

## Committee on Governance, Civic Engagement and the Environment (Governance Committee)

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### Nature on the edge: How local and regional authorities can promote biodiversity

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#### Summary

Urban and rural communities across Europe are experiencing an unprecedented loss of biodiversity. Intensive agriculture, construction, and pollution are among the many long-standing causes. Added to this, climate change and its associated temperature increases, and extreme weather events is also fuelling species decline. Europe's biodiversity has never been in greater peril.

This loss of wildlife means a loss of natural beauty and wonder and has hidden economic costs. More than this, it threatens entire ecosystems and, ultimately, people's way of life.

This report guides local and regional authorities in taking an ambitious and central role not only in protecting biodiversity, but in actively promoting it. As part of a multilevel governance approach, sub-national authorities can play a vital, on-the-ground role delivering on national policies and international commitments, such as those relating to the Kunming-Montreal Global Diversity Framework and Council of Europe Strategy on the environment.

A range of policy options are explored including the use of local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans, applying the "right of nature" concept at the sub-national level, and the elimination of harmful subsidies and recognition of the underlying economic value of biodiversity. Ensuring public support by means of proper consultation is addressed. So too are ways to expand and create access to funding, including from international institutions.

These policy options sit alongside a range of contemporary examples in which European local and regional authorities have taken meaningful action, including in cooperation with other levels of government, non-governmental organisations and others.

By applying concrete steps and best practices, real progress can be made towards reversing the decline of biodiversity and ensuring a healthy future for Europe's ecology.

1. L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions  
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress  
SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats  
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group  
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group  
PFE: Patriots for Europe Group  
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress.

## DRAFT RESOLUTION<sup>2</sup>

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

- a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122, "the Charter"), in particular its Articles 3, 4, and 9;
- b. the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats ("Bern Convention", ETS No.104) and its Strategic Plan 2030;
- c. the Council of Europe Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176), as amended by the 2016 Protocol (CETS No. 219);
- d. the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law (CETS No. 228);
- e. the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022) under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and related international commitments;
- f. the "Reykjavik Declaration: United for Europe" adopted at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023;
- g. the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment (2025), as adopted by the Committee of Ministers, and its accompanying Action Plan, notably Strategic Objectives 2 and 5 relating to democratic governance and protection of biodiversity;
- h. Congress Resolution ... (2026) "Congress priorities 2026–2031";
- i. Congress Resolution ... (2026) and Recommendation ... (2026) "How can we cope with coastal erosion?";
- j. Congress Resolution 511 (2025) and Recommendation 529 (2025) "Water resources under stress: towards better local and regional governance";
- k. Congress Resolution 503 (2024) and Recommendation 512 (2024) "Fostering a circular economy at local and regional levels";
- l. Congress Resolution 500 (2024) and Recommendation 510 (2024) "Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience";
- m. Congress Resolution 489 (2022) and Recommendation 484 (2022) "A fundamental right to the environment: a matter for local and regional authorities. Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government";
- n. Congress Resolution 486 (2022) and Recommendation 480 (2022) "Smart cities and regions – prospects for a human rights-based governance approach"

2. The Congress underlines that:

- a. Biodiversity sits alongside pollution and climate change as one of the three inter-related strands of the triple planetary crisis that European leaders pledged to address at 2023 Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government;
- b. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has prioritised helping sub-national authorities to play their part in addressing this triple planetary crisis as part of a multilevel governance approach;
- c. Biodiversity is increasingly imperilled as a consequence of various and often long-standing man-made threats, but made worse by the increased intensity of climate change and increases in temperature and extreme weather events that accompany it, including drought, flooding and wildfires;

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<sup>2</sup> Approved by the Governance Committee on 16 October 2026.

d. Species throughout Europe are therefore experiencing record pressures and decline that is forecast to worsen;

e. Loss of species presents a threat to the broader ecosystem and poses a direct threat to people's way of life, the economy and livelihoods and, ultimately, life itself;

f. Action at every level of government is therefore required by means of innovative new policies and the spread of best practice;

g. Sub-national authorities in particular have a role to play in developing policy solutions that best fit their particular situation and challenges, help achieve policy outcomes and commitments agreed at national and international level and, as the level of government closes to communities, put in place the consultative processes required to ensure public confidence and support.

3. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

a. Prioritise and embed action to protect and promote biodiversity, tailored to specific urban and rural conditions, as part of a broader commitment to environmental action through multilevel governance;

b. Invest in nature in all areas within their competence in order to encourage ecosystem recovery and sustainability, including for example in parks, nature corridors, tree planting and rewilding, as well as in improved water management and regenerative agriculture, well-managed fisheries and sustainable continuous cover forestry;

c. Coordinate community-led restoration and biodiversity monitoring projects;

d. Develop local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans that mainstream ecological targets across non-environmental sectors such as municipal budgeting, transport and zoning and planning; develop timelines for checking and, where appropriate, raise ecological targets;

e. Underpin policies, strategies and action plans with an understanding of the true value of biodiversity including: the intrinsic value of nature to people's health and wellbeing; the concept of the "rights of nature"; the prevention and elimination of harmful subsidies and reorientation of public spending towards green procurement; and environmental accounting that recognises natural capital as an asset which, when lost, usually involves long-term financial costs that outweigh short-term gains;

f. Put in place inclusive consultative processes that build trust and community buy-in – for the protection and promotion of biodiversity, including from the private sector; in particular draw from best practice and consider innovative deliberative democracy models such as citizens' assemblies;

g. Allocate adequate financial resources, taking advantage of access to available national and international level funding mechanisms, including through financial institutions.

4. The Congress calls on the local and regional authorities and their national associations to take account of this resolution and the accompanying explanatory memorandum, on this specific issue. It also asks its statutory bodies to take the present resolution into account in their activities.

### **DRAFT RECOMMENDATION<sup>3</sup>**

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

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- c. Species throughout Europe are therefore experiencing record pressures and decline that is forecast to worsen;

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<sup>3</sup> Approved by the Governance Committee on 16 October 2026.

d. When biodiversity is diminished for short-term financial gain, it is a false economy given that no economy exists outside ecology, gross domestic product depends on nature, and that there is a high financial return on investment in policies that protect and promote biodiversity;

e. Loss of species presents a threat to the broader ecosystem and poses a direct threat to people's way of life, the economy and livelihoods and, ultimately, life itself;

f. Only a coordinated multilevel governance approach can ensure that international biodiversity commitments are met, such as those relating to the Kunming-Montreal Global Diversity Framework, with policies put in place at the national level and implemented at the sub-national level.

3. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. Put in place National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans that will deliver and, where appropriate, go beyond the international commitments to ensure healthy and sustainable ecosystems;

b. Recognise the true economic value of protecting and promoting biodiversity, including by implementing the UN System for Environmental and Economic Accounting (UN SEEA) with a view to integrating natural capital into economic accounts;

c. Acknowledge that implementation of national policies requires action at the sub-national level and put in place consultative, participatory mechanisms that ensure the involvement of the public and local and regional authorities in policy formulation in line, for example, with the practice outlined in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on landscape and democracy (CM/Rec(2019)8);

d. Provide local and regional authorities with the information, tools and financial resources required by them to develop Local and Regional Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and other related policies;

e. Specifically, facilitate sub-national authorities' access to green financing, including by international institutions, to implement local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans and other related policies and work with those institutions to widen funding and ensure the possibility of direct access by local and regional authorities;

f. Make strong and concrete undertakings at the international level to protect and promote biodiversity including strategies and budget streams enabling their implementation at the local and regional levels;

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and its explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to Council of Europe member States.

## **EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>4</sup>

1. The Reykjavik Declaration,<sup>5</sup> adopted at the 2023 Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government was clear that the environment is a key priority for the Organisation. It underlined the urgency of taking coordinated action to protect the environment by countering the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity. The vital role of sub-national and local authorities was recognised as central part of the multilevel governance approach required to make progress.

2. As a follow-up to the Declaration, a Council of Europe Strategy on the environment<sup>6</sup> was adopted in May 2025 with five strategic objectives, including strengthening good democratic governance (Strategic objective 2) and Protecting wildlife, ecosystems, habitats and landscapes (Strategic objective 5). An Action Plan related to the Strategy<sup>7</sup> was also elaborated and a Steering Committee on the Environment (CDENV)<sup>8</sup> set up to ensure the implementation of the Strategy.

3. In alignment with this, the Congress of local and regional authorities have made the environment a priority in its work, including through a series of thematic reports.

4. This report, “Nature on the edge: How local and regional authorities can promote biodiversity” provides a unique perspective on how local and regional authorities can use their powers, as part of a multilevel governance approach, to ensure that biodiversity is protected and promoted throughout Europe’s many and diverse communities.

## 1. THE DECLINE OF BIODIVERSITY

### 1.1. What’s at stake?

*From the world’s great rainforests to small parks and gardens, from the blue whale to microscopic fungi, biodiversity is the extraordinary variety of life on Earth. We humans are part of, and fully dependent on, this web of life: It gives us the food we eat, filters the water we drink, and supplies the air we breathe. Nature is as important for our mental and physical wellbeing as it is for our society’s ability to cope with global change, health threats and disasters (EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives).<sup>9</sup>*

5. Without the intricate web of plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms, human life would not be possible. The World Health Organization emphasises this reality, noting that humanity depends directly on ecosystems for clean air, fresh water and climate regulation.<sup>10</sup>

6. However, driven by unsustainable practices this biodiversity is being lost with unprecedented speed across the Council of Europe area, and throughout the wider world. Whether on land or in the water, species of plants and animals are becoming extinct tens to hundreds of times faster than the normal rate. The 2019 global biodiversity assessment by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) asserts that out of an estimated 8 million species, 1 million plant and animal species are currently threatened with extinction.<sup>11</sup>

7. Many remaining species are decreasing rapidly in numbers. For example, a 47% decrease in grassland butterflies and 41% decline in common farmland bird species has been documented in the European Union since 1990.<sup>12</sup> There have also been sharp falls in the number of bees and other

4 The report was drafted with the contribution of Ignace SCHOPS, Director, Bond Beter Leefmilieu, Belgium

5 <https://edoc.coe.int/en/the-council-of-europe-in-brief/11619-united-around-our-values-reykjavik-declaration.html> c.f. especially Appendix V “The Council of Europe and the environment”

6 <https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-strategy-on-the-environment-2025/1680b5d582>

7 <https://rm.coe.int/gme-2025-08-updated-action-plan-on-the-environment/48802985a5>

8 Steering Committee on the Environment (CDENV) - Reykjavik process and the Environment

9 EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives. COM(2020) 380 final. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

10 <https://evs.institute/fundamentals-of-environmental-science-and-ecology/essential-role-environment-human-wellbeing/>

11 [https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/inline/files/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers.pdf](https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/inline/files/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers.pdf), page 24

12 Since 1990, common bird species in Europe have declined by more than 17% and common farmland species by more than 41%. (cf. *Common bird index by type of species - EU*

[aggregate.https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_15\\_60/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_15_60/default/table?lang=en))

For insects the evidence is even more drastic, with 47% EU -wide decrease in grassland butterflies since 1990 (c.f. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_15\\_60/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_15_60/default/table?lang=en))

pollinators on which humans rely.<sup>13</sup> In parallel to these losses at the species level, this degradation is also evident in many more of the complex ecosystems such as forests, coral reefs, entire landscapes as well as the smaller scale diversity of genes and microbiological organisms.

