

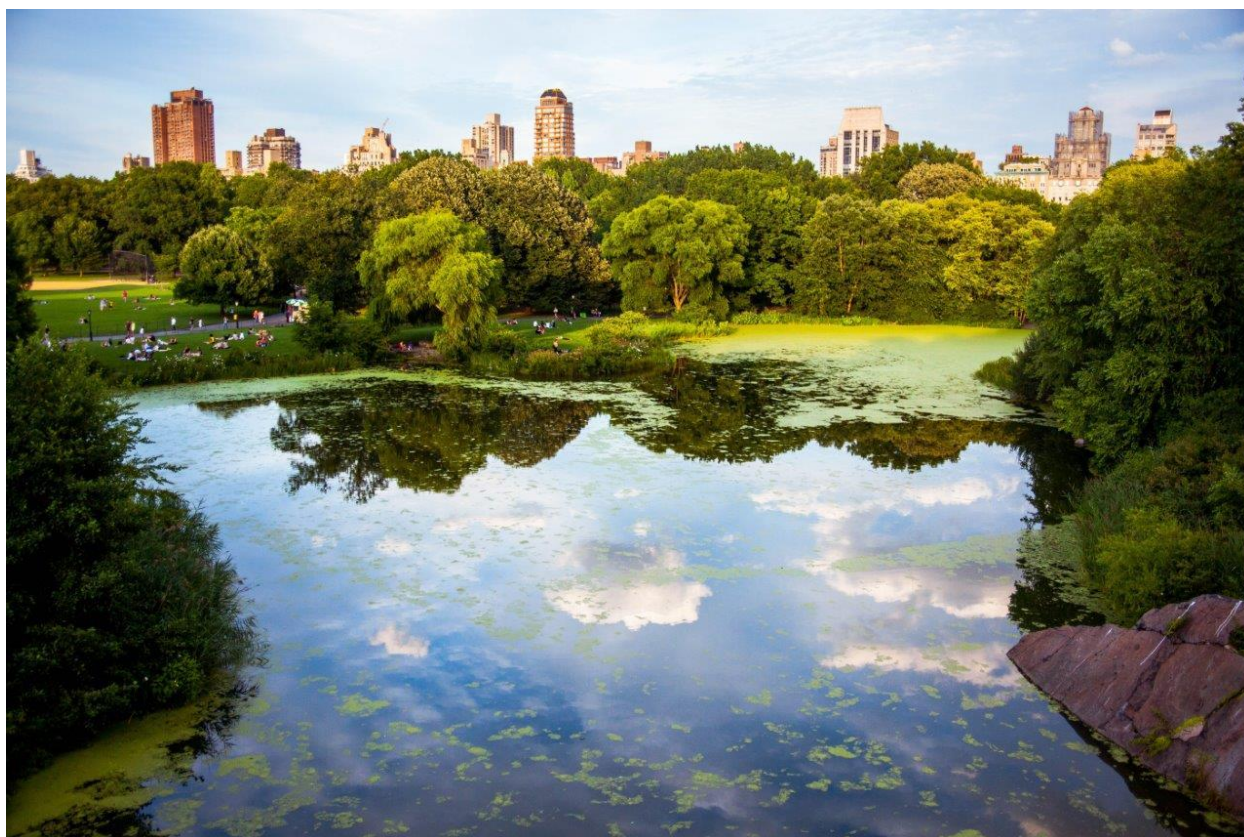


Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională
București - Ilfov



BLUE GREEN CITY

Blue and Green Infrastructure for Sustainable Cities



Action Plan

Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development
Agency



Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională
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INTRODUCTION

Climate Change is one of the greatest environmental, social and economic challenges facing the European Union. As stated in the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change¹:

“Climate change is happening today, so we have to build a more resilient tomorrow. [...] People, planet and prosperity are vulnerable to climate change, so we need to prevent the un-adaptable and adapt to the un-preventable. [...] We need to better understand the interdependencies between climate change, ecosystems, and the services they deliver”.

The Strategy foresees the promotion of Nature-based Solutions for adaptation, stating that “Blue-green (as opposed to grey) infrastructures are multipurpose, “no regret” solutions and simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build climate resilience. [...] It is vital to better quantify their benefits, and to better communicate them to decision-makers and practitioners at all levels to improve take-up”.

According to the EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure (GI)²:

“Green Infrastructure (GI) is a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services such as water purification, air quality, space for recreation and climate mitigation and adaptation. This network of green (land) and blue (water) spaces can improve environmental conditions and therefore citizens' health and quality of life. It also supports a green economy, creates job opportunities and enhances biodiversity. The Natura 2000 network constitutes the backbone of the EU Green Infrastructure”.

