URBAN

Rooted in the City

Preliminary research findings and recommendations · November 2026

Kultur Nest e.V.

messzelátó EGYESÜLET

Co-funded by the European Union

Full report on the project website at the end of 2026

Erasmus+ KA2 cooperation partnership

The question

What helps young people connect with nature in the city they already live in?

- Youth Participation and Agency
- Inclusive and Accessible Nature
- Urban Nature and Everyday Environments

About the project

Our partnership for urban nature immersion

Who

Two partners working with youth workers, educators, researchers and young people.

- **Messzelátó Egyesület** (Budapest) lead org.
- and **KulturNest e.V.** (Berlin)

What

- Research on youth and urban nature,
- training of Urban Nature Advocates,
- guided walks in city parks for youth,
- best practices and recommendations,
- and an open resources for practitioners: templates, geocaching and audiowalks.

How and what we listened to

Four methods, four kinds of knowledge

01

Desk research

What has already been tried across Europe? Practices collected on a shared map.

02

Focus groups

What do practitioners, educators, researchers and young people think and feel?

03

Advocate evaluation

How do trained facilitators develop? Self-assessment before and after the training.

04

Walk feedback

What do participants experience? Short questionnaire straight after each walk.

We compared the four sources and paid special attention to the moments where young people's and professionals' views diverged.

The research in numbers

What this evidence is built on

15

Urban Nature Advocates trained (6 in Berlin, 9 in Budapest)

8 + 2

training meetings (4 per country) and 2 international study visits

7

focus groups: 3 international (about 30 participants, incl. 7 young people aged 14–22) and 4 in Hungary

20

practices mapped in 10 European countries

90

walk feedback forms analysed with over 115 participants of the walks

Key findings

Six things we learned

Nature is background, not foreground

The social is the way in

Barriers are structural, not a lack of interest

Young people and professionals use different frames

Everyday urban nature is enough, if we learn to notice it

Inclusion is invitation, not only access

Finding 1

Nature is background, not foreground

Young people spend time in parks, by lakes and on beaches, but nature stays an unnoticed backdrop rather than something they relate to.

Being close to green space does not create connection on its own. In Luxembourg, "the green point of Europe", young people engage as little as in an almost treeless Spanish coastal town.

The task: move nature from the background to the front.

> **"I think most young people don't really think about nature that much."**
>
> **Young participant, ~17, Berlin**

> **„Most people feel you always have to leave the city for it…"**
>
> **(UNA, Budapest)**

Source: international focus groups FA1 and FA3; Hungarian focus group synthesis

Finding 2

The social is the way in

Young people go to green spaces to be with each other: a free, non-commercial place when you can't afford a café or are too young for a bar.

This is not "shallow" use. It is the most reliable entry point. Start with what young people already enjoy, and let nature take them by surprise along the way.

In practice: shared tasks, games, picnics, music and events first. Contemplation can come later.

Source: international focus groups FA1–FA3; Hungarian focus group synthesis

> "The nature matters, of course, but it's mainly the people that matter, and being in a beautiful, comfortable place with them is even better."
>
> **Young participant, 14, Poland**

> In nature people become much more open… those who are lonely need it most"
>
> **UNA Budapest**

Finding 3

The barriers are structural, not a lack of interest

Cost
Entry fees for green spaces

Policing
Police called on teenagers for gathering

Hostile design
Anti-youth sound devices, anti-rest benches

Concrete schools
Courts, no trees, nowhere to sit

Winter darkness
School ends after dark from October to March

Single-use spaces
Playgrounds for kids, dog parks for dogs

> **“We just need our own place that we don’t have to pay for, that we won’t be called police on.”**
>
> **Young participant, 14, Poland**

