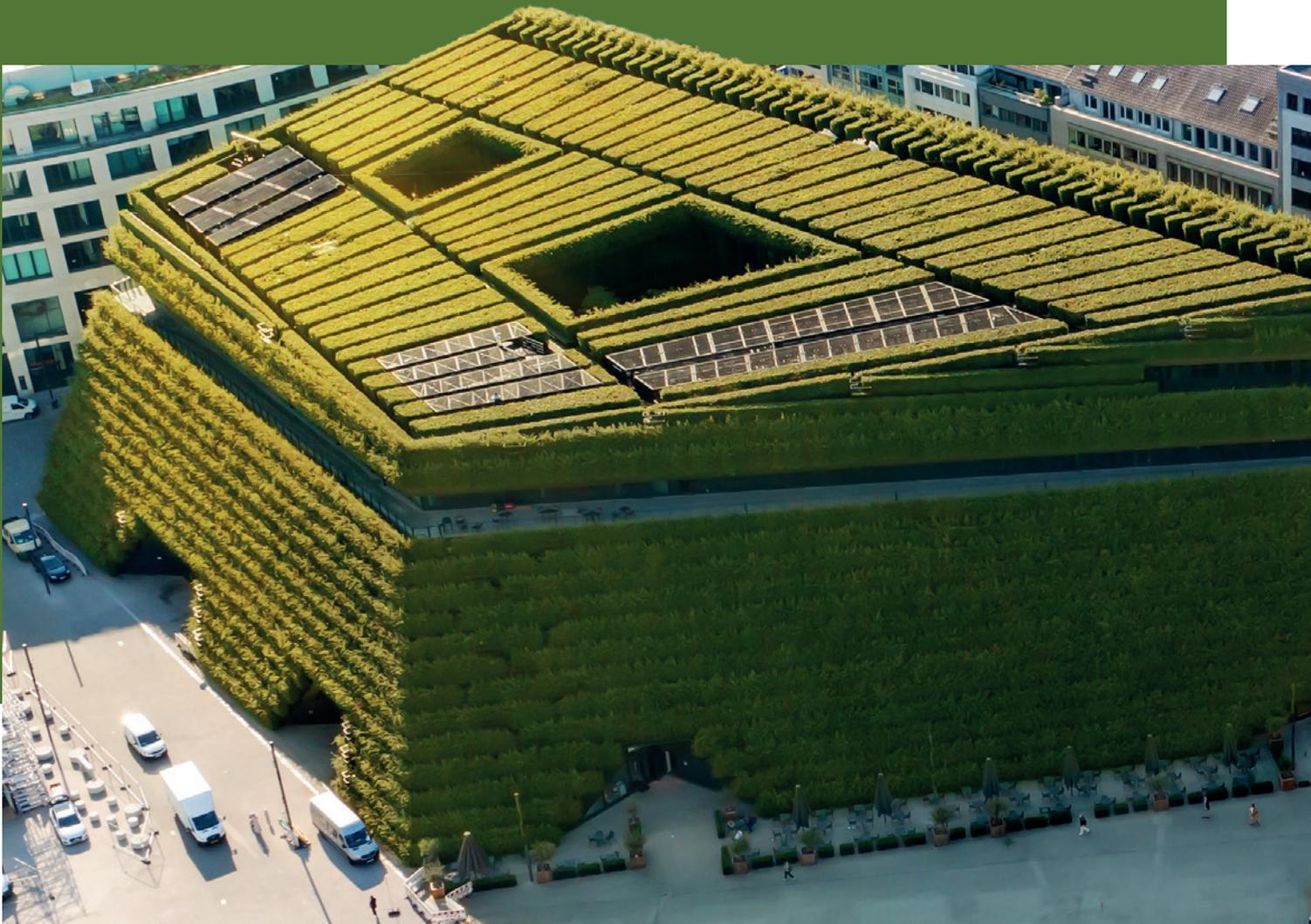


# European Platform for Urban Greening

Case Studies from Year Three



Co-funded by the  
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## FOREWORD

# Strengthening Green Education

As momentum in Urban Greening accelerates and garners greater attention, the European Platform continues to mature its Centres of Vocational Excellence and secure its position as a world-class reference point, particularly for Green education. By strengthening curriculum across the Platform and adapting it to the latest needs and advances in the sector, we strive to reinvent Green education for the 21st century and redefine who it is for.

We know that Green education is vital for creating more sustainable, liveable, and equitable cities, which is why the Platform's partners collectively ensure that our approach is inclusive, accessible and applicable to everyone, at every level. To do this requires a multi-faceted and compelling approach to education that involves attractive and authentic learning opportunities, incorporating applied research into curriculum and training, and creating dynamic digital offerings.

Throughout this year's Case Studies, you will find numerous examples of how our Centres of Vocational Excellence are using technology, including virtual reality (VR), to engage new audiences and provide fast, flexible opportunities for Green practitioners to up-skill on the go.

While some countries are reinventing the way Green curriculum is delivered using new technology, other countries are redefining who Green education is for through authentic public learning experiences, developing core curriculum (starting as early as elementary school where it didn't exist before), or establishing new professional qualifications; in all cases, major gains are being made by our partners.

By placing an emphasis on accessible learning opportunities and using applied research to demonstrate the tangible impacts of Greening in real-world contexts, we can equip individuals and communities with the necessary knowledge and tools they need to actively participate, receive training, and enhance their skills in Urban Greening.

Providing the most up-to-date Green education to students, professionals and the public has never been more robust. By strengthening Green education, we aim to improve the overall health and well-being of urban communities, and widely promote Urban Greening practices as viable solutions that offer immediate practicality and relevance, paving the way for the development of sustainable Green cities and fostering the goal of Nature-Inclusive Living.



## OVERVIEW

# The Power of Mobility Learning

**Over the past three years partners of the European Platform for Urban Greening have harnessed the power of mobility learning to transcend traditional educational boundaries and create attractive learning opportunities that allow for the valuable transfer of knowledge in Urban Greening across Europe.**

Whether learning from best practices and new innovations in different countries or improving curriculum based on the experience of others, vocational educators, students and industry professionals alike have been inspired by the ability to travel and connect in dynamic environments where they are empowered to acquire new knowledge first-hand. In particular, challenge-based cooperative learning experiences have proved to be hugely beneficial for generating momentum in the Green sector and forging a collaborative European network.

In 2023, the European Platform organised the first ever International Urban Greening Week, hosted by AhlmanEdu in Finland and Yuverta in the Netherlands. With more than 30 students and teachers from four countries (Finland, the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Denmark) taking part, participants were invited to solve real-world Urban Greening challenges.

The inaugural International Urban Greening Week consisted of students and teachers forming teams to work on assigned challenges, conduct research, execute practical work, and participate in several excursions. In this intensive cooperative learning environment, the Urban Greening Week concluded with a presentation of original findings and solutions that addressed community participation in Urban Greening in each of the two host locations.

The outcomes of this first International Urban Greening Week proved so successful that Platform partners in Czech Republic and Romania will host the second annual event in the spring of 2024. Using a challenge-based collaborative mobility model has also produced tremendous results for two other notable spin-off projects of the European Platform for Urban Greening this year: BARCOVE hosted in Denmark and GREENVUE hosted in the Netherlands.

Looking ahead, the Platform plans to incorporate more challenge-based mobility learning opportunities to strengthen Green education and to spur greater collaboration and innovation in Urban Greening amongst its expanding network of students, vocational educators and industry partners.

## CASE STUDY

# European Landscape Contractors Association

## Strengthening Green Education through Employee Exchanges

The European Landscape Contractors Association is an association that champions Green education in Landscaping and Gardening and the Green sector at-large, by using and elaborating the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The European Qualifications Framework is a cohesion for common understanding and transparency both in education and industry. By training industry practitioners and vocational education providers to have a universal understanding of EQF levels, ELCA is better able to support the mobility of learners and workers, and to promote lifelong learning and professional development across Europe.

ELCA Exchange is the association's programme, where employee exchanges are carried out between companies in Europe and abroad. Every year through the ELCA Exchange, practitioners and companies gain international experience, expand their networks, develop their skills, and gain an understanding of the political issues in the Green sector, faced by different regions.

The success of the ELCA Exchange has demonstrated the value of mobility learning and will continue well into the future.





## Project Highlight

### Nature Restoration Law

In June 2022, the European Commission launched a proposal for the Nature Restoration Law. This law, which is one of the pillars of the EU Green Deal, focuses on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in all kinds of ecosystems, including in urban areas. The Commission proposed a no net loss of Green urban spaces by 2030 and a growth of Green urban spaces with 5% and tree canopy with 10% by 2050.

ELCA welcomes this Nature Restoration Law and the legally binding targets for urban areas. The era in which Greenery was considered merely as decoration, has now passed. The law is an acknowledgement of the key values of Greenery and Nature-Based solutions for a better climate, biodiversity and public health.



Photo provided by Lutze von Wurmb

Unfortunately the proposal met a lot of opposition. The Council of the European Union replaced the concrete targets for Greening urban areas with a general definition: 'a raising trend in Urban Greening till a satisfactory level is reached'. Voting on this law in the European Parliament was a close call, however, the law was adopted by Parliament with this general definition for Greening urban areas.

The Nature Restoration Law is now in trialogue. ELCA will continue to be involved in the legislative process, and put forward suggestions for: clear targets, a plan for the successful implementation of the law on local levels, and for the close monitoring of the results.

***“The European Union is united in the decision that biodiversity needs to be legislated – the time has come that there can be no further loss of nature as a result of human actions.”***

– Henrik Bos, President, European Landscape Contractors Association

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## YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### Development of Education & Industry Networks

Although the first focus of ELCA remains on the European continent, the call for alignment for the Landscaping and Gardening sector on a global level has become louder. Associate member CNLA of Canada has invited ELCA to join them in an approach towards the United Nations. At the UN Conference of the Parties (COP) in Dubai held in November the Landscape and Gardening sector presented Greenery and Nature-Based solutions for mitigation, adaptation and prevention as part of the climate strategy. Besides their mission as a stakeholders, CNLA and ELCA will continue to work together to translate the UN Sustainable Development Goals into a tool for companies in the sector to better define their own aims and report on them. To make the global alignment stronger, there are now contacts for cooperation with countries in Asia.

#### Industry Feedback & Impact

Earlier this year ELCA participated in a three-day deep dive on Urban Water Management in Utrecht, in the Netherlands. From an Landscaping perspective, ELCA representatives discussed new ways to approach Water Management that treat this natural resource as one of, if not the most valuable, commodities. Over the course of the three days participants drilled down on what kind of impact could be made through innovations and thinking more holistically about urban water resources and how they are managed.

#### Dissemination of Information

In an effort to disseminate information beyond the partners of the European Platform for Urban Greening, ELCA worked with EU countries outside of the Platform including Latvia, Poland and Estonia to help them widen their understanding of Urban Greening. With a mission to facilitate a culture shift around the Green sector, ELCA provided guidance on curriculum design, European Qualifications Framework levels, recruitment and building strong partnerships within the sector.

On a larger stage, last June ELCA's President, Henrik Bos and ELCA's Secretary General, Egbert Roozen promoted Urban Greening during EU Green Week in Brussels, disseminating information about the European Platform in the political heart of Europe.



# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### Platform Sustainability

As the European Platform for Urban Greening completes its third year, of the initial four year project, ELCA has maintained a clear focus on the long-term sustainability of the Platform. As a primary organising partner, ELCA, connecting industry stakeholders with vocational institutions to accelerate change and innovation across the Green sector, has laid the groundwork for developing a digital platform that will become the central knowledge and resource hub for Urban Greening in Europe. Archiving and maintaining the work of the partners of the European Platform for Urban Greening in one central location will allow for the continuation of partnerships and the valuable exchange of ideas that will carry this work and the Urban Greening Platform into the decade ahead.

### ELCA's 60 Year Anniversary

In October of this year ELCA celebrated its 60th anniversary during a two-day event in Brussels, which included a jubilee seminar entitled: 'Think Green First'. Guest speakers shared their thoughts on how we are going to make urban areas greener, more liveable and sustainable for future generations to come, and importantly, what a "satisfactory level of Green" means. This significant milestone in the Landscaping and Gardening sector, celebrated the achievement of reaching a point where Greening is recognised as a key solution for climate adaptation, sustaining and improving biodiversity, and enhancing the health and well-being of people. The input from the Think Green First seminar will be used in ELCA's further lobby of the Nature Restoration Law and their Position Paper for the upcoming elections.

### Impact Policy Makers

ELCA is currently working with small and medium sized businesses as well as larger publicly traded companies on their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While some of the larger companies have mandated SDGs to meet, ELCA is also training smaller companies on developing their sustainability goals. Through this process, ELCA is aiming to create a more united international language around SDGs that can be disseminated more widely.



### Continuing Momentum in 2024

#### ELCA Expansion

Having already made progress developing its industry networks this year in Canada, a step in formally expanding the Association internationally, ELCA plans to continue building their network in the year ahead. Specifically, ELCA is aiming to welcome 25 new members to their Committee of Firms; a professional network that helps Green businesses grow their companies and expand their own networks. Members have the benefit of participating in professional excursions both within Europe and abroad and their employees are eligible to take part in the ELCA Exchange programme.

#### Presentation of a new Position Paper

In preparation for the forthcoming European elections, ELCA plans to present a new Position Paper. With 23 national member associations and three associated members (Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom), one of ELCA's missions is to make the 'Green voice' in Brussels even stronger. The Position Paper will be aligned with the interests and cooperation of eight European associations that are involved in Urban Greening and part of the SoGreen Alliance including: Landscape Architects, Tree Nurserers, builders of Green roofs and façades, tree care specialists, builders of swimming ponds, Indoor Greeners, Green professionals in municipalities, and Landscapers and Gardeners.

#### Online Sessions

In the months ahead ELCA plans to offer its Committee of Firms members with 12 inspiring online sessions about the latest advances and hot topics in the Landscaping and Gardening sector. This new initiative will allow members to participate from their preferred location, gain insights into the most current professional themes in the Green sector, and encourage networking amongst its members.

*“The Landscaping and Gardening sector contributes to a better climate, biodiversity and public health through the advance of their Green and Nature-Based solutions. On a European level, ELCA builds bridges with politicians and stakeholders to make this sector more visible and create opportunities for the future development of the companies we represent.”*

*- European Landscape Contractors Association*



## CASE STUDY

# Czech Republic

## Strengthening Green Education through a new Green Cities 2030+ Centre

### International Urban Greening Week & Mobility Learning

Students and teachers from Czech Republic took up an exciting opportunity to participate in the first ever International Urban Greening Week, organised by the European Platform for Urban Greening. Hosted by AhlmanEdu in Finland and Yuverta in the Netherlands, five students and two teachers from the Agricultural School travelled to Tampere and Utrecht/Houten to challenge themselves alongside vocational students and teachers from around Europe in a two-week exchange.

Solving real-world problems related to the themes of Urban Greening in these two distinct locations, it offered Czech students a chance to participate in practical, hands-on projects that took learning and training beyond the classroom. Moreover, working on projects in a cooperative learning environment with students from other European countries provided insights into different Urban Greening approaches and allowed Czech students to improve their English speaking abilities, while making their own personal connections and networks in the field.

Feedback from the students and teachers was very positive and all the participants found the exchange to be a rewarding learning experience.

In addition to the International Urban Greening Week, nine student gardeners from Czech Republic travelled to the Green Academy in Denmark to take part in a two-week bespoke training course on the 'Adaptation of Cities to Climate Change'. Students focussed on topic and projects including: insect housing solutions, tree pruning and associated diseases, and biodiverse decorative gardens that avoid invasive or introduced species.





## Project Highlight

### Green Cities 2030+ Centre

With support from the Central Bohemian Region and its Department of Environment and Agriculture an official Centre of Vocational Excellence was established this year in Czech Republic.

Referred to as the Green Cities 2030+ Centre, this new space has been established as part of the European Platform for Urban Greening and aims to increase the knowledge and skills needed to address biodiversity, climate adaptation, and well-being in the urban environment, while providing a place to expand the expertise of staff in city, municipal and regional authorities who are working on Urban Greening issues.

The Green Cities 2030+ Centre will also act as an information hub for vocational educators and students in secondary and higher education, focussed on Horticulture and Landscaping, or any other interested parties, including members of the public.

