

# Six keys to co-creating biodiversity

- a methodology



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## Introduction: Facilitating co-creation

In this leaflet, you will find practical guidance on how to lead urban biodiversity initiatives in a co-creative way. Based on hands-on experiences from the six local projects, we have extracted six keys that are central in co-creating biodiversity. The keys are addressed to everybody with an ambition to strengthen biodiversity in their city, wishing to mobilise the resources of relevant stakeholders, i.e. citizens, students, NGOs or local institutions such as the school, the church or the municipality.

The six keys are rooted in hands-on experiences from the Co-Bio project (Co-creating Urban Biodiversity), aiming to support the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 with a special focus on urban biodiversity. During the project, Co-Bio partners from six European cities have experimented with co-creation methodologies to promote urban biodiversity. The project aimed to foster citizens' active participation and influence in their local community and society. Read more about the Co-Bio project at [www.co-bio.vejle.dk/](http://www.co-bio.vejle.dk/), including the 'Guide to co-creating urban biodiversity'.

### The six local Co-Bio cases

**Portugal:** Right Challenge has collaborated with the Municipal Urban Planning and Social Housing Company, Gaiurb, on the Tiny Forests project focusing on developing tiny forests in three deprived neighbourhoods in a district of Porto involving the local inhabitants.

**Greece:** The Athens Lifelong Learning Institute has collaborated with the municipality and a local school in the village of Plataies to plant native species in a local school yard and cultivate a shared sense of responsibility for their urban environment.

**Austria:** Öko Campus Wien and Garten Polylog have collaborated with the biology student union and local inhabitants to develop part of the University campus and adjacent sites belonging to housing companies towards a more green and biodiverse space.

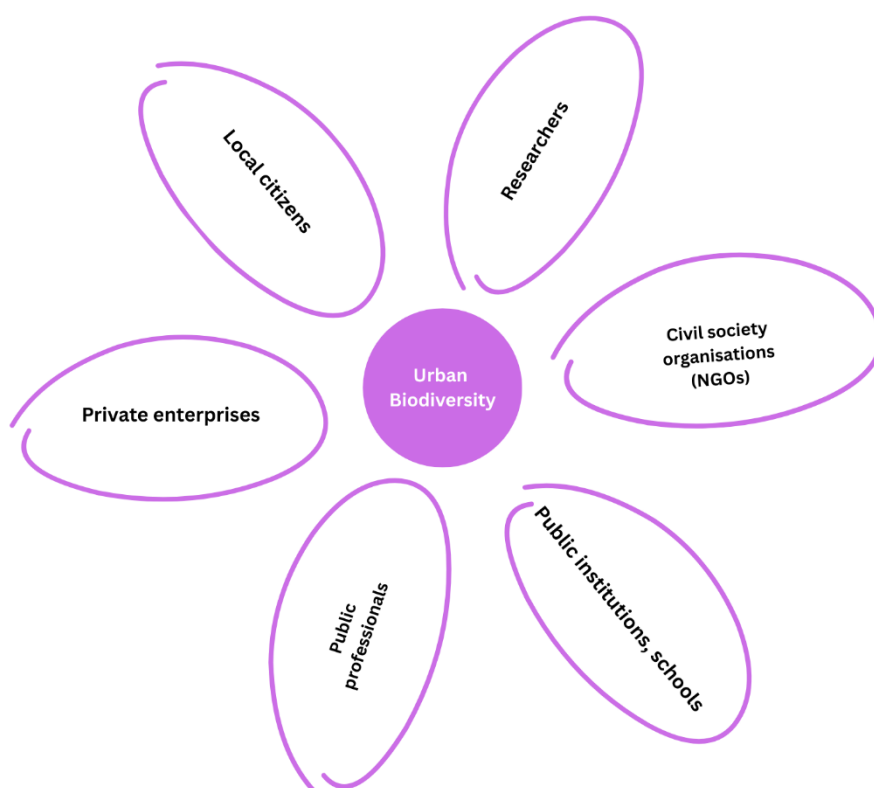
**Italy:** In collaboration with Euromadonie, a professional learning institute and employment agency, CESIE has developed a biodiversity garden. This is a living laboratory to preserve native flora, promote ecological awareness, and strengthen the connection between people and their natural surroundings.

**Denmark:** In the village Skibet near Vejle, Denmark, citizens and the municipality of Vejle are working together to strengthen local biodiversity. A volunteer group of 13 residents are working on developing inspirational biodiversity boxes to be distributed locally.