> **„Margit Island is packed, Normafa is packed…”**
>
> **UNA Budapest**

Source: international focus groups FA2 and FA3

Finding 4

Young people and professionals use different frames

Topic	What young people said	What practitioners said
Nature is…	• **stress relief,** • **quiet,** • **a free social venue,** • **safety**	• **a teacher,** • **a co-facilitator,** • **a spiritual resource**
Disconnection comes from…	• **no green space nearby;** • **nature takes extra effort**	• **attitudes;** • **technology;** • **a lack of impulses**
The ideal programme…	• **a fun outdoor activity, with nature as the setting**	• **forest therapy,** • **foraging,** • **intergenerational learning**
Ownership means…	• **organising an activity with friends**	• **taking responsibility,** • **tending something**

Implication: judge good practice by young people's own criteria, not only by ours.

Finding 5

Everyday urban nature is enough, if we learn to notice it

Street trees, courtyards, plants in pavement cracks, birds, water: nature is overlooked rather than absent. Noticing is a skill, and guided walks, sensory and playful activities can teach it.



A conceptual pathway suggested by the Hungarian focus groups, not a measured causal model

Finding 6

Inclusion is an invitation, not only access

Accessibility has several layers. Some participants love silence and solo time; others need a game or a friend beside them. Offer several entry points, and let people choose how deep they go.

Physical

distance, mobility

Practical

free, nearby, flexible, no equipment

Emotional

safety, choice, no pressure to perform

Social

peers, a welcoming host

“You just need to hold a space for them to experience nature, then they can bloom. They can be themselves.”

Practitioner, international focus group

Urban Nature Advocates

Training peer facilitators for urban nature

4 x 2

Content and practice meetings

Sensing, breathing, observation, visual arts, storytelling. Each advocate leads an invitation, with structured feedback

2

Study visits

Berlin and Budapest learn from each other's parks

15

Advocates lead 12 walks

in tandems, with one mentoring session before and one after

The walk structure:

- 4 stages, and gentle invitations that speak to the head, the heart and the hands.

Urban Nature Advocates - before and after

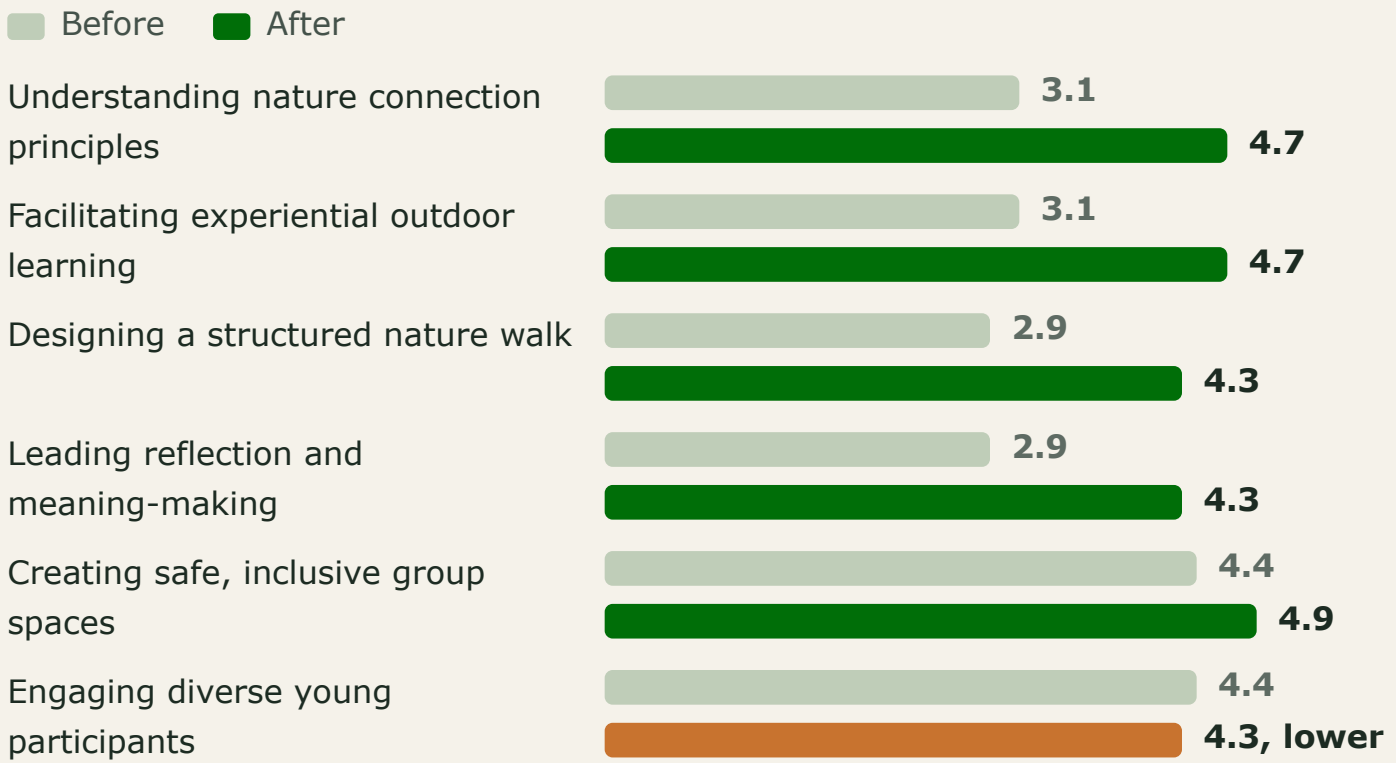
The biggest gains came where the training focused