8. According to the European Environment Agency's report, Europe's Environment 2025<sup>14</sup>, and related assessments available as of May 2026, the outlook for biodiversity in Europe remains highly concerning. Most biodiversity targets set for 2030 are currently off track, despite the existence of a relatively strong legislative and policy framework within the European Union.

9. In total these irreversible losses to our biodiversity threaten not only food security<sup>15</sup>, climate<sup>16</sup>, and the economy<sup>17,18</sup>, but even also physical and mental health<sup>19</sup>, and democracy itself.

#### *Biodiversity loss as part of Poly-crisis*

10. Many human factors can explain biodiversity loss, such as agricultural intensification, unsustainable forestry and fisheries, urban expansion, infrastructure development, pollution, and habitat fragmentation.

11. However, the bigger and broader environmental context is important to understanding what is happening. Biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution worsen each other through shared human drivers, forming a destructive feedback loop.<sup>20</sup> On a global scale, the interlinkages between environmental crises caused by human activity are well presented in the **planetary boundaries framework**<sup>21</sup>, a scientific concept that identifies nine critical Earth system processes which regulate the planet's stability and resilience. It defines a 'safe operating space' for humanity, but recent global assessments suggest that already seven of the nine boundaries have been transgressed.

12. Climate change used to be perceived by many as an abstract concept. However, its transition from threat to reality is increasingly clear. Droughts, forest fires are happening more frequently and more severely, and extreme weather events are destroying harvests, homes and livelihoods and putting enormous pressure on infrastructure and the economy, as well as nature itself.

13. Copernicus is the European Union's Earth observation program, monitoring the planet's atmosphere, oceans, and climate using a vast network of satellites and ground sensors. It has confirmed August 2026 was the world's joint warmest month on record (tied with July 2023), pushing global temperatures back above 1,5° above pre-industrial levels.<sup>22</sup>

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and, more locally, a more than 75% decrease of total flying insect biomass has been observed in German nature reserves between 1989-2016 <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0185809>

13 <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/Declining-bee-populations-pose-threat-to-global-food-security-and-nutrition/en>

14 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025>

15 e.g. Feuerbacher, A., Kempen, M., Steidle, J.L.M. *et al.* The economic, agricultural, and food security repercussions of a wild pollinator collapse in Europe. *Nat Commun* 16, 9892 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-65414-7>

16 e.g. H.-O. Pörtner *et al.*, Overcoming the coupled climate and biodiversity crises and their societal impacts. *Science* 380, eabl4881(2023). DOI: [10.1126/science.abl4881](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abl4881)

17 <https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/science-environment/3968996-the-cost-of-a-dying-planet-oecd-urges-governments-to-transform-how-the-world-finance-nature>

18 IPBES (2026). Summary for Policymakers of the Methodological Assessment Report on the Impact and Dependence of Business on Biodiversity and Nature's Contributions to People. Jones M., Polasky S., Rueda X., Brooks S., Carter Ingram J., Egoh B. N., von Hase A., Kohsaka R., Kulak M., Leach K., Loyola R., Mandle L., Rodriguez-Osuna V., Schaafsma M. and Sonter L. J. (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15369060>

19 e.g. Buxton, R.T., Hudgins, E.J., Lavigne, E. *et al.* Mental health is positively associated with biodiversity in Canadian cities. *Commun Earth Environ* 5, 310 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-024-01482-9>

20 <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/biodiversity>

21 <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

22 <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-august-was-worlds-joint-hottest-month-record-pushing-global-temperatures-back-above>

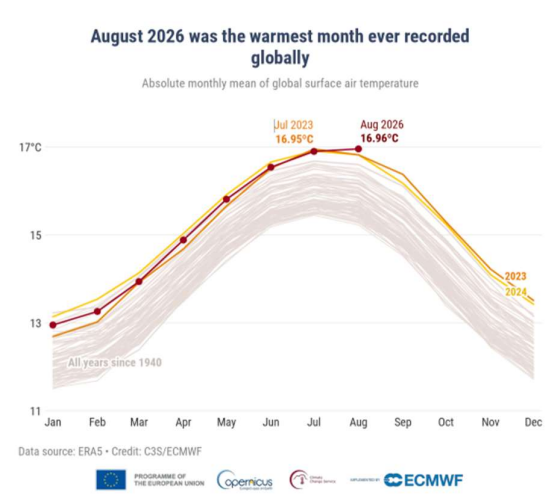


**Figure 1: Absolute monthly mean global surface air temperature - Copernicus ERA5**  
**Credit: C3S/ECMWF**

14. Western Europe had its hottest Summer on record in 2026, driven by jet stream, El Niño and unusually warm oceans that kept hot, dry air locked over the continent. The heat caused over 35.000 deaths<sup>23</sup>, record-low Danube and Rhine levels threatening energy supplies, maximum heat alerts across parts of Europe, and crop-loss concerns as far north as the United Kingdom. Drought has left landscapes dry, fuelling widespread wildfires.<sup>24</sup>

15. More specifically, the heat wave over the last weekend of June 2026 caused the highest excess mortality in Belgium in decades.<sup>25</sup> In Spain, the wildfires were so severe that a state of emergency was declared. Many French communities were confronted with wildfires for the first time this year. More than 200.000 people were evacuated, and tens of thousands of hectares of natural habitat were burnt.

16. All of this contributes to biodiversity loss. Whether we consider the impact of rising air and sea temperatures, or the damage caused by extreme weather events and extensive fires or flooding, the habitats and conditions necessary for certain species are compromised in ways that can be not only challenging but fatal for them.

17. At the same time as addressing climate change action is critical to addressing biodiversity loss, it should also be recognised that the two aims may in some cases be in direct conflict - especially at the local level. For example, forests have been recently cleared in Nordic municipalities<sup>26</sup>, to make space for solar power plants. This kind of negative environment-environment interaction should be considered in advance and minimised.

18. Armed conflict also has profound detrimental effects on biodiversity. The Russian Federation's ongoing and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine shows this. As of July 2026, 16.874 civilian deaths in Ukraine were reported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) following the full-scale Russian invasion that started on February 24, 2022.<sup>27</sup> Many more thousands of soldiers have been killed or wounded defending their country. The loss of human lives is the greatest tragedy of this war. Additionally, it is also a driver of ecological destruction.<sup>28</sup> Forests and steppes are being devastated, while damaged industrial sites and exploded munitions contaminate soil and groundwater with toxic substances. Military operations in the Black Sea have triggered an unprecedented ecological crisis, causing the estimated deaths of over 100,000 dolphins and severely disrupting the flight and nesting patterns of millions of migratory birds.<sup>29</sup>

23 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/aug/25/at-least-35000-excess-deaths-europe-back-to-back-heatwaves>

24 <https://www.weforum.org/stories/nature-and-biodiversity/europe-heatwaves-wildfires-charts/>

25 <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2026/08/15/hoge-venen-herstel-lang-duren-biodiversiteit-natuur/>

26 e.g. Finland (<https://yle.fi/a/74-20164851>) and in Sweden (<https://www.skogen.se/nyheter/solcellsparker-soker-sig-till-skog/>)

27 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1296924/ukraine-war-casualties-daily/?srsltid=AfmBOodeS939ZJdKHky-FNFLVn7jwEQQCFeOacs5BGVVbNVP7ebaPTq>

28 <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/how-conflict-impacts-our-environment>

29 <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/entire-ecosystem-at-risk-how-russia-s-war-1783926072.html>

## 1.2. The value of nature

19. Nature has an intrinsic value that cannot be priced. This is true of its beauty, its educational value and its contribution to people's mental health and broader well-being. Therefore, it cannot be simply monetised but should be appreciated and preserved for itself.

20. Nevertheless, as biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate, it is increasingly important to complement ethical arguments with the compelling socio-economic evidence that exists for preserving and protecting biodiversity.

21. In reality, no economy exists outside ecology: every financial system depends on healthy, natural ecosystems, a stable climate, fertile soils, clean water, photosynthesis and the interactions that make both life and economic activity possible.

22. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Economic Forum (WEF), around half of global GDP depends directly or moderately on nature.<sup>30</sup> Economic prosperity is therefore inseparable from ecosystem health. For more than a decade, the World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report*<sup>31</sup> has consistently ranked biodiversity loss and climate change among the greatest long-term threats to the global economy.

23. A recent article in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*<sup>32</sup> (Oxford University) argues that the macroeconomic damage from climate change is far larger than previously estimated. Using natural variation in global temperature, the authors find that 1°C of warming reduces world GDP by more than 20% in the long-run.

24. The recent OECD report, "Mobilising public and private finance for biodiversity"<sup>33</sup> urges governments to transform how the world finances nature. Biodiversity loss is becoming a serious economic and financial threat, affecting agriculture, water supplies, infrastructure, businesses and public budgets. The global financing gap to addressing this remains hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Governments must reform harmful subsidies, strengthen regulation and use public and private finance to build measurable, inclusive and investable nature-positive projects.

25. With most global crops relying on bees and other pollinators and nature exposure improving multiple dimensions of human well-being, biodiversity protection becomes a foundation for food security, health, sustainable development and for social and economic stability.

26. Nature is still treated as an infinite resource, with many financial models assuming that forests, soils, fisheries and wetlands remain stable even as they visibly decline. Revenues are projected and assets valued while the ecological foundations that enable them, like bees and other pollinators, fertile soils, clean water, stable climates are eroding, creating stranded assets in agriculture, fisheries and tourism.

27. Healthy ecosystems provide essential ecosystem services<sup>34</sup> - from clean water and fertile soils to climate regulation and pollination - that underpin agriculture, public health and economic resilience. Integrating these services into economic systems and local budgets strengthens decision-making and empowers local and regional authorities.

28. Examples across Europe show that businesses depending on healthy ecosystems often overlook growing risks such as drought, wildfire, coral loss or declining fish stocks. Approaches like the German's Biotope/Green Area Factor originally developed in Berlin during the 1990s and the UK's 'Biodiversity Net Gain' - an approach to development where developers must deliver a biodiversity net gain of 10% - aim to address this, though long-term effectiveness remains uncertain.<sup>35</sup>

29. Yet recovery is possible: regenerative agriculture, agro- and ecoforestry, improved water management and well-managed fisheries demonstrate that degraded ecosystems can be restored. For

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30 <https://www.unep.org/topics/nature-action/nature-economy/biodiversity-economies>

31 <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/>

32 <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/141/2/889/8490467?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false>

33 [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/mobilising-public-and-private-finance-for-biodiversity\\_e2b996a1-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/mobilising-public-and-private-finance-for-biodiversity_e2b996a1-en.html)

34 <https://unece.org/ecosystem-services-0>

35 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain-guidance-for-developers-land-managers-and-authorities>

investment to follow, natural assets must be properly reflected in valuations and lending decisions. When markets recognise ecosystem quality as a productive economic asset, nature becomes investable and capable of generating returns while strengthening biodiversity, local economies and community resilience.