**Hungary:** GreenFormation has collaborated with the Transition Wekerletelep civil organisation, the Kiserdő Association (Smallforest Association), the local community centre, and volunteers to implement a range of different actions to enhance biodiversity Wekerletelep.

The Co-Bio project aimed to promote urban biodiversity through collaboration. The focus on urban biodiversity provides an opportunity to form local partnerships and to develop knowledge, competencies and tools to rebuild biodiversity, create awareness and mobilise local action. This is where the idea of co-creation becomes relevant. Co-creation means collaboration among stakeholders from different sectors, i.e. civil society, public institutions and the private sector, to solve a specific issue or problem. The aim is to engage local professionals and volunteers across sectors in a collaborative process, developing local initiatives for enhancing urban biodiversity.

Working with co-creation in urban biodiversity means mobilising and facilitating collaboration among relevant stakeholders to address the challenge and implement biodiversity initiatives. The model below illustrates this principle.



Model: Isa Klee/Canva

## Key 1: Get access to a suitable piece of land

### Ensure a room for co-creation and sharing of interests

In many cities, land is scarce and expensive – that is why you should not underestimate the importance of getting access to a piece of land suitable for co-creating biodiversity. This need may well become the guidance for the alliances you will want to build.

In terms of access to land, the six local Co-Bio projects have ended up with a very different focus. Some are working with biodiversity in private gardens collaborating with local citizens. While others have made alliances with a public school, a university, a church or a housing association with an interest in enhancing biodiversity on their grounds. In general, it often turns out to be difficult, and time consuming to get access to areas such as parks or left over spaces owned by the municipality.

### **Difficult to get access to publicly owned areas**

The Hungarian Co-Bio initiative initially hoped to be able to transform an abandoned green space next to a public Sports Centre into a more biodiversity friendly place. But after a long process it was decided to give up this idea and focus on private gardens and a school area instead. The project leader, Tamara, explains: *“The local partner negotiated for two years with changing employees at the municipality about this space. But in the end, they were not able to reach a final decision that made it possible for us to use this space – so we realised that we needed to focus on something else”*. She has learnt the hard way, that patience is necessary for collaborating with public institutions: *“For institutions, we need more time for planning, for processing everything. So, we definitely learned that with institutions like the municipality or a school, we cannot decide what to do from one week to the next. We need more structure and more time”*.

### **Co-creation implies shared ambitions**

The Danish co-creation initiative initially explored the idea of raising a forest on a piece of land owned by a farmer interested in raising a forest. However, it turned out, that the ambitions of the landowner did not leave room for co-creation. Therefore, it was decided to focus on collaborating with local citizens on developing their gardens instead. This shift strengthened community engagement by making room for the citizens’ dreams and ambitions. The project leader, Malene, says: *“There needs to be a shared interest to be able to mobilise around biodiversity. When somebody owns a piece of land and wants to plant a forest, it may be difficult to mobilise other actors to participate, as there needs to be room for their interests and ambitions”*.

### **Shared interests in developing a deprived area**

The tiny forest initiatives in three deprived housing areas constituted a room for co-creation and of shared interests between RightChallenge and Gaiurb, the Municipal Entity responsible for Land Management and Social Housing in Gaia. Gaiurb decided to collaborate on the initiative, as it fitted perfectly with the company’s ambitions for improving life quality for the inhabitants in the social housing areas. The company saw it as a way of strengthening social sustainability *“We hoped that involvement of the community would generate a positive mobilisation effect, encouraging more people to participate and value the common space, reinforcing social, environmental and community sustainability in social housing dwellings”*.

Likewise, in Palermo, the local parish made a piece of the church land available for developing a biodiversity garden in collaboration with CESIE and the local professional learning institute, Euromadonie. The project leader, Sara, says: *“The local priest was positive about the idea, as*

*he saw it as a way to develop this leftover area into a beautiful place of value for the local inhabitants of the parish”.*

### Takeaway points

- Don't underestimate the time and effort involved in getting access to a piece of land for your biodiversity initiative
- Stakeholders that have access to land, i.e. schools, universities, churches, municipalities, private landowners/citizens, could be relevant allies
- Be patient, if you are opting for access to an area owned by the municipality or a municipal institution, i.e. a public school. Negotiations with these stakeholders typically take a long time
- Shared interests among key stakeholders are a prerequisite for co-creating initiatives. Spend your time and effort at the beginning of the process on developing common ground among stakeholders – or most of them

## Key 2: Build local alliances

### Develop relations to stakeholders that may contribute resources, connections and knowledge

Building clever alliances is a prerequisite in co-creating urban biodiversity. Alliances with people and organisations that have local knowledge, connections with the relevant stakeholders, and maybe even offer access to a piece of land, have turned out pivotal to succeed with the Co-Bio initiatives. Often you won't need to look out for new alliances. Instead, you may build on your existing network. What is important is to build alliances with one or more stakeholders, that share your ambitions concerning biodiversity and find that the initiative will also serve their interests. It may also be a good idea to reach out to stakeholders who are resourceful and have a potential of acting as 'change agents', supporting new collaborations and initiatives.