Romania has a range of policies and strategic documents (local/urban development strategies) in place to develop and improve Green Infrastructure. For example, one of the objectives of **Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030**³ refers to the development of Green Infrastructure and the use of the services provided by natural ecosystems through the integrated management of the river basins and wetlands.

The **2014-2020 National Biodiversity Strategy and Strategic Action Plan**⁴ implicitly addresses Green Infrastructure, through the actions foreseen in this field, such as: introducing

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/adaptation/what/docs/eu_strategy_2021.pdf

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0249&from=EN>

³ <http://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/web/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Romania-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-2030-en.pdf>

⁴ <http://mmediu.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/NBSAP.pdf>



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provisions on landscape and natural heritage in the legislation in force, action plans for the reconstruction and/or restoration of degraded and/or destroyed landscapes, the development of studies to identify and evaluate urban species and their habitats, financial incentives (subsidies, tax exemptions) for green roofs, review of the Law No. 24/2007 on the regulation and administration of green spaces in built-up areas of localities through redefining the notion of *green space* in relation to the water cycle in nature, and the development of standards for green spaces (plant species recommended for different types of uses – for example, green roofs).

The **2035 Territorial Development Strategy**⁵ clearly refers to Green Infrastructure as an efficient way to adapt to climate change and to diminish natural risks compared to physical or grey infrastructure. Specific measures include protecting natural habitats (by ensuring diversity of and interconnectivity between natural areas, particularly in the context of Natura 2000 management) and developing green spaces in urban areas and green belts around major cities.

The **2035 Integrated Urban Development Strategy for Bucharest**⁶ foresees specific measures for the integration of green solutions at metropolitan and territorial level, an increase in the percentage of green space per capita, integration of new typologies of green spaces with a therapeutic role (treatment and social contact parks for disadvantaged categories and persons with disabilities), conservation and landscaping of existing urban wetlands, protection and preservation of existing urban park areas with heritage value, and its integration into a cultural-pedestrian and tourist circuit.

Furthermore, the **Local Action Plan for Environment – Bucharest**⁷ approaches the issue of greening the city through the increase of green/blue space areas (promoting green roofs, green walls) and their proper maintenance.

Being aware of the role that GI has in the mitigation of environmental dysfunctionalities, its contribution to the improvement of urban life quality, its benefits for biodiversity conservation, and efficiency in fighting against the effects of climate change and improving air quality, the Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (BI RDA) is looking to develop support services through which to encourage the adoption of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) in urban and peri-urban areas, through new projects, thus enhancing the sustainable development of the Bucharest-Ilfov Region.

Based upon the results of the interregional learning process determined by the participation in the Blue Green City project, BI RDA and its stakeholders - key representatives from public

⁵ http://mmediu.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014-08-14_SDTR_6.1.pdf

⁶ http://media.realitatea.net/multimedia/other/201202/concept-strategic-bucuresti-2035-1_80161300.pdf

⁷ [http://apmbuc-old.anpm.ro/upload/172188_Proiect%20PLAM%20Bucuresti_versiunea%201\(01.04.2021\).pdf](http://apmbuc-old.anpm.ro/upload/172188_Proiect%20PLAM%20Bucuresti_versiunea%201(01.04.2021).pdf)



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authorities, research institutes, universities, NGOs and private sector - will raise awareness of the economic and social benefits that GBI projects deliver and disseminate their benefits for the population.

Following our stakeholders' involvement in the project's 1st Phase, both at the local meetings but also in the project events, we could observe that there is a limited understanding of natural ecosystems functions, which translates into limited capacity (in terms of knowledge and availability) of the public authorities to develop/implement GBI projects. Also, there is a lack of examples on both socio-economic and environmental benefits to convince decision-makers of the opportunities of investing in this kind of projects.

Participation in the Blue Green City initiative has enabled BI RDA and its stakeholders to acknowledge the fact that other European regions face similar challenges and obstacles in adopting and implementing GBI and to learn from them about how to improve the consciousness of GBI values and to implement GBI through innovative ways and examples of good practices.



