urban Nature Exchange agenda and important information

URBAN NATURE PLANS +

Funded by the European Union

UGPplus is funded by the European Union (Grant Agreement No. 101135386).V iews and opin- ions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor REA can be held responsible for them.

# The UNE in short

From 14–16 October 2025, the third in-person Urban Nature Exchange took place in Mannheim, bringing together city representatives, researchers, and partners to explore the integration of biodiversity, communication, financing, and resilience into Urban Nature Plans ( UNPs). During the three-day event, we experienced Mannheim's transformation firsthand, from military sites that have been converted into green, inclusive housing districts, to cross-departmental approaches that link nature, climate, and community. The UNE balanced workshops, exchanges, and site visits with creative and reflective moments that fostered collaboration and inspiration.


## Day 1

The UNE began with an introduction to **Mannheim's Biodiversity Strategy, presented by the city's Nature Conservation Authority**. This strategy is under development and is structured around three overarching goals: preserving and promoting biodiversity; raising awareness and acceptance of biodiversity; and creating synergies across sectors to enhance and protect biodiversity. **Six key areas of action and cross-cutting themes** were presented, including 1) watercourse development, 2) wildlife management, 3) agriculture, 4) urban diversity, 5) species conservation,and 6) forestry. Important cross-cutting themes such as invasive species, environmental education, and the aesthetic value of nature provide insight into the work that will happen in each action area. We learned that the

**city's unique landscape**, framed by two rivers and comprising diverse habitats ranging from floodplains to drifting dunes, **makes it a biodiversity hotspot**. The city's efforts to engage children, marginalised groups and residents with migrant backgrounds through table talks, online portals and decentralised events demonstrate that public participation and education lie at the heart of the city's planning approach. A key takeaway was that **lasting transformation depends on a collective mindset shift that takes time, patience and persistence**.

The following session, **'Data Dashboards'**, explored how cities can use centralised data platforms to improve planning, monitoring and communication. **Case studies from London, Glasgow and Barcelona** demonstrated how dashboards and biodiversity atlases can make complex information more accessible and actionable. Discussions highlighted the **opportunities** (hint: cities might be able to do more with existing resources than they first think) **and challenges**, including limited resources, fragmented data ownership and the need for clear political commitment to sustain such efforts. We all agreed that **data visualisation supports technical work and helps to tell the story of why urban nature matters**.


Just after lunch, **Prof. Dr. Diana Pretzell, the Environmental Mayor of Mannheim**, welcomed us to the City and **reflected on the interdependence of climate and biodiversity**. She emphasised that both issues need to be addressed together in urban planning and communication: '*We have to frame biodiversity better — not as another burden for cities, but as part of the solution to making urban life liveable*.' She spoke about Mannheim's **climate action leadership**, its warming plan, and the **importance of enabling citizens to take action** while making sustainability relevant to everyday concerns.

In the afternoon, we set out on a site visit to the **Spinelli and Franklin areas, where Mannheim has transformed former American military sites into green corridors and inclusive neighbourhoods**. First stop was **Spinelli Park, a 58 ha urban park** where the State Horticultural Exhibition took place in 2023. It provides habitats for plants and wildlife, recreational and sports opportunities, and channels fresh air into the city (an important point for the city's land-use planning). The **Spinelli**

**neighborhood**, our second stop and adjacent to the park, **combines greenery with urban living**: streets and courtyards are planted, facades are greened, and a variety of housing types and sizes cater to different needs of families, singles, students, and older residents. The development emphasises sustainability through timber construction, groundwater management and largely car-free streets, while community spaces encourage interaction and shared use.

