101113893 LIFE22-GIE-ES

LIFE GreenMe5

D4.1. Multi-partner approaches and experiences to foster the GCA approach in the EU

LIFE GreenMe5

FEDERACIÓN DE MUNICIPIOS · COMUNE DI AREZZO · Cieza · HELSINGBORG · Ayuntamiento de Murcia · VILNIUS · EUROVÉRTICE

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D4.1 (D10)

MULTI-PARTNER APPROACHES AND EXPERIENCES TO FOSTER THE GCA APPROACH IN THE EU

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Introduction

1. Introduction

The **Green City Accord** (GCA) was launched in 2020 as a movement of European mayors committed to making cities cleaner and healthier. As a network of diverse municipalities, the initiative has strong potential to foster the exchange of experiences and capacities, and to promote collaboration among technical teams that face similar urban environmental challenges.

LIFE GreenMe5 builds on this collaborative spirit. The project originated from an analysis of the barriers encountered during the first two years of GCA implementation, highlighting the need to accelerate local environmental action. Through transnational cooperation and capacity building among five European municipalities, the project aims to create a foundation for sharing experiences, enhancing institutional capacities, and identifying common solutions for GCA signatory cities.

The participating cities (Arezzo, Cieza, Helsignborg, Murcia and Vilnius) represent a wide range of contexts, starting points, and levels of progress regarding the GCA implementation. This diversity is one of the project's main assets, enabling municipalities to address their specific weaknesses by drawing on the strengths and expertise of their peers.

During the short online workshops organised in **Task 4.1**, some of the knowledge gaps and practical needs of municipalities for effective GCA implementation were discussed. These workshops served not only to improve the capacities of municipal technicians but also to foster mutual understanding, build trust among partners, and create the conditions for more fluid and meaningful cooperation. The project has demonstrated that targeted capacity-building activities, combined with structured spaces for peer exchange, can significantly accelerate learning and collaboration. Moreover, the inclusion of technical partners such as EuroVértice (EV) and the Federation of Municipalities of the Region of Murcia (FMRM) has provided added value to the project. These actors have supported the municipalities with methodological guidance, technical expertise, and facilitation of knowledge exchange, helping to translate strategic objectives into concrete action.

In this deliverable, **EV** will analyse other multi-beneficiary and transnational projects that apply similar cooperation models and partnership structures. By identifying and comparing tested approaches, the document will highlight what makes collaborative governance effective in advancing environmental objectives at the local level.

The findings will not only support the implementation of LIFE GreenMe5 but will also provide a consistent reference for the future roll-out of the GCA at EU level. This deliverable will serve as a knowledge base to inform future policy development, funding mechanisms, and support tools aimed at scaling the GCA and maximising its impact across Europe.

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The GreenMe5 approach

2. The GreenMe5 approach

LIFE GreenMe5 cooperation approach and methodology

LIFE GreenMe5 project builds its cooperation model on the specific challenges identified by GCA signatory cities during the early stages of implementation. These include:

- The need for cooperation between different levels of governance
- The need for coordination across policy sectors
- A lack of dedicated budgets and financing instruments
- Inconsistencies between local aspirations and legal mandates
- Competing priorities that delay environmental action
- Inadequate knowledge and limited capacity to monitor GCA indicators
- A lack of technical capacity—especially in medium-sized municipalities—to operationalise the GCA framework

To address these challenges, LIFE GreenMe5 has developed a set of multi-level governance structures, tools, and actions that foster peer learning, knowledge exchange, and joint capacity building across participating cities.

Multi-Governance Structures

Three key governance structures are being promoted to improve coordination, data availability, and action planning within each municipality:

- **Internal Cooperation Structure**: A working group composed of municipal technicians from departments related to air quality, noise, biodiversity, circular economy, and water, along with representatives from relevant municipal companies. These teams are expected to meet at least twice a year to assess progress on GCA implementation and define priority actions.
- **External Working Structures**: While not necessarily formalised bodies, these structures consist of communication channels with supra-municipal authorities (regional, national, etc.) responsible for environmental monitoring. Their role is to facilitate the flow of data and improve alignment with reporting needs. Establishing these mechanisms—specifying who communicates what, how often, and through which channels—is recommended as soon as a city joins the GCA.
- **Local Action Groups**: These involve local actors—such as research institutions, environmental NGOs, and businesses—that may hold relevant environmental data or expertise. These groups can support the identification of environmental issues and contribute to designing measures. Depending on context, cities may establish one comprehensive group or multiple groups aligned with specific GCA pillars. Occasional joint sessions are encouraged to provide a holistic view of the city's environmental performance.

