

Position Paper: Nature Restoration Law within the European Green Deal

ELCA states; “let’s make the move to greener cities together”

Weather extremes are in the news every day. Extreme hurricanes, heavy rainfall and serious drought are causing many victims and severe material damage. We can no longer deny that climate change is effecting our daily life. That is also the case with the current loss of biodiversity on our planet. Urgent action is needed to keep our planet liveable for ourselves and generations to come.

European Green Deal

With its Green Deal, the European Commission proposes measures to make Europe climate neutral by 2050. In 2030 the emission of Co2 must be reduced with 55% already. Besides reduction, it is also relevant to look at possibilities to absorb Co2. That is where the benefits of natural greenery come in. The European Commission underlines that greenery is part of the solution and has set out goals for green development in urban areas within the Nature Restoration Law: **“By 2030 there must be a no net loss of green spaces in urban areas. By 2050 the surface of green spaces in urban areas has grown with 5% and also a growth of at least 10% of tree canopy in urban agglomerations. Besides that there must be a net profit of green spaces that are realized in buildings and infrastructure.”**

It highlights the importance to combine climate and biodiversity issues together. The Nature Restoration Law is a key element of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, which calls for binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.

Greenery serves multiple benefits in view of our actual challenges and can be considered as long-term investments in climate, biodiversity and people’s health. These green measures can also be part of the framework of the Renovation Wave, which is also part of the European Green Deal. The EU must facilitate the implementation of green infrastructures and nature-based solutions in urban spaces. It must ensure that policies include details about achieving high quality urban nature that is accessible and integrate these solutions in response to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).

ELCA and the SoGreen alignment

SoGreen, in which the European associations of tree nurserers, landscape architects, landscapers and gardeners, interior greeners, builders of green roofs, green facades and natural bathing water pools, ecological engineering operators and green specialists of municipalities cooperate, appreciates the EU-recognition of the benefits of greenery as part of the solution. We welcome the initiatives of the Green Deal and hope to reinforce them so that the results of the fight against climate change and the loss of biodiversity might be even more ambitious. By working together with all relevant stakeholders on European, national and local level, we aim to maximize our common efforts in establishing sustainable and inclusive green cities.

Can we link and reinforce?

To put goals to practice, ELCA has on behalf of SoGreen, thought about possible actions to work together on in order to make the green move. We like to discuss these ideas with European institutions and possible new partners and hope to discover where we can align and reinforce. Our ideas concentrate on:

interlinkage of initiatives and policy making:

In order to define concrete plans on European, national and local level there must be an interlinkage between the different launched initiatives of the European Commission. How can we realize a coherent process of policy making in which all initiatives are combined and projects can be accelerated? We call on the European Commission for the following actions:

- Appoint a EU Green City Envoy (in comparison with the EU SME Envoy) to align national plan making and to facilitate a European expert network in defining local policies and monitoring;
- Translate the concepts such as the Living Public Space' (<https://onlinetouch.nl/vhg/vhg---handleiding-de-levende-openbare-ruimte?html=true#/0/>), Living Buildings (<https://onlinetouch.nl/vhg/branchevereniging-vhg---handleiding-het-levende-gebouw#/0/>) and Living Gardens (<https://onlinetouch.nl/vhg/handleiding-de-levende-tuin?html=true#/0/>) as source of inspiration and put these at the disposition of national and local governments and stakeholders. These concepts can be disclosed within for example the New European Bauhaus.
- Include nature-based solutions as a requirement for the delivery of mandated functions (e.g. water quality treatment) or for the maintenance of land-holdings (e.g. train sidings, roadside verges). This provides an important pathway for mainstreaming: the EU competences in these functions must set a guideline to develop green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in all infrastructures (example Transport = a shared competence);
- Develop the topic of biodiversity in “building based financing” and renovation subsidies: the renovation wave¹ in Europe which stimulates massive building renovations is a great opportunity for mainstreaming nature-based solutions. Their integration is a key for increasing the aspect of green solutions into planned renovation and retrofitting projects. Currently, a prominent barrier for mainstreaming nature-based solutions is the perception of high financial costs associated with urban greening measures in dense cities. The EU must help to support the implementation of green infrastructure solutions in urban development decision-making processes;
- Include urban nature-based solutions in the EU taxonomy: urban nature-based solutions must be defined as a green investment for real estate and infrastructure development in the EU Taxonomy. It would create an opportunity for promoting the mainstreaming of nature-based solutions into institutional investment portfolios (Toxopeus et al. 2020);
- Create European sustainable building certifications: various sustainable building certifications are currently being used (BREEAM, LEED, HQE) and measure sustainability in the supply chains of used materials and building performance. However, these certifications do not regard biodiversity and green infrastructures. The EU must help to harmonize these different certifications and support plans made by EU member states (RE 2020 in France) to provide an opportunity for building-related greenery (green spaces, green roofs, walls, parking lots, etc.).
<https://networknature.eu/sites/default/files/uploads/networknature-nbs-knowledgebrief01.pdf>
https://naturvation.eu/system/files/pathways_for_systemic_integration_of_nbs_report.pdf

research and innovation:

After the launch of the Strategy on Nature Based Solutions within Horizon 2020 there is support on scientific research on green concepts. It is important to continue this support in order to validate green innovations and to develop new green applications. We call on the European Commission for:

¹ “A Renovation Wave for Europe – Greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives’

- growing EU financial support for local scientific research, validation and monitoring initiatives;
- the publication, together with other stakeholders, of state of the art scientific research in a dedicated central open source database;
- organizing a EU-scientific workshop, together with other stakeholders, in Brussels to facilitate an exchange network of European scientists;
- facilitating the realization of nature-based solutions and green infrastructures in EU funds: the EU must initiate policy-making to preserve biodiversity through green infrastructures. Urban green regulation must increase biodiversity and city's resilience to face the global challenges in order to provide ongoing investment flows for green infrastructures (no net loss);
- facilitating knowledge and experiences in the application for EU-subsidy such as LIFE for green projects and the financial support in the definition of a biodiversity strategy for SME's;
- Creating tools to estimate impacts, benefits and cost-effectiveness of green infrastructures in quantitative terms across ecosystems.

green craftsmanship and vocational training:

We are making a development in which green thinking comes first. This demands also developing green skills in all segments within the green chain. What does it take to prepare our branch for a more prominent role? We call on the European Commission, in accordance with the EU Skills Agenda, to:

- facilitate vocational training for all segments within our branch and at all levels in the vocational training column in programs like E-Plug;
- support the creation of a network of green hotspots in which schools, companies and other stakeholders work together in realizing an applied vocational training system from secondary school till university level. This network facilitates the European exchange of students and workers in which they can broaden their green knowledge and skills.

awareness and participation:

The fact that the European Commission integrates greenery in their initiatives helps us to implement our green solutions in policy making and in concrete projects. Besides initiatives and regulations it is important to work further on the awareness of the importance and benefits of greenery. This helps citizens in being involved in an early stage of green projects and to state their wishes. We call on the European Commission for:

- the promotion of the role of nature-based solutions for health: nature-based solutions play an important role in health by improving recreation, social cohesion, mental wellbeing and clean air;
- a structural status of the Year of Greener Cities (work in progress);
- involvement of SoGreen in the competitions of the European Green Leaf and the European Green Capital Award.

We open the floor

The chance is now to exchange, to link and to work on common actions by creating partnership for the green future. Curious about the ideas of ELCA/SoGreen? We are looking forward to get acquainted and to explore opportunities. We open the floor to all ideas and suggestions. Contact Egbert Roozen via mail eroozen@telfort.nl. More information about SoGreen can be found on: <https://www.onthegreenmove.com>.