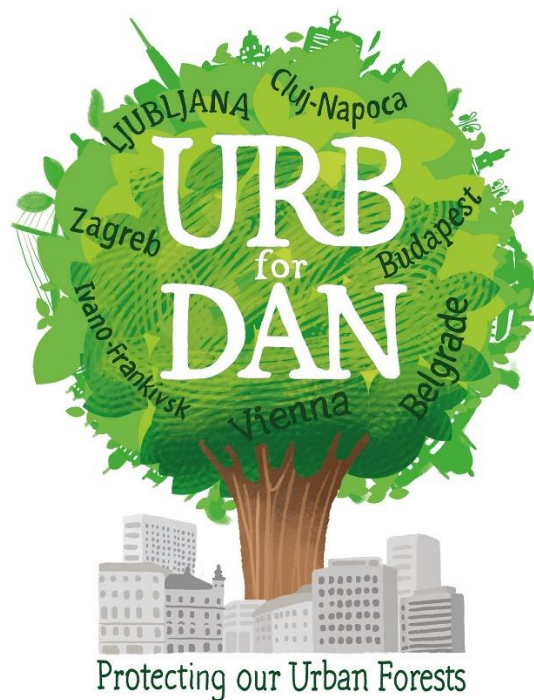


URBforDAN

Management and Utilization of Urban Forests
as Natural Heritage in Danube Cities

June 2018 – September 2021

Layman's Report



Project co-funded by European Union funds (ERDF, IPA, ENI)



Today's urban lifestyle in cities is fast and very intensive. Thus, vast numbers of citizens and visitors search for places to relax from daily stress. Often, there is no time for "the escape from the city", so they look for alternatives. Traditionally, they find them in urban forests. Urban forests are immensely important vehicles for the health and well-being of city dwellers. Moreover, in times of climate crisis, they represent crucial means to mitigate the effects of warming and to strengthen the resilience of urban dwellers to increased heat days.

In the framework of the Interreg project URBforDAN (URBforDAN is short for Management and Utilization of Urban Forests as Natural Heritage in Danube Cities), the Project Partners set new standards in sustainable urban forest management. They improved conditions for land owners and visitors of urban forests, as well as shared their experience and knowledge with a larger UPF community of cities and regions, organisations, associations, experts, stakeholders and the interested public.

Inappropriate management and overuse put forests under pressure

The status of "green city lungs" is the main reason why urban forests in all Project Partner Cities (Ljubljana, Belgrade, Zagreb, Budapest, Cluj-Napoca, Ivano-Frankivsk and Vienna) have so far survived all urbanization pressures relatively intact (over 35 km² of UPF in 7 Partner Cities). However, multiplication of activities and ever-increasing numbers of citizens (almost 6,5 Mio. in all 7 Cities) and visitors (over 15 Mio. per year in all 7 Cities) put urban forests under ever increasing pressures. Even if many urban forests are protected as natural/cultural heritage, inappropriate management, overuse and poor coordination between key stakeholders plague most of urban forests in Danube cities today.



Field trip of all project partners 2018 at the project kick-off-meeting in Ljubljana

Capitalizing on its experience and achievements as European Green Capital 2016, the City of Ljubljana decided to create a partnership with other cities in the Region to develop the URBforDAN project to develop new standards in sustainable management of urban and peri-urban forests. URBforDAN project aimed to tackle actual needs and challenges linked to sustainable management of natural heritage within urban areas of Danube Region, which demand a transnational approach and the development of new standards to be effectively resolved. URBforDAN was designed to bring about a change in urban forest management practices and in the utilization of ecosystem services provided by the selected focus areas in 7 Partner Cities. It was designed to restore the existing image of urban forests and to make sure that the areas became places for socialization, relaxation, recreation, education, high-quality experiencing of natural heritage and green tourism for a diverse set of people, while at the same time providing a wide range of ecosystem services. It also aimed to improve cooperation between key local stakeholders to resolve conflicts and improve management of the forests. At the same time, it aimed to diversify and enrich “green tourism” offer of Danube Cities through new and improved services and products from over 700 ha of urban forests.

Danube Transnational Programme

As a part of the Danube Transnational Programme, the URBforDAN-project implemented joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local stakeholders from different member and non-member states. These include: Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Austria, Croatia, Serbia and Ukraine. 4 associated partner, Cities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Czech Republic, as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) joined the partnership and did participate in integrated planning/management approach.



Before taking a closer look at the individual partner cities and the activities they implemented, we would like to introduce to you the main outputs of the URBforDAN project. All the guidelines, programs, instructions and concepts have been designed and written in such a way that they are internationally applicable and replicable, outside the URBforDAN project and also after the project has ended. In the future, we hope that these guidelines will serve as the basis for the modern management of urban forests around the world. Here is a brief overview:

Participatory Approach Workshop Implementation Guidelines

The overall aim of this guideline is to support forest managers in the implementation of the Participatory Approach that means, to involve all key stakeholders like forest owners, visitors or otherwise affected people before and during the planning and implementation period. This is not a comprehensive guide for design and delivery of trainings, but rather a support tool for managers and workshop moderators/facilitators.

Participatory Planning & UPF Management Guidelines

In addition another guideline was created to support forest managers in the implementation of the Participatory Approach as a key methodological advantage to ensure adequate understanding and capacities by all stakeholders involved. Results of this process can be found in the [URBforDAN Library](#). This guideline also included recommendations regarding ecosystem services and Integrated multi-use Management Plans, about which you can read more below.

Ecosystem services mapping & valuation methodology for urban forest

The main objective of ecosystem services mapping is to get a good basis for the preparation of a strategic and operational management plan for the urban forests. Ecosystem services are the many and varied benefits to humans provided by the natural environment and from healthy ecosystems like a forest. These ecosystems, functioning in healthy relationship, offer such things like natural pollination of crops, clean air, extreme weather mitigation, and human mental and physical well-being. The methodology mainly focuses on mapping the potential of forests (looking at the current use and potential uses) for a longer time period. For example, one can discover that a particularly sensitive area needs to be protected, and it is decided to proceed in the management plan as following: provide a hiking trail with information boards around the area in such a way that the area is no longer exposed to such great loads because the visitors now stay on the guided trails. The final product of the methodology is the map of ecosystem services, the forest manager want to promote. In URBforDAN project ecosystem services mapping was carried out on over 1.200 ha of urban and peri-urban forests in 7 cities!



Participation and cooperation are vital for the URBforDAN project

Guidance Packages and Trainings of Trainers

The overall aim of this package, that was developed during the project, is to support forest managers in the implementation of the Participatory Approach and workshops with key stakeholders. This is also not a comprehensive guide for design and delivery of trainings, but rather a support tool for forest managers and workshop moderators/facilitators. Alongside Guidelines it also includes Training Exercises used during the Participatory Approach Training.

Integrated multi-use Management Plan

The Integrated multi-use Management Plan (short IMMP) is the basis for the implementation of the activities and measures in urban forest for providing desired ecosystem services. Additional detailed plans (projects, sketches) for carrying out the activities and measures can also be elaborated. It is a vital support tool for forest managers, providing them with a clear methodology/approach and an universal template. It was used to produce 7 IMMPs in all URBforDAN cities, covering over 1.200 ha of urban and peri-urban forests. Results of this process and all other material can be found in the [URBforDAN Library](#).

UPF Danube Network

The URBforDAN project partnership mobilized key actors in the Danube Region, but took a step further with establishment of the urban and peri-urban forests (UPF) Danube Network. The transnational network has been created with the help of FAO, with the intent to strengthen cooperation between key actors, to ensure timely knowledge and best-practice

sharing, dissemination and transferability of project outputs and to enable further capitalization. The network is used for experience/data/solution sharing and dissemination of project results/outputs. Relevant partners from all over Europe (e.g. similar EU funded projects, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, etc.) and other relevant networks (e.g. EFUF) were invited to join. All interested institutions and interest groups will also be able to actively support this process through [UPF Danube Network](#). Several documents have already been published, and the content will be continuously updated.

Scientific articles

As part of the project, each project partner has also published scientific papers or expert articles that deal with the respective measures in the urban forests. During the project more than a dozen articles on scientific topics were published.

URBforDAN Smartphone App

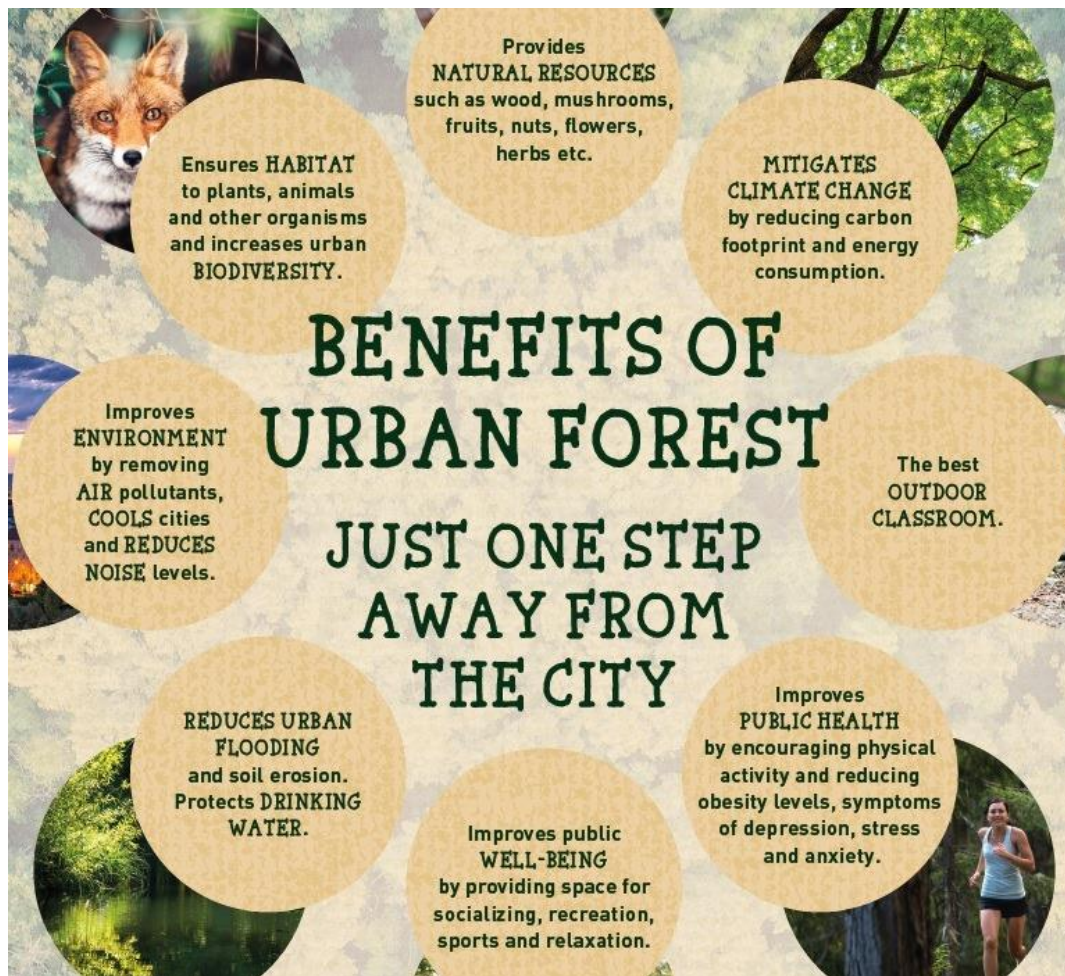
During the project an App named URBforDAN was created. It invites the users to visit the focus area in the seven project cities and to discover beautiful places, supported by a map. The user learns about nature in the focus area, history, the city in numbers and URBforDAN innovations and recreation options. The App can be downloaded in the Android-Playstore and in the Apple-Appstore (search for URBforDAN).

Best idea contest

The project also launched a competition of best ideas on the urban forests. These could be sent as a drawing, painting, text etc. It was intended to gather sustainable ideas for spending time in urban forests from all interested stakeholders in the 7 cities. The three best ideas were presented and awarded at the final project conference in Ljubljana in September 2021.

Leaflets, posters, educational materials

A wide variety of information folders and posters were designed and produced in all national languages to raise awareness of the importance of urban forests and their preservation. These included for example a “Code of Conduct in the forest” (especially for schools and kindergartens), a general folder on URBforDAN or a poster about the benefits of urban forest.



An example for a poster, especially produced for schools

Photo exhibition

At the end of the project, the most beautiful project photos were presented in a separate photo exhibition at the final conference in Ljubljana. In addition to beautiful impressions from the forests, the exhibition showed the specific project results in the cities with before-and-after photos.

Now here is, what concrete actions from 7 IMMPs were realized in the urban forests of the cities (without claim of completeness):

Ljubljana

Visitors to Ljubljana now find new information boards, signposts and direction boards, wooden benches, tables and platforms, and several learning points on Golovec Hill. Eight entry points were built in this beautiful city forest. Information boards and added bike racks were set up. Thirty wooden pillars or totems to guide visitors and 13 posts with educational or informative functions were erected. There are now three marked forest playrooms, which are mainly used for playing and learning by the nearby kindergartens and schools. Ljubljana has set urban equipment also in its 2nd focus area Šmarna gora with visitor information boards at entrance points, informational totems and new and rebuilt benches and wooden steps.

Ivano-Frankivsk

In Ivano-Frankivsk an educational area - a "study room" in nature - with a forest playground and natural camping for children was created on Vovchynets Hill, in addition to three observation decks, a recreational area for the cycling community and bicycle path markings with bicycle covers/points. On the territory of focus area no. 2., which was edited during the prolongation of the project, three recreational cycling spots were installed.

