

NATURE IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD, UUSIKAUPUNKI, FINLAND



Nature in my Neighborhood - a transition arena in Uusikaupunki brought together local people interested in enhancing biodiversity in their nearby nature and private yards. Through a process of four workshops and follow-up meetings, they proceeded to agree and implement biodiversity actions with the city and launched a shared digital space for coordinating the activities. Uusikaupunki is a coastal town of about 15 000 inhabitants in Southwest Finland.

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

More than 20 local actors were involved in the arena workshops, including representatives of the municipal government, nature and gardening enterprises, environmental NGOs and local residents. All the participants were interested in promoting more pop-up-voluntarism and individual participation in their own yards through first coming together and learning from others.

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Biodiversity topic was chosen to support the municipality's environmental work, utilize the great number of local leisure gardeners as a ground for bottom-up enthusiasm. The arena tackled with four challenges regarding biodiversity:

1. How to fight biodiversity loss locally? What is the role of local civil actors?
2. How to make biodiversity promotion accessible for citizens?
3. How to enhance wellbeing and community building through inclusive participatory methods and events among biodiversity work?

ABOUT THE PROCESS

The arena process of four workshops was coordinated by a "local transition team" consisting of representatives of project partner organisation, Uusikaupunki city and civil society. The arena was built upon an earlier survey on ecosystem services in the city centre area mapping gaps in green areas and pollinators' needs. Collective action and concrete outcomes were achieved through careful planning and the creation of a shared vision 2035 based on local nature work, key actors, and preferred forms of participation.

The arena fitted well into the local government's ambitions to organise the general city area development and city environmental work in a participatory manner, and work in stronger cooperation with local associations and residents. The arena provided input to the drafting of the city's climate programme.



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RESULTS

The most significant outcome of the Uusikaupunki transition arena is the network-based collaboration, which consists of various components that evolve along the activities. As direct results of the arena workshops, the following local biodiversity actions started in Uusikaupunki with support of the We make transition! project:

- 1) Producing signs for private yards to highlight active efforts to support biodiversity and shift perceptions away from seeing these areas as neglected.
- 2) Organizing informal gatherings called "Biodiversity Coffees" for sharing knowledge, fostering dialogue, and supporting collaboration around biodiversity.
- 3) Establishing an urban meadow on a vacant lot, with the aim of enhancing both community engagement and biodiversity.

For wider participation, the arena participants including municipal representatives established a "Biodiversity Ring" which enables easy and low-commitment involvement in promoting biodiversity.

The ring concept is inspired by the REKO rings for local food, which operate with minimal organization.

The central platform for the network is an open Facebook group that has gained 90 members in just six months. Also a bigger event – Biodiversity Forum – will be organized annually. The Biodiversity Forum is a way to monitor the implementation of the actions and serves as a part of the network's ongoing activities.

Nature in my Neighbourhood managed to create structures for local biodiversity work and to awaken the residents' interest and cooperation on the topic. An important benefit of the method was creating a space to discuss solutions and create a positive vision about the future without first getting stuck on agreeing on the basics. This was possible even though many of the participants did not have previous expertise on biodiversity. More important than expertise was the shared will to act and creating a fun atmosphere for collaboration.

"I think that what we will do in the future, even within our own association, it will be colored by all the things that this arena process brings with it"

"If you come up with an idea to do something, you now know who to contact"

CONTACT

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