These structures may be integrated into existing governance frameworks where appropriate, to optimize resources and reduce duplication. However, LIFE GreenMe5 recommends that all signatory cities develop governance mechanisms that integrate these three levels, either within a single structure or across multiple ones, to ensure robust GCA implementation.

Figure 1. Meetings with Local Action Groups in Arezzo, Helsingborg, Murcia, Vilnius and Cieza.

From Different Starting Points to Mutual Support

The five municipalities participating in LIFE GreenMe5 signed the GCA at different times and had varied levels of progress when the project began. This diversity has proven advantageous. First, it allowed the development of **flexible methodologies tailored** to cities at different stages of implementation. Second, it enabled less advanced cities to benefit directly from the experiences and guidance of those further along.

One of the first requirements of GCA membership is the submission of a report within two years, detailing the city's baseline situation, its 2030 environmental targets, and the steps planned to achieve them. Thereafter, updates are required every three years. While the GCA provides a web tool for data entry, LIFE GreenMe5 encourages the **creation of a more structured and communicative report** that can serve as a practical reference for technicians, decision-makers, and local stakeholders. This "baseline and action plan" document should present:

- The city's motivation to join the GCA
- Commitments made under each of the five pillars
- Current performance across the 15 GCA indicators

- Future measures and actions to meet targets

Before drafting the report, cities are guided to align their vision and goals with existing legislative and strategic frameworks at local, regional, and national levels. This ensures coherence and facilitates access to existing data sources and benchmarks. For instance, Helsingborg—already advanced in its GCA reporting—shared its templates and methodology with Cieza and Arezzo, helping both cities align with reporting requirements and develop their own local action plans.

Fostering Peer-to-Peer Learning and Transnational Exchange

Beyond supporting internal progress, LIFE GreenMe5 actively fosters cooperation among the five partner cities. The underlying principle is that all cities have something to teach—and something to learn—from one another.

For example, northern European cities are increasingly facing droughts due to climate change, while southern cities already have years of experience in water efficiency. Conversely, northern cities often have more resources and data regarding air and noise pollution, which are now becoming higher priorities in southern cities.

To support this transnational cooperation:

- A **Transnational Expert Team** has been established to facilitate technical exchange among municipal staff.
- Five **Green Innovation Camps (GICs)** will be organised—one in each city—focusing on the five GCA pillars. These events will bring together local stakeholders, municipal technicians, and external experts to identify and share innovative solutions.
- Once pilot actions are completed, a second round of site visits will be held to promote the transfer of successful practices from one city to another through **peer-to-peer exchange**.
- Ongoing communication is supported through an **online forum**, allowing municipal experts to stay connected, ask questions, and share updates in real time.

The Added Value of Technical Partners

The presence of technical partners such as **EuroVértice (EV)** and the **Federation of Municipalities of the Region of Murcia (FMRM)** adds significant value to the project. These partners provide targeted support on methodology development, data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with EU and national policy frameworks.

In addition, the **project approach and the methodology developed to implement the GCA are being validated by the GCA Secretariat**, ensuring coherence with the broader vision of the Accord. This endorsement reinforces the replicability and credibility of the outputs generated by LIFE GreenMe5.

To address the knowledge gaps and capacity needs identified during the early stages of the project, a series of short, online workshops have been planned. These are designed to build

the capacities of municipal technicians in key areas of GCA implementation. In this context, **EV, with the support of the GCA Secretariat, has organised three online, dynamic and participatory capacity-building sessions** targeted at members of the internal coordination structures in the five partner municipalities. These sessions offered participants the opportunity to ask questions, resolve doubts, and engage directly with experts to ensure a proper understanding of the GCA requirements and procedures.

These training activities not only reinforced the capacities of local teams but also helped create a shared foundation of knowledge, trust, and operational clarity across all project cities. The content and outcomes of these sessions will be further detailed in the following section of the deliverable.

Knowledge gaps and needs

One of the key pillars of LIFE GreenMe5 is strengthening the technical capacity of municipal teams involved in the GCA. From the outset, the project adopted a dynamic approach to identifying and addressing knowledge gaps, combining predefined thematic areas with evolving needs identified through continuous partner feedback.

Identified before the project

During the proposal phase and following initial conversations with project partners, several priority areas for capacity building were defined. These topics reflected shared challenges across cities and were intended to guide the design of the first training activities. The identified needs included:

- Internal and external coordination structures to facilitate the implementation of the GCA.
- Communication with stakeholders and general public.
- Monitoring and data collection. Common mistakes.