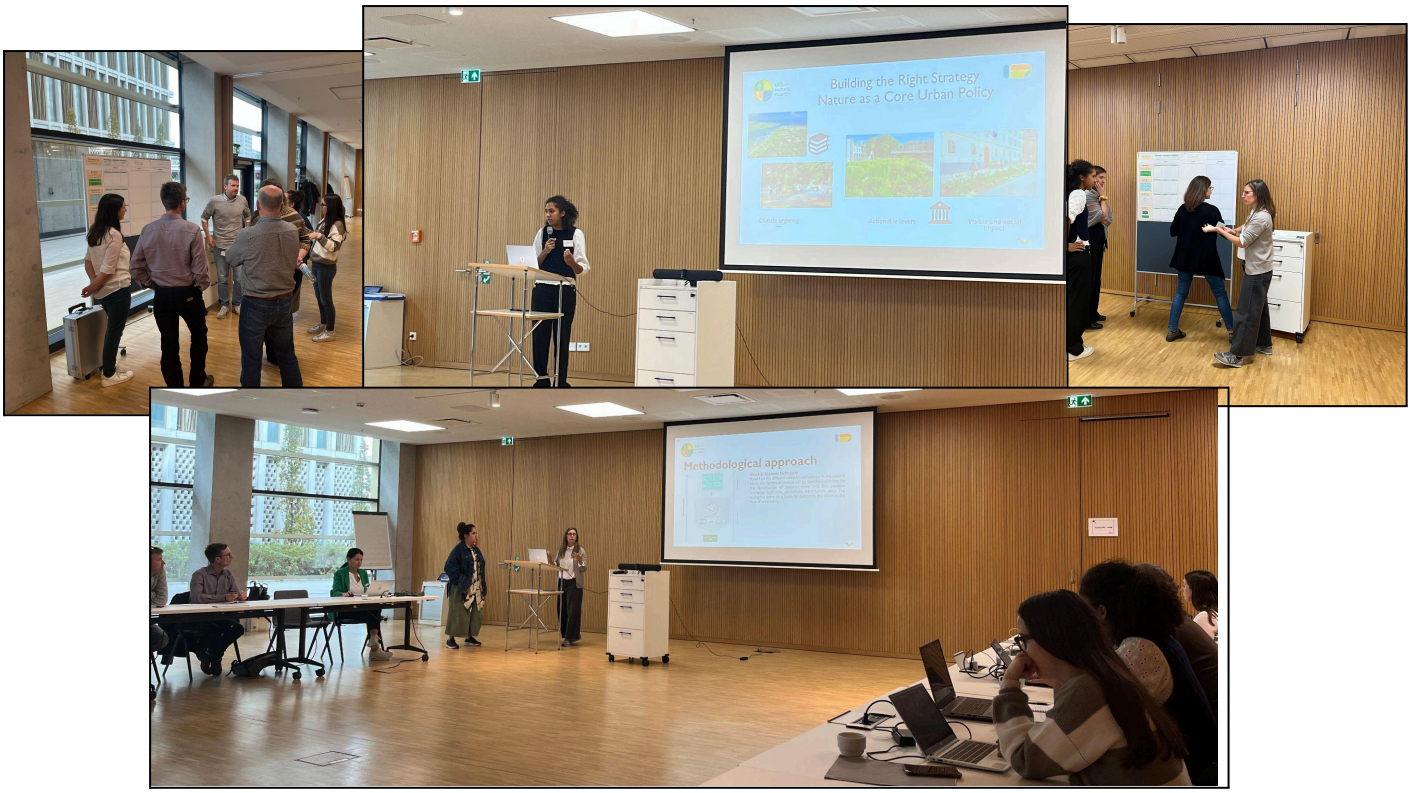
**Franklin District**, Mannheim's largest redevelopment project, integrates energy efficiency, mobility, and community building across 1.4 million square metres. The district **retains the historical barracks layout while integrating residential, commercial and community spaces**. Its generous green corridors, known as the Franklin Green Fields, form a U-shaped network that connects all sub-areas and creates recreational spaces throughout the district. Franklin Mitte, the central area, features a mix of apartment buildings and terraced houses, as well as essential infrastructure, sports facilities, and cultural venues. The tour vividly illustrated how the **city's motto, 'From sealed land to living space'**, is being realised through co-creation, adaptive reuse and long-term ecological planning.

## Day 2

The second day began with the **'Deep Green**' session, which was hosted by the **Local Green Deal Team from Mannheim**. The team presented how **the city translates European climate and sustainability goals into local action** through its Climate Action Plan, which involves interdisciplinary cooperation across eight action fields: ambitious climate targets, clean energy, sustainable economy, environmentally friendly mobility, sustainable construction, land use and food, biodiversity and ecosystems, pollution-free environment. By acting as **connectors across departments**, the team embodies a **collaborative governance model within the administration**. They described their approach as 'a start-up inside city hall' — agile, creative and quality-driven. They have enjoyed success by fostering trust and engagement within the administration and using tools such as ClimateView to visualise $CO_2$ reductions and track progress on over 300 measures.