30. Investing in nature generates a high return on investment (ROI). UNEP's report 'Closing the Gap' shows that financing nature-related SDGs and ecosystem restoration delivers exceptionally high returns, with studies indicating that such investments can generate more than twenty times their initial value.<sup>36</sup> The European Commission estimates that each euro invested in restoring nature yields between four and thirty-eight euros in long-term socio-economic and environmental returns.<sup>37 38</sup>

## 2. MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

### 2.1. Addressing Biodiversity Loss – The Multilateral Framework

31. While important for specific contexts, early efforts to halt biodiversity loss by designating and managing protected areas alone have not been effective in reversing the general trend. As a consequence, an awareness of the need to implement sustainable practices society-wide, across sectors of human activity, is underlying our current collective efforts to address biodiversity loss, both globally and within the Council of Europe area.

32. Global leadership for biodiversity is provided by the United Nations. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>39</sup> (UN CBD) is a comprehensive, international treaty adopted in 1992 to protect nature, and has 196 parties. Its three main goals are conserving biological diversity, using its components sustainably, and sharing genetic resource benefits fairly. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework<sup>40</sup> (GBF), agreed by CBD in 2022, includes the currently valid action plan to implement the goals until 2030. Progress toward the GBF goals will be assessed in October 2026 at the 17th meeting of the CBD Conference of the Parties (COP) in Yerevan, Armenia,<sup>41</sup> and again at its 19th meeting in 2028.

33. Regional intergovernmental work, including by the Council of Europe, contributes to the efforts to implement the CBD and the GBF. For example, the Strategic Plan 2030<sup>42</sup> of the Council of Europe Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats<sup>43</sup> (1979) was adopted in 2023 to align European nature conservation with global goals - such as the Kunming-Montreal Framework (UN CBD) - guiding parties to reverse biodiversity loss and ensure sustainable use of natural resources by 2030. The implementation plan is supported by other ongoing Council of Europe work. The main tools for the Contracting Parties to comply with their obligations under the Bern Convention include the Emerald Network<sup>44</sup> which is an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest as well as Species Action Plans to recover specific at-risk populations. Importantly, and related to environmental justice, the Bern Convention case file system allows non-governmental organisations, citizens, and environmental defenders to formally report harmful public actions (of the central, regional and local authorities) or development projects that violate the Convention, holding member States accountable, including for sub-national authorities' actions.<sup>45</sup>

34. The Council of Europe Landscape Convention (ETS No.176) (2020)<sup>46</sup> also contributes to the preservation of biodiversity: an aim that is integrated in the management and planning of the landscape, the implementation of which entails taking into account the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law<sup>47</sup> (2025) is also relevant.

36 <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/en/news/funding-nature-related-sustainable-development-goals-would-deliver-more-than-20-times-return-on-investment-study-shows>

37 [https://ieep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/4\\_-Nature-Restoration-Law-and-Funding.pdf](https://ieep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/4_-Nature-Restoration-Law-and-Funding.pdf)

38 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_3746](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3746)

39 <https://www.cbd.int/>

40 <https://www.cbd.int/gbf>

41 <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/15d6/7b5b/85c5ad50d44f284c127acbd9/cop-17-01-rev1-add1-en.pdf>

42 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/vision-strategic-plan-2030>

43 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/texte-de-la-convention>

44 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/emerald-network>

45 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/active-cases>. Other examples include the European Diploma for Protected Areas as an incentive for a better protection of biodiversity, in particular: [European Diploma - Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats](#)

46 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape>

47 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reykjavik-process-and-the-environment/protection-of-the-environment-through-criminal-law>

This new convention is the first international legally binding instrument to address environmental crime, covering a broad range of criminal acts that aggravate the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. It is expected to come into force when it attracts the proscribed number of ratifications.

35. Within the European Union, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is a comprehensive, long-term plan to restore Europe's nature by 2030, aiming to protect biodiversity, reverse ecosystem degradation, and fight climate change.

## 2.2. The role of local and regional authorities

36. Local and regional authorities exercise significant responsibilities in areas directly affecting biodiversity, including spatial planning, water governance, ecosystem restoration, public green spaces, and environmental permitting.

37. As the level of government closest to ecosystems and communities, they are increasingly recognised as important actors in the implementation of biodiversity policy and the development of innovative governance approaches.

### *Framing biodiversity protection at local and regional levels*

38. International frameworks - such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework - are vitally important but ambitious commitments on paper must be implemented on the ground. For this national governments must ensure that local and regional governments are empowered to act. In turn, those sub-national authorities must have the political will to identify what they can do to protect and promote biodiversity, and then to do it. This is critical because they are on the front line of ecological change and possess the specific contextual knowledge needed to manage local ecosystems effectively. Where they have the necessary autonomy, capacity, and funding, sub-national authorities can help better ensure that global or national biodiversity targets are met.

39. For example, the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework<sup>48</sup>, the EU biodiversity strategy 2030<sup>49</sup> as well as the 2023 Bern Convention Strategic Plan<sup>50</sup> and subsequent decisions all recognise the essential contribution of local and regional authorities with regard to implementation.

40. Local and regional authority groups have therefore been involved in the implementation of the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and in addressing biodiversity loss in general. This includes, for example, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability)<sup>51</sup> and its Cities Biodiversity Center (CBC)<sup>52</sup>, Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform (R4BLP)<sup>53</sup> and, within Europe, the European Committee of the Regions.<sup>54</sup> Local and regional authorities also have dedicated advisory bodies within the CBD system, the Advisory Committee on Local Governments and Biodiversity (ACLG) and the Advisory Committee on Subnational Governments and Biodiversity (AC SNG), respectively.<sup>55</sup>

48 See the Plan of action on subnational governments, cities and other local authorities for biodiversity (2023-2030), appended to decision 15/12 "Engagement with subnational governments, cities and other local authorities to enhance implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework" adopted by the Conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (7-19 December 2022): <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/COP-15/cop-15-dec-12-en.pdf>. The decision 15/12 followed a series of related decisions including the 2016 Quintana Roo Communiqué on Mainstreaming Local and Subnational Biodiversity Action (2016 Cancun) <https://subnationaladvocacyfornature.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Quintana-Roo-Communique-1-1.pdf>

49 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

50 <https://rm.coe.int/tpvs18e-2023-strategic-plan-final/1680ada084>

51 <https://iclei.org/>

52 <https://cbc.iclei.org/>

53 <https://regions4.org/project/regions-for-biodiversity-learning-platform/>

54 <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/commissions/enve>

55 <https://www.cbd.int/subnational/partners-and-initiatives>

| Framework                             | Sub-national Action                                  | Sub-national Competencies                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kunming-Montreal GBF (Decision 15/12) | Subnational Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans | Participatory integrated spatial planning, targeted biodiversity measures & biodiversity mainstreaming to other subnational tasks |
| EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030         | Mandatory Urban Greening Plans                       | Phasing out pesticide use in urban green areas; planting urban trees; nature-based solutions                                      |
| Bern Convention Strategic Plan        | Vertical compliance & landscape management           | Protection of the Emerald Network; local mitigation of urban sprawl/infrastructure                                                |

**Table 1: Local and regional authorities' role in implementing international frameworks**

41. More broadly, local and regional authorities exercise significant responsibilities in areas directly affecting biodiversity, including spatial planning, management of forests and other public land, agriculture and rural development, water governance, and environmental regulation and permitting. They are also uniquely positioned to break down policy silos, foster community-led conservation, raise public awareness, and support local businesses in adopting sustainable, nature-positive practices. Examples of responsibilities and tangible actions are provided in table 2 below:

| Local and regional authorities responsibility | Example 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Example 2                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spatial Planning                              | Rules on Green Area Factor (GAF) maintenance, tree planting, access to green space and green corridors. Measures relate to green roofs, living walls, urban forests, rain gardens, restored rivers, and nature-based solutions for climate adaptation | Zoning Restrictions: banning constructions in the buffer zone of a protected area to prevent habitat fragmentation |
| Management of Public land                     | Implement biodiversity targets for public land including forestry practices                                                                                                                                                                           | Nature conservation targets for maintenance of public land                                                         |
| Agriculture & Rural development               | Agroforestry Grants subsidies to reduce soil erosion and to create insect habitats                                                                                                                                                                    | Local seed banks to protect native crop varieties and resilient to climate shifts                                  |
| Water Governance                              | River Restoration: removal of dams, restoration of natural flows of rivers and creeks                                                                                                                                                                 | Implementing local 'Blue Deal' for water collection and retention                                                  |
| Regulation & permitting                       | Biodiversity Offsets: a double offset for destruction of habitats                                                                                                                                                                                     | Dark sky-ordinance: to turn off outdoor lights in and near protected areas                                         |
| Community led conservation & local business   | Citizen-Science Funding: micro-grants for local involvement                                                                                                                                                                                           | Eco-Tourism Incentives: tax discount for biodiversity friendly businesses                                          |

**Table 2: Examples of sub-national authority competencies**

42. Ensuring proper protection of biodiversity requires the use of these competencies on a wide scale. Protecting biodiversity must move beyond 'postage-stamp' conservation, the notion that nature can be safeguarded solely within the boundaries of national parks and protected areas. A genuinely effective

strategy integrates and promotes biodiversity across cities, rural landscapes, agricultural land, and privately owned spaces. While protected areas remain indispensable, they often function as isolated ecological islands. Long-term biodiversity recovery therefore depends on ensuring that the surrounding rural and urban landscapes also sustain healthy ecosystems, ecological connectivity, and species movement. This means that biodiversity objectives must not be confined to protected areas but must be incorporated into all aspects of spatial planning, both urban and rural. Local and Regional Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans can help to achieve this objective (see Chapter III).

*Concrete ways to foster biodiversity conservation at local and regional levels*

43. There are many ways which local and regional authorities can preserve biodiversity. Among them, nature-based solutions<sup>56</sup> can help to address biodiversity loss, as they are regenerative actions that protect, manage, and restore natural ecosystems to address societal challenges like climate change, disasters, and food security.

44. With regard to urban biodiversity, local and regional authorities should start by recognising nature as essential urban infrastructure rather than confining consideration to parks and botanical gardens. It can be harnessed and managed with multiple, overlapping benefits. Green roofs, living walls, urban and other public forests, rain gardens, restored rivers, and nature-based solutions for climate adaptation can simultaneously enhance biodiversity, reduce urban heat, improve air quality, and strengthen public well-being. Ecological corridors and biodiversity-sensitive spatial planning reconnect fragmented habitats within and beyond cities.

45. As rural areas are increasingly neglected, new opportunities emerge for natural regeneration. These recovering areas can be supported through biodiversity credits or other biodiversity-supporting initiatives. Reversing biodiversity loss is possible if we shift from short-term gains to long-term investments that protect both people and the planet. Biodiversity conservation must also be embedded within productive landscapes.

46. In line with this, agricultural practices such as hedgerow restoration, flower strips, agroforestry, reduced pesticide use, regenerative farming, and the restoration of wetlands, grasslands, and native woodlands reinforce key ecosystem services including pollination, natural pest control, water regulation, carbon storage, and soil fertility. Local and regional authorities could encourage the development of such practices, for example through conditional lease contracts for public land, financial incentives or by streamlining the necessary regulations and permits.

47. Conventional forestry practices need to shift to sustainable continuous cover forestry<sup>57</sup> as deforestation poses a major threat to biodiversity on land but also in nearby waterways due to increased runoff. As conventional models only consider and optimise the value of timber production in a forest ecosystem, its other natural capital is wasted and biodiversity lost during harvesting. With around 10 million hectares of forest lost annually through logging and an additional 70 million hectares affected by wildfires, new approaches are urgently needed. Given that European forests are half publicly owned<sup>58</sup>, sustainable forestry can be managed in ways that meet present needs without compromising those of future generations, respect biodiversity and prevent wildfires. Local and regional authorities should implement such biodiversity-friendly measures in the forests they own and encourage other owners to do the same, demonstrating the positive and tangible impacts of such measures.

