

Nature moves us: green cities, active living | Narava nas zmiga!

Exploring the urban nature-health nexus | Zelena mesta za aktivno življenje

Introduction

Climate change, air pollution, and biodiversity loss are no longer just environmental concerns — they also represent critical public health challenges. The **Planetary Health** concept highlights the intrinsic interdependence between human wellbeing and the ecosystems that support life. As urbanisation increases and ecological stressors multiply, the health and resilience of urban populations hinge on equitable access to nature and the integration of green infrastructure in city planning.

Urban green and blue infrastructure — including parks, forests, wetlands, green roofs, rivers, ponds, tree-lined streets — are essential to improving quality of life, reducing health inequalities, and promoting sustainability. These elements not only beautify the urban environment but also provide substantial health benefits such as reducing air pollution, regulating temperatures, mitigating flooding risks, and offering opportunities for physical activity, recreation, and social interaction.

Access to nature has been shown to lower stress and cortisol levels, improve mental health, enhance cognitive function, and promote healthier movement behaviours across the 24-hour day, in line with the HEPA EUROPE¹ 2026 conference theme: "**Green Pathways to Health.**"

How can urban policies and strategies value and integrate nature?

Nature-based solutions (NBS) and other interventions aimed at increasing, protecting, and restoring urban ecosystems can underpin an important paradigm shift in cities. By adopting a nature-positive approach, urban policies can integrate planetary health principles to simultaneously tackle ecological and public health crises.

Organised in collaboration with the **Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia (MNVP)**, this Policy Lab promotes a crucial dialogue between urban/spatial planners and

¹ European network for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity:
[https://www.who.int/europe/groups/hepa-europe-\(european-network-for-the-promotion-of-health-enhancing-physical-activity\)](https://www.who.int/europe/groups/hepa-europe-(european-network-for-the-promotion-of-health-enhancing-physical-activity)).

public health professionals. As emphasized in HEPA 2026, green infrastructure plays a key role in enabling the 24-hour movement behaviour paradigm — supporting not just physical activity, but also quality sleep and reduced sedentary time. Integrated, sustainable design must become a shared goal across disciplines. Nature-based solutions (NBS) — when embedded into city policies — can serve as a foundation for co-benefits: environmental sustainability, health promotion, social equity, and community resilience.

The event will take place on 12th January 2026 in Ljubljana, Slovenia as a preparatory meeting for the HEPA conference organised with the Slovene National Institute of Public Health.

Date, time & venue

12th January 2026.

M-hotel, Derčeva ulica 4, Ljubljana, Slovenia. Directions: 

Language

The event will be held in English with interpretation to Slovene available during the morning session (experts' presentations). The afternoon session (interactive workshop) will be in English only.

Objectives

- To strengthen collaboration between **urban and spatial planners** and the **public health sector** to co-create sustainable and healthy urban environments.
- To promote innovative strategies to embed nature-based solutions and green infrastructure into city planning.
- To showcase European case studies that **demonstrate health benefits of accessible, inclusive green infrastructure**.
- To provide insights into how the **24-hour movement behaviour paradigm** (physical activity, sleep, reduced sedentary behaviour) can be supported through urban design.
- To identify opportunities to **implement HEPA principles** in Slovenia and across Europe through policy alignment and multi-sectoral governance.

Target Groups

- Total of 60–70 participants
- Urban & spatial planners, architects (eligible for ZAPS/IZS credits)
- Local and national government officials responsible for urban development
- Researchers and academics in urban planning, health, land use, and sustainability
- Public health professionals and HEPA stakeholders
- European experts involved in planetary health, NBS, and urban green design

Preliminary programme

Time	Activity
9:30–10:00	Walk in and registrations
10:00–10:30	Welcome & opening by EUKN and MNVP - State Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning (Slovenia) - Martin Grisel, EUKN Director (Netherlands)
10:20–11:15	The nature–health nexus in cities: health benefits of urban green & blue spaces Presentations by: - Mark Nieuwenhuijsen, Director of the Urban Planning, Environment and Health Initiative, ISGlobal (20mins) - Tjaša Knific, Head of 24hr movement research group, National Institute for Public Health (Slovenia) (20mins) Q&A with participants (15mins), moderated by: - Martin Grisel, EUKN Director/ Federica Risi, Senior Policy & Project Officer EUKN
11:15–11:30	Coffee break
11:30–12:45	Panel discussion: key lessons from design and implementation of urban nature–health strategies Snapshot presentation of initiatives (5mins each), followed by guided discussion (40mins) - Ina Šuklje, Senior researcher, Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia (Slovenia); - Marju Prass, Project Lead, Lahti University (Finland); - Mario Balzan, Founder, Ecostack Innovations, GoGreenNext project (Malta); - European expert tbc. Q&A with participants (15mins), moderated by: - Martin Grisel, EUKN Director/ Federica Risi, Senior Policy & Project Officer EUKN
12:45–13:45	Lunch break
13:45–15:00	Workshop: working group (WG) discussions (no interpretation) Interactive discussion (1hr): - Participants will be divided in 3–4 (TBD) WGs to delve into and address a set of questions/tasks. These questions will be agreed upon in advance by EUKN and MNVP.

	- Each WG will be self-organised and will appoint its own rapporteur. Experts as well as EUKN and MNVP staff will be distributed across the WGs to feed the exchange and fill-in moderation gaps as needed. - The workshop will be in English only. Reporting back to plenary (15mins) - Each WG rapporteur will report back a summary of the discussion had.
15:00-15:10	Wrap up & closure by EUKN