Next, the **Communications and Community Engagement workshop** demonstrated **Citizen Science** as an example of participatory communication.  We had the chance to experience how shared observation and curiosity can connect citizens with nature, by using the Merlin and eBird app to do some birdwatching and identification. The discussion touched on limitations of different processes, tools and methodologies highlighting the importance of  diversity and inclusion, and recognising that **citizen science must reach beyond those who are already engaged by adapting the language and format to local contexts.**

In the afternoon, the **'Building a Shared Vision for Renaturing Cities'** session provided **guidance to cities on developing long-term visions and goals for urban nature**. The Greening Cities worked on aligning their context-specific challenges with actionable visions, discussing scenarios, timeframes and stakeholder engagement. The message was clear: **a vision must be realistic, co-created and regularly reviewed** to remain relevant and effective.




The day concluded at the [Green School in Luisenpark](), **Mannheim's award-winning centre for environmental education**. Nestled amid the park's greenery, the **Green School is a lively hub for discovery where science, creativity, and curiosity come together**. During our guided tour, we explored the **Insect Hill** with its colourful wildflower meadows, nesting structures, and habitat towers, and learnt about the **Flowers for the Future** initiative, which promotes planting climate-adapted species with long blooming seasons to support pollinators. We also learnt how the Green School engages visitors of all ages with interactive workshops, themed tours and events such as the annual '**Day of the Insects**', where experts, families and young explorers can delve into the fascinating world of beetles, bees and butterflies. **Through field experiments and engaging activities, participants learn how small actions can make a big difference**, such as building insect hotels (perhaps better called houses!) and planting a variety of plant species. The Green School is a prime example of how

education, science and imagination can come together to raise awareness and nurture a sense of stewardship for the natural world. As our guide summed it up beautifully: *'Opportunities are everywhere — you just have to seize them.'*

In the evening, participants attended **a discussion and concert with artists from the National Theatre Mannheim**. Combining music and climate storytelling, the performance evoked the emotional dimension of environmental change. The performance offered a fresh and powerful way to raise awareness of the urgency of climate action and the need to protect nature.

## Day 3

On the final day, the **focus was on reflection, integration and next steps**. During the **Reflexive Monitoring** session, the Greening Cities took a first step to align their **Dynamic Learning Agendas** with their **UNP technical support work plans**. The cities presented their critical turning points and discussed how to translate learning into concrete actions. Mannheim representatives reflected on the progress they have made, e.g.publishing its sealing concept and green roof register and advancing the political process for adopting its biodiversity strategy, while also acknowledging the challenges they have faced in terms of budget allocation and departmental coordination.


**Lighthouse Cities and non-city partners offered advice**: Paris representatives offered insights from its six-year greening plan and indicators, while Barcelona representatives emphasised the importance of integrating financial foresight into long-term planning. Mannheim's reflections on balancing ambition and feasibility were particularly well-received, particularly the suggestion to **prioritise what can be achieved within the next 14 months while laying the groundwork for future iterations of its UNP**.


The '**Business Model Canvas**' session introduced **methods for financing and entrepreneurship in nature-based solutions**. Discussions revealed the need for better internal structures, knowledge exchange and capacity building. Mannheim shared its plan to establish a knowledge hub and explore new partnerships for funding and innovation.

The UNE concluded with an **Open Space session**, where participants held small-group and one-on-one exchanges on resilience, communication, and their shared understanding after more than one and a half years of developing Urban Nature Plans within UNP+. The session provided space for reflection, dialogue, and alignment.

The Mannheim UNE demonstrated that **the path to creating greener, more resilient cities is not straightforward; it is an ongoing process of collective learning, experimentation, and adaptation**. The story of Mannheim illustrates how local commitment, cross-sector teamwork and creativity can transform vision into action, reconnecting people with the natural environment on their doorstep.