3.8 → 4.6

average self-rated competence across 12 areas (scale 1–5)

9 of 9

advocates with complete data rated themselves higher



Urban Nature Advocates - in their own words

Noticing became a habit

"Before, I was going to the park to have a picnic… Now I realise that I look really more at the nature."

Advocate, Berlin

"There was a spider with its web, and I stopped and looked at it for a minute. I don't think I would have done that nine months ago."

Advocate, Berlin

"Even if it's not always planned, that doesn't mean it's going to be bad. Trust the process."

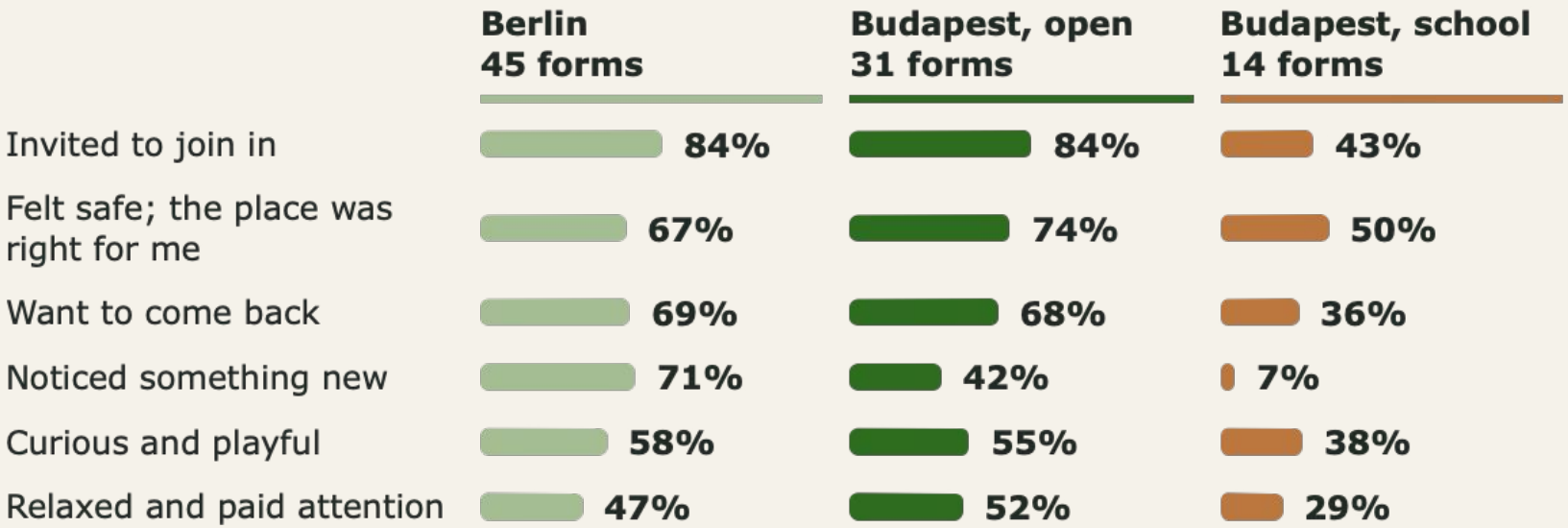
Advocate, Berlin

Advocates also named working in tandems, mentoring and the Berlin–Budapest exchange as what helped them most, and many say they now use the skills at work and in daily life.

Walk feedback from Berlin and Budapest

Most felt invited – a school class much less so

Share answering "very much" (5 of 5) straight after the walk



What they will remember

"I didn't know the magic was so close."

Berlin

"I don't have to go deep into nature to find this calm. A small piece of green is enough."

Budapest

"Climbing trees."

Pupil, Budapest school walk

https://padlet.com/kulturnestberlin/urban-nature-practices-pvwyh1qkwhppokrk

Mapping practices across Europe

20 practices in 10 countries: three patterns

Learning by doing, with visible results

Planting tiny forests, youth farms, urban gardening

e.g. The Tree Party (NL), Jugendfarm Bonn (DE), Café Mondial (Konstanz, DE)

Young people as co-creators

Youth propose, plan and lead the activities themselves

e.g. BUNDjugend (DE), Bolygó community space (Budapest), Action for Conservation (UK)

Reclaiming everyday city spaces

Riverbanks, parking spaces, former industrial sites

e.g. Valyo riverbank (Budapest), PARK(ing) Day (Villach, AT), De Ceuvel (Amsterdam)

Inspiration box: practices for children, such as nature kindergartens, puppet story trails and eco-games, show how early nature connection can begin. Outcomes of all practices are as reported by the organisations themselves.xax