48. The private sector and individual landowners play a critical role as well. Businesses can transform industrial sites, business parks, and corporate campuses into biodiversity-rich environments. Farmers, landowners, and developers can integrate ecological restoration into land management. Implementing nature and greening sites - like planting hedges, digging ponds, creating flower-filled hay meadows and verges - benefits in a double advantage: they function as corridors – or stepping stones - for the dispersion of species and improve the corporate identity and responsibility of the initiators. Financial institutions can incentivise biodiversity-positive management approaches and investments, while companies can incorporate natural capital into their strategies and reporting.

49. Citizens are also essential partners. Community-led restoration, volunteer monitoring programmes, citizen-science initiatives, and local stewardship projects increase public awareness while

<sup>56</sup> <https://iucn.org/our-work/nature-based-solutions>

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233542853\\_Sustainable\\_Forestry\\_What\\_Is\\_It\\_How\\_Do\\_We\\_Achieve\\_It](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233542853_Sustainable_Forestry_What_Is_It_How_Do_We_Achieve_It)

<sup>58</sup> <https://efi.int/publication/who-owns-forests-and-how-are-they-managed>

generating valuable ecological data. People who actively participate in restoring nature often become its strongest advocates and long-term guardians. Local and regional authorities can create these projects and attract and work with local volunteers.

| Action                                                  | Local and Regional Authorities Governance Mechanism                                                                                                                       | Link                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Coastal Dune Restoration – Maharees Peninsula, Ireland  | Local residents, schools and volunteers installed protective fencing, restoring fragile sand dunes                                                                        | <a href="https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/case-studies/community-led-partnership-for-coastal-restoration-in-the-maharees-peninsula-ireland">https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/case-studies/community-led-partnership-for-coastal-restoration-in-the-maharees-peninsula-ireland</a> |
| Wastewater Basin to Nature Park – Ormož, Slovenia       | Local stakeholders helped transform industrial wastewater basins into a wetland reserve with now over 200 bird species                                                    | <a href="https://urbact.eu/whats-new/articles/eight-urbact-good-practices-reconnect-cities-nature">https://urbact.eu/whats-new/articles/eight-urbact-good-practices-reconnect-cities-nature</a>                                                                                                                 |
| Land Regeneration and Agroforestry – EcoAtivo, Portugal | Community members drive local stewardship by regenerating fire- and erosion-degraded soils through hands-on water retention, native planting and sustainable agroforestry | <a href="https://ecosystemrestorationcommunities.org/community/eoativo-portugal/">https://ecosystemrestorationcommunities.org/community/eoativo-portugal/</a>                                                                                                                                                   |

**Table 3: Examples of community-led restoration**

50. Restoration and conservation must operate at the land- and seascape scale. Protected areas should be connected through ecological corridors, buffer zones, restored river-ocean systems, marine pathways, wildlife crossings, and multifunctional landscapes that enable species to migrate, disperse, and adapt to changing environmental conditions. Connectivity is no longer an optional enhancement to conservation policy; it has become one of its fundamental requirements. Local and regional authorities should therefore seek to collaborate with neighbouring sub-national authorities within the same country, or across borders, to ensure a contiguous approach to supporting biodiversity where advantageous to do so.

51. By adopting this holistic approach, biodiversity conservation evolves from protecting isolated pockets of nature to managing entire landscapes. It combines scientific knowledge, spatial planning, economic incentives, and local stewardship to build resilient ecosystems that support both biodiversity and human well-being.

### 2.3. Putting the local and regional levels at the centre

52. Local and regional authorities often face significant challenges in applying international conventions, directives, and environmental regulations. These frameworks are frequently perceived as top-down mandates, while recognition for successful implementation rarely reaches the local level - even though this is where most of the practical work takes place. The gap between international agreements and national policy design on the one hand and local implementation on the other remains one of the biggest obstacles in environmental governance. Broad, top-down targets rarely match the specific ecological and economic realities on the ground. Meanwhile, essential local action and work often go unnoticed. When responsibility rests at local level but without levers and resources, progress stalls and this risks the erosion of public trust.

53. This top-down pattern is not inevitable. The Council of Europe Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176) was designed to embed local and regional authorities and the public directly into landscape governance, requiring Parties to set up participation procedures for sub-national authorities and citizens in defining and implementing landscape policy (Article 5.c). The Congress has long

recognised this comparative advantage in its own texts on the Convention's implementation.<sup>59</sup> This is reinforced by a Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the role of culture, cultural heritage and landscape in addressing global challenges (CM/Rec(2022)15)<sup>60</sup>, which explicitly names biodiversity loss among the challenges landscape policy must help confront and calls on States to mobilise traditional knowledge and practices and to engage local communities through participatory, democratic governance.

54. National authorities should therefore also look to adopt this form of inclusive decision-making when it comes to designing biodiversity strategies. In this way, co-management and co-creation of policies, with the involvement of local stakeholders will ensure stronger conservation policies with buy-in at every level.

### 3. LOCAL AND REGIONAL ACTIONS

#### 3.1. Local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans

55. Where local and regional authorities develop plans for the protection and promotion of biodiversity in cooperation with national authorities, or alone, these are rarely individual policy ideas, but rather part of a broader, place-based approach.

56. This can certainly work. While biodiversity outside Protected Areas<sup>61</sup> is collapsing, within them it remains stable on average.<sup>62 63</sup> Protected Areas are cradles for biodiversity, as they act as vital refuges, shielding ecosystems from wider biodiversity loss and they are extremely important because they play a vital role in the restoration of nature in the wider sea and landscapes, the repopulating of (populations of) species and the genetically diversification of genes of species. Operating at this intersection of community and ecology allows local and regional authorities to cultivate initiatives that are rooted in local identity yet aligned with planetary boundaries and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

57. Key vehicles for systematically translating the international and national commitments to local action (such as those implementing tools in 3.4, 3.5 and in the appendices) are local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans. These serve as the primary institutional mechanisms to translate high-level international treaties into actionable, localised policies. National biodiversity strategies and action plans set baseline commitments under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). However, without downscaling these strategies into local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans, national targets remain abstract and difficult to enforce. They act as a bridge, aligning local and subnational work with the global Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the related regional intergovernmental strategies such as the 2023 Bern Convention Strategic Plan.

58. The development of local and regional strategies and action plans can strengthen regenerative practices, empower communities, and contribute to a wider shift toward living systems approaches such as bioregional governance, regenerative development, and ecosystem-based policy. The proximity of local and regional authorities enables them to design and deliver place-based solutions to global ecological challenges while helping spark a renewed environmental consciousness. In other words, local and regional authorities act as the vital bridge that translates broad global sustainability goals into practical, real-world solutions. Because they are physically and culturally closer to their communities, they can design place-based solutions that larger national governments cannot.

59. The core utility of a local and regional biodiversity strategy and action plan lies in its ability to mainstream ecological targets across non-environmental sectors, such as transportation, municipal budgeting, and disaster risk reduction. By integrating conservation targets directly into city budgets, zoning laws, and urban planning as well as other daily municipal operations, local authorities shift from a reactive mind set to pursuing proactive, systemic preservation. Furthermore, Local and Regional

59 See: [Recommendation 150\(2004\)](#) and [Resolution 178\(2004\)](#) on the contribution of local and regional authorities to the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, and [Resolution 312\(2010\)](#) on 1Landscape: a new dimension of public territorial action

60 Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2022\)15](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the role of culture, cultural heritage and landscape in helping to address global challenges (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 May 2022 at the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers)

61 <https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/news-and-stories/what-are-protected-areas--and-what-are-they-for>

62 <https://www.worldwildlife.org/news/press-releases/catastrophic-73-decline-in-the-average-size-of-global-wildlife-populations-in-just-50-years-reveals-a-system-in-peril/>

63 <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/people-and-nature-unesco-designated-sites-global-and-local-contributions>

Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans establish clear baselines, assign institutional responsibilities, and set definitive timelines for checking and upgrading ecological targets.

*Challenges in drafting and agreeing on local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans*

60. Despite the critical role of local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans, local and regional authorities often face challenges in drafting them. The challenges include a lack of political will, intensified by the expectation or reality of opposition from businesses, associations or individuals affected.

61. Politicians must provide the necessary leadership and demonstrate their sincere willingness to address legitimate points of concern and to make progress. To do so, they should consult broadly those concerned with the strategies and action plans. To build lasting legitimacy, the drafting and adoption of a local and regional biodiversity strategy and action plan must function as an exercise in consultative democracy rather than a purely technical exercise. Although a genuine consultation process can be costly, the failure of a strategy or initiative due to a lack of support and buy-in from those directly affected can entail far higher costs. Token consultation triggers resentment, even when the initial proposals were sound. It is therefore essential to conduct a proper consultation, carefully examining the views expressed and taking them into account where relevant. This could take the form, for example, of open, transparent and responsive written consultations and organised hearings with scientific experts that are open to the general public, followed by a question-and-answer session to openly address concerns raised by the audience. There are well-established models for public consultation at the sub-national level and these should be followed.

62. For example, participatory ambition is already enshrined in the Landscape Convention which requires Parties to establish procedures for the participation of the public, local and regional authorities and other interested parties in the definition and implementation of landscape policy (Article 5.c). These obligations are operationalised in a dedicated Committee of Ministers Recommendation on landscape and democracy (CM/Rec(2019)8)<sup>64</sup>, which offers local and regional authorities tested participatory methodologies that local and regional action plans processes could adapt directly rather than build deliberative mechanisms from first principles. A further Recommendation on the responsibility of stakeholders for sustainable and harmonious development (CM/Rec(2021)9)<sup>65</sup> goes even further, calling on regional and local authorities to co-develop with local actors, including the population, voluntary "sustainable development and landscape" charters - a model directly transferable to the co-authored local and regional action plans targets described above.

63. Citizens' assemblies and other deliberative processes are also increasingly used across Europe to involve citizens in addressing complex policy challenges. When properly designed, they can complement representative democracy, improve public decision-making and strengthen trust in public institutions. Organised in line with CM/Rec(2023)6 on deliberative democracy, and following the Congress guide on "How to organise deliberative democracy processes at local level"<sup>66</sup>, they could prove a useful tool for preparing biodiversity strategies and action plans, albeit one that can be resource intensive.

64. Driven by the Congress, the European Local Democracy Action (ELDA) initiative provides local and regional authorities with tools to increase grassroots participation in local decision-making.

*Challenges in implementing local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans*

65. The implementation of local and regional biodiversity strategies and action plans can also be challenging. Several institutional and political obstacles – already highlighted above in different contexts – prevent local authorities from turning these action plans into reality including:

- Weak vertical integration: a disconnect often exists between national targets and local jurisdictions, resulting in poor coordination across different levels of government;

64 Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States with a view to the implementation of the European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe – Landscape and democracy: public participation (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 October 2019 at the 1357th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

65 Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States for the implementation of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention – Landscape and responsibility of stakeholders for sustainable and harmonious development (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 23 November 2021 at the 1418th (Budget) meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

66 <http://rm.coe.int/eng-web/4880296308>

- Limited technical capacity: many local governments lack the scientific data, standardised metrics, and technological tools required to track and monitor biodiversity progress;
- Absence of legal mandates: plans are frequently designed as non-binding guiding documents rather than enforceable local laws, reducing accountability;
- Siloed sectoral planning: land-use, spatial planning/zoning, and economic development departments at the local level often operate independently without mainstreaming biodiversity into their decisions;
- Competing interests: implementing local and regional action plans often competes with other interests such as economic development and the tourism industry.

