Interreg
Baltic Sea Region

Co-funded by
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SUSTAINABLE WATERS
City Blues

Analysis on collaborative mission potential of the NBS model

D3.2 Analysis on collaborative mission potential: case 'NBS for resilient urban watersheds in BSR'

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interreg-baltic.eu/project/city-blues





Illustration: Jatta Ikäheimonen

Scope of the analysis

This analysis is part of the City Blues project. It explains what the potential for the joint operational model (NBS model), the main output of the project, is in the participating cities and organisations and more broadly in the Baltic Sea region.

NBS model is a tool towards water sensitive cities

NBS model (nbsmodel.eu)

In City Blues, we created a web-based tool, the “NBS model”, for other cities seeking to become more water-sensitive. It brings together our experiences and best practices on how to use nature-based solutions (NBS) and catchment-based approach for urban flooding and stormwater management.

The model guides cities through **different stages of the process**, from financing and planning to implementation, maintenance, and monitoring, and explains how stakeholders can be involved.

In the NBS model, we focus on implementing NBS that are designed as **catchment-fit** and thereby, are either

- mitigating the flood risk of existing built-up areas or new areas, or
- improving water quality in the receiving natural waterbodies.

The model is meant **for stormwater and other city experts**. It contains practical examples and case descriptions from the partner cities.



Our mission?



“NBS in stormwater management are increasingly important in the future. We want to make the use of NBS and catchment-based thinking mainstream.”

City Blues project partners

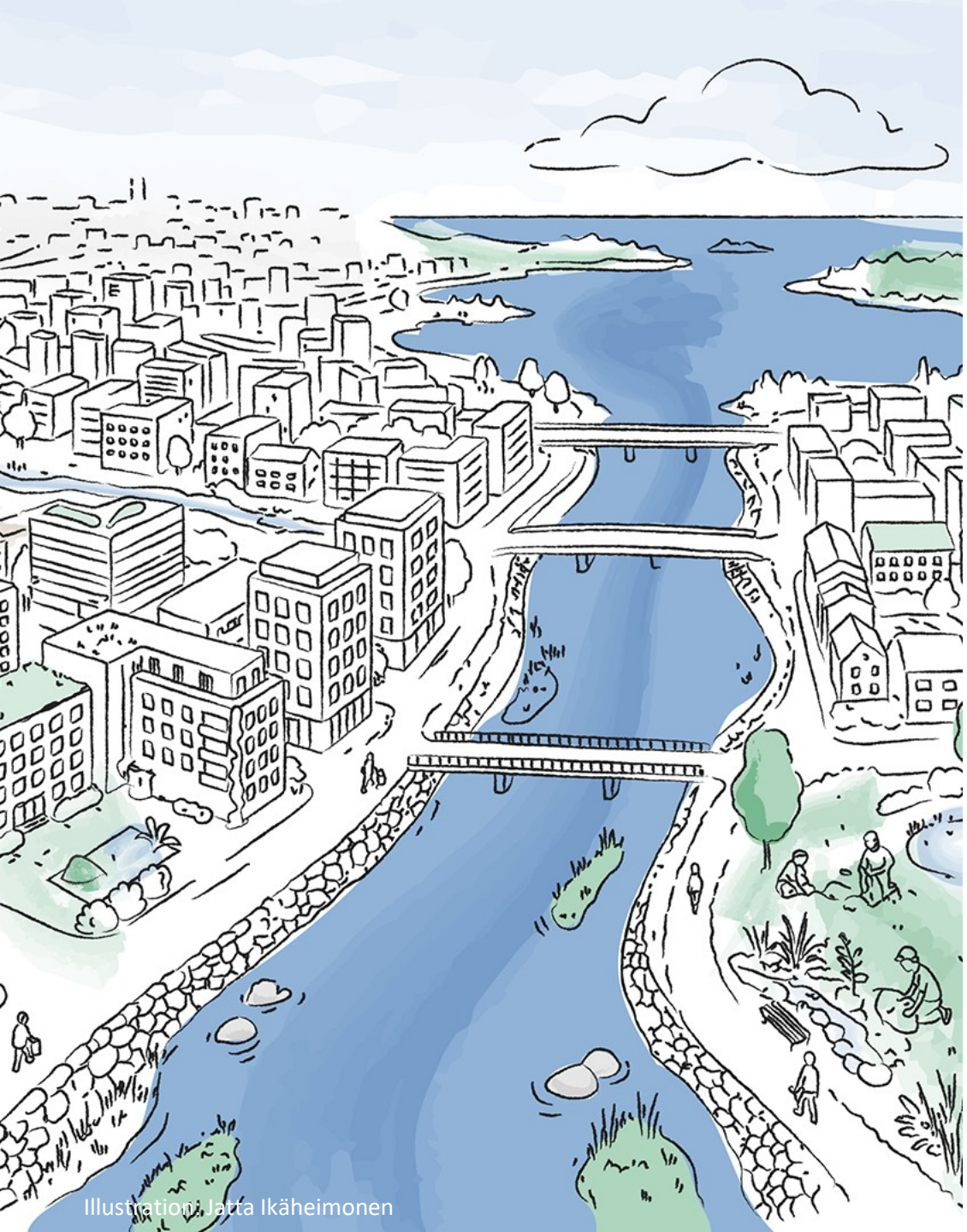


Illustration: Jatta Ikäheimonen

Questions

The analysis answers the following questions:

