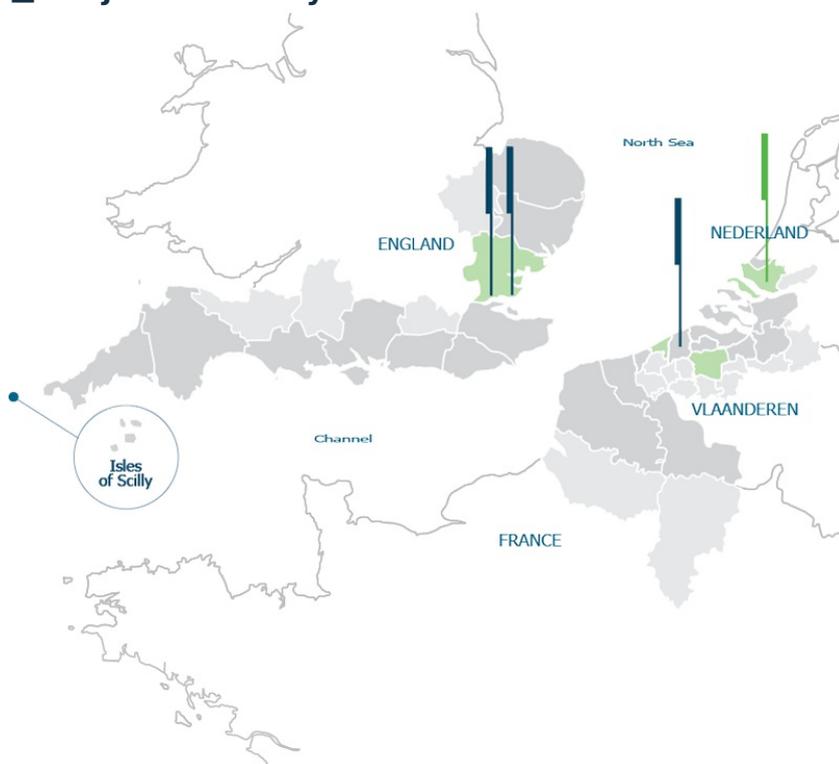


Urban Habitats

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■ Project summary



The aim of Urban Habitats is to improve availability and quality of urban natural spaces and enhance awareness and engagement of urban nature by local communities. This space is essential for the quality of the urban living environment, offering outdoor recreation possibilities and contributing to conservation of nature and biodiversity in urbanised areas. The partnership is composed of four actors managing urban nature sites in The Netherlands, UK and Flanders. They have all noticed that as a result of growing economic activity and population levels, the sparsely available natural space has been under increasing pressure.

Urban Habitats partners will design

tailor-made measures to improve the quality of each other's Urban Habitat sites and the public's experience of them. They will then develop tools to raise public awareness of the challenges urban natural areas, such as local campaigns and an education package. Results and findings will then be actively disseminated to nature management professionals, policy makers and politicians in the 2 Seas area.

■ Activities

What was the project trying to achieve?

The overall aim of Urban Habitats was to improve the availability and quality of urban natural spaces and enhance awareness and engagement of urban nature by the public through cross-border cooperation. At operational level this translated into the following objectives: 1. the

partners have jointly collected and analysed the partners experiences with and instruments for creating and managing natural spaces and habitats in urban areas; 2. the partners have implemented measures to improve the quality of or establish new urban habitat sites on different locations in the Two Seas programme area, building on the expertise of the cross border partnership, and working with local stakeholders (e.g. municipalities, community groups); 3. the partners have jointly developed public communication tools relating to the availability, accessibility possibilities and responsible use of natural spaces in their area, eg the photo competition Big Picture (in UK and NL); 4. the partners have jointly developed educational material for awareness raising on nature conservation, biodiversity and quality of the natural environment in urban areas (lesson / water laboratory for Rotterdam school area); 5. the partners have implemented the jointly developed communication tools and educational material targeting the various relevant target groups in each of the participating areas; 6. the partners have disseminated the tools and experiences collected in the project to other actors responsible for Urban Habitats in the 2 Seas area and wider Europe. In achieving these objectives, the Urban Habitats project contributed to the development of the cross border area through addressing the issue of landscape fragmentation, urbanisation and declining biodiversity and increase the quality of life in the cities and areas involved.

What were the activities implemented?