66. Underpinning all of these challenges is the first: a profound shortfall in financial resources. Local authorities rarely receive dedicated financial resources or fiscal instruments to turn broad conservation goals into on-the-ground projects. Globally, only about 0.1% of GDP is directed toward biodiversity conservation.<sup>67</sup> Local authorities find themselves trapped in an unsustainable cycle: they are tasked with managing complex biodiversity, yet they remain dependent on unpredictable national grants or very limited local taxes.

67. Furthermore, traditional funding structures are designed for national-scale infrastructure. A small municipality attempting to restore a local wetland or build an urban wildlife corridor cannot easily navigate the administrative burdens required to access European funding or financing instruments or global funds like the Global Environment Facility (GEF). This lack of effective fiscal autonomy weakens the capacity of local democracy to act.

68. Dedicated finance mechanisms tailored specifically to subnational governance and democratic accountability are important to addressing this.

69. At the national level this could be implemented by dedicated biodiversity financing mechanisms, with premiums for local and regional authorities that have adopted biodiversity strategies action plans and have demonstrated commitment to implement them. This would channel environmental capital directly to local authorities while tying disbursements to strict democratic and human rights standards, in accordance with the values upheld by the Council of Europe.

70. At the international level, implementation of local and regional action plans could be supported by initiatives with relevant International Financial Institutions (IFIs). These might include the Council of Europe Development Bank, the Nordic Investment Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

71. Many of these have in place green financing instruments and cooperate on the basis of joint standards and approaches. One platform for joint IFI action in this field could be the Multilateral development banks (MDBs) Nature Working Group (formerly Environment Group) a coalition of ten major MDBs (including CEB, EIB and EBRD) that creates shared rules, tools, and metrics to track and grow investments in nature.

72. The European Investment Bank and other financial banks and institutions start with conditional regulations not to harm biodiversity. At the EU level, the Nature Credits<sup>68</sup> initiative is a promising new approach to attract private investments via mechanisms such as nature credits/values markets. They offer new income opportunities for farmers, foresters, fishers, landowners and local communities while helping them restore ecosystems and bolster the resilience of their businesses.

73. The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) mission is to promote social cohesion in Europe. It pursues its mission by financing social investment and projects in a variety of sectors such as health and social care; urban, rural and regional development; natural or ecological disasters; and

<sup>67</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/a-decade-of-development-finance-for-biodiversity\\_e6c182aa-en/full-report/component-5.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/a-decade-of-development-finance-for-biodiversity_e6c182aa-en/full-report/component-5.html)

<sup>68</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/ip\\_25\\_1679](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/ip_25_1679)

environmental protection. It can do so directly to sub-national authorities. The CEB also assesses the environmental impact of the projects it finances.<sup>69</sup> A few examples:

- In Cyprus, the CEB has financed major municipal infrastructure upgrades - such as modernising sewage treatment and wastewater recycling networks in cities like Larnaca, Nicosia, and Limassol - which unexpectedly created thriving wetland habitats and resting grounds for migratory birds on treated water ponds<sup>70</sup>;
- The CEB has funded multi-regional disaster risk management and climate adaptation loans across Spain. Instead of using traditional grey concrete walls for flood defense, the funding supports nature-based solutions. This includes restoring natural floodplains, replanting native riparian forests, and cleaning river basins. These actions stabilise the riverbanks while rebuilding degraded wetland habitats for endemic amphibians and local waterbirds<sup>71</sup>.

74. When applicable, these and other relevant financial institutions should look to develop further direct funding instruments and grant money to local and regional authorities. They should also publicise these possibilities directly to local and regional authorities and to make the bidding process for financing as simple and accessible as possible.

### 3.2. Rights of Nature

75. The Rights of Nature has emerged internationally as a legal and governance approach that recognises ecosystems as subjects of rights, reflecting their intrinsic value and ecological functions. Instead of viewing nature as human property, this legal approach treats ecosystems as living entities with their own inherent right to exist, persist, and regenerate. This is already being done at the sub-national level.

76. Rather than replacing existing environmental legislation, Rights of Nature approaches are generally developed alongside established legal frameworks and may contribute to more integrated and ecosystem-centred decision-making. Examples include:

- Tamaqua Borough (Pennsylvania, USA) was the world first municipality that passed a local Rights of Nature ordinance, banning toxic sewage sludge dumping to protect local ecosystems and human health<sup>72</sup>;
- Magpie River (Quebec, Canada). The Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality enacted twin resolutions recognising the Magpie River's legal rights and appointing dedicated guardians to represent it<sup>73</sup>;
- The Mar Menor saltwater lagoon (Murcia, Spain). Mare Menor made history in September 2022 as the first ecosystem in Europe to be granted legal personhood under the Rights of Nature movement<sup>74</sup>;
- Eijsden-Margraten (The Netherlands). This municipality became the first in the Netherlands to pass a local motion officially recognising the legal personality of nature in local policy-making without waiting for national law<sup>75</sup>;

77. At the local level, these approaches have been applied through municipal ordinances, river guardianship arrangements, ecosystem representation mechanisms, and participatory governance structures that incorporate the interests of nature into public decision-making.

<sup>69</sup> <https://coebank.org/en/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://coebank.org/en/news-and-publications/projects-focus/financing-water-resilience-face-climate-challenges/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://coebank.org/en/project-financing/sectors/protection-of-the-environment/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://sustonmagazine.com/rights-of-nature-legal-status-ecocide/>

<sup>73</sup> <https://ecojurisprudence.org/initiatives/recognition-of-legal-personality-and-rights-of-the-magpie-river/>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589811626000261>

<sup>75</sup> <https://ecojurisprudence.org/initiatives/eijsden-margraten-netherlands-motion-granting-legal-personality-to-nature/>

78. The Netherlands example is particularly interesting. Stichting Rechten van de Natuur<sup>76</sup> has contributed to the development of Rights of Nature at the local and regional level by collaborating with municipalities, provinces, water authorities, academic institutions, and civil society organisations. Its work focuses on exploring how Rights of Nature principles may be reflected in local governance, public policy, and institutional practice, including through legal innovation, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. These initiatives illustrate the role that local and regional authorities can play in supporting governance models that complement existing biodiversity and ecosystem management frameworks. The municipality of Eijsden-Margraten (The Netherlands) recognises that the existing Environment Act provides sufficient scope to embed the voice of nature and the landscape more firmly in local policy. When new council proposals are now brought forward, the balancing of landscape interests and local biodiversity will be made more explicit and underpinned with greater transparency. In addition, the municipality is exploring alternative legal and administrative instruments—such as local advisory committees or strengthening the duty of care for the environment—to give nature a clearer and more influential position at the decision-making table.

79. Currently, there are 693 worldwide initiatives, of which 92 in Europe, including 66 countries having officially recognised the Rights of Nature<sup>77 78</sup>. The 'Harmony with Nature' report<sup>79</sup> by the Secretary-General of the United Nations has recognised Earth Jurisprudence to be the 'fastest growing legal movement of the twenty-first century'.

80. The international relevance of this development is reflected in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. It acknowledges the diversity of values and governance systems supporting biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, including that 'rights of nature' and Mother Earth are recognised by some countries as part of an effective approach to achieving its objectives.<sup>80</sup> This reference illustrates the growing recognition of Rights of Nature within international biodiversity policy while respecting the diversity of legal traditions among States.

### 3.3. Preventing and eliminating harmful subsidies

81. Currently, governments worldwide are estimated to invest an annual total of 1.8 trillion dollars in sectors such as fossil fuels, agriculture and fisheries<sup>81</sup>. The first and most important step in biodiversity conservation is prevention, which focuses on safeguarding natural environments and maintaining ecological integrity, rather than relying on restoration efforts after harm has been done.

82. Eliminating environmentally harmful subsidies<sup>82</sup> is the most powerful structural and preventive measure for saving biodiversity. Redirecting these funds would correct market distortions and fill the global biodiversity financing gap<sup>83 84</sup>.

83. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030<sup>85</sup>, a core part of the European Green Deal, explicitly commits to phasing out Environmentally Harmful Subsidies (EHS) as a key mechanism to reverse biodiversity loss. The strategy requires that all EU funding become "biodiversity and climate proofed," with a specific focus on reforming agriculture, fisheries, and energy incentives by 2030.

84. While strategies exist, reports indicate that member States still use billions of EU funds on activities that harm nature, requiring stronger enforcement and stricter "nature-proofing" of funding. Legally binding targets may be required in order to ensure the phase-out of EHS, rather than relying on voluntary commitments.

85. Regardless, European action of this kind should not be limited to the EU area: maximum impact means guiding all forty-six Council of Europe member States towards action of this kind.

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.rechtenvandenatuur.org/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://blog-iacl-aicd.org/new-blog-3/2022/2/22/european-rights-of-nature-initiatives-6gxaj>

<sup>78</sup> [https://ecojurisprudence.org/?post\\_type=ejm\\_initiative&\\_ejm\\_eco\\_jurisprudence=rights-of-nature&\\_ejm\\_region=europe](https://ecojurisprudence.org/?post_type=ejm_initiative&_ejm_eco_jurisprudence=rights-of-nature&_ejm_region=europe)

<sup>79</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1299301?v=pdf>

<sup>80</sup> Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, page 5, section 7 c

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.bteam.org/our-thinking/news/study-governments-are-subsidizing-the-destruction-of-nature-to-the-tune-of-1-8-trillion-each-year>

<sup>82</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/economy-and-finance/phasing-out-environmentally-harmful-subsidies\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/economy-and-finance/phasing-out-environmentally-harmful-subsidies_en)

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/blog/government-subsidies-and-environment-balancing-between-support-and-sustainability>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.biofin.org/news-and-media/launch-nature-subsidies-step-guide-repurpose-subsidies-harmful-biodiversity-and>

<sup>85</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en)

86. Certainly, it can work. Globally, Colombia, Ecuador, India and Thailand are pioneering measures to tackle harmful subsidies<sup>86</sup>. In Europe, Switzerland and the United Kingdom are the most active in developing policies and national strategies to identify, phase out or reform subsidies harmful to biodiversity.

87. When regional governments manage EU Cohesion and Regional Development Funds (ERDF), they are bound by the European Climate Law and the EU's 8th Environmental Action Programme (EAP)<sup>87</sup>.

88. In Flanders (Belgium), local and regional water boards have historically subsidised high-volume water consumption via large-scale infrastructure or tax exemptions. Subsidies that encourage over-extraction are being phased out in favour of active ecosystem recovery<sup>88</sup>. The Flemish budget for active ecosystem recovery has increased progressively. Working on ecosystem recovery can have huge benefits for biodiversity. Over three decades, Flemish and Dutch water agencies - Vlaamse Waterweg and Rijkswaterstaat - have partnered with local and regional authorities and local partners in the Riverpark Maasvallei to prevent flooding while restoring ecosystems. In that time, the nature area has doubled and biodiversity for key species groups has tripled<sup>89</sup>.