Identified during first year of the project

At the kick-off meeting (KOM), partners were invited to reassess the initial training topics and reflect on whether they matched their actual capacity building needs. Many expressed a preference for more operational and technical topics, which had emerged since the proposal preparation. These included:

- Developing the baseline report, with a focus on lessons learned from Helsingborg and its transfer to cities like Cieza.
- Monitoring and reporting on birds and biodiversity.
- Air quality and noise monitoring and reporting.
- How to measure GCA indicators, including comparisons of monitoring equipment and cost assessments.

- Methods to assess the impact of local actions on GCA targets and manage the related data.

Partners also committed to consulting colleagues within their internal working structures to gather broader input on training needs. As a result of ongoing discussions in project meetings, new themes emerged, reflecting both technical and governance-related concerns:

- How to develop a comprehensive GCA action plan.
- Urban park and tree management.
- Strategies to improve the quality of waste separation and raise citizen awareness.
- Noise and air: how to reduce car use in city centres and pathways for transformation.
- Expanding the scope of municipal mobility strategies: how technicians can build political and public support.
- Awareness campaigns to change mobility behaviours.
- Good practices in traffic reduction and limitation.

In parallel, partners provided feedback on how to make the capacity building sessions more attractive and useful for municipal staff. They recommended narrowing down topics to address specific, practical challenges and ensuring a participatory and problem-solving-oriented format.

Tackled during GreenMe5 online capacity building workshops

Based on the most frequently mentioned needs during internal meetings and project exchanges, three priority topics were selected for the online capacity building workshops, organised by EuroVértice in collaboration with the GCA Secretariat. These workshops were designed to be dynamic, participatory, and tailored to the real needs of technical staff.

1st Session – GCA Baseline Journey

Date: 15 January 2024

This session focused on the development of the GCA baseline report and the importance of internal and external coordination structures to support successful implementation. It began with a general overview of the Green City Accord, followed by a detailed presentation of Helsingborg's experience, which served as a best practice example for the partner cities.

The methodology presented by Helsingborg has proven to be successful in their context, particularly in involving municipal technicians from various departments and securing political approval for the proposed actions. The experience demonstrated how coordinated internal structures and early political engagement can create a solid foundation for the GCA implementation.

Such experience-sharing sessions among municipal staff are particularly valuable in assessing the transferability of methodologies across different European contexts. They directly contribute to the project's objective of facilitating and strengthening the local implementation of the GCA.

The main conclusions drawn from the session were:

- **Political involvement is essential:** Politicians should be engaged throughout the GCA implementation process, continuing the commitment made with their initial signature. Their active participation from the outset helps facilitate the approval of subsequent strategies and action plans.
- **Internal governance structures are key:** Establishing structured internal coordination mechanisms ensures consistency in data collection and alignment across departments. Appointing a clearly designated person to coordinate these structures was identified as a good practice worth replicating.
- **Peer collaboration and engagement with competent authorities adds value:** Collaborating with other GCA signatories and with entities responsible for environmental monitoring at the regional or national level enhances data quality and creates opportunities to jointly address common challenges.
- **Communicating the benefits of joining the GCA is essential**: Making the advantages of being part of the Accord clear—especially in terms of visibility, capacity building, and access to European funding—helps motivate participation among political representatives, other municipal technicians, and even citizens.

These conclusions informed the design of subsequent workshops and reinforced the importance of combining strategic vision with operational support for successful GCA deployment.

2nd Session – Nature and Biodiversity Monitoring

Date: 20 June 2024

The session opened with an introduction to relevant European strategies and the GCA's mandatory indicators related to biodiversity. EuroVértice presented various indexes to measure urban biodiversity and methods for data collection. Contributions from project partners and external experts further enriched the discussion:

- Gustav Persson (Kullabygdens Ornithologist Association) shared Helsingborg's bird monitoring practices
- Francesco Chianucci from CREA presented a case study on citizen science in biodiversity monitoring in Arezzo
- Aušra Sičiūnienė (Vilnius Municipality) introduced the city's biodiversity strategy and its implementation challenges
- Jolanta Radžiūnienė and Rokas Butkus (Verkiai & Pavilniai Regional Parks Office) provided insights into biodiversity monitoring in Vilnius' natural parks

It concluded with an open discussion among all participants.