Currently this centre, is located within the Agricultural College and Agricultural Secondary School Benešov, and there are plans to make a more permanent physical centre in the years to come.

Through the hard work and dedication of the Czech Platform partners, over the past few years eight new partners have joined their Centre for Vocational Excellence and they can celebrate the involvement of 26 regional districts within the Central Bohemian Region that will pro-actively champion Urban Greening and environmental best practices.



### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### **Raise Awareness**

This year the partners in Czech Republic, Agricultural College and Agricultural Secondary School Benešov and ITTEC, have continued raising awareness around biodiversity and Urban Greening both regionally and country-wide. As a result of their efforts to raise awareness and share resources, they now have several vocational schools that will become partners of their new Green Cities 2030+ Centre. Alongside these vocational partnerships, they have continued their 'Urban Area Maintenance Showcase' and held a competition for young gardeners this past September. As a practical demonstration, the Benešov School of Agriculture team is now working on the design of a 'new type' of planting for the Central Bohemian town of Pyšely, building on the already completed planting around the Regional Office of the Central Bohemian Region in Prague. These planting projects demonstrate to the general public how to adapt to changing climate conditions through the incorporation of Green in urban areas.

#### **New Curriculum & Life-Long Learning**

Based on new trends that have emerged in the Green sector a new course has been design and approved. Commencing in 2024 'Design of Urban Greening' will be offered, with curriculum developed for students at the secondary school level. This is a new field of study focussed on innovative approaches to the establishment and maintenance of urban Green spaces. During the four years of study, students will acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to create Green habitats that respect natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

#### **Partnerships & Knowledge Exchanges**

Over the past few years the Czech Platform partners have substantially expanded their reach through new partnerships, curriculum and knowledge exchanges. This year their most significant new partner, the Central Bohemian Region, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Agricultural College and Agricultural Secondary School Benešov, to support the development of Urban Greening and to deepen cooperation in this field. One key aim of this partnership is to facilitate greater collaboration between vocational schools, research centres and companies to better adapt and strengthen the quality of Horticultural education.



# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### Establish Infrastructure

Building on the momentum achieved during the first two years of the European Platform for Urban Greening, the Centre for Vocational Excellence in Czech Republic established the Green Cities 2030+ Centre in 2023. Another important step was the appointment of a Director for the new centre this year. This Urban Greening headquarters is now well-placed to better coordinate the region's activities and further elevate its partnerships and initiatives to a national and European-wide level. With the leadership of the new Director, alongside the other partners in Czech Republic, the sustainability of this Centre for Vocational Excellence in Urban Greening is secure and set to continue well into the future.

### Secure Future Funding

In collaboration with the Central Bohemian Region, the Centre for Vocational Excellence in Czech Republic has established formal support to source future funding. This regional government body will help to secure funding for Erasmus+ projects and other initiatives stemming from the new Green Cities 2030+ Centre. Additionally, industry partners are committed to using their private resources to help fund programmes, initiatives and research in order to advance Urban Greening across the country.



### Expand Reach

The past year has seen the addition of eight new partners to the Czech Centre of Vocational Excellence. These new partnerships demonstrate the growth potential of Urban Greening within Czech Republic and will result in the opportunity to make a greater impact through collaboration. In order to further expand their reach, the Platform partners will set up new communication channels, including an official website for the Green Cities 2030+ Centre, to help with the flow of information and facilitate collaboration between new partners.



# THE YEAR AHEAD

## Continuing Momentum in 2024

### Target Curriculum to Build a Talent Pipeline

Building on the creation and promotion of new Urban Greening curriculum over the past few years in Czech Republic, in 2024 there will be a targeted push to engage students at the secondary school level. Recognising that there is a gap between introducing concepts around biodiversity at an elementary school level and training students in Urban Greening at a higher vocational level in post-secondary education, more needs to be done to develop the talent pipeline, attract new students, and promote career pathways in the Green sector to secondary school students. This is one of the missions for the year ahead.

### Host International Urban Greening Week

Having participated in the inaugural International Urban Greening Week held in both the Netherlands and Finland, the Czech Platform partners are preparing their plans to host the second annual International Urban Greening Week, alongside Romania, in April 2024. Following the timelines and planning guides provided by the two previous host countries, the Czech partners hope to benefit from lessons learned by their counterparts, generate increased participation and student exchanges with all the Platform counties, and create engaging opportunities for tangible solutions and outcomes during this intensive cooperative learning week.



### Publish an Online Course – Introduction to Biodiversity

In the coming year, Agricultural School Benešov will be offering a new online course called 'Introduction to Biodiversity'. Aiming to expand the scope and reach of their curriculum, the course will be published in both Czech and English, making it available more widely to all Platform partners and vocational schools internationally. The course will not only introduce key concepts about biodiversity management, but it will incorporate topics on Urban Greening practices, such as a guide on how to make your own flower garden respecting the principles of biodiversity.

***“A new curriculum focusing on sustainable horticulture will start an era of Czech professionals who think differently in the Green sector.”***

*– Veronika Zikmundova, Garden Designer and Teacher,  
Agricultural College & Secondary Agricultural School Benešov*



## CASE STUDY

# Denmark

## Strengthening Green Education with the Virtual Green Academy

### International Urban Greening Week & Mobility Learning

Amongst the four countries to participate in the inaugural International Urban Greening Week, two Danish vocational students from the Green Academy travelled to Finland to take part in a cooperative learning challenge. Hosted by AhlmanEdu in Finland, the hackathon style event featuring challenges, workshops and excursions, prompted students to come up with solutions to some real-world challenges faced by Urban Greening. This style of learning helped students to elevate themselves to think outside the box, while sharing skills and knowledge with their counterparts from the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Finland. The feedback from this experience was extremely positive, students felt moved on a personal level and the results demonstrated the strength of engaging people in a meaningful learning environment.

Finding new ways to harness mobility learning, the Partners in Denmark have also focussed on ways to offer micro-learning on-the-go. With a new series of 'Biodiversity Podcasts' (and a transcript offered in both Danish and English in the future) Landscapers, Gardeners and other Green sector workers, can now up-skill while they are travelling from one destination to another. In a profession that often requires a lot of travel to different project locations, the podcast format offers an accessible and engaging way to learn outside of a formal classroom setting. In the future a short test will be offered to provide micro-credentials that can be used in performance reviews or assist in career progression.





## Project Highlight

### Expansion of Danish Centre for Vocational Excellence

In 2023, eight new partners joined the Danish partners of the European Platform for Urban Greening, bolstering their Centre of Vocational Excellence and securing its sustainability in Denmark for the future.

Having each signed a Memorandum of Understanding, these new partners place immense value in becoming part of the Urban Greening movement and are invested in becoming active participants in the push to ensure Green solutions are visible and at the forefront of development.



New partners include RTS/Vilvorde, the second largest vocational school in Denmark, the Danish Trade Union, two landscaping companies, a construction company, various municipalities and the Church of Denmark.

As one of the largest landowners in the country, the partnership with the Church of Denmark is of particular note. Having previously lent much of their land to local farmers, the Church is now looking to ensure that biodiversity thrives on its properties. Amongst other initiatives, Landscapers and Gardeners employed by the Church will work with the Green Academy to up-skill and train in the latest best practices in Urban Greening.

A round-table for the new partners has already been held to lay the groundwork for cooperation in the years ahead.



## YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### Virtual Learning & Exchanges

The Virtual Green Academy is now live and offers users to the site an interactive experience with the plants and facilities around the school. Using Virtual Reality, users can explore the grounds in a 360 degree setting on their phone, computer or via a VR headset. While in the Virtual Green Academy, audio and visual information is presented about plant life in both Danish and English, in future iterations short expert videos will pop-up upon prompt to provide engaging insights, and timelapses videos will demonstrate how plants develop. Available to students, professionals and the public, this new learning tool will continue to develop into a bigger offering in the years ahead.

#### Continuous Education

Working with the Mayor of Aarhus, the Green Academy is developing an interactive, hands-on Biodiversity course for the public. The course will be offered through local municipalities and the Mayor and his family have agreed to be amongst the first participants to take part. This new initiative aims to engage the public and bring greater awareness, in a fun way, to issues around climate adaptation, biodiversity and well-being in the urban environment.

