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FROM GREY TO GREEN. CAN CITIES BE TRANSFORMED?

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Rapid European urbanization and climate change pose some of the greatest challenges our societies have ever faced. In Europe, the trends tell us that by 2050, 84% of its population will live in urban areas and human-induced emissions leading to climate change will increasingly damage human health and negatively impact our safety. To address these challenges, we focus on promoting and innovating Urban Forests as crucial contributors to greener, healthier and more resilient and liveable cities. Urban Forests (UF) are tree-based urban ecosystems and effective Nature-based Solutions (NbS) that help to better adapt and mitigate the negative effects of climate change. UF improve air and water quality, support biodiversity, enhance people's health and wellbeing, and mitigate the high temperatures of modern cities. For these reasons, and to meet their current changing and future needs, many cities across the globe are setting challenging urban reforestation targets. However, cities struggle with such targets due to their high related costs, the need for long-term citizen engagement and capacity of existing institutions to implement urban forestry solutions. Indeed, as defined by FAO urban forestry needs integrated, interdisciplinary and participatory approaches to planning and management of trees in urban areas, in order to support their economic, environmental and social benefits. Urban planning, forestry, arboriculture, and related fields have failed to provide interdisciplinary training and engage and support innovative public-private urban forestry initiatives and trends. On the other hand, the demand for urban forestry practitioners who can provide the urban forestry solutions will continue to grow with urbanization, climate change, and community needs.

Uforest (full name "European Alliance on Interdisciplinary Learning and Business Innovation for Urban Forests Project) is a three-year Knowledge Alliance project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission, that starts in 2021 until 2023. The project creates cross-sectoral alliances that bring together universities, businesses and public administrations of often non-collaborative disciplines such as urban planning and architecture, with forestry and urban ecology, as well as with socio-economic and information and communication technologies (ICT) (Figure 1).

The project will focus on Italy, Spain, Romania, Ireland, Netherlands and Sweden. Results will have a strong EU-global dimension and transferability potential, capitalizing on existing national and international networks and through the partnership with the European Forestry Institute, a leading European networking and research institution.

UFOREST contributes to the EU2020 common objectives by offering high quality, interdisciplinary training programs, enhancing innovation and entrepreneurship while promoting social cohesion, equity and active citizenship. UFOREST is strategic in embracing multiple EU2020 objectives by:

- providing a long-lasting partnership between High Education Institutions and business and enhancing opportunities for the knowledge triangle to work in an emerging and dynamic sector with increasing opportunities for innovation and sustainable economic growth;
- creating new skills and job opportunities in forestry and urban planning through the innovative use of natural resources;
- creating an occasion for increasing green-economy income through multifunctional forestry while supporting social and gender equity;
- making use of online training, staff mobility and innovative teaching through its blended-learning approach.

Finally, the alliance is the basis for the development of new training and support to students and practitioners working towards innovative urban forestry projects.



Facilitating

the flow of knowledge among universities, local authorities, and businesses.



Promoting

a new and multidisciplinary training course on urban forestry.



Stimulating

innovative and cost-effective urban forestry solutions and business ideas.

Fig. 1. Uforest project steps