89. Several other local and regional authorities across Europe have begun auditing, reforming, and shifting public funds away from activities that degrade local ecosystems<sup>90</sup>. Regions and cities such as Munich<sup>91</sup>, Barcelona<sup>92</sup> and Austrian municipalities<sup>93</sup> are reforming their property subsidies and green space management policies, and are linking public procurement to strict sustainability criteria in order to fund local nature restoration.

90. Sub-national authorities can accelerate the phase-out of environmentally harmful subsidies by tightening oversight of local financial flows, redirecting public spending, and aligning territorial policies with national reforms. Their first lever is auditing and transparency: mapping tax breaks, land grants, utility discounts, and regulatory exemptions that artificially reduce costs for polluting or unsustainable activities. By exposing these implicit supports, local authorities reveal where public resources contradict (climate and) biodiversity goals.

91. Bordeaux (France), Barcelona (Spain), Hamburg (Germany) and Amsterdam (The Netherlands) are developing the foundations for Sustainable Development Goal budgeting, ensuring that local public finances become a strategic lever for sustainability-driven governance and long-term societal well-being<sup>94</sup>.

92. The reorientation of public spending is also important. Through green public procurement, cities and regions can exclude goods and services linked to destructive subsidies and prioritise low-carbon, circular, and nature-positive alternatives. They can also repurpose local funds by phasing out incentives for carbon-heavy transport or intensive agriculture and redirecting them toward public transit, active mobility, ecosystem restoration, ecological agriculture and community-based conservation.

93. Finally, local and regional authorities can act to ensure policy alignment and advocacy. Local zoning, building codes, and environmental permitting can discourage activities that benefit from national-level loopholes. At the same time, cities and regions can use local impact data to advocate for broader tax and subsidy reforms, demonstrating how harmful subsidies affect air quality, water resources, land use including the implications for biodiversity.

86 [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2020\)050-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2020)050-e)

87 [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/economy-and-finance/phasing-out-environmentally-harmful-subsidies\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/economy-and-finance/phasing-out-environmentally-harmful-subsidies_en)

88 <https://www.integraalwaterbeleid.be/en/blue-deal>

89 <https://view.publitas.com/r1km-1/synthese-brochure-maas-in-beeld-engels/page/1>

90 <https://decentralization.net/2026/02/local-public-finances-and-the-sdgs-how-are-european-cities-rewiring-budgeting-for-a-sustainable-future/>

91 <https://www.lvoe.de/>

92 <https://www.ecologic.eu/18824>

93 [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-environmental-performance-reviews-austria-2026\\_520533a1-en/full-report/towards-the-green-transition\\_3fc24d7a.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-environmental-performance-reviews-austria-2026_520533a1-en/full-report/towards-the-green-transition_3fc24d7a.html)

94 [https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/technical-support-instrument-0/revenue-administration-and-public-financial-management/sustainability-local-public-finances-slpf\\_en](https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/technical-support-instrument-0/revenue-administration-and-public-financial-management/sustainability-local-public-finances-slpf_en)

### 3.4. Nature on the balance sheet: a picture of real prosperity

94. A country's financial health is typically measured through GDP, public debt and physical assets, yet nature (forests, soils, wetlands and rivers) rarely appears on the balance sheet. Recognising natural capital as an economic asset would reveal the true value of ecosystem services such as water purification, carbon storage, flood protection and pollination, and make the costs of degradation visible. A wetland that prevents €20 million in annual flood damage may seem expendable when replaced by €100 million in real estate, yet its lost services could exceed €300 million, an uncounted decline in national wealth.

95. Frameworks like the UN System for Environmental and Economic Accounting (UN SEEA)<sup>95</sup> support such accounting, with respect of the intrinsic ecological and cultural values. Integrating natural capital into national accounts helps governments see hidden losses, like soil erosion, polluted water, declining biodiversity and make more balanced choices. It reframes nature not as a cost but as productive capital essential to long-term prosperity and future generations.

96. While the United Nation's UN SEEA is primarily implemented at the national level by central statistical offices across more than 95 countries, several regional governments, catchments, and local authorities have pioneered sub-national and local pilot implementations<sup>96</sup>.

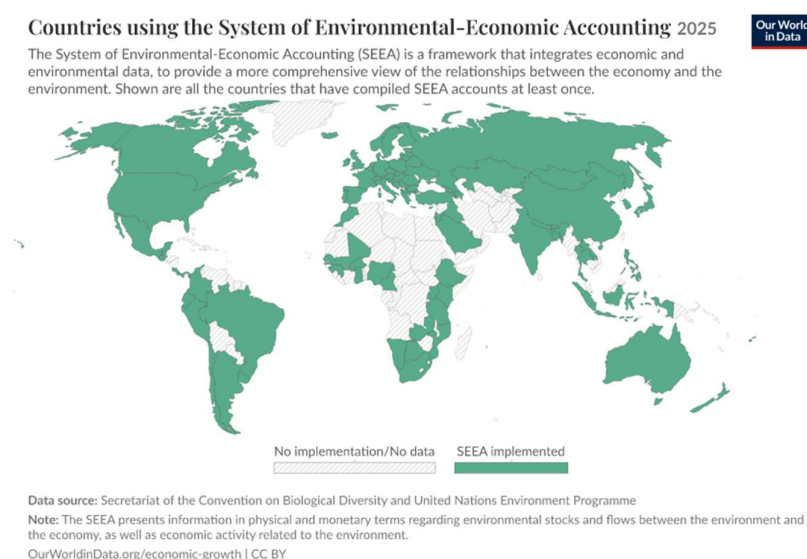


**Figure 2: Global overview of Environmental-Economic Accounting - Our World in Data<sup>97</sup>**

97. Examples of integrating natural capital systems at the sub-national level can be found in:

- United Kingdom. The London Borough of Barnet became the first London borough to create a borough-wide Corporate Natural Capital Account to measure the economic and social value of its parks and open spaces<sup>98</sup>; Plymouth utilises a natural capital approach specifically focused on marine and coastal assets like Plymouth Sound, estuaries, and subtidal seagrass beds to guide local environmental management, risk registers, and green financing<sup>99</sup>;
- Norway, which is implementing the SEEA framework to systematically track nature's values, ecosystem distribution, and the services environment, at national, counties and municipalities levels<sup>100</sup>. For example, Oslo tested the 'TEP Urban' platform. This program integrates spatial

<sup>95</sup> <https://seea.un.org/en>

<sup>96</sup> <https://seea.un.org/en/about-seea/global-assessment-environmental-economic-accounting>

<sup>97</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/countries-using-the-system-of-environmental-economic-accounting>

<sup>98</sup> <https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/resources/projects/london-borough-of-barnet-corporate-natural-capital-account/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://pml.ac.uk/projects/marine-social-and-natural-capital-lab/>

<sup>100</sup> [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/S4b\\_4\\_Norway\\_updated.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/S4b_4_Norway_updated.pdf)

municipal land-use registries directly with ecosystem asset accounts to measure how expanding urban boundaries impacts local biodiversity and stormwater runoff costs<sup>101</sup>. Oslo, again, put in place “Grøntregnskap” (Green Accounting) which is an operational municipal management system that tracks changes in urban vegetation and tree canopy cover to ensure that city development does not deplete the financial and ecological value of its green infrastructure;

- Spain, where the city of Madrid deployed a SEEA model to map its urban ecosystem condition accounts at a hyper-local, object-based level. By systematically evaluating tree density, bird species variety, and soil imperviousness, municipal planners map "ecological deficits". This data allows city planners to allocate urban re-greening budgets specifically to high-contamination, high-heat urban zones<sup>102</sup>;
- Armenia which has begun developing a national accounting system aligned to the SEEA, starting with water accounting. The Governmental Decision on the classification of land cover in RA (2019) initiated the first step toward ecosystem accounting by establishing extent accounts for land-cover classes based on the results of land accounting in communities, marzes (provinces) and nationwide<sup>103</sup>;
- Ukraine, which applies the SEEA framework to measure natural capital, evaluate environmental damage from wartime destruction, and guide sustainable post-war recovery, at the national and regional levels<sup>104</sup>.

98. At the EU-level, the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre completed a large-scale operational mapping of natural capital assets across the territorial units used for EU cohesion and development funds<sup>105</sup>.

### 3.5. Local and regional authorities, drivers of systemic change

99. Local and regional authorities can become key drivers of systemic change, often drawing on the mechanisms outlined above. Some examples of how local and regional governments have implemented their ecological policies can be found in Appendix I. They can be source of inspiration for concrete action.

100. Local and regional authorities can also choose to collaborate with specific initiatives of a more general nature, from nature conservation organisations and scientific institutes to networks, agencies and dedicated individuals. Many such initiatives are striving to make a real difference for biodiversity in Europe. Several particularly promising initiatives can be found in Appendix II. Local and regional authorities are encouraged to take advantage of them.

101 <https://seea.un.org/en/events/2019-forum-experts-seea-experimental-ecosystem-accounting>

102 <https://burjcdigital.urjc.es/items/012a6e29-8274-4b9c-a5b9-0d7cc959ff4b>

103 <https://www.biofin.org/knowledge-product/ecosystem-accounting-in-armenia-setting-the-scene/>

104 <https://abg-journal.com/index.php/journal/article/view/499>

105 [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/natural-capital-drives-eu-regional-growth-2025-03-19\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/natural-capital-drives-eu-regional-growth-2025-03-19_en)

## CONCLUSIONS

101. The report demonstrates that, whilst respecting the intrinsic value of nature, socio-economic benefits provide additional and compelling arguments for local and regional authorities to restore and conserve biodiversity in line with priorities of the Congress and of the Council of Europe as a whole.

102. National Strategic Action Plans for Biodiversity set baseline commitments under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). However, without downscaling these strategies into Local and Regional Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, national targets remain abstract and difficult to enforce. In order to achieve the objectives and targets, local and regional authorities should receive sufficient technical and financial support, including economic incentives, from (inter)national authorities to develop the plans, implement them and to restore and protect the local biodiversity and their habitats.

103. Local and regional authorities can immediately start with an implementation process including for example the Rights of Nature concept. These approaches have already been applied through municipal ordinances, river guardianship arrangements, ecosystem representation mechanisms, and participatory governance structures that incorporate the interests of nature into public decision-making. Already, 92 initiatives have been taken in Europe, and a lot of experience and best practice can therefore be exchanged.

104. Eliminating harmful subsidies and repurposing environmentally harmful subsidies is considered a top strategy for protecting biodiversity, as it prevents public funding from driving ecological destruction and frees up financial resources for positive incentives and conservation. Responsibility doesn't lie solely at the international and national levels. Local and regional authorities can also eliminate harmful biodiversity subsidies and identify perverse incentives and phase out the most damaging financial support.

105. Finding new financing models for restoring and protecting nature is crucial in the next decade. Initiatives and incentives have already been introduced. The United Nation's System for Environmental and Economic Accounting is a promising global initiative and primarily implemented at the national level. However, several regional governments, catchments, and local authorities are pioneering sub-national and local pilot implementations. Putting nature on the balance sheet is a game changer and makes the value of biodiversity immediately visible and comparable.

106. Local and regional authorities have a lot of power at their disposal even in their daily work. By combining local action with national engagement, local and regional authorities can become key drivers of systemic change. Many excellent examples of how local and regional governments are implementing their ecological policies inspire others. A toolbox of good practices could be built and collected within the Council of Europe and made available.