*“The need for digitalising our curriculum is exponentially growing, along with the students’ demand for more up-to-date and engaging blended-learning methods. We consider this attempt to capture the attention of our future landscapers to be very meaningful and enlightening for us teachers.”*

– Boncho Kostadinov, Green Academy Aarhus

#### Recruitment

In the past year a few schools from Odder Municipality, located just 10 kilometres from the Green Academy in Aarhus, took part in a new pilot event that aimed to introduce children to Urban Greening. Over the course of two days, over 300 students went to the Green Academy to receive an introduction into the wide range of professional opportunities in the Green sector and try their hand at a variety of Green professions. At the end of two days, students were encouraged to invite their parents or guardians to see what they had been working on, which resulted in over 800 participants learning about the possibilities within the sector and celebrating the students’ achievements.



# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### Islands of Excellence

Further advancing their 'Islands of Excellence' concept, the new partnerships made this year have expanded the network of the Danish Platform partners. Each new partner who shares their facilities and resources to further the advance of Urban Greening, becomes an Island of Excellence. Likewise, the emergence of Living Labs for science and research, or product development for Green roofs, provides yet more opportunities to develop Denmark into a sustainable Centre of Vocation Excellence in Urban Greening.

### Follow-up Project

This year saw the Danish Platform partners host the first BARCOVE Hackathon at VIA University College in Aarhus. 'The Blue Green Innovation Challenge' brought start-up companies and vocational and applied science students from seven different countries together to tackle innovation challenges in Urban Space and Water Management. With the start-up companies pitching their challenges to the teams, students were guided using a design thinking methodology. Blending their perspectives, ideas and talent, over the course of a few days, the students then presented some incredible and creative solutions to the companies. The results of this Hackathon were so positive that a number of the proposed innovations are currently being implemented in practice. It was a huge success and further proof that mobility learning adds tremendous value.



### Expand Capacity for Innovation

In an effort to act locally but reach globally, the Green Academy has organised five one-hour Virtual Exchange Meetings between students from vocational schools within the European Platform for Urban Greening and vocational schools in Brazil and the United States. These virtual meetings provide a forum for students to discuss different topics in the Green sector, such as the use of GMOs, landscaping practices in the U.S. or the latest innovations in Urban Greening in Europe. Through these forums new perspectives are gained and promote innovation across regions.



***“We have spent a lot of time expanding our network and personal connection in the past year, and the results are starting to show.”***

*- Anne-Marie Thomassen, Green Academy Aarhus*

# THE YEAR AHEAD

## Continuing Momentum in 2024

### Consolidating Their Network & Maintaining Momentum

With the addition of so many new partners in 2023, a major focus for the fourth year of the European Platform for Urban Greening project in Denmark, will be to consolidate their network and to establish the roles of each new partner in its Centre for Vocational Excellence. Ensuring that all partners find value in the mission to advance Urban Greening and the Green sector at-large, the aim is to create a central hub for all Green initiatives within Denmark, and maintain the momentum already generated by the Platform partners. In consolidating their network, they hope to legally formalise this group into an entity that can carry on the work of this movement into the decade to come.

### Updating and Developing Curriculum

With the emergence of new innovations in the Green sector, placing greater emphasis on applied research and keeping pace with the latest best practices in Urban Greening, the year ahead will see the Green Academy revisit their existing courses and ensure that each has the most up-to-date curriculum and offers the latest thinking in the field.

Further, the new partnership with the Church of Denmark will see the Platform partners work together on crafting a bespoke training programme for the Landscapers and Gardeners who maintain the grounds and cemeteries owned by the Church. Biodiversity will be a primary focus of this training.



### Impact and Measuring Results

Key to the final year of the Platform project will be to measure the impact and results achieved by this Centre of Vocational Excellence in Urban Greening. So much has already been achieved in just a few short years by the Danish Platform partners Green Academy and OKNygaard.



## CASE STUDY

# Finland

## Strengthening Green Education through Virtual Learning

### International Urban Greening Week & Mobility Learning

Organising and hosting the European Platform's first International Urban Greening Week, in tandem with partner hosts in the Netherlands, Finland welcomed 17 student participants from the Netherlands, Denmark and Czech Republic to take part in a two-week, cooperative learning experience.

The challenge put forward to students by the Finnish Platform partners was to create participatory activities in Hatanpää or Hiedanranta park for the local community. They were asked to think about the visible and invisible communities who might use the park and how these different communities would: benefit from the park activities, how they could improve the biodiversity in their neighbourhoods, and how they could adapt to a changing climate and enhance well-being in a holistic way.

The challenge-based model for International Urban Greening Week was championed by the City of Tampere and resulted in the emergence of new communication channels that started a wider conversation about who needs, uses and benefits from Green spaces in the community.

This provided an opportunity to understand the greater needs of all members of the community and how Tampere can engage people in Urban Greening in a meaningful way.

At the end of the challenge, students presented a range of participatory activities that would reach different communities, including: a voluntary Urban Gardening scheme, community barbecues, and 'Plant of the Week' programmes to teach communities more about their local Biodiversity.



***"It has been great to be part of a project that really matters! I have been able to play my part in making the future of the Green sector more visible, which is something we should all be paying attention to. The International Urban Greening Week was the highlight of this season, where we challenged Green professionals of the future to focus on the Urban Green and its communities."***

*- Jenni Arjoranta, Project Specialist, AhlmanEdu*

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## Project Highlight

### Virtual Learning for Vertical Green

Looking to implement the most innovative approach to learning, this year AhlmanEdu launched a digital platform for 'Vertical Green'.

Taking users on a virtual learning journey to understand the definition of what Vertical Green is, from design and construction, through maintenance and the benefits, the platform offers an immersive and interactive experience of Vertical Green structures using mixed reality.

With a VR headset, a mobile phone or computer users can explore spaces and the various materials that are used to build green walls, roofs and structures in 360 degrees. Information is provided via pop-up boxes and questions are prompted to users throughout the experience.

Currently the platform is offered in Finnish, for students and the public alike, but will soon be translated into English and all other languages represented by the partner countries of the European Platform for Urban Greening.



Plans are also underway for an 'immersive room' in the second phase of this digital platform.

***"In our third-year of the European Platform for Urban Greening project, we have focused on the significance of dynamic educational environments. It has been inspiring to experiment, succeed, and learn from failures. Students are motivated by new, self-created authentic learning opportunities, such as VR environments, that foster creativity and innovation. These encourage students to be active participants in their own learning, where inspiration flourishes."***

*- Essi Clewer, Learning Coordinator, AhlmanEdu*



## YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### Communication

This year important dialogues took place between local businesses and the City of Tampere in joint meetings within this Centre of Vocational Excellence. These discussions led to the implementation of new maintenance approaches to two key areas in Tampere. The first, was to utilise the Soil Food Web Method to improve the biological balance of the soil at the Tampere Wood Nursery and the second, was to involve residents in the mowing of a local meadow called Piikahaka. Both initiatives were successfully implemented in 2023 and will be improved and continued in the year ahead.

Additionally, Platform partners from AhlmanEdu presented these projects at Viherpäivät, the largest Green trade fair in Finland. Stressing the importance of Green education in the changing work environment, they highlighted their 'metromap' where connections between educational entities can be made both visible and tangible.

#### Specialised Short Courses

In 2023 three short course were piloted including: Soil Food Web, Edible Forest Garden and Stream Restoration. Given the positive uptake and feedback from these courses, AhlmanEdu will continue to build on these three and focus on additional specialised and bespoke training in Urban Greening. Offering very specific subjects has proved to be popular with professionals and students who want to stay up-to-speed with the latest research and best practices in the sector. Stream Restoration in particular has been a huge success with students and there are plans to expand this course in the years ahead. Participants in the pilot were so inspired that they are taking action to increase awareness and knowledge of Stream Restoration amongst policy makers and the public.



#### Fast & Flexible Training

Last winter AhlmanEdu offered LUMOtarhuri training to over 30 participants. This biodiversity-intensive training lasted three months and proved to be a good solution for the seasonality of the Green sector, which in Finland, often sees a lack of work opportunities during the winter months. Students and professionals were able to study together, free of charge, and each accumulated 15 credits that complemented their skills and knowledge. More seasonal short course that are adapted to the needs of Green sector students and professionals will continue to be put forward.

# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### Advance Short Courses

This year two forward-thinking courses aimed at ushering in the new era of the climate movement were offered at AhlmanEdu: Soil Food Web and Edible Forest Garden. Two courses for the Soil Food Web ran in English, with participants joining from Finland, the Netherlands, and Latvia. This course was implemented in autumn 2023 in Finnish and a web-based distance version was offered in English by the end of the year. In spring 2024, a lecture on Soil Food Web and the experiments at AhlmanEdu, in cooperation with the City of Tampere, will be given at the largest national Green conference in Finland.

Aimed more at local participants, the Edible Forest Garden ran four courses this year and has been so popular that the school has now used all of the space allocated for planting. This hands-on course has allowed participants to actually design and plant the edible forest and going forward the course will focus on plant growth and maintenance.

### Launch New Training Courses

Two new training workshops were also launched this year, including a 'Weeding Festival' and 'Piikahaka Meadow Maintenance'. Both workshops provided practical hands-on learning in the field. During two Weeding Festivals students learned how to identify plants designed for dry meadows and how to remove unwanted natural plants. Knowing which plants to keep and protect and which ones to weed out, required students to react to each square metre of meadow differently and resulted in increased knowledge at a hyper-local level.

The Piikahaka Meadow Maintenance workshop was devised by maintenance contractors and training representatives from AhlmanEdu, following their idea to find an alternative to mechanical mowing and trial sheep grazing of the pasture in summer 2023. Mechanical mowing had been having a negative impact on Piikahaka's wildlife and this autumn Horticultural students mowed the meadow manually, learning about the value of maintaining this traditional biotope. A week after the mowing, local residents participated in a raking event and were given the opportunity to contribute to the diversity and well-being of their local environment.



### Further Vocational Qualifications

Aiming to establish new vocational qualifications regionally is a long term project. Currently there is a push to obtain a middle qualification between an introduction to Urban Greening and a more advance qualification in the Green sector in Finland. A need has been identified to equip students with a 'bridge' qualification that maintains interest and momentum in Urban Greening and provides a smoother transition into more professional Green qualifications.



# THE YEAR AHEAD

## Continuing Momentum in 2024

### Increase the Number of Biodiversity Pilots

In the coming year Platform partners in Finland will invest in more LUMOTarhuri training, and the resulting biodiversity outcomes, in workplaces and neighbourhoods around Tampere. The aim is to communicate the actions and impact individuals can make on their local environment. Research and improvements to the soil of the Tampere Nursery will also continue in 2024 as well as web-based training for Soil Food Web.



With the goal of creating engaging learning opportunities, the Finnish Platform partners will also prepare virtual 360 degree material on the transformation of a lawn into a meadow in the heart of Tampere. The objective of the project, and the step-by-step process of the work, will be documented and developed into training modules that will focus on the theme of well-being in a comprehensive way.

### Virtual Platform & Micro-learning

Building on the new digital platform for Vertical Green will be a focus of the year ahead. Ensuring that this platform is made available to the widest possible audience will require the information to be accessible in multiple languages, which is a key priority. In-line with increasing the platform's accessibility will be testing the micro-learning outcomes against the European Qualifications Framework and ensuring learning is targeting various EQF levels.

### Sustainability of the Finnish Centre for Vocational Excellence

In the fourth year of the European Platform for Urban Greening project, Finland is focussed on securing the sustainability of their Centre for Vocational Excellence through solidifying their network, establishing new sources of funding and further developing a partnership with another vocational education leader in the country.

*“Knowing, applying, wanting and doing are the keys to a healthy, diverse and happy life in a Green urban world.”*

– Kaisa Koskelin, Project Manager, AhlmanEdu

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## CASE STUDY

# Netherlands

## Strengthening Green Education for Elementary School Children

### International Urban Greening Week & Mobility Learning

Organising and hosting the European Platform for Urban Greening's first International Urban Greening Week, alongside partner hosts in Finland, the Netherlands welcomed 14 student participants from Finland and Czech Republic to take part in a cooperative learning experience.

The challenge put forward to students by the Dutch Platform partners was to convert the vision of the municipality of Houten: 'More, better and connected Green', into policy and planning solutions for the train stations of Houten Central and Houten Castellum.

The challenge-based model asked students to think about key Urban Greening principles including:

**Biodiversity:** with regard to soil selection and management and considering the ecological connection between the buildings and the surrounding flora and fauna.

**Well-being:** in terms of the social value of Green and how best to promote safety, recreation, participation and environmental education through different design and management models.

**Climate Adaptation:** so that the stations contribute to climate adaptation through Blue-Green solutions that address factors such as drought, heat and pollution.

At the end of the challenge, students presented a range of policy and planning proposals to the municipality's policy officer. The ideas put forward will be included in further developments of the two station areas.





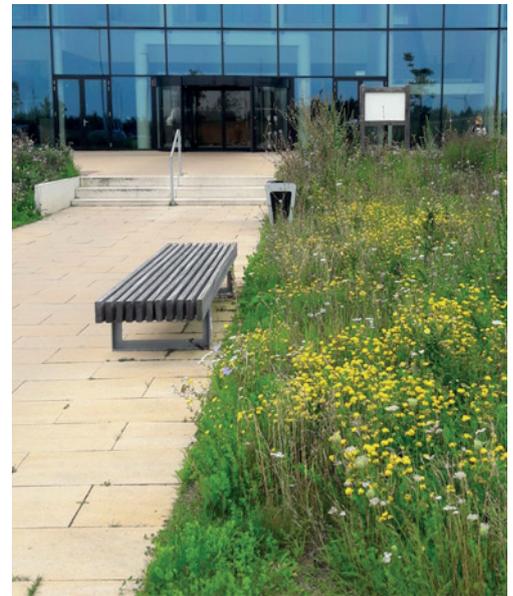
## Project Highlight

### Working Landscapes of the Future

With more than 3,000 industrial estates across the Netherlands, a new project called 'Working Landscapes of the Future' is being implemented by a national coalition of partners – educational organisations, government bodies, umbrella companies, industrial estates, consultancy firms and NGOs.

Over the course of the next nine years, this coalition aims to transform these industrial estates into Green, healthy, energy efficient and climate-proof working landscapes of the future.

Using a scale-up approach, the project will be developed using four living-labs and ten ambassador areas initially, which will coincide with a major research programme. Overall, six provinces and a larger number of municipalities will participate in 'Working Landscapes of the Future' to transform major parts of the Netherlands.



Creating attractive working environments for employees of these industrial estates, contributing to the recovery of biodiversity in these environments, promoting the Green energy transition and demonstrating the power of innovation in the Green sector are amongst the key goals of this large-scale initiative.

The urgent social and economic challenges in the areas of climate adaptation, biodiversity restoration, and energy transition requires new perspectives and ways to work and live in a more circular, Nature-Inclusive way. With the efforts of this national project, the Netherlands hopes to make a business-case for making industrial estates, found in countries all over the world, more sustainable and future-proof.



## YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### Communication

Strengthening Green education amongst elementary school children and communicating the value of Green is a priority for the Platform partners at Yuverta. Over the past year, funding, development, and a plan to implement a new 'Nature Environment Education' programme has been underway. Aimed at children between the ages of four and ten years old, this new programme will introduce concepts including: biodiversity, climate change, edible forests and horticulture through various nature walks in and around Houten. The purpose is to inspire children at a young age to view nature through a different lens and to learn about the natural environment in an engaging and hands-on way.

#### Recruitment

At the Hotspot Green Liveable City in Houten master-classes in Urban Green Development are continuing. Offering topics including the 'Social Value of Green', 'Biodiversity', and 'Edible Forests', these master-classes aim to help students and professionals build on their knowledge and skills and recruit professionals from other sectors through the introduction of key Urban Greening principles. Courses are adapted to the latest applied research and provide participants with a new way to view and interact with the environment around them. The master-classes have now been running for three years and have seen a two-thirds uptake from participants outside the Green sector, and a one-third participation from Green students and professionals. Allowing participants to apply their learnings to their individual circumstances, each master-class graduate is awarded a certificate upon completion.

#### Culture Change

Proof that creating culture change can happen at any scale, the offices at the Hotspot Green Liveable City in Houten have incorporated a 'Worm Hotel' to engage colleagues in the compost process. Using common kitchen waste, over the past year employees at the Hotspot Green Liveable City have fed their Worm Hotel to create compost for the gardens surrounding the offices. After just one year, worm castings have been produced and employees are actively invested and engaged in the process. This small initiative has demonstrated the power of participatory Green activities and the impact they can make on an individual level.



# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### **BARCOVE Hackathon**

Alongside participants from six other European countries, a delegation of representatives from three Dutch companies, eight students, and two teachers from Yuverta travelled to Aarhus, Denmark to take part in the first BARCOVE Hackathon. 'The Blue Green Innovation Challenge' saw start-up companies in the Blue-Green sector pitch innovation challenges to teams of students, who were guided using a design thinking methodology. This intensive two-day Hackathon inspired vocational and applied sciences students to blend their perspectives, ideas and talents to come up with creative solutions for issues faced in Urban Space and Water Management. The results of this mobility learning opportunity were astounding. In this intensive challenge-based environment, students presented their ideas to the companies, some of which have immediately been implemented by the start-ups.

### **Green Roofs Qualification**

This year, the new Green Roof Qualification was further developed to respond to training needs in the industry. Partnerships with industry leaders in Green roof technologies will see the qualification offer a primary focus on water sensing, collection and monitoring and will ensure the most advanced health and safety training for working on Vertical Green structures. The course will use design thinking methodology to challenge students to adapt to changes, as Green innovations and technologies continue to develop. Once development of this course is completed, the goal is to make it a national skills qualification that is available to every vocational school in the Netherlands.

### **Extend the Platform**

Aiming to develop partnerships that will impact change on a larger scale the Platform partners in the Netherlands are focussed on developing their network with Green suppliers. Specifically, they are targeting suppliers such as nurseries, and Green infrastructure manufacturers that can have a seat at the table from the outset when development plans are being made for new Living Green buildings such as the Wonderwoods complex in Utrecht. It is fundamental to the success of these developments that proper long-term thought is given to the types of plants, the size of the plants, the impact on biodiversity of the plants, and how they are maintained from the earliest stages.



# THE YEAR AHEAD

## Continuing Momentum in 2024

### New Vocational Curriculum

Given the importance of Green space in and around the city of Houten, the Dutch Platform partners plan to expand their supply chain network in the year ahead to bolster the Green educational offering in Holland. By incorporating new partners such as nurseries, Green contractors, and Green infrastructure suppliers into its Centre of Vocational Excellence, Yuverta hopes to be able to offer a new range of vocational curriculum to its students with

courses such as: 'Installation Engineering', and 'Construction & Facilities Management'. Discussions about this new curriculum have already taken place at the policy, project and teacher levels.



### International Future Green Cities Congress

In September 2024 a four-day International Green Cities Congress will be held in the Netherlands. Following the submission of proposals in October 2023, this Centre of Vocational Excellence plans to send a delegation of representatives to participate in the event and showcase: the importance of Urban Greening, the value of vocational education and training, and the work of the European Platform for Urban Greening. This will be an excellent platform to continue championing momentum for change in the Green sector.

### Challenge-Based Cooperative Learning

Based on the positive outcomes of challenge-based cooperative learning events this year, the Platform partners in the Netherlands plan to organise and participate in new Green challenges on a regional, national and European-wide level in the year ahead. Investing in 'knowledge meetings' such as Deep Dives and Hackathons is an effective way to generate new solutions to challenges faced in the Green sector and allows for the cross-disciplinary pollination of ideas, within an authentic learning environment. Creating opportunities for vocational students to work together with industry practitioners and companies is a model for generating innovative Green solutions for the future.

*"The most valuable aspect of the European Platform for Urban Greening project has been the strengthening of our network here in the Netherlands and across Europe. Such strong bonds have been created between industry partners and vocational schools, based on trust and respect. The strength of these relationships proves the sustainability of the Platform, as they are sure to continue well into the future."*

- Sijtske Ouderkerken, Yuverta

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## CASE STUDY

# Romania

## Strengthening Green Education through Biodiversity Training

### Mobility Learning

Each year Romania uses mobility learning and the network of the European Platform for Urban Greening to advance their knowledge and skills in the sector and learn from the best practices and latest innovations in other Centres of Vocational Excellence.

In order to strengthen Green education in Romania, it has been a priority to ensure vocational educators have the most current information and curriculum for their courses. This year 15 teachers from Liceul Technologic Cezar Nicolau (LTCN) technical high school travelled to Denmark to participate in an intensive 'Teaching Urban Greening' programme that took place at the Green Academy over the course of five days.

As a result of this mobility programme, two new courses were developed for LTCN that go towards Horticulture or Agro-Tourism Worker qualifications respectively, including: 'Biodiversity in the Urban Environment' and 'Peri-Urban and Agro-Tourism Garden'. Each course requires up to 300 hours of practical study that equip students with key skills, general and specialised technical skills and a pragmatic understanding of the workplace in both Romania and abroad. Core to the curriculum in both courses, students are required to have a comprehensive understanding of common and specialised vocabulary, agricultural terms, and an ability to translate information about the cultivation of horticultural plants in order to prepare them for mobility work opportunities in the future.

In addition to the teacher training at the Green Academy, 25 students from the National College of Agriculture and Economics from Tecuci, Romania also travelled to Denmark to participate in a bespoke three week course on 'Biodiversity and Climate Adaptation'.





## Project Highlight

### Biodiversity Education in Urban Spaces

A new training course from Worldskills Romania aims to increase awareness around the importance of biodiversity and pollinators amongst students, teachers, and the wider population and equip them with the necessary skills to protect biodiversity in urban areas.

In 2022 a pilot of this training course ran with 71 students participating from eight schools, alongside 19 teachers, with the primary objective to teach people where to look for biodiversity.

In 2023, 'Biodiversity Education in Urban Spaces' ran in conjunction with an inaugural Green Week in Romania, an initiative led by the Ministry of Education, and built on the pilot from the year before to huge success. This year 19,500 students from 69 schools across the country participated, alongside 217 teachers, 34 of which came from vocational schools.



Offered at every level of education from kindergarten, through middle school, high school and vocational studies, in its second year, this 40 hour training programme was geared towards teaching students how to assess biodiversity and incorporated activities designed to understand ecosystems, protect pollinators and develop transversal skills.

The results of the latest training in Biodiversity Education in Urban Spaces saw schools cooperate with local authorities and stakeholders to solve sustainable development and environmental problems in their local areas and provide specific solutions at the end of the programme. A 'Catalogue of Pollinators' was also produced by interns from the University of Arts and Design, which was disseminated as a guide to assess and increase local biodiversity in Romania.

In the year ahead, Worldskills Romania will provide schools with new materials to further teaching activities and offer consultancy from experts in the fields of Biodiversity, Arboriculture and Urbanism through a collaboration with the Romanian Landscape Architects Association – Bucharest Branch. Beyond just reaching students, in their third year Worldskills Romania hopes to impact and raise awareness around biodiversity within the wider population.



## YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### Develop a Talent Pipeline

The development of a strong talent pipeline of Green industry professionals remains an important priority in Romania. In 2023, curriculum and engaging activities in Biodiversity were introduced to primary and middle school students through the Biodiversity Education in Urban Spaces programme. Recognising the importance of introducing Green education to students at an early age, these children gained an understanding of Green vocations and issues surrounding Urban Greening more generally.

#### Specialised Qualifications

Following a long, complex and bureaucratic process, the new Urban Gardener occupation was introduced into the Romanian Occupational Code. As a result, in the later months of this year, a select group of vocational teachers and professionals will begin to outline the professional education standards of the training and prepare for the first course, which will be part of the curricula offered by Romanian technological high schools starting in autumn 2024. In the year ahead a targeted campaign will commence to raise awareness for the new qualification and promote enrolment. Sector 6 City Hall in Bucharest has already committed their support and will provide professional training scholarships for the Urban Gardener qualification of Platform partner LTCN.

#### Increase Demand for Urban Greening

The Platform partners in Romania have made great strides over the past three years in raising awareness around Urban Greening and professional Green vocations. Introducing key concepts around biodiversity, climate change and well-being in the urban environment to over 19,500 students this year, aimed to inspire the next generation of Green practitioners in Romania and embed a major culture shift in the population. Moreover, having an officially recognised Urban Gardener qualification, the first of its kind in Romania, will allow this Centre of Vocational Excellence to increase demand for Urban Greening and elevate the status of Landscapers and Gardeners across the country.



# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### Outdoor Training Area for Urban Greening

As part of their goal to develop outdoor training areas for Urban Greening in Romania, a new partnership with IKEA has led to a robust model for hands-on research, training and development. IKEA's Biodiversity Garden, which is being built on a dedicated plot of land beside their warehouse in Bucharest, was initially developed as a concept to educate their employees about biodiversity. Thanks to the efforts of Romanian Platform partners, the IKEA Biodiversity Garden will now be open to the public with the help of students from Liceul Technologic Cezar Nicolau (LTCN) technical high school. The students will monitor and maintain the garden, using it for their studies and training in biodiversity, and ensure the space is accessible to the wider public who can learn about the benefits Urban Greening in a living-lab environment.

### Mobility Training

Continuing with the mobility training of vocational educators and students, plans are underway for a group of 20 participants from Crucea Technological High School from Constanta, Romania to travel to the Green Academy in Denmark in the spring of 2024. Over the course of three weeks, this group will have the opportunity to up-skill and learn through a bespoke training course that is being specifically designed to meet the learning needs of the participants and teach them the latest best-practices in Urban Greening coming out of Denmark.

### BARCOVE Hackathon

Alongside participants from six other European countries, two student representatives from Romania travelled to Aarhus, Denmark to take part in the first BARCOVE Hackathon. 'The Blue Green Innovation Challenge' saw start-up companies in the Blue-Green sector pitch innovation challenges to teams of students, who were guided using a design thinking methodology. This intensive two day Hackathon inspired vocational and applied sciences students to blend their perspectives, ideas, and talents to come up with creative solutions for issues faced in Urban Space and Water Management. Students from Romania were part of a team that was awarded an innovation prize for their idea to 'gamify' water usage.

*"The outdoor training area provided by IKEA Biodiversity Garden is a very important step in developing the Urban Greening educational field. In the Romanian context, changing the paradigm regarding the overall image of Green spaces is paving the way toward biodiversity protection and climate change adaptation."*

*- Diana Culescu, Vice-President of the Romanian Landscape Architects Association - Bucharest Branch*



### Continuing Momentum in 2024

#### Biodiversity Guides

Based on the successful outcome of their 'Catalogue of Pollinators' this year, Worldskills Romania plans to develop two Biodiversity Guides in the year ahead. Alongside the development of the Biodiversity Garden at IKEA, they will write a guide on how to monitor biodiversity and another one on how to maintain biodiversity. These guides will not only be useful resources for the Biodiversity Garden project, but will be used for wider dissemination in the national Biodiversity Education in Urban Spaces programme.

#### Develop Infrastructure for the Centre of Vocational Excellence

As part of the ongoing 'Landscape Factory' initiative to develop outdoor training centres in Urban Greening across Romania, in 2024 an official site will be developed at the Liceul Technologic Cezar Nicolau (LTCN) technical high school. The outdoor training site will be built in the school's courtyard, with co-funding of 6,500 Euros and resource support from four new partners of the Romanian Centre of Vocational Excellence.



An application to secure further financing has also been submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, in response to a call issued to support agricultural high schools develop their infrastructure. Should their application be successful, LTCN will receive sufficient funding to develop the courtyard as an outdoor learning environment, digitise the education process, and buy the equipment needed to develop and maintain the outdoor space.

#### Host International Urban Greening Week

Following the inaugural International Urban Greening Week held in the Netherlands and Finland, Romanian Platform partners are preparing their plans to host the second annual International Urban Greening Week, alongside Czech Republic, in April 2024. Using the timelines and planning guides provided by the

two previous host countries, the Romanian partners hope to benefit from lessons learned by their counterparts, generate increased participation and student exchanges with all the Platform counties, and create engaging opportunities for tangible solutions and outcomes during this intensive collaborative learning event.



## CASE STUDY

# Spain

## Strengthening Green Education through Technical Innovations

### Mobility Learning

Creating enriching mobility learning opportunities for vocational students and teachers has been a priority for the Platform partners in Spain. In the past year, nine students from Spanish vocational schools, including EFA La Malvesia, undertook professional internships abroad, which allowed them to gain international experience, enhance their inter-cultural skills, expand their personal networks, and boost their competitiveness in the job market.

Supported by Erasmus+, students completed internships in Germany at the prestigious Seddiner See Golf & Country Club, where they carried out their practical skills and training in the maintenance and conservation of gardens and forests, as well as on the golf courses themselves. Learning to work with specialised machinery, planted crops, managed irrigation and new species and pest control techniques, this mobility opportunity provided a new professional framework for the students and helped them improve their English communications skills in an international environment.

Other Erasmus+ internships included students from the Higher Degree in Forest Management at EFA La Malvesia working with Dutch holiday park company Texelcamping. Working alongside the Texelcamping team, students carried out maintenance work on the gardens and green spaces and acquired new knowledge about the use of machinery.

Likewise, enriching teaching staff with opportunities to stay on top of the most innovative techniques, products, and knowledge in the Green sector remains an ongoing priority. This year five teachers travelled to Brittany, France to learn different techniques for managing livestock and new approaches to landscaping from members of the regional federation: Maison Familiale Rural. These opportunities are key to ensuring that Green education in Spain continues to advance alongside its European counterparts.





## Project Highlight

### Urban Vertical Gardens

Based on a pilot project in 2022, and an ongoing collaboration between Platform partners EFA La Malvesia, PAIMED and Projar, a designed prototype for a new vertical garden system called Urban Tec-Roc has been formalised.

This joint project saw this innovative bioengineered prototype for an urban vertical garden system, designed by PAIMED and Projar, installed and tested on the school grounds of EFA La Malvesia in two stages.



In the first stage, three technicians from PAIMED taught the teachers and students from the school about the technical features of the system and showed them how to install and hydro-seed the vertical garden. In the second stage, students learned how to monitor the germination of the plants and maintain the evolution of the Green walls. To guarantee the viability of the Urban Tec-Roc as a vertical garden, technical aspects of all its elements are being studied: the anchoring structure, the support based on volumetric Trinter geogrids, the substrate, the planting pallet, and the irrigation system.

Going forward, two students from the school will manage the vertical garden, with the support of a teacher, and continue to use applied research to collect data and observe the progress of the system. In the coming years it is hoped that this prototype will be successfully placed in the market and make vertical garden systems more accessible to a wider consumer base.

***“Within the framework of the Smart Green City 4.0 project, we (Paired and Projar) are working on the development of a new vertical gardening system, the Urban Tec-Roc. The goal is to achieve a vertical gardening system rich in biodiversity, resistant and sustainable, with reduced installation and maintenance costs that will boost its implementation in the market. The project involves vocational training schools and companies in the Green infrastructure sector and is financed by the Ministry of Education through Next Generation-EU funds.”***

*- Juan Manuel Mondejar, PAIMED*

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## YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

### Perspectives on Priorities – Advancing their Mission

#### **New Sources of Funding**

Securing new sources of funding remains an ongoing priority for the Spanish Platform partners. Ensuring that their Centre of Vocational Excellence is sustainable in the years to come, they have secured multiple sources of new funding from both private and public bodies. Participating in major spin-off projects related to the European Platform for Urban Greening, such as BARCOVE and GREENVUE, have not only raised the profile of this Centre, but has contributed substantially to its sources of funding.

#### **Collaborations**

With over 50 entities actively collaborating with the Platform partners in Spain, efforts are now underway to formalise this group through Memorandums of Understanding and formally expand this Centre of Vocational Excellence. Ranging from private enterprises and municipal government bodies to educational providers and NGOs, the objective is to ensure this diverse network continues to engage and increase momentum in the adoption of Urban Greening practices in Spain. Whether these entities are collaborating on projects or providing vocational students with internships and training opportunities in the sector, they share a common desire to strengthen Green education to ensure there is a strong talent pipeline of Green professionals for the future.

#### **Knowledge Transfers**

In order to further expand their Centre of Vocational Excellence and transfer their knowledge, the Platform partners in Spain intend to strengthen their position as a leading reference for Urban Greening by producing and disseminating a 'Best Practices Manual'. Using the learnings from the European Platform for Urban Greening project, they are working to deliver a PDF book-format guide that relays the importance of this European-wide project and the benefits of Urban Greening.