# Key learnings

The following key learnings are structured around the four main pillars of the project: **Biodiversity**, **City**, **Connection**, and **Community**.

- **Local projects and pilot sites such as Luisenpark, Spinelli, and Franklin illustrate that well-designed interventions — whether modest or large-scale — can deliver biodiversity, social, and climate benefits while engaging communities.** These examples show that impact can occur at multiple scales when design quality, community engagement, and ecological intent align.
- **Visioning is a strategic tool for shaping desirable futures.** Visioning involves collaboratively imagining and defining a preferred future state to guide present-day decisions and actions. Visioning **supports foresight, informs urban planning, and enables sustainable transitions by aligning stakeholders** around shared goals and adaptive strategies.
- **Effective urban vision development requires the involvement of diverse internal and external stakeholders**, including public authorities, private sector actors, and civil society.
- **Successful vision development and execution depend on adequate financial and human resources, as well as sustained commitment from all involved parties.** Aligning stakeholders and maintaining focus on implementation priorities are essential for long-term success.
- **Planning** – both strategic and spatial – **must balance ambition with local realities,** such as political commitment, funding constraints, extreme weather, and the social and physical context of each city. Feasible, actionable **goals should follow SMART principles** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound), ensuring plans are realistic while still driving meaningful progress.
- **Cities need to re-learn how to use maps** not just as visuals, but as tools to ask questions and explore interconnections, dependencies, and co-influences between spatial and social dynamics.
- **Business model thinking can help finance and sustain components of Urban Nature Plans**.
- Long-term u**rban nature visions are strongest when developed collaboratively** with stakeholders across multiple scales of government, city departments, community groups, and leadership levels.

- **Visioning processes should link short-term actions to long-term goals**, and these goals should be clearly communicated by city leaders and project managers to both internal stakeholders and the public, regularly reviewed, and publicly visible to maintain accountability and momentum.
- A **clear, inclusive vision is the cornerstone for aligning stakeholders** and guiding consistent action over time.
- Data-driven decision-making and visual tools such as **dashboards are essential for cities to centralise information, monitor key indicators, and communicate progress** effectively to citizens.
- Accessible and visual **data platforms**, such as biodiversity atlases or dashboards, **help track urban nature**, support interventions, engage stakeholders, demonstrate impact, and improve transparency by consolidating data in one place.
- Interdisciplinary **collaboration can turn climate targets into local action**, connecting biodiversity, mobility, and social goals, like for example the Local Green Deal in Mannheim.
- Communication and engagement matter! **Participatory science must be locally relevant and inclusive**. Clear, evidence-based communication of the vision, goals, and outcomes increases buy-in from stakeholders and the public.
- **Our communities thrive when nature, mobility, housing, and inclusion are designed together from the start.** Just take a look at the Spinelli area of Mannheim!

# Interested in more in-depth content?

## Presentations from the sessions:

- Data Dashboard
  - Introduction - Caroline Nash
  - Glasgow Case Study - Gilian Dick
  - Barcelona Case Study - Marc Montlleo
- Deep Green w/ Local Green Deal Team
- Communication: Engaging communities through citizen science
- Building a shared vision for renaturing cities
- Reflexive Monitoring
- Business Model Canvas
- Notes of all sessions can be found here

### Further links:

- IDEAL for Mannheim – Our Local Green Deal (Explanation video)
- Mannheim's Climate Neutrality Action Plan
- More detailed information about the Spinelli area
- More detailed information about the Franklin area
- Data Dashboards:
    - Glasgow Urban Model
    - Observatori de la Biodiversitat de Barcelona
    - Barcelona Web map viewer

# Visual impressions

**Day I: Welcome to Mannheim, Technical Townhall, Spinelli area and Franklin quartier**

*Technical Townhall*

*Exhibition "Spatial order model - target vision 2040+"*

*Spinelli Park*

*Spinelli neighborhood*

*Franklin Area*

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**Day II: Birding, Luisenpark and a concert with artists from the National Theatre Mannheim**


*Deep Dive Local Green Deal*

*Birding*

*Focused: Building a vision for the future...*


*Visiting Luisenpark in the afternoon...*

*....environmental education, an insect home city and a lot of old trees and flowers!*