107. Lastly, local and regional authorities can choose to collaborate with organisations already involved. Across Europe many initiatives are striving to make a real difference for biodiversity. Several particularly promising initiatives can be highly valuable in finding practical, scalable, and community-rooted solutions.

## Appendix 1. Examples of biodiversity-supporting ecology policies by local and regional authorities

### 1. Land-use Planning and Spatial Development (Systematic process of evaluating, allocating, and organising physical land and water resources to balance social, economic, and environmental needs)

Bavaria, Germany. Uses regional planning laws to enforce a mandatory statewide biotope network, connecting isolated habitats across agricultural lands<sup>106</sup>; Bavaria's biotope network legally requires municipalities to map and protect ecological corridors across 15% of open space, ensuring these routes cannot be breached by development. It operationalises state conservation law through regional planning and local zoning, linking fragmented habitats across farmland. The system strengthens genetic exchange, climate adaptation and farm-level ecosystem services while supporting farmers through targeted subsidies

Bucharest, Romania. The Văcărești Natural Park serves as a premier example of how local action combined with national governance can drive spatial development and land-use transformation. Through innovative urban planning, it was officially designated as Europe's largest urban natural protected area<sup>107</sup>;

### 2. Management of Public Land (Process of planning, maintaining, and regulating government-owned property to balance public use, economic benefits, and environmental protection)

Île-de-France, France. The regional agency manages thousands of hectares of public forests to balance timber production with biodiversity preservation<sup>108</sup>;

This multifunctional model balances ecological, social, and economic goals. Management combines close-to-nature forestry, strict biodiversity reserves, climate-resilient replanting, and controlled public access. Selective harvesting supplies local timber while protecting habitats and strengthening long-term forest resilience;

### 3. Green Infrastructure, including in urban environments (Network of natural, semi-natural, and engineered plant or soil systems designed to solve environmental problems and improve community life)

Barcelona, Spain. Deploys its projects 'Superblocks' and 'Green Axes' program, removing car lanes to create pedestrian spaces filled with native trees and bees and other pollinators plants<sup>109</sup>.

City grids are restructured to prioritise pedestrians, green space, and ecological connectivity over car traffic. By diverting vehicles, reclaiming asphalt, adding permeable soils, and planting drought-resistant urban forests, they create cooler microclimates and continuous biodiversity corridors. The model delivers major health, social, and ecological gains by reducing pollution, restoring water cycles, and expanding community spaces;

In France a similar project is developed, called Greening Schoolyards (Végétaliser les cours d'école)<sup>110</sup>.

The Cities-With-Nature Action Platform, used by nearly 400 cities, channels local ecological metrics into national dashboards under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, ensuring federal funding aligns with actual municipal habitat needs<sup>111</sup>. In Europe, the Biodiverse Cities project<sup>112</sup> advances Nature-based Solutions to counter urban biodiversity loss and climate impacts through collaborative, city-driven innovation.

106 <https://www.gesetze-bayern.de/Content/Document/BayNatSchG-19>

107 <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/12/1/245>

108 <https://www.onf.fr/onf/%2B/78::onf-en-ile-de-france.html>

109 <https://ebrdgreencities.com/policy-tool/urban-planning-with-superblocks-barcelona-spain-2/>

110 <https://www.banquedesterritoires.fr/guide-vegetaliser-cours-ecole>

111 <https://talkofthecities.iclei.org/science-based-approaches-to-measuring-biodiversity-progress-and-impact/>

112 <https://www.interregnorthsea.eu/biodiverse-cities>

**4. Water and Ecosystem Management** (Process of planning, maintaining, regulating and restoring wetland sites, water landscapes and their ecosystems)

Västra Götaland, Sweden. Local authorities lead wetland restoration projects along river basins to filter agricultural runoff and bring back wildlife<sup>113</sup>;

Local wetland restoration uses natural filtration, nutrient absorption and silt trapping to improve water quality and rebuild aquatic habitats. Recreated shallow waters, native fish recovery and expanded bird and insect populations demonstrate rapid biodiversity gains. The governance model is strongly local, with municipalities, farmers and watershed-based planning coordinating implementation;

Nemunas River Delta, Lithuania. Multi-tiered marsh restorations in the Baltic region use controlled cattle grazing to keep floodplains open and prevent reed overgrowth. This cooperative model between local authorities and farmers restores key wetland structures essential for threatened species. It re-establishes nesting habitat for the aquatic warbler and reopens historical migration routes for salmonids<sup>114</sup>;

Water landscapes such as these often sit within the joint remit of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. The two treaties are complementary: Ramsar identifies and protects wetland sites of international value, while the Landscape Convention addresses the wider territorial fabric - land use, planning, and the everyday and degraded landscapes - that falls outside formal site designations. The two conventions also converge on the same principle running through this report: Ramsar's own guidance calls for the active participation of local and indigenous communities in wetland management, echoing the Landscape Convention's participatory requirements.

**5. Environmental Regulation and Permitting** (Public policies to protect the environment through specific standards and permits)

Andalusia, Spain. The regional government issues environmental permits that strictly limit groundwater extraction near the sensitive Doñana National Park wetlands<sup>115</sup>;

Andalusia protects Doñana by enforcing strict groundwater limits and rigorous environmental permitting across the Guadalquivir basin. Extraction caps, irrigation-zone restrictions and exhaustive project reviews form a tightly integrated regulatory system. Together, these measures curb aquifer depletion and prevent land-use pressures from pushing the wetland toward ecological collapse;

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo<sup>116</sup>, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia target water pollution and unsustainable extraction. The EU4Green-project<sup>117</sup> tackles nitrate pollution and unregulated groundwater extraction across the Western Balkans by enforcing strict implementation of the EU Nitrates Directive. Local authorities map Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and restrict fertiliser permits to protect aquifers.

**6. Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development** (Projects to accompany individuals and farmers to restore the environment with positive consequences on biodiversity)

Brittany, France. Local councils incentivise farmers to replant bocage (traditional hedgerows) to combat soil erosion and provide habitat for small mammals<sup>118</sup>;

Brittany's councils are restoring traditional bocage landscapes by subsidising hedgerow planting and simplifying access to CAP environmental funds. Rebuilt hedgerow networks stabilise soils,

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<sup>113</sup> <https://improveaquaticlife.se/en/>

<sup>114</sup> <https://rewildingeurope.com/rew-project/managing-human-coexistence-with-natural-processes-in-nemunas-delta/>

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/news/spanish-government-blocks-controversial-irrigation-law-in-drought-stricken-donana/>

<sup>116</sup> All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo

<sup>117</sup> <https://eu4green.eu/topics/depollution-of-water/>

<sup>118</sup> [https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/programme-breizh-bocage-2-farm-hedge-networks-france-restored-and-preserved-local-cap\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/programme-breizh-bocage-2-farm-hedge-networks-france-restored-and-preserved-local-cap_en)

regulate water, boost biodiversity and sequester carbon. The programme also strengthens rural economies through eco-tourism, sustainable wood biomass and natural pest control;

Moldova. Moldova's IFAD Shelter Belt Project<sup>119</sup> helps smallholders plant native tree lines to combat severe drought and topsoil erosion. These shelter belts stabilise fields, capture carbon and create blooming corridors that support bees and other pollinators. By integrating nectar-rich species, the project also strengthens rural economies through local honey and organic apiary production.

**7. Climate and Biodiversity Integration** (Nature restoration to reduce carbon emissions and rewild the areas in question through dedicated funding)

Scotland, UK. Scottish regional councils restore peatlands by rewetting degraded bogs to stop carbon emissions and restart long-term sequestration<sup>120</sup>. Raised water levels bring back sphagnum moss, insects and wading birds while reducing downstream flood risks. Implementation relies on ditch-blocking, bunding and moorland management, supported by Peatland ACTION funding and private finance through the UK Peatland Code;

Industrial reversion in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. The Baltic States are restoring vast areas of drained peatlands once used for forestry and fuel extraction through large-scale rewetting projects. These efforts align closely with EU Nature Restoration Law targets and use real-time GHG-reduction data to attract private carbon-credit investment. The model mirrors Scotland's peatland finance approach, linking climate mitigation with long-term ecological recovery.

Singapore's National Biodiversity Centre App enables residents to record terrestrial and marine species in real time, feeding legally recognised data directly into municipal planning; This citizen science network directly impacts municipal planning through a systematic loop of crowdsourced data generation, institutional validation, and predictive urban design. It has helped the city expand its green canopy from 36% to 47% despite rapid population growth<sup>121</sup>.

**8. Education, Awareness, and Community Engagement** (Initiatives aimed at supporting individuals in their commitment to nature conservation)

Helsinki, Finland. Operates local nature centres that run citizen-science programs tracking the impact of climate change on arctic bird species<sup>122</sup>;

Citizen science, bird tracking, and community-driven climate monitoring are expanding rapidly across Southeastern Europe (the Balkans and neighbouring regions). Initiatives are led by national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and regional open-science academic networks;

**9. Economic Development and Procurement** (Public procurement standards that include access restrictions in the event of environmental degradation)

Oslo, Norway. Norway enforces national zero-deforestation and green public procurement standards, aligning with broader policies applied across municipalities like Oslo to restrict public purchases of goods linked to environmental degradation<sup>123</sup>;

Scotland, UK. Through local planning and construction frameworks, public developments must include "pollinator-friendly stepping stones". Tenders for highway and railway verge maintenance dictate strict ecological timelines: roadside contractors face severe financial penalties if they mow wildflower buffers during peak bees and other pollinators foraging and breeding seasons<sup>124</sup>.

119 <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/rural-voices/in-moldova-shelter-belt-forests-build-rural-livelihoods-and-protect-against-climate-change-impacts>

120 <https://academic.oup.com/jel/article/38/2/222/8705152>

121 <https://www.weforum.org/stories/nature-and-biodiversity/biodiversity-cities-wildlife-nature/>

122 <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/climate-change/species-adapted-cold-weather-are-giving-way-species-adapted-warmer-climates>

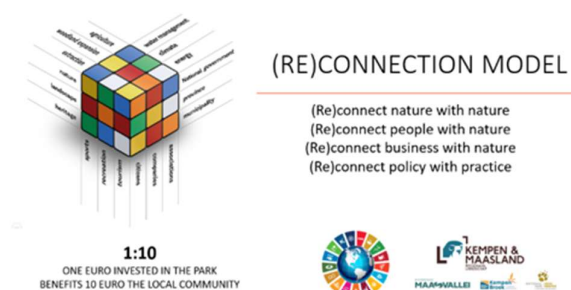
123 <https://www.regnskog.no/en/news/norwegian-state-commits-to-zero-deforestation-1>

124 <https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity/scottish-biodiversity-strategy/local-biodiversity-partnerships>

## Appendix 2. Examples of successful biodiversity initiatives

### ***(Re)Connection Model***

1. Originating in the Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland in Belgium, the (Re)connection Model<sup>125</sup> works bottom-up to reconnect nature with society. Its core ambition is simple and powerful: to restore and protect more and better nature, for and by more people, now and in the future. LRA take actively participate in the local coalitions of the parks and become part of the decision-making and governance.
2. By translating the value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems into socio-economic language, the model provides an additional layer of convincing evidence for restoring and safeguarding natural heritage. Studies show that investing in a region's natural quality yields substantial benefits for local communities: a return ratio of 1:10. In other words, every euro invested in nature generates ten euros in local socio-economic value and demonstrates that environmental restoration is an economic engine, not a financial drain<sup>126127128129</sup>.
3. The return on restoring and protecting the natural heritage is fourfold: it strengthens natural capital, social capital, human capital, and financial investment value. The results are visible on the ground. In the 12.000-hectare Hoge Kempen National Park (*Hoge Kempen, Hoge Baten*), direct and indirect revenues amount to €191 million annually, supporting more than 5,000 jobs<sup>130</sup>. Monetising was based on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Model (TEEB)<sup>131</sup>. In the Maas Valley River Park, the model helped double natural habitat and triple biodiversity<sup>132</sup>, and similar outcomes were achieved in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve KempenBroek.