#### Tap into relevant political strategies

Tapping into existing policies and strategies that resonate with your initiative may be a smart way to develop alliances. The Co-Bio project in the Danish village of Skibet tapped into the political aim of the municipality to support climate action by local citizens and communities. It thus succeeded in developing a synergy effect, gaining access to municipal resources and support. Likewise, the Greek initiative in Plataies involving students from primary schools has gained support from the municipality and schools as it taps into current national and municipal policies of reducing CO<sub>2</sub>-levels as well as educating children on climate and biodiversity measures. According to the project leader of the Greek case, Kostas: *“It is much easier to gain political support for initiatives that align with political strategies. So, it is worthwhile studying policy papers and framing your initiative to tap into existing political objectives”.*



### Explore what is already there

Another similar approach is to explore existing initiatives in the local area you want to work in, to connect with and build on. Co-creation initiatives do not always need to start from scratch and evolve according to a 'project logic'. Sustainable co-creation projects are often based on 'what is already there', linking existing initiatives, agendas and stakeholders, thereby supporting collaboration and enlarging their impact. When working with urban biodiversity, relevant stakeholders could be local citizens interested in gardening or birdlife, local kindergartens or schools that aim to teach children about biodiversity, a local church wanting to contribute to a sustainable city or NGO's and public organisations working to develop a sustainable community.

A pragmatic way of mobilising participants for a co-creative biodiversity initiative is to think in terms of 'what is already happening – and how may these initiatives be linked?' by building alliances and connections. This entails mapping active stakeholders, institutions and existing activities that are currently addressing related agendas or tasks – and linking them in a common initiative. This exercise may open your mind to the stakeholders, who you are not normally aware of and are not used to collaborate with. In the Hungarian case in the neighbourhood of Wekerletelep it proved crucial to make an alliance with Transition Wekerle, a central organisation of the area, that is well connected and trusted by the local inhabitants.

Use your personal network – do you know anybody who is connected to the people you would like to talk with? Existing relations help build trust and open doors. Start with an informal and personal contact – getting to know each other over a cup of coffee.

### Rely on your network

At one stage, the project leader of the Italian Co-Bio initiative, Sara, was close to giving up. She had approached local primary schools potentially interested in collaborating on biodiversity but had not managed to make an alliance. Sara explains: *"I found myself in a place, where I was thinking, Oh My God, we have this budget, we have this chance, we have this amazing project, but we are missing the right stakeholder, who will trust the process. The point was finding the right stakeholders who wanted to be part of this long-term process"*. A colleague of hers pointed her in the direction of an organisation, Euromadonie, an adult education Center, which was already a connection. An alliance was built on co-creating biodiversity with the students on the school grounds as part of the teaching activities.

Building clever alliances by choosing resourceful and connected stakeholders will often help you mobilizing and collaborating with a wider range of stakeholders and participants.

### 'Borrowing' trust from another stakeholder

The Portuguese Co-Bio initiative, which consisted of co-creating pocket forests together with the inhabitants of three social housing areas, was launched in close collaboration with an already existing partner, Gaiurb. Gaiurb is a Municipal Entity responsible for Urban Planning and Housing in Vila Nova de Gaia outside Porto. The initiative benefited from Gaiurb's access to land in the housing areas as well as the employees' local knowledge and trusted relations to

the inhabitants. According to the project leader, Catarina, co-creating a biodiversity project with the local inhabitants would not have been possible without Gaiurb: *“If we had gotten there and just said: ‘we are xx and we want to make this happen, just trust us!’ it's not the same as having the people who work with the inhabitants and have been working there for 10 plus years, being so enthusiastic with our idea and just passing this to them. That makes the process a lot easier for the facilitator”*. At first, some of the inhabitants were sceptical towards the biodiversity initiative and pointed to other, more urgent problems in their housing estate, such as infiltration problems. Residents of one neighbourhood, particularly, have been facing serious problems with water infiltrations in their roofs for several years, which have yet to be resolved. Thus, for them it was difficult to understand why investment would be made in improving the biodiversity of the outdoor spaces rather than solving the infiltration problems. In this situation, the local employees of Gaiurb took an important role in explaining the different initiatives and the potential benefits of the pocket forest.