In this way, the second capacity-building session showcased a variety of perspectives and methodologies on how to monitor and promote urban biodiversity, with examples from multiple European contexts. The session highlighted the complexity of biodiversity monitoring and the importance of having flexible yet robust approaches adapted to local realities. The main conclusions drawn were:

- **Urban biodiversity requires tailored indicators and approaches.** Cities must choose appropriate tools for their context. While comprehensive indexes such as the City Biodiversity Index (CBI), the European Urban Biodiversity Index (EUBI), or the IUCN Urban Nature Index are useful, they must be adapted or selectively used depending on local data availability and monitoring capabilities.
- **Birds are effective indicators of ecosystem health, but species counts alone are not enough.** The experience of Helsingborg highlighted the importance of long-term monitoring, with attention to breeding pairs and local population trends. Practical actions to attract and retain biodiversity, such as habitat restoration, are essential to reversing biodiversity loss.
- **Citizen science can significantly strengthen local monitoring efforts.** The case of Arezzo demonstrated how citizen engagement—supported by structured methodologies and scientific supervision—can expand data collection and improve awareness. Tools like the European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (eBMS) and the School of Ants project were presented as practical, scalable examples.
- **Urban planning and policy must integrate biodiversity criteria.** The example of Vilnius showed how green infrastructure, such as regional parks and green factors in urban development, can be institutionalised. Efforts to distinguish between private and public green coverage are essential for accurate reporting and planning.
- **Invasive species remain a major threat to biodiversity in urban areas.** The experience in Vilnius regional parks illustrated the impact of invasive species and the importance of active habitat restoration. Monitoring programmes must consider the dynamics of urban expansion and rapid land-use changes.
- **Standardising monitoring protocols is key to comparability and data quality.** One of the main challenges raised was the lack of consistency across monitoring programmes, which limits the ability to assess trends or transfer methodologies. The establishment of shared protocols was highlighted as a priority.
- **A balanced approach to non-native species is needed.** A discussion emerged around the use of non-native species for climate adaptation. While some support their use under controlled conditions, others raised concerns about long-term risks. The consensus was that any such decision must be evidence-based and framed within a precautionary approach.
- **Biodiversity awareness should be promoted both within and outside local administrations.** Participants agreed on the need to foster a better understanding

of biodiversity issues among the public and among urban planners, landscape designers, and technicians. Changing perceptions around practices such as mowing and plant selection is crucial for effective local action.

3rd Session – Transforming Urban Mobility: Experiences and Strategies That Work

Date: 13 June 2025.

The third capacity-building session of the project focused on **urban mobility transformation**. It featured various expert presentations, offering insights and lessons from European cities on promoting sustainable mobility:

- Marta Reguilón (EuroVértice) opened the session, welcoming participants and emphasizing the **importance of transforming urban mobility** to align with the Green City Accord's environmental goals, especially in the context of noise and air pollution. She contextualized the topic by giving data of the main challenges, policies and funding opportunities in Europe.
- Eulalia Peris from the European Environment Agency (EEA) provided an insightful presentation on **sustainable mobility from a noise perspective**, highlighting the severe health impacts of urban noise pollution and the need for noise reduction as part of broader sustainable mobility strategies.
- Balázs Kiss, project manager at Paks Transportation Ltd. (Hungary), presented key strategies which include introducing an **electric bus fleet to reduce emissions and improve public transport**, as well as implementing low-emission zones (LEZs) and car-free areas to reduce air pollution and encourage pedestrian-friendly spaces.
- Paolo Gandolfi from Reggio Emilia, Italy, discussed the city's successful **cycling infrastructure and strategies,** including super-cycle highways and low-speed zones, which have led to a more pedestrian-friendly and sustainable urban environment.
- Mats Alfredson from Gothenburg, Sweden, introduced the MOSAIC project, showcasing the **quadruple helix approach** (collaboration between municipalities, businesses, academia, and civil society) and the development of mobility hubs as part of the city's transition towards sustainable mobility.
- Daniel Macenlle from Pontevedra, Spain, shared how the city has **dramatically transformed from a car-dependent model to prioritizing pedestrians through car-free zones and public transport improvements**, leading to a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and a more vibrant urban environment.

The session included a final discussion, which ended with key takeaways, reflections, and recommendations:

- Successful urban mobility transformation requires **strong political leadership**, as demonstrated in **Pontevedra**, where the governing party played a pivotal role indriving ambitious policies despite initial resistance. Local politicians often focus on **electric cars** as the primary solution, neglecting broader mobility changes such as reducing traffic or creating more **pedestrian-friendly spaces**.