The cross-border activities that were scheduled and implemented were: - Kick-Off Conference (March 2009 Rotterdam); - Mid-Term Conference (October 2010 Brugge); - Final Conference (September 2011 Southend-on-Sea); - 4 cross-border initiation sessions; - 8 expert visits; - 1 Joint Event (education package and photo competition)- The Big Picture; - 1 Final Publication. The aim of these activities was to exchange knowledge between the partners. This has taken place through the various difficulties the partners had in their local project, and with help from the other partners solved this. The Urban Habitats project really gave a boost to the Big Picture. The youngsters involved were impressed and enthusiastic about being a part of a European project. The partners in turn hosted the Conferences and the expert meetings. All the partners contributed to the organisation of the Conferences (an excellent example is the Green Work(s)! Conference in Brugge). This Conference, organised by the VLM, was a joint project with 5 different Interreg projects. All partners of all the Interreg projects were involved. For Urban Habitats: HHSK was involved in the planning of the workshops, gave a lecture and was part of the panel discussion. The partner RSPB gave a lecture and a workshop. Southend assisted, and VLM organised the whole Conference. It was a great succes. The other implemented cross-border activity is the Big Picture. Simultaneously, Southend and HHSK held a photo competition based upon experiences from the RSPB. The VLM took the experiences from Southend and HHSK and implemented their own picture quest during the Ghentse festivities. The other cross-border activities (beside the visits) can be found mainly in the execution and realisation of both the local pilot projects (physically) and with the approach of the public. This can be read extensively in the 2 final reports of Activity 1: Improving Urban Habitats and Activity 2: Public Awareness and Engagement.

■ Results

What were the key results of the project?

Key results are: - 4 improved Urban Habitats sites - 1 Final Report listing all 4 site specific recommendations - 1 Development Strategy - 4 Awareness campaigns - 1 Education package - 1 joint event The Big Picture - 1 Evaluation of the effect measurements - 1 Final Report listing all results from activity 2: Public awareness and engagement

Did all partners and territories benefit from the results?

All partners (HHSK, VLM, RSPB) and Southend and all 3 Territories (NL, BE, UK) where the partners are located are beneficiaries: The local inhabitants of these regions (Groot-Rijnmond, Ghent, Oostende, Essex, Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea), and particularly the school children who received more attention and additional focus due to The Big Picture; The professionals in urban nature management in these same regions; The politicians and key policy makers were informed of the project, and received invitations for all Conferences. The benefits for each territory are: 1. An improved urban habitat (Kralingse Plas, Krekengebied Oostende & Oude Kale; South Essex Marshes Southend Country Park); 2. More attention from the local public for these existing habitats; 3. More knowledge and understanding from schoolchildren about their environment and responsible use; 4. More attention for the fact that the partners have a specific and important role in this area, and with the assistance of Europe the living circumstances of the local public is enhanced.

What were the effects / outcomes for the territories involved?

The effect for all Territories involved is that the public is more aware of the existing habitats, the effort it takes to maintain this, and the fact that the partners and Europe feel responsible and assist (financially) to provide healthy and enjoyable living surroundings.

■ Distinctiveness

What was the real added-value of doing this cross-border project?

The Urban Habitats partners all have the ambition and capacity to implement measures in their area to open up and improve natural sites in urbanised areas and to increase the awareness and involvement of the public. The issues of urban sites have no networks because within separate countries only few such sites exist. In planning for the further development of their urban habitats all individual partners have identified the need for specific experience and expertise they do not have locally. UH provides a platform for cross border cooperation and exchange to jointly find the best design for each local measure. E.g. the water quality issue in Kralingse Plas was an eye opener for the RSPB- and VLM-projects, the Oude Kale project of the VLM was a guide line for the Southend Development Strategy. Also, the manner in which the RSPB interacted with their donor audience was a key factor in the organisation of the photo competition Big Picture and the development of the education packages.

Have any synergies been developed with other projects or networks?

By combining the Mid-Term Conferences of the European projects 'Value', 'MP4', 'Solabio' and 'Urban Habitats' in one bigger Mid-Term Conference Green Work(s)! there have been built synergies.

What are the key messages , key lessons learned you would like to share?



The Key lessons for a Lead Partner are to involve all partners from the start. Additional attention should be given to getting to know all actors and participants. Please do use all the exchanges foreseen in the project. The Key lessons for the partners are that every partner is involved. There are no bystanders. Even if there is an activity which does not concern you, please stay involved and informed. It helps to remain involved during the longer period of time. The physical results (the 4 improved urban habitats) are 'jewels' of the region, the knowledge gained from the other partners in the various areas (both the management, realization, challenges and interaction with public and policy makers) have made an impression on all actors involved

■ Project Information

Title	Urban Habitats
Total project budget	€ 4 778 115
ERDF	€ 2 389 057
Priority & objective	Priority 2 d. Promote, improve and manage nature, landscapes, natural heritage, and relations between urban, peri-urban and rural areas
Timeframe	2008-02-01 - 2012-06-30
Lead partner	Hoogheemraadschap Schieland en de Krimpenerwaard
Project Coordinator	Yill HAVERS(y.havers@hnsk.nl)