Recommendations · practice

What youth workers and educators can do now

Youth workers and NGOs

- **Take your next session outside:** even 20 minutes in the nearest park changes the conversation
- **Start with the social hook (**games, food, music) and let nature be the setting
- Offer several ways in, and **let young people choose** how deep they go
- **Hand over ownership step by step:** co-design, then peer facilitation

Schools and educators

- **Green the school grounds:** trees, grass and benches, even on sports courts
- **Make plant care a daily routine,** not a curriculum topic
- **Go outside in every season**, including winter
- **Count outdoor time as learning time**, not free time

Recommendations · policy

What cities and programmes can change

Municipalities and policy makers

- Provide free, **unsupervised,** multi-use green space for teenagers
- Find and **remove hostile design**: anti-youth sound devices, anti-rest furniture
- Treat **urban greening as youth policy,** not only environmental policy
- Make existing **offers visible** beyond the already "green" audience

Erasmus+ projects and funders

- Scale the peer facilitator model: training, tandems, mentoring
- Build practitioners' own nature connection before they facilitate
- Evaluate practice with young people's own criteria
- Support study visits between cities to exchange practice

Open materials

A toolkit tested in parks with youth

6

Audio walks

Self-guided experiences in city parks. You need a park and a phone.

20

Facilitation templates

One-page session guides for head, heart and hands.

6

Geocaching games

Playful park invitations in Berlin and Budapest.

20

Practice map

European urban nature practices on an open map.

Free to use, adapt and share. Released together with the full report.

What comes next

“I didn’t know the magic was so close.”

Walk participant, Berlin

The full report **Rooted in the City** will be published on the project website at the end of 2026, including the complete Budapest data.

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