- Resistance from **local businesses**, especially shop owners in city centers, is common, as they fear that reducing car access will harm their sales. Businesses tend to see car traffic as essential for bringing customers to their stores, leading to opposition against car-reducing initiatives. Testing car-free policies in certain areas temporarily could demonstrate how such changes improve the quality of life, making public spaces more accessible and attractive for people to walk, shop, and support the local economy.
- **Resistance to reducing car use** is also prevalent among residents in many cities, driven by habit and the belief that car ownership is necessary for convenience. **Education and public awareness campaigns** are crucial to help people understand the long-term benefits of walking, cycling, and using public transport, which go beyond environmental gains to include improved health, reduced stress, and stronger communities**.**
- A **cultural shift** is one of the most significant barriers to implementing sustainable mobility. While cities may have the right policies in place, changing people's habits requires a sustained effort. Younger generations tend to be more open to alternative mobility options, while older generations remain attached to their cars. **Incentivizing sustainable mobility** through discounts on public transport or subsidies for **electric bike-sharing services** could help lower barriers and encourage the adoption of new transport modes.
- The **integration of cycling, public transport, and shared mobility solutions** is essential to reducing car dependency and promoting sustainable urban mobility.

- Gothenburg highlighted the importance of engaging the community through **open innovation and citizen science projects to co-create sustainable mobility solutions**. Drawing from the MOSAIC project, Mats emphasized the **importance of professional facilitators for success**, noting that structured guidance is critical for effective collaboration. He also discussed the use of **rewards and vouchers to encourage** citizen participation and engagement in mobility initiatives. Additionally, Mats stressed the significance of **anchoring ideas and ensuring that cities are prepared to follow through on the actions generated during collaborative processes.**
- The session underscored the value of ongoing collaboration and networking among cities to learn from each other's experiences and build stronger, more sustainable urban mobility systems.
- The discussion wrapped up with a focus on the importance of **data** in shaping policy decisions. and for convincing stakeholders of the long-term benefits. Participants noted how data, including studies showing the **economic benefits** of reduced traffic or improved public health from lower emissions, can be a compelling argument to convince politicians and residents of the long-term value of these changes. **Pontevedra** shared their **"PO2 effect" Observatory** in collaboration with **Vigo University**, which monitors 186 indicators, including **water quality**, **atmosphere and climate**, **waste**, and **mobility**. This data is crucial for evaluating the impacts of urban design changes on the environment and the overall **quality of life** in the city.

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Other multi-beneficiary and transnational projects applying similar approaches and partnership structures than LIFE GreenMe5

3. Other multi-beneficiary and transnational projects applying similar approaches and partnership structures than LIFE GreenMe5

Similarities of the approach proposed with other European Programmes

LIFE GreenMe5 builds on the premise that cooperation across municipalities, reinforced by technical and policy support structures, can accelerate local implementation of European voluntary approaches such as the Green City Accord. This approach is strongly aligned with the core principles of various **European territorial cooperation programmes**. These programmes have long supported transnational and interregional collaboration as a mean to strengthen institutional capacity, promote policy innovation, and ensure the transferability of successful solutions across borders.

Programmes such as **URBACT**, **Interreg Europe**, the **LIFE Programme**, and **Horizon Europe**—along with policy initiatives like the **Covenant of Mayors** and the **Green City Accord (GCA)** itself—have all placed increasing emphasis on multi-level partnerships, peer exchange, and transnational learning. These frameworks share a vision where local governments are empowered to lead the green transition, with appropriate support from technical partners, national agencies, and EU institutions.

In this context, LIFE GreenMe5 is both a product of and contributor to the growing body of EU projects that operationalise this model. The following examples illustrate how similar structures and approaches have been successfully implemented across Europe.

URBACT Programme

Programme nature: European Territorial Cooperation programme co-financed by the ERDF.

Objective: to promote integrated urban development by enabling cities to work together in transnational networks.

Key Features:

- Brings together 7–10 cities per project to co-design local action plans.
- Requires the creation of **URBACT Local Groups** in each city, made up of municipal departments, NGOs, citizens, and private sector representatives.
- Strong emphasis on **peer learning**, **capacity building**, and **methodological guidance** for participatory governance and implementation.

Project example:

URBACT Health&Greenspace (2019–2022)

A network of ten European cities focused on integrating health and wellbeing into urban green space strategies. Each city developed its own action plan through local stakeholder groups and peer review processes. The structure mirrors LIFE GreenMe5's use of local action groups and collaborative planning.

Similarities with GreenMe5:

- ✓ Participatory action planning
- ✓ Peer-to-peer exchange
- ✓ Local stakeholder involvement in decision-making

Interreg Europe

Programme nature: Interregional cooperation programme covering the entire EU territory, co-financed by the ERDF.

Objective: to help regional and local governments across Europe improve their policies and public services through exchange of experiences and policy learning.