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Part I – General information

Project	Blue and Green Infrastructure for Sustainable Cities “Blue Green City”
Partner organization	Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency
Other partner organizations involved (if relevant)	NA
Country	Romania
NUTS2 region	Bucharest-Ilfov
Contact person	Matei Smădu
Email	matei.smadu@adrbi.ro
Phone number	+4021.315.96.59

Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme
- European Territorial Cooperation Programme
- Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument addressed: **It is envisaged to link the results of our Action Plan in relation to the next Regional Operational Programme - BI ROP 2021-2027.**

BI RDA was originally targeting the Regional Operational Programme Investment in Growth and Jobs ERDF 2014-2020. This has not proved to be feasible because of the timeframe - the current Regional Operational Programme is at its end period and concrete changes cannot be achieved at this time. Furthermore, the Regional Operational Programme Investment in Growth and Jobs ERDF 2014-2020 has been until recently managed by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration as Managing Authority and the priority investment axes have already been drawn up for the current implementation period (2014-2020). According to Emergency Ordinance no. 122/2020 (on some measures to ensure the efficiency of the decision-making process of non-reimbursable external funds for regional development in Romania), BI RDA will be the Managing Authority for the next Regional Operational Programme for the Bucharest-Ilfov Region (BI ROP 2021-2027). The process of taking over this role by BI RDA is on-going and involves a complex approach in terms of the new attributions and responsibilities.

Taking all of the above into account and following discussions with our stakeholders and our management, we have focused our attention on the next Operational Programme (BI ROP 2021-2027) and we hope to link the results of our Action Plan in relation to it.

Concerning the relationship with the new reference policy instrument BI ROP 2021-2027, the Regional Operational Programme includes the priority number 3 “A friendly environmental region”, with a specific objective which refers to the protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas and reducing all forms of pollution.



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Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION. Development of support services through a Guide on financing sources and measures to encourage the adoption of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) in urban and peri-urban areas through new projects

Background

Urbanization generates unprecedented pressures on natural ecosystems in Romania, in particular due to the increasing size of the population in urban environments, which has growing ecological, economic and social needs.

Beyond the political-administrative barriers (scarce involvement of local authorities, institutional inexperience - particularly common is the lack of technical expertise, lack of awareness or general knowledge of GBI), there is evidence of a real interest from NGOs and the population in knowing about and implementing green solutions/GBI. The level of confidence in nature's potential to generate benefits at city level is still quite limited in our country.

In recent years, the green spaces have reduced their area and ecosystem services provided, built areas have often expanded in an uncontrolled way, urban air quality has steadily deteriorated amid increased road traffic, urban water quality has decreased considerably under the effect of unpurified or insufficiently purified wastewater discharges, and the effects of climate change have started to cause more and more damage.

However, there is an important potential to connect green and aquatic spaces implicitly by promoting green solutions/GBI (that can improve their quality and enhance their functions) and raising awareness about the links between GBI and adaptation to climate change.

The lessons learnt during the participation in the Blue Green City project meetings fostered an understanding of the shared challenges and drivers for adopting Green and Blue Infrastructure and formed the basis for the actions contained in this Action Plan. The experiences and initiatives carried out by the partners of the Blue Green City project have served as a source of inspiration to try to apply some of them in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region in order to increase general knowledge about the value of GBI and the benefits of Nature-based Solutions.

In our region, we do not have a unitary approach regarding the concepts of GBI and NBS, however, because of our involvement in the Blue Green City project, a novelty and important project for our region, we managed to highlight the importance of these concepts and also



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worked towards financing projects in this field. In order to develop our Action Plan we analyzed our stakeholders' needs, expectations and readiness, thinking about measures that will improve the adoption and implementation of GBI while taking into account our regional context.

Based on the discussions with our stakeholders and the relevant department from the Agency, in charge with the development of the new Policy Instrument, a specific objective which refers to the protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure and reducing all forms of pollution, has been included in BI ROP 2021 – 2027. This will stimulate potential beneficiaries to apply for funding, within BI ROP 2021 – 2027, with projects directly linked to the Blue Green City theme and in line with the GBI and NBS approach. The influence on the PI will thus be made through the financing of new projects within the new programme.

At the moment, the new ROP BI 2021-2027 is still a draft version and under negotiation with the responsible bodies. It is intended that the programme guidelines will be finalized in 2022 and the first calls will be launched after this step is accomplished. However, since there is a degree of uncertainty we consider that the best concrete applicable action to influence the new BI ROP 2021 – 2027 is the development of support services encouraging the adoption of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) in urban and peri-urban areas through a guide showcasing the potential financing sources and measures for this domain – as a predecessor document of the specific programme guidelines, therefore the Action Plan intends to have a lasting impact. The guide will stimulate beneficiaries to apply for funding under BI ROP 2021 – 2027 within the specific financing line for this domain, thus having a direct impact on the Policy Instrument.