4. Today, the (Re)connection Model serves as an inter(national) source of inspiration and a guiding framework. It is applied not only in Belgium but also in Portugal, France, Latvia, as well as countries outside Europe, including South Korea. The (Re)Connection Model is recognised as one of Europe's most promising best practices and increasingly understood as an investment in public health, community well-being, and long-term resilience.

125 <https://rlkm.be/wie-zijn-we/reconnection-model/>

126 <https://wvf.be/nl/persberichten/1-euro-investeren-natuurherstel-levert-belgie-tot-wel-51-euro-op>

127 <https://www.change.inc/infra/miljardeninvestering-in-meer-natuur-levert-8-tot-38-keer-zoveel-op-41378>

128 <https://www.natuurpunt.be/nieuws/1-euro-investeren-in-natuur-levert-in-belgie-tot-wel-51-euro-op>

129 <https://www.bioeconomy.fi/the-finnish-national-parks-have-a-high-return-on-investment-the-visitor-volumes-are-going-up/>

130 <https://www.nationaalparkhogekampen.be/nl/over-ons/hoge-kampen-hoge-baten>

131 <https://www.unep.org/topics/teeb>

132 <https://www.naturetoday.com/intl/nl/nature-reports/message/?msg=27112>

## Bioregional Weaving Labs

5. Many municipalities and regions are experiencing difficult times in Europe. Coalmines need to phase out, agricultural transformation and regeneration is needed, biodiversity is collapsing, abandonment and depopulation of regions are visible and demography changes with young adults leaving the countryside for cities. The cohesion of the local communities decreases. Bioregional Weaving Labs<sup>133</sup> aim to align human behaviour with the fundamental principles of life on Earth, ensuring that societies operate within planetary boundaries. Achieving this paradigm shift requires a holistic, adaptive learning approach at the scale of bioregions, the subregional level where ecological, cultural, and social dynamics intersect most meaningfully.



6. Working at this scale allow local and regional authorities and communities to understand and practise regenerative systems in ways that are deeply rooted in local context and place. When interconnected, these resilient bioregions form a living tapestry that strengthens biodiversity and ecological health across the planet. Rather than relying on polarisation or fragmented initiatives, Bioregional Weaving Labs are built on collective action, new forms of leadership, portfolios of systemic innovation, and regenerative finance mechanisms. They depend on the active involvement of rural inhabitants, supported by enabling policies that make long-term ecological regeneration possible. Together, these elements create a framework in which communities can restore ecosystems, strengthen local resilience, and contribute to a broader global shift toward living systems thinking.

7. Bioregional Weaving Labs, originated in 2022, is fast-growing and works in six countries: the Oltentia de Sub Munte (Romania), Laconia (Greece), Orne Watershed (France), Cilento (Italy), Mid Vistula River Valley (Poland) and Living Delta (the Netherlands).

## Rewilding Europe

8. Rewilding Europe<sup>134</sup> is already demonstrating large-scale restoration initiatives that support wildlife recovery and help develop nature-based enterprises, showing that ecological restoration can serve as a driver of local opportunity rather than a barrier to development<sup>135</sup>.

9. Crucially, rewilding does not imply abandoning rural communities. The future of Europe's landscapes depends on balancing natural recovery with vibrant rural societies. Restored ecosystems can generate new economic prospects - from sustainable tourism and regenerative agriculture to ecosystem restoration, carbon storage, and other nature-based businesses. In this way, ecological recovery and rural revitalisation can move forward together, creating landscapes that are both ecologically rich and socially resilient.



10. Rewilding Europe is directly active in 10 large rewilding landscapes across 15 European countries. Through 'Wilder Parks', the wider European Rewilding Network it connects additionally over 70 member initiatives spanning 28 countries.

11. Several local and regional authorities collaborate with the Rewilding Europe Network, supporting mayors through initiatives such as the Alliance of European Mayors<sup>136</sup> to strengthen local ecological dialogue, working with councils on concrete restoration actions. In several European countries like Italy, Sweden and Portugal they are partnering with local governments to restore natural river dynamics.

133 <https://bioregionalweavinglabs.org/>

134 <https://rewildingeurope.com/>

135 <https://rewildingeurope.com/news/rewilding-europe-is-helping-nature-based-businesses-to-thrive/>

136 <https://rewilding.europa.com/news/working-with-mayors-and-communities-to-help-shape-a-wilder-future/>

### **The 3-30-300 Rule**

12. While rural areas offer opportunities for large-scale ecological restoration, cities face the opposite challenge: reconnecting people with nature in increasingly dense urban environments. The 3-30-300 rule<sup>137</sup>, developed by urban forestry expert Dr. Cecil Konijnendijk, provides a practical guideline for integrating nature into urban planning. It proposes that every resident should:

- See at least 3 mature trees from their home;
- Live in a neighbourhood with at least 30% tree canopy cover;
- Have access to a high-quality green space within 300 metres of their home.



13. This approach recognises that urban greenery is not merely decorative. Trees, parks, and natural areas function as essential urban infrastructure, improving physical and mental health, reducing heat stress, managing water, improving air quality, and supporting urban biodiversity.

14. The future of European landscapes therefore requires action at both ends of the spectrum: restoring larger rural areas where nature can return, while redesigning cities so that biodiversity becomes part of everyday life. Depopulated rural landscapes and densely populated urban areas represent two sides of the same challenge - and two opportunities to rebuild a healthier relationship between society and nature.

15. Malmö, Kolmar and in Belgium, the Agency for Nature and Forestry have adopted the model<sup>138</sup>. The Nature based Solutions Institute promotes the 3-30-300-model as one of the best practices<sup>139</sup>. Municipalities and researchers use it as a spatial analysis tool rather than a rigid legal mandate. They map neighbourhoods via satellite data and GIS to see which districts meet the 3-trees, 30% canopy, and 300-meter park thresholds.<sup>140</sup>

### **Regional Parks**

16. Regional Nature Parks<sup>141</sup> are government-recognised protected areas dedicated to conserving nature and landscapes shaped by long-term human use. These cultural land- and seascapes host diverse species and habitats, and the parks work transversally by translating international and national standards into effective local action. Their core objectives include biodiversity conservation, sustainable land-use, nature-based recreation and tourism, rural development, and environmental education.

17. They operate through broad regional cooperation, involving local authorities, administrative organisations, NGOs and the local population. Regional Nature Parks function at an integrated landscape scale - both on land and at sea- and typically cover at least 3.000 to 5.000 hectares, except in justified cases. Across Europe, around 900 such parks exist in 22 countries (2016)<sup>142</sup>. Although their names and governance structures vary, they share common principles of purpose, mission, and integrated management. These parks are key actors in rural development, sustainable agriculture,

<sup>137</sup> <https://nbsi.eu/330300-principle/>

<sup>138</sup> <https://pub.norden.org/temanord2025-520/2-the-3-30-300-principle-from-concept-to-nordic-implementation.html>

<sup>139</sup> <https://nbsi.eu/330300-principle/>

<sup>140</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301479726010017>

<sup>141</sup> <https://www.europarc.org/>

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.european-parks.org/publications/brochure-living-landscapes>

natural and cultural heritage protection, biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature education. Their overarching mission is to integrate biodiversity protection with sustainable land use and socio-economic development within their territories.

18. The term “Regional Nature Parks” encompasses a wide range of large-scale protected areas, including Nature Parks, Regional Parks, Landscape Parks, Protected Landscape Areas, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Some are also recognised internationally through UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme or the Geopark network. Most of the regional Parks are included in the network of Europarc Federation.

19. The initiative to become a regional park differs from country to country. The establishment of regional parks is predominantly based on national regulation. But regional and local authorities (together with local and regional organisations) are the initiators, organisers and have full control. Because regional parks contain more local authorities – sometimes more than 10 municipalities are involved – the cooperation leads to less costs for management and maintenance, and higher benefits due to regional promotion, sustainable tourism, etc. The bigger the regional park, the bigger the survival for species (based on the Island Biogeography: Larger protected areas (islands) hold more species because they provide more diverse habitats and lower the risk of extinction for resident populations<sup>143</sup>).

20. Often, regional parks join forces and cooperate at national level: In France les Parcs naturels régionaux<sup>144</sup>, in the UK Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty<sup>145</sup>, in Germany they are called Deutsche Naturlandschaften<sup>146</sup>, in Italy Federparchi<sup>147</sup>, etc.

### ***Drinkable Rivers***

21. Rivers are vital for all life on earth, rivers are our lifelines. It’s impossible to live without water from drinkable rivers. This should be a guiding principle for our societies.

22. The Drinkable Rivers<sup>148</sup> project is fast-growing, successful hands-on model that connects the whole society to make visible what’s invisible: that we cannot survive without clean drinking water. For people, for wild and domestic animals, for wild and agricultural lands.

23. The model connects the whole society, but is particularly interested in local authorities. For the river Maas (la Meuse) – that runs through 3 countries and 160 municipalities in France, Belgium and the Netherlands – a structure of ‘Mayors for a drinkable river’ is installed<sup>149</sup>. Likewise, projects are started for the river Thames (United Kingdom), the IJssel (The Netherlands) and the Scheldt (Belgium).

### ***Green Area Factor***

24. The green area factor is a tool to link biodiversity values/green areas and spatial development through spatial planning, typically in cities but also applicable in more rural areas. Based on detailed mapping of ecologically valuable green areas it steers and requires new developments to avoid, minimise or compensate loss of ecological values through design choices and green infrastructure. Since the original application in Berlin (Biotopflächenfaktor, or Biotope Area Factor)<sup>150</sup> during the 1990s the approach has spread Europe wide, for example to London,<sup>151</sup> Malmö,<sup>152</sup> Helsinki,<sup>153</sup> Oslo and beyond.

143 <https://www.nature.com/nature-index/topics/l4/island-biogeography-and-species-diversity>

144 <https://www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.fr/les-parcs/decouvrir-les-60-parcs>

145 <https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/Defra::areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-england/about>

146 <https://nationale-naturlandschaften.de/>

147 <https://www.federparchi.it/>

148 <https://drinkablerivers.org/>

149 <https://drinkablerivers.org/mayors-for-drinkable-rivers/>

150 <https://www.berlin.de/sen/uvk/natur-und-gruen/landschaftsplanung/bff-biotopflaechenfaktor/>

151 [www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance/urban-greening-factor-ugf-guidance](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance/urban-greening-factor-ugf-guidance)

152 <https://www.boverket.se/sv/PBL-kunskapsbanken/teman/ekosystemjanster/verktyg/gronrytefaktor/kvartersmark/>

153 <https://www.hel.fi/static/liitteet/kaupunkiymparisto/julkaisut/aineistot/aineistoja-14-21.pdf>