Zagreb

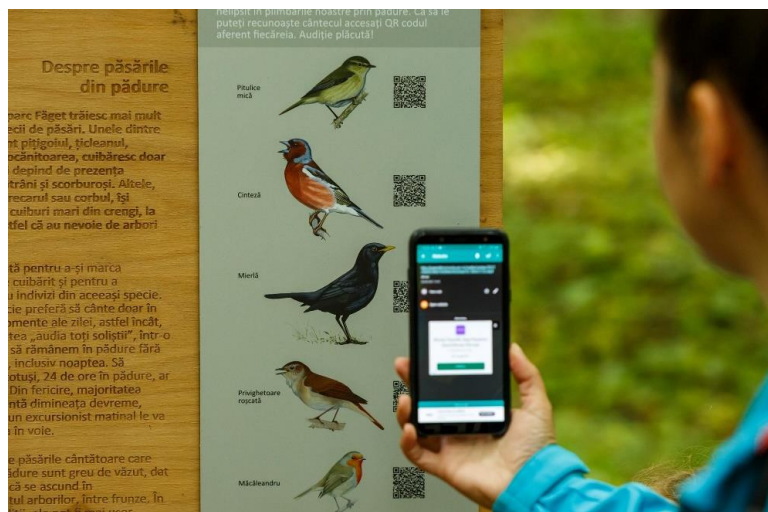
The following urban equipment was installed in the Grmoščica forest in Zagreb: new entrance design and urban equipment (stairs, handrails, markings) together with tables and benches. Three trails, with a different level of difficulty for downhill mountain biking, were also designed; the bike trails have been separated in order to maintain safety of every forest visitor. Also, information boards, markings, education trails and a soccer field were realized along with the forest lookout which has been renewed as well.

Cluj-Napoca

In Făget Forest in Cluj-Napoca, bicycle and thematic paths were marked and signaled with information panels regarding the fauna and flora of the area. An amphitheatre, an educational platform, a relaxation platform and several benches were installed, without disrupting the natural environment.

Budapest

The Birders' Clearing was named after a bird-hide and is a place, where visitors can watch birds from very close through a reflection window without being noticed by the birds. In another corner of the clearing teachers can find a forest classroom with enough space to seat 30 children. A 1.3 km educational nature trail gives information and inspiration to the hikers. In the upper end of the focus area there is a forest playground, where children can find 5 pieces of specially designed, carved and painted animals, characteristic of the focus area.



Nature experience in the forest supported by digital means

Vienna

A nature discovery trail with seven stations that convey interesting facts about the flora and fauna in and around the Danube in a playful way was built around the Reichsbrücke bay. New, large-format information boards were erected around two protected areas, Zinkerbachl and „Toter Grund“, pointing out the valuable fauna and flora in these forests and urging recreation-seekers to leave nature its space and peace. New seating and resting furniture were also installed.

Belgrade

In Belgrade 30 information boards were designed and produced in the protected area of Avala hill - these show and explain the outstanding places of the forest. The information boards are placed in spots that are an important access for visiting Avala for enjoying the valuable nature of this hill near the city. They provide a lot of information about the bird species, mammal fauna, heptefoana (snakes and amphibians). In addition, six hiking trails have been created and provided with signs containing information about the points of interest encountered during the hike. There are also wooden canopies, signposts, wooden outdoor furniture and an electronic information desk.

Summary

URBforDAN project, which was prolonged with additional activities to be implemented until September 2021, has set new standards in the sustainable care of our urban forests and developed internationally applicable management plans. URBforDAN brought forest owners, managers as well as users to the same table and achieved their active involvement. Furthermore, it improved management of over 1.200 ha of urban and peri-urban forests, daily used by over 6,5 million citizens and 15 million visitors in the 7 URBforDAN Cities. By improving urban forest management, also the overall experience and awareness of visitors of our urban forests has been elevated.

Links and URBforDAN movie

To get a real beautiful impression of the project, we invite to watch the URBforDAN movie on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bjq4MYTkV2A>

You might also wish to visit our website for a more complete overview of all the achievements of the project in the different cities:

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/urbfordan>

All outputs and deliverables are available on URBforDAN webpage library at:

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/urbfordan>

URBforDAN Project partners:

Cities:

City of Ljubljana (leading partner)

City of Vienna – Municipal Department 45 – Water Management (Austria)

Municipality of Budapest (Hungary)

City of Zagreb (Croatia)

City of Belgrade (Serbia)

City of Cluj-Napoca (Romania)

City of Ivano-Frankivsk (Ukraine)

Organizations and companies:

Slovenian Forest Service (Slovenia)

Budapest Horticultural Private Limited Company Főkert (Hungary)

Croatian Forests (Croatia)

State Enterprise for Forest Management “Srbijašume” Belgrade (Serbia)

Cluj Metropolitan Association

Associated partners:

City of Prague (Czech Republic)

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague - Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences

Capital City Podgorica (Montenegro)

Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and Environmental Protection of the Canton Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – FAO (Italy)

The project's total value for all participants is € 3.105.666,61, the amount of EU funds' co-financing is €2.639.816,58 (ERDF, IPA, ENI).

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IPA Contribution: € 281.691,62

ENI Contribution: € 248.774,30