Key features:

- Supports multi-beneficiary projects involving public authorities, universities, and development agencies.
- Structured around **interregional learning** and **good practice exchange**.
- Prioritises the **transfer and adaptation** of successful policy models and best practices from one region to another.

Project example:

RESORB (2019–2023)

Focused on sustainable resource use, this project brought together regions and cities to share practices and influence local policies. Activities included site visits, joint working sessions, and capacity building for public officials.

Similarities with GreenMe5:

- ✓ Policy transfer through transnational exchange
- ✓ Emphasis on cross-sector cooperation and technical facilitation
- ✓ Support for multi-level governance reforms

LIFE Programme

Programme nature: The EU's funding instrument for environment and climate action.

Objective: To support the implementation, updating, and development of EU environmental policy and legislation by co-financing innovative projects.

Key features:

- Includes sub-programmes on Nature & Biodiversity, Circular Economy, Climate Mitigation, and more.
- Funds pilot, demonstration, and best practice projects, many of which are led by municipalities or involve them as core partners.
- Encourages replicability and transferability of results, often with transnational partnerships.

Project example:

LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans (2021–2024)

This project assists cities in developing Urban Greening Plans in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy. It brings together municipalities, technical partners, and regional authorities to co-design strategies and build capacity for implementation.

LIFE BEWARE (2018–2022)

Although implemented within one country (Italy), this project shows how small municipalities can work together with technical partners to manage flood risks and promote nature-based solutions through local stakeholder engagement.

Similarities with GreenMe5: As a LIFE project itself, GreenMe5 applies this principle through demonstrative actions, training sessions, and cross-city cooperation tools. Also:

✓ Methodological guidance by technical partners
✓ Structured capacity building for municipal staff
✓ Integration of local plans with EU strategies

Horizon Europe – Mission Cities & Related projects

Programme nature: EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme (2021–2027).

Objective: to fund research and innovation addressing key societal challenges; includes dedicated "Missions", such as the "100 Climate-Neutral Cities by 2030".

Key features:

- Supports innovation ecosystems composed of cities, researchers, businesses, and civil society.
- Emphasis on pilot testing, scaling-up, and twinning arrangements between cities.
- Often includes capacity building, transition planning, and monitoring frameworks to ensure progress towards targets.

Project example:

NetZeroCities (2022–2026)

A cornerstone project of the EU's Mission on Climate-Neutral Cities, NetZeroCities supports over 100 European cities in designing and implementing transition pathways

toward climate neutrality by 2030. It includes pilot cities, twinning, thematic cohorts, and expert guidance.

Similarities with GreenMe5:

- ✓ Peer learning across cities at different stages
- ✓ Multi-actor governance and stakeholder engagement
- ✓ Emphasis on local adaptation and strategic planning

Covenant of Mayors & Green City Accord Frameworks

Nature: Voluntary EU initiatives, not funding programmes, but supported through EU technical assistance and alignment with other instruments.

Objective: To create a community of cities committed to ambitious climate and environmental goals.

Key Features:

- Promote common reporting structures, baseline assessments, and local action plans.
- Offer cities a framework to track progress and exchange best practices.
- Increasingly supported by projects like LIFE, Horizon, or Interreg that operationalise their goals.

Similarities with GreenMe5: the project directly contributes to the operationalisation of the GCA, developing tools, methods, and peer support systems for effective implementation.

Networking with other LIFE project

Networking is a recognised added value in any European project, particularly within the LIFE Programme, where synergies between initiatives can significantly amplify impact, increase visibility, and foster cross-sectoral innovation. However, in practice, connecting with other projects and identifying those with the highest potential for collaboration can be challenging—especially in the early stages, when projects are still setting up internal structures and planning activities.

In the case of **LIFE GreenMe5**, an unexpected but very valuable opportunity for networking arose through the initiative of CINEA, which convened a cluster of seven LIFE projects funded under the 2023 call. These projects were selected for their thematic alignment across three major axes:

1. Environmental governance and city participation,
2. The built environment, and
3. The New European Bauhaus initiative.

The projects in this informal cluster were:

- Bauhausing Europe (LIFE-Bauhaus-SAP)

- Big 4 LiFE (LIFE-Bauhaus-SAP)
- GreenMe5 (LIFE-Good Governance)
- LIFE HELP (LIFE-Good Governance)
- BE WoodEN (LIFE-Bauhaus-PLP)
- Panelka 2.0 (LIFE-Bauhaus-PLP)
- More LIFE to Level(s) (LIFE-PLP)

This clustering initiative, facilitated by CINEA, aimed to foster early collaboration, encourage conversations, and explore ways to pool resources, knowledge, and expertise among projects. In addition to project representatives, the meetings were also attended by a CINEA project officer, European policy organisations, and external LIFE technical monitors, further reinforcing the policy and technical relevance of the exchange.