In practice, alongside the Valencia Public Administration (OAM) and Municipal Conservation Department, EFA La Malvesia is raising awareness around Urban Greening practices in Valencia's Central Park through the knowledge transfer of plant species identification. Demonstrating the importance of local plant species biodiversity in city parks, students are learning to identify beneficial flora that can be pollinated by hummingbirds and insects and become a refuge for the proliferation of beneficial fauna that leads to healthier environments for city dwellers.



# YEAR THREE IN REVIEW

## Initiatives Update

### BARCOVE Hackathon

Alongside participants from six other European countries, a delegation of 10 representatives from La Malvesia and PAIMED travelled to Aarhus, Denmark to take part in the first BARCOVE Hackathon. 'The Blue Green Innovation Challenge' saw start-up companies in the Blue-Green sector pitch innovation challenges to teams of students, who were guided using a design thinking methodology. For this project, the Spanish partners are creating a practical e-book for stakeholders in company-school based applied research that will present tested innovative solutions to specific challenges faced in Urban Greening and Water Management in 2024. Additionally, two related training models were developed as a result of this hackathon and shared with vocational educators and industry professionals to create further impact in this space.

### GREENVEU

This year a delegation of participants from EFA La Malvesia took part in another spin-off project of the European Platform for Urban Greening called GREENVEU in Amsterdam. Alongside partners from five other European countries including the Netherlands, Hungary, Finland, Romania and Denmark they investigated new ways in which they can work together to create a more sustainable and greener world. More specifically, they looked at increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and training in the Green sector, with the aim of attracting more professionals and future professionals in order to successfully realise the Green transition in Europe. Each participating country will conduct research on target groups for the Green sector and create a regional recruitment strategy based on the outcomes of their research.

Developing and nurturing a strong talent pipeline within Urban Greening, agriculture, and nature preservation will be crucial for meeting global climate goals and making the transition toward a Green and sustainable world.



### A Study in Biodiversity

Aiming to incorporate and emphasise applied research into this Centre of Vocational Excellence, a new project between PAIMED and EFA La Malvesia will see professionals, teachers and students engage in a research study of local biodiversity. Inspired by BARCOVE, this project will involve the implementation of a biodiverse Green rooftop, from which students will monitor, research and evaluate the biodiversity that the rooftop draws to that specific location. With the goal of gathering new knowledge about the impact that a Green roof has on local biodiversity, plans are currently underway to realise this project early next year.



# THE YEAR AHEAD

## Continuing Momentum in 2024

### Promote Rural-Urban Greening

With EFA La Malvesia being located in a rural area outside of Valencia, it has been a primary aim of this Centre of Vocational Excellence to promote and advance Rural-Urban Greening practices. In the year ahead Platform partners in Spain would like to collaborate with the local town of Llombai and use it as a model for best practices in Rural-Urban Greening. Conversations are also underway with 12 other local towns to help advise on coherent forward-thinking concepts for the new green areas they plan to develop.



### Construction of a Headquarters for the Centre of Vocational Excellence

In the fourth year of the European Platform for Urban Greening, plans are underway in Spain to construct an Urban Greening pavilion on the grounds of EFA La Malvesia, that will become the headquarters of this Centre of Vocational Excellence. This pavilion will provide a physical space for a wide range of Urban Greening activities including: internships, hackathons, workshops, conferences and living-labs. Thinking about the sustainability of Platform going forward, the implementation of a central hub of this kind will be very valuable in attracting new partners as well as adding value for the partners who have already signed Memorandums of Understanding, all joining the mission to promote and advance Urban Greening in Spain.

### Valencia – European Green Capital 2024

Having been named the European Green Capital in 2024, Valencia has numerous events planned to celebrate and promote Green initiatives throughout the year. The Partners of the European Platform in Spain plan to use this opportunity to further advance, advocate and generate renewed support for their Centre of Vocational Excellence and Urban Greening throughout the country. Given the importance of agriculture in the region, with over 120 km<sup>2</sup> of land around the city dedicated to fruit and vegetable farms, this is the perfect platform to further showcase the impact that best practices in Rural-Urban Greening can make.



# Summary of Activity

With hundreds of new partnerships forged across the European Platform over the past three years, the Platform's effect on advancing Urban Greening across the continent is undeniable. Each Centre of Vocational Excellence has been securing new funding from public bodies and private industry alike and are laying the foundations for their long-term sustainability with the development of Urban Greening centres, hubs and headquarters in each region.

This year, the Platform partners are proud to showcase the impact they are making: with policy makers, by offering new approaches to Green education, and through raising the profile of Urban Greening locally, nationally and on a European-wide level. Below are some of this year's key highlights:

## Impact Highlights in 2023

- Nature Restoration Law adopted by EU Parliament and entering a trilogue
- ELCA joins approach to United Nations representing the Landscaping & Gardening sector
- ELCA promotes Urban Greening during EU Green Week 2023 in Brussels
- ELCA's 60th anniversary jubilee seminar promotes 'Think Green First'
- 300 students introduced to Green professions during a two-day event in Denmark
- Tampere Wood Nursery improves balance of its soil using the Soil Food Web Method with the help of students from AhlmanEdu
- Finland shares their 'metromap' that facilitates partnerships between educational entities
- Student & residents use traditional mowing methods at Piikahaka meadow in Finland
- Students inspired by Steam Restoration course increase awareness amongst policy makers and the public in Tampere
- Seasonal training assists in up-skilling during the Green sector's off-season in Finland
- 'Working Landscapes of the Future' a multi-stakeholder project aims to transform over 3,000 industrial estates across the Netherlands
- 'Nature Environment Education' programme aims to inspire children ages 4-10 in Holland
- Worm Hotels create a culture change amongst staff at the Hotspot Green Liveable City in Houten
- Green Roofs Qualification is developed to make a new national skills qualification in Holland
- 'Biodiversity Education in Urban Spaces' programme took place alongside Green Week in Romania which saw 19,500 students and 217 teachers participate from close to 70 schools
- Urban Gardener occupation was officially introduced into the Romanian Occupational Code
- IKEA Biodiversity Garden, open to the public, takes root in Bucharest with the help of students from LTCN technical high school
- PAIMED's bioengineered vertical garden prototype Urban Tec-Roc installed and monitored at EFA La Malvesia in Spain with plans to offer the system to the market in the future
- Conversations underway with over 12 local authorities to advance Rural-Urban Greening best practices in Spain



## Mobility & Virtual Learning Highlights 2023

- 1st International Urban Greening Week held in the Netherlands and Finland
- 1st BARCOVE Hackathon takes place in Denmark with 'The Blue Green Innovation Challenge'
- 1st GREENVUE project takes place in Amsterdam to promote vocational education and training in the Green sector
- ELCA Employee Exchange programme continues to create Green mobility opportunities
- Green Academy creates a bespoke course 'Adaptation of Cities to Climate Change' for Czech students
- Biodiversity Podcasts are offered by the Green Academy in Denmark
- The Virtual Green Academy is launched in Danish and English for users to explore with VR headsets, mobile phones or on their computers
- Virtual International Exchange Meetings on Urban Greening take place between participants from the U.S., Brazil and Denmark, facilitated by Green Academy
- AhlmanEdu launches a Virtual Platform for Vertical Green in Finland that takes users on a virtual journey to learn about the construction, maintenance and benefits using VR headsets or other mobile devices
- 20 participants from Romania travel to the Green Academy in Denmark for bespoke Urban Greening training
- Spanish students complete Green internships at Sediner See Golf & Country Club in Germany
- Students from the Higher Degree in Forest Management at EFA La Malvesia complete Green internships with Dutch holiday park company Texelcamping

## Platform Sustainability & Partnership Highlights 2023

- ELCA develops plans for a central digital knowledge/resource hub for Urban Greening in Europe
- Church of Denmark becomes a major new partner in Denmark
- Green Cities 2030+ Centre is established in Czech Republic along with 10 new partnerships
- Central Bohemian Region signs Memorandum of Understanding and becomes a major partner in Czech Republic
- Over 50 entities are actively collaborating with Platform partners in Spain, many of which have signed Memorandums of Understanding
- Plans take shape for a new Urban Greening Pavilion at EFA La Malvesia outside of Valencia

**EuropeanPlatform**  
**UrbanGreening** 

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