### **Boosting visibility through an alliance**

The Austrian Co-Bio initiative aiming at developing biodiversity on the grounds of the University of Vienna and adjacent grounds managed to develop an alliance with the Student Union of the University's biology students. This turned out to be a great asset in terms of reaching out to students, who are potentially interested in biodiversity activities. The project leader, Isa, comments: *“The students' union has several thousand followers on Instagram. And as a political representation, they also have a lot of interest in the political side. So, this alliance turned out to be quite fruitful, because there was a circle of people who had a stake in the area, who disposed of an area, that we could use, and also the visibility, the channel to a lot of potentially interested biology students”*.

### **Takeaway points**

- Aligning your initiative with current political strategies may be a smart way to gain political support and access to resources
- Partnering up with stakeholders with local knowledge and relations is central to biodiversity initiatives
- Build on what is already there. Map existing initiatives and stakeholders that may be relevant for your project
- Use your network to identify stakeholders that may become local allies in your biodiversity initiative

## **Key 3: Take a curious and humble position**

**Be aware that language and communication are pivotal in co-creation**



Many people find it difficult to understand and relate to the concept of biodiversity. Thus, the concept of biodiversity may not itself be a driver of engagement. To some, the idea of enhancing biodiversity may spur engagement. Whereas for others, the possibility of working hands-on together on a local green initiative is the main motivating factor. The potential of cocreating biodiversity initiatives, thus, is tied to linking different needs and motivations of a range of stakeholders. The stakeholders you want to mobilise or collaborate with may have very different needs as well as motivations for wanting to take part in a local biodiversity initiative. For schools, hands-on learning and awareness raising among students and parents may be an important motivation. For citizens and local communities building stronger relations and a sustainable community may be a driver as well as a need to experience ‘agency’ and overcome climate anxiety. Also, to some local citizens, a wish to improve the outdoor environment and offering shade in ‘heat islands’ may be central.

Co-creation implies developing an initiative designed to meet the needs and ambitions of all the partners collaborating. It is pivotal, therefore, that you as a facilitator take a humble position and curiously explore the potential ‘common ground’ that may link your need, ambitions and interests to those of other stakeholders. Here, language and communication play a key role.

### **Language is important**

‘Biodiversity’ as a concept does not always attract a lot of engagement from citizens. From the outset, the Hungarian initiative framed itself as ‘collaborating on biodiversity’ and did not manage to engage many local citizens. Once it began framing itself as an initiative to develop a certain local area, more citizens became interested. Tamara, the project leader, reflects: *“At the beginning it was just: Are you interested in participating in this project and increase biodiversity? Maybe it wasn't so clear. When we gave it a structure and named it after the place, this helped people understand and relate to this initiative”*.

Particularly, if you want to engage ‘vulnerable’ groups such as unemployed or socially deprived citizens in a biodiversity initiative, it is very important to be aware, that their perspectives may be different from yours. Be aware of the language you use when talking about the ambitions of biodiversity – and respect that practical knowledge is as valuable as professional knowledge about biodiversity.

The Portuguese initiative unfolding in a deprived housing area experienced that it was a challenge to convey the concept of biodiversity to the local inhabitants. The language became an important issue. The project leader, Catarina, was surprised, that some of the inhabitants had not even heard of a forest. Therefore, it was necessary to change the way of working and talking to be able to reach the inhabitants by making it much simpler and more visual. She reflects: *“The most important thing is to speak the same language as them. Particularly with people who have very low levels of education and maybe face some serious social challenges, it is really crucial to be able to convey our ideas in a way that they understand. For example, showing them 3D models saying: ‘Isn't it very hot in here in summer? Wouldn't it be really nice to have all this shade from all these trees and benches and everything so that you could take advantage of the space, that you have outside?”* Another way to meet the inhabitants was to listen to their concern that the tiny forest would risk being destroyed by dogs, securing that a fence would be set up.

### The value of knowing biodiversity in practice

As a facilitator, it is important to acknowledge that different stakeholders in co-creation processes carry with them different types of knowledge and thus different ways of communicating. To develop an equal collaboration between the partners, practical and hands-on experience must be treated equally to professional knowledge. Also, it may be necessary to translate between and bridge different communication styles. Communication and language turned out to be of central importance in the Italian initiative. The project leader, Sara, realised, that she must collaborate with ‘translators’ in terms of local stakeholders to understand and navigate within the communication culture and language of the participants. She also realised that the concept of ‘biodiversity’ did not make sense to the participants – although many of them were already doing it in practice: *“They just didn't know that this was biodiversity. Because they don't have that kind of language. I remember once someone said: ‘I do that all the time in my garden’. So, in this sense, there was a very good basis for working with biodiversity among this group”*.