First Cluster Meeting – 5 March 2024

This initial meeting was an opportunity for each project to present their objectives, key activities, stakeholder strategies, and emerging challenges. More importantly, it served as a platform for identifying complementary approaches and defining potential collaboration pathways. Projects openly shared what kind of **support they would benefit** from within this emerging "LIFE community."

Several **bilateral connections** emerged as a result, particularly between projects with shared methodologies or overlapping policy targets. The value of this structured networking space was clearly acknowledged, and the group agreed to reconvene for a second meeting with a thematic focus once projects had made further progress.

Second Cluster Meeting – 4 June 2024

The second meeting deepened the exchange and introduced new policy insights. It began with a presentation by **Estelle Elizagoien (DG ENV)** on the **Level(s)** framework for circularity in the built environment, followed by a LIFE Programme update from **Piedad Rivas (CINEA)**. Each project then gave a brief update on their current activities, stakeholder engagement achievements, challenges encountered, and lessons learned.

The session reaffirmed the importance of cooperation among projects working on themes such as:

- Urban planning and green infrastructure
- Governance innovation at the municipal level
- The integration of environmental and climate goals in city strategies

The atmosphere of collaboration and openness led to the identification of new shared opportunities and reinforced the role of the cluster as a knowledge-sharing hub.

Bilateral Networking: LIFE GreenMe5 and LIFE HELP

Following the first cluster meeting, **LIFE GreenMe5 initiated a bilateral exchange with LIFE HELP**, a project that introduces a new model of environmental policy governance, currently being tested in the City of Rimini. LIFE HELP aims to promote an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to environmental management and encourages cities to sign the **Green City Accord**, the key component of LIFE GreenMe5.

This meeting, held on **26 March 2024**, offered an opportunity to share respective approaches and explore synergies. As part of the collaboration, LIFE GreenMe5 reviewed a survey prepared by LIFE HELP titled *"Evaluation of experiences and practices of integrating environmental objectives into the planning tools of EU municipalities."* Moreover, the municipalities participating in LIFE GreenMe5 contributed by responding to the survey, thus enhancing its empirical base and providing cross-national insights.

Looking Ahead: Sustaining Networking Beyond the Project Lifetime

LIFE GreenMe5 recognises networking not just as an opportunity but as a **strategic tool** to scale up the results of the project, strengthen capacities, and enrich the implementation of the Green City Accord. For this reason, the project will continue to seek networking opportunities **throughout its duration and beyond its conclusion**, engaging with other LIFE projects, European initiatives, and policy platforms to share knowledge and encourage replication of successful approaches.

In this context, the project sees value in contributing to a growing **LIFE Community of Practice** focused on environmental governance at the local level—a space where cities and their partners can learn from each other, co-create solutions, and build a stronger foundation for future collaboration.

Analysis and added value of the approach proposed by LIFE GreenMe5

The comparative analysis of other European projects and cooperation programmes confirms the relevance of the LIFE GreenMe5 model and highlights its unique contribution to operationalising the GCA at the local level. While the project builds on proven cooperation methodologies—such as peer learning, transnational collaboration, and technical facilitation—it also introduces specific innovations that respond to the real implementation barriers faced by signatory municipalities.

A Model Tailored for GCA Implementation

LIFE GreenMe5 is uniquely designed to support cities in **implementing the Green City Accord from within**. The project emerged from an analysis of the initial implementation barriers identified by early GCA signatories and aims to offer practical, replicable methodologies for overcoming them. Unlike broader environmental or climate projects, GreenMe5 focuses specifically on the tools and structures needed to operationalise the GCA—such as the creation of baseline reports, monitoring indicators, and establishing internal and external coordination mechanisms.

Structuring Local Governance for Long-Term Impact

One of LIFE GreenMe5's most distinctive contributions is its promotion of a **multi-layered governance structure** within each city. By establishing internal coordination teams, external collaboration mechanisms with competent authorities, and local action groups that engage citizens and civil society, the project fosters both vertical and horizontal integration. This framework not only facilitates the reporting and monitoring obligations of the GCA but also strengthens cross-departmental cooperation and stakeholder alignment at the municipal level.

This governance model mirrors the EU's broader commitment to **multi-level governance and local empowerment**, translating it into a concrete, adaptable structure for cities of different sizes and capacities.