Action

Taking in account the learnings of the project, the current situation regarding the use of GBI and NBS in Romania, the discussions with our stakeholders and the state of development of the BI ROP 2021 - 2027, we have decided to develop support services in the form of a Guide that will offer to the actors in the sector the possibility to access practical information in one place on the most relevant financing sources and measures comprised in strategical documents whilst also making an overview of the most important benefits of GBI and NBS by presenting European good practices that could inspire the actors from our region, creating the premises for joint actions. It will support stakeholders to know the general rules under which they can apply for ROP funding and will be financed through the Regional Development Fund. The Guide will therefore represent a reinforcement of the BI ROP 2021-2027 because this document will create the basis for future impacting projects in this domain.



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We appreciate that only a successful implementation of the herein Action Plan will allow to the parties involved to access ROP financing, therefore the policy instrument in hand being directly influenced. The action proposed will contribute to the improving of the policy instrument addressed by creating, through the Guide, the competition environment that will allow new projects dealing with GBI and NBS to be proposed for financing under BI ROP 2021 – 2027. We are anticipating to have the first BI ROP call launched in the first quarter of 2023, but financing these projects will depend on their quality, assessed by the evaluation committees at that time.

The source of inspiration for this action is the online project meeting that took place in July 2020, when the Irish partner, Southern Regional Assembly, presented the status of the Shared Challenges Analysis Report on Developing Blue Green Infrastructure (GBI) and Nature-based Solutions (NBS) in the Southern Region of Ireland, namely the production of a “cookbook”, that will contain recipes for GBI and NBS for various different type of projects e.g. greenway, public realm improvements etc. This “cookbook” is intended to be a better, more practical and understandable communication tool and platform than traditional Government guidelines.

Another key factor that enabled the elaboration of the action comprised in this Action Plan is the successful collaboration with our regional and local stakeholders (key representatives from public authorities, research institutes and universities, NGOs and private companies) during the regional stakeholders meetings organized in the 1st Phase of the project. These events represented a major opportunity to exchange ideas and share knowledge in order to find ways to promote GBI and NBS in our Region.

The Guide will be addressed to potential beneficiaries, practitioners, experts responsible for environmental issues, but also to the general public interested in this field. It will be made available and distributed through specialized institutions (NGOs, universities, environmental protection agencies) to be used by all the relevant stakeholders and interested parties from the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, with the scope of receiving new projects to be financed within BI ROP 2021 – 2027.

Taking in account the stakeholders’ needs and readiness identified during the project meetings, the Guide may convince key-actors like government authorities, public administration, academic groups, the general public and NGOs that GBI is achievable and economical and will positively influence the adoption of GBI at a larger scale – this being translated in the number of projects.

Our intention is that by producing this Guide, distributing and presenting it to the relevant stakeholders, to smooth the path for beneficiaries to gain knowledge and access financing through new projects in the framework of BI ROP 2021 - 2027. Also, we will try to set up a dialogue between all parties involved, hoping to draw attention to the challenges posed by climate change and emphasizing the need to take action to improve the natural environment.



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The focus will be on sharing the learnings from the 1st Phase of the project, raising awareness, providing information on the benefits of GBI and supporting stakeholders to know the general rules for funding projects under ROP.

Players involved

The first stakeholders to be involved are the decision-makers and public authorities, as they represent the main bodies that ensure the allocation and implementation of funds in the environmental sector. Also, they play a key role in creating the legal framework for adopting specific measures to improve the quality of the environment.

A second category of stakeholders is represented by universities and research institutes. These organizations also have influence in implementing GBI projects due to their position as suppliers of know-how and technical expertise.

The third category of stakeholders is represented by NGOs, as they have an important role in developing communication campaigns, disseminating educational and informative green materials and thus helping to strengthen the capacity of the local community.

Last but not least, the private sector is also intended to be part of the process. It can bring in additional funding, elements of technical expertise or the promotion of Green and Blue Infrastructure within the community.

Timeframe

The Guide will be developed in the 2nd Phase of the Blue Green City project (2022-2023).

The main steps for the development of the Guide are the following:

- ✓ assessment of the current situation & drafting the structure of the Guide (semester 6)
- ✓ development of the Guide (semester 7)
- ✓ dissemination & raising awareness regarding the contents of the Guide (semester 7)



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Costs (if relevant)

10.000 euro

The sum we have indicated represents an estimation of the following costs:

- salary costs for specialized personnel working on the new BI ROP 2021 – 2027
- salary costs for auxiliary personnel supporting us with activities' implementation
 - o financial activities
 - o technical editing of the guide
- meeting costs between BI RDA representatives and potential beneficiaries

Funding sources (if relevant)

The funds needed to cover the costs for this Action will be gathered from the local authorities in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, through the Regional Development Fund (based on the Law 315/2004).

Part IV – Declaration

The Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency agrees to support the implementation of the Action Plan detailed above.

DAN-DUMITRU NICULA

General Director

Signature _____ **date: 01.03.2022**