An important driver for participants in co-creative process is ‘to spread the word’, celebrate achievement and thus become visible and receive acknowledgement from the local community. Accordingly, communication activities are an important part of these initiatives. Communication may take many different forms such as project narratives, social media communication or events like planting days or ‘bio-blitzes’.

#### Takeaway points

- Be aware that the idea of ‘biodiversity’ to many people is difficult to understand and not in itself appealing. It is important to explore and acknowledge the different needs and motivations of the stakeholders, i.e. knowledge, community-building or agency.
- Be curious – an explorative mindset allows you to approach other stakeholders openly, discuss possible common gains from working together and establish common ground
- Strive to develop an initiative designed to meet the needs and ambitions of all the partners collaborating – and give room for different types of motivations and dreams which participants bring to the table
- Different types of knowledge are valuable in co-creation. Language and communication are pivotal to bridge differences. Listen to advice from those who know the people you would like to collaborate with
- Spend time and energy on celebrating your achievements and ‘spread the word’, as acknowledgement from peers and the local community may be an important driver for participants

## Key 4: Collaborate with a diverse group of participants

### Reach out – and rely on the ‘ripple effect’

The basic idea of enhancing biodiversity through co-creation is to bring people with diverse ambitions, interests and competencies to work together and thus create more creative and

sustainable solutions. Therefore, you as a facilitator should be on the lookout for diversity. Don't be satisfied with mobilising 'the usual suspects', but aim to reach out to diverse participants – and be prepared to integrate the needs and ambitions of all the involved stakeholders into the design and planning of the initiative.

### **A working group with different knowledge**

Sometimes, it may be a good idea to reach out to the inhabitants in a neighbourhood with the aim of mobilising participants for a local initiative. This may be done through an 'open invitation' in the form of an event, workshop, competition or survey to spur interest in the biodiversity initiative.

In the Danish Co-Bio initiative, an idea sharing workshop was set up in a local neighbourhood, inviting all inhabitants to contribute their ideas for enhancing sustainability of their area. A group of local citizens with a common interest in biodiversity ended up forming a working group developing an 'inspirational box' for garden-owners on biodiversity. According to the Danish facilitator, Malene, the diverse competencies and knowledge in the group were a great advantage: *"The working group consists of people who all have an interest in biodiversity but have very different skills and knowledge. Three local citizens, a biologist, a lawyer and the owner of a painting shop together on developing this inspirational box. Along the way, we have had a very interesting dialogue and developed a lot of mutual learning"*.

### **Reach out to and through children**

To mobilise local citizens' interest in biodiversity the Hungarian Co-Bio initiative collaborated with the local Community Centre in setting up a drawing competition for children. The children were asked to observe nature around the neighbourhood and draw or paint their impressions. Even if it was necessary to push the teachers, and the administrative burden turned out to be quite heavy, the local project leader, Tamara, was satisfied with the visibility of the initiative. She says: *"It was so nice to see their contributions, because you could see that they really observed wildlife and nature around them. We did not receive that many, but those we got, were really good. And for the award ceremony, all the children came – together with their parents and grandparents"*.

The Co-Bio project shows that working hands-on with biodiversity is often considered a meaningful and engaging activity, particularly by children and young people. Psychological wellbeing that stems from the experience of 'agency' and of acting together, seems to be particularly important to children and young people to cope with climate anxiety. This is important, as children and young people may in general be considered 'hard to reach'.

Sometimes, it may be a good idea to start your biodiversity initiative pragmatically, reaching out to people from your network who have competencies that you know will be important to succeed with the biodiversity initiative. Co-creation initiatives often develop like 'ripples in water'. So, starting out pragmatically with a small group of engaged participants – perhaps even friends or colleagues - may well be the right approach. Often, once the initiative gets underway, and positive stories are beginning to spread, more stakeholders will get interested and sign up.

### **Integrating the needs of the inhabitants**

In the Portuguese Co-Bio initiative of co-creating pocket forests a range of professionals, i.e. landscape architects, social technicians and managers were involved from the beginning. Also, it proved central to involve the inhabitants of the three social housing areas from the beginning and to integrate their needs and concerns in the design of the initiatives. According to the project leader, Catarina, the inhabitants in one of the areas were concerned about dogs' excrement in the forest. Whereas the inhabitants in one of the other housing areas were concerned about the new forest attracting a lot of tourists. In both cases, it turned out very important for the initiative to incorporate the ideas and concerns of the local inhabitants.