Practice-Based Capacity Building and Peer Learning

LIFE GreenMe5 prioritises **hands-on capacity building**, rooted in real municipal experiences. The transnational capacity building sessions organised in the first year of the project have allowed cities to learn directly from each other's successes, challenges, and working methods. These sessions are not generic trainings, but rather **collaborative learning spaces**, where cities co-reflect on how to adapt methodologies and improve their implementation processes.

This approach has already resulted in tangible benefits: less advanced municipalities have replicated successful practices (e.g. from Helsingborg's baseline methodology), and practical challenges—such as how to monitor biodiversity or communicate targets to politicians—have been addressed collectively.

The Role of Technical and Institutional Partners

The inclusion of technical actors such as **EuroVértice** and the **Federation of Municipalities of the Region of Murcia (FMRM)**, together with the **support and validation from the GCA Secretariat**, ensures that cities receive consistent, high-quality guidance throughout the implementation process. These partners act as facilitators, advisors, and translators of EU policy into local practice, bridging the gap between ambition and execution.

The proactive involvement of the GCA Secretariat in the design and delivery of capacity-building sessions further reinforces the **alignment of LIFE GreenMe5 with the overarching objectives of the Accord**, while allowing lessons learned to feed into the broader GCA community.

Creating a Community of Practice through Strategic Networking

Beyond its immediate partnership, LIFE GreenMe5 has actively contributed to **creating a wider ecosystem of collaboration** through networking with other LIFE projects. Its participation in a CINEA-facilitated cluster of seven LIFE initiatives—working on environmental governance, city participation, and the built environment—has opened a new space for synergies and joint learning.

This cluster has led to thematic discussions, bilateral cooperation (e.g. with LIFE HELP), and mutual support in stakeholder engagement and data collection. It has also amplified LIFE

GreenMe5's visibility and relevance in the context of emerging EU priorities such as the New European Bauhaus, Level(s), and the circular economy in cities.

In doing so, LIFE GreenMe5 is not just a project; it is a **catalyst for building a community of practice** around local environmental governance, where municipalities and technical partners share, adapt, and upscale solutions to meet shared challenges.

A Replicable and Scalable Model for the EU

Thanks to its structured yet flexible approach, LIFE GreenMe5 offers a **tested model that can be adapted by other GCA signatories**. The combination of:

- internal and external coordination structures,
- stakeholder engagement mechanisms,
- technical facilitation,
- and transnational knowledge exchange,

...makes it particularly suited for **medium-sized municipalities**, which often lack the resources to translate EU frameworks into action. The replicability of its governance model, reporting tools, and peer learning formats positions LIFE GreenMe5 as a valuable reference for improving the implementation of the GCA and providing feedback to the GCA Secretariat and European Commission for this and future initiatives.

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Conclusions

4. Conclusions

This deliverable has explored how **multi-partner and transnational cooperation approaches**—as exemplified by LIFE GreenMe5—can facilitate and accelerate the implementation of the **Green City Accord (GCA)** at the local level. By analysing common challenges faced by signatory cities, reviewing relevant European cooperation frameworks, and showcasing concrete project practices, the document highlights the added value of structured collaboration, shared learning, and technical facilitation.

LIFE GreenMe5 stands out for its **integrated, hands-on methodology**, which supports municipalities through the full GCA implementation cycle: from aligning with local strategies and establishing baseline data, to fostering cross-departmental coordination and reporting on progress. The establishment of internal coordination teams, external cooperation mechanisms, and local action groups has proven to be a replicable governance model that enhances both technical accuracy and political legitimacy.

The project's capacity-building sessions and peer-learning activities—co-developed with the GCA Secretariat—have demonstrated that **practice-based learning** is one of the most effective ways to build municipal capacities. The dynamic exchange between more and less advanced cities, combined with tailored technical support, fosters mutual trust, increases institutional readiness, and supports the long-term sustainability of the GCA commitments.

Furthermore, LIFE GreenMe5 has taken proactive steps to position itself within a **broader LIFE project ecosystem**, participating in a cluster of thematically aligned initiatives and initiating bilateral cooperation. This demonstrates that structured networking—especially when supported by CINEA and DG ENV—can create new spaces for alignment, visibility, and innovation.

In summary, the LIFE GreenMe5 experience confirms that local environmental transformation benefits from **multi-level, multi-actor and multi-city cooperation**. The approaches tested in this project can inform the further roll-out of the GCA across Europe and inspire future projects seeking to bridge the gap between EU policy frameworks and local implementation. As such, the deliverable provides a **practical reference** for scaling up ambition, improving governance, and delivering tangible environmental progress at city level.