### **A landscape architect with important skills**

When setting up the Italian Co-Bio initiative, the local project leader, Sara, decided to reach out to Alfredo, who had been part of an earlier project. He is a landscape architect and knows the city very well from both his professional and voluntary work. She knew that he would be an invaluable resource in knowing the local areas in the city as well as in handling a big challenge in biodiversity initiatives in Italy: scarcity of water. The garden, which was planted as part of the Co-Bio initiative thrived thanks to the professional skills of Alfredo. Sara says: *"Alfredo was great in planning the watering system in advance, so we've been good throughout the summer"*.

Likewise, the Co-Bio initiative in Vienna enjoyed inviting a group of international landscape architects from an international network of universities (Hochschulinitiative für Biodiversität) working for biodiversity to contribute to the project.

### **Takeaway points:**

- Bringing different participants together often strengthens co-creation. It is important to involve all central stakeholders from the beginning, and to integrate their needs and ambitions in the design of the initiative
- Reach out to potential participants and stakeholders through diverse channels, for example events, idea workshops, surveys or competitions.
- To children and young people, biodiversity activities may be a way to overcome climate anxiety
- Start out pragmatically with a small group of engaged participants and rely on the 'ripple effect'. Start small – flash your achievements and celebrate quick wins
- Sometimes it may be a good idea to 'handpick' stakeholders that you know will be valuable for the biodiversity initiative

## **Key 5: Work hands-on with visible activities**

### **Creating something tangible together is a strong motivation**

In general, the six Co-Bio initiatives have experienced that activities such as planting, walking tours and excursions constitute good ways of attracting attention and participation from citizens. To many people, biodiversity may seem an abstract concept. So, hands-on activities and visualisation may help local citizens in a neighbourhood understand what it is all about.

Biodiversity is suitable for being a ‘common third’, bringing people together to work on something tangible. Planting and nurturing a green area calls for working together, and often it is a satisfying experience for participants to make a visible difference in beautifying the neighbourhood. Also, DIY activities of planting and nurturing plants are suitable for engaging citizens who are not used to close contact with nature.

Making your biodiversity initiative visible by situating it in a public place may be a good way to gain attention. For example, the Austrian Co-Bio initiative at the University campus in Vienna managed to draw quite a lot of attention from the students, as those belonging to the biodiversity group gathered and worked together in public spurring attention and curiosity from other students.

### **Events and walks draw attention**

The project leader of the Hungarian Co-Bio initiative, Tamara, experienced that public presentations and particularly local events like a bat walk and other walks focusing on trees, birds or a demonstration garden were effective means for mobilizing interest among local citizens and institutions. She reflects: *“After the events more people realised that we were doing this for a whole year and thought: Maybe I can be part of that. Actually, the local school became a part of this project at a later stage, as one of the teachers had participated in several presentations and several events and started to become more involved and asked if we could do something in their school yard”.*

### **A tangible task: Inspirational boxes**

The Danish Co-Bio initiative succeeded in motivating local citizens to engage by offering an open space brainstorming on ideas and initiatives. After this brainstorm, however, the challenge was how to channel the biodiversity ambitions of local citizens into a specific and tangible task – not having access to a piece of land. In the end, the citizens came up with an idea of developing inspirational boxes for local inhabitants who want to support biodiversity in their private garden. This gave the group a tangible task to work with and helped their motivation and collaboration. Malene, the local project leader, observes: *“It turned out that for the citizens engaged in biodiversity working together on a practical task of refining and developing the boxes was engaging and meaningful”.*

### **Educate, stimulate, create!**

Hands-on activities have also been important in the Greek Co-Bio initiative. According to the local project leader, Kostas, the Greek initiative of planting pocket parks in Plataies has unfolded in three steps: *“Educate, stimulate, create. I believe that before going into co-creation the other two steps need to be taken first”*, says Kostas. The educational part consisted of an interactive game to promote the participants’ understanding of local biodiversity. Also, visualisation was made of the plan for the pocket park and the obligations after planting. According to a citizen participating in the Greek initiative: *“Don’t just hold meetings. Bring people together and build something tangible”.*

### **Takeaway points:**

- Working with biodiversity hands-on, i.e. planting, watering and nurturing plants, animals and insects are activities suitable for engaging a broad range of people

- Many people prefer ad hoc participation, i.e. participating in a specific activity with a visible outcome: Planting flowers or detecting bats or insects.
- Promote the biodiversity initiative in a way that attracts attention and makes people want to participate, set up hands-on activities such as planting days, walks, DIY-activities or games.
- Support the community and ‘working on it together’ aspect of biodiversity initiatives through social activities such as eating and celebrating together. Social events may be a good way of attracting attention and participation

## Key 6: Set a framework – and be flexible

### Navigate in chaos and create an inspirational atmosphere

Co-creation processes require a special type of leadership. These processes may seem messy, unclear, complex and diverse, as participants belong to different organisations with different logics. You may say that leadership of co-creative processes is continuously negotiated. As a facilitator, you are leading stakeholders who may decide to leave the collaboration at any minute, should a situation become too complicated or the task meaningless.

The task as facilitator and thus leader of a co-creation process is about finding the right balance. On the one hand, the participants – and the biodiversity initiative – will need a clear purpose as well as framework in terms of the management of time and resources. On the other hand, as you will often be working with volunteers, it is important to be flexible and accommodating towards the needs of the participants and the unpredictable nature of the co-creation process. As well as supporting the motivation and engagement of the participants.

#### A fixed meeting structure

The project leader of the Austrian Co-Bio initiative, Isa, set up a fixed meeting structure with meetings every 2-3 weeks on the site of the biodiversity project, adding flexible dates to adhere to the needs of the participants. This provided a framework for the initiative and made it possible for new participants to know how to join. It also supported building a community around the initiative. If there were no practical tasks, the meetings were used to strengthen the relations among participants. Isa says: *“Sometimes it was only about sitting together, looking how the plants were doing. So not a lot of things happened, but in this way, you really relate to nature. And this is, I think, a very important part of the project. I figured out that people are quite happy just being there, talking to each other, watering the plants”*.

It is a general experience among the Co-Bio projects, that to lead processes of co-creating biodiversity you need to be able to navigate in chaos, as both nature and collaborative processes are unpredictable. So, you need to apply skills of time management and problem solving.

#### Focus on the task



In the Hungarian Co-Bio initiative, the project leader, Tamara, took the role of coordinating and structuring the tasks through planning sessions and coordination of events, involving the participants in decisions as well as implementation.

Facilitating collaboration with stakeholders with very different personalities can be challenging. One way to overcome the challenges is by focusing on the task of the group and the shared motivations. When the differences hinder the collaboration, it is recommended to talk about the problems and find common grounds.

Generally, it is important, when leading co-creation processes, to ensure clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities among the participants. Especially, when collaborating with volunteers, it is crucial to align expectations and respect the limitations of voluntary work.

### **Creating an inspirational atmosphere**

The Austrian biodiversity initiative in the University grounds succeeded in creating a ripple effect, as new ideas and initiatives began popping up among the students. The co-leader of the Austrian initiative, Cordula, attributes this to ‘an inspirational atmosphere’ created through the biodiversity initiative: *“Throughout the project, some new ideas popped up on how to set up even more projects. One of the nicest things is to not only be in a role of facilitator, but also an inspirator transporting the message: ‘You can do something by yourself!! We have created an inspirational atmosphere where the students realise that they can set up things and change things, so they came up with the idea of raised beds in the sealed area, which we will set up in September’”.*

### **The personal side: How to cope as a facilitator**

Leading and facilitating co-creation processes may be a demanding task, because of the diversity of participants and motivations, and the insecurity and ongoing re-negotiation of the task and process. Also, working on the edge of and between organisations with different logics and purposes, may be hard – and sometimes lonely – work.

Therefore, it is important that you, as facilitator, seek support and coaching from colleagues that may help you reflect on the processes you are coping with and your role in them. As well as providing you with insights, moral support and – if needed – tools and advice on how to proceed. Also, it may be a good idea to establish a ‘facilitator duo’, sharing the role and responsibility with a colleague.

### **Takeaway points:**

- As the facilitator and leader of a co-creation process, realise that you are navigating in chaos
- Find the right balance between, on the one hand a clear purpose and time-structure – and on the other hand, being flexible and accommodating the needs of the participants
- As a facilitator, it is important that you explore and recognise the participants’ motivations and interests, as well as build trust and handle conflicts
- Act as an inspirator, creating an inspirational atmosphere for participants to start their own initiatives

- Facilitating co-creation processes can be a demanding task. Establishing a room for reflection, support and advice from colleagues may help.

### Facilitation tools

If you want to read more about hands on facilitation tools, we recommend the following books and websites:

- [https://dragondreaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DragonDreaming\\_eBook\\_english\\_V02.09.pdf](https://dragondreaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DragonDreaming_eBook_english_V02.09.pdf) - tools for a participative and systemic methods called 'Dragon Dreaming' inspired by the thinking of aboriginal people
- [www.seedsforchange.org.uk/tools](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/tools) - a website offering facilitation tools for meetings and processes
- [www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/collective-intelligence-design-playbook/](http://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/collective-intelligence-design-playbook/) - a website offering tools for designing collective intelligence projects
- Weisbord, M. & Janoff, S. (2007) Don't just do something, stand there! Ten principles for leading meetings that matter.
- Weisbord, M. & Janoff, S. (2015) Lead more – control less. Eight 8 Advanced Leadership Skills That Overturn Convention. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

## Conclusion: Ensure the sustainability of the initiative

### By working with anchoring and developing stewardship

A common risk when working with projects with a time limit is that once the extra attention, facilitation and resources disappear, the local engagement in the initiative will vanish, too. It is, therefore, important to work continuously to ensure the sustainability of the initiative, i.e. ensuring its 'afterlife'.

If you follow the six steps of this guide, there is a good chance that your initiative will be sustainable and is likely to live on after the project period has finished. An important factor here is the social sustainability in terms of the connections, relations and collaborations between different stakeholders developed during the initiative. One way to work with sustainability is through networks. If your biodiversity initiative has been designed and developed in collaboration between local stakeholders who have succeeded in finding common ground, it will more likely be sustainable. Economic sustainability, of course, is also important for a project to live on. Read more about financial sustainability in the 'Guide on co-creating biodiversity' ([www.co-bio.vejle.dk/](http://www.co-bio.vejle.dk/)).

### Anchoring the initiative with a resourceful organisation

One way to work with sustainability is by anchoring the initiative with one or more local organisations that have resources to hold up the initiative and are willing to keep on sustaining it.

One example of this is the Portuguese initiative of planting pocket forests in social housing areas in collaboration with Gaiurb. The biodiversity initiative is well aligned with Gaiurb's mission of maintaining the physical space of the housing areas as well as improving the living conditions of the inhabitants. Thus, Catarina, the project manager, believes in the sustainability of the initiative: *"I will be very proud if in 10 years time I just pass through some of these social housing dwellings and see trees and shade and people enjoying time outside. Hopefully, this space is being maintained and full of biodiversity and useful for these communities. Depending on the success of the first implementation, Gaiurb really wants to try and invest and do this on other social housing dwellings. So, I am sure that the sustainability of this project is guaranteed here, yes"*.

Another example of anchoring a biodiversity initiative with a resourceful local organisation is the Italian initiative, where both the parish and the local professional institute have a stake in the biodiversity garden and are likely to sustain it.

### **Developing 'stewardship' among citizens**

Pocket forests, parks and raised beds must be continuously nursed, watered and maintained. This, surely, is a weak spot in biodiversity initiatives: Who will look after the trees and flowers, once the project's attention and resources are gone? One way of overcoming this is to develop ownership among the local citizens and users of the garden to ensure that they will take on a role of 'stewards' in the afterlife of the project.

Citizens are more likely to exercise ownership and stewardship of a garden or park that feels like 'their own'. So, the more citizens may influence the biodiversity initiative, the more likely they are to take ownership in the long run. The Austrian initiative is a good example of this: The students engaged in enhancing biodiversity on the university campus, have been deeply involved in developing the initiatives – and the university is responding positively. The project leader, Isa, is confident, that as the initiative has succeeded in empowering the students, it will have an afterlife: *"Students are allowed to go into designing places, really doing something active and changing a spot. We have been working on this as a group for almost five years. The university kind of minds us now and they also see that change can be done and it's needed to be done in terms of sustainability and biodiversity on the campus sites"*.

Another way of ensuring stewardship from the citizens is by clearly addressing the need to maintain the green space. In the Greek initiative, every participating child thus made a personal pledge to care for their new green space. Each person wrote a personal pledge on a sticky note, reading pledges like: "I will take on watering them every Tuesday!" and "I will make sure others don't throw trash there".

### **Takeaway points**

- If you have followed the six steps, your biodiversity initiative is likely to be more sustainable, as collaboration and relations are important for sustainability
- One way to secure the afterlife of your initiative is to anchor it with a resourceful local organisation willing to sustain it in the long run
- Ownership among local citizens is central to the sustainability of a biodiversity project. Citizens who experience the new green area as 'their own' are more likely to look after and maintain it.

- Making the need for continuous local commitment visible through a personal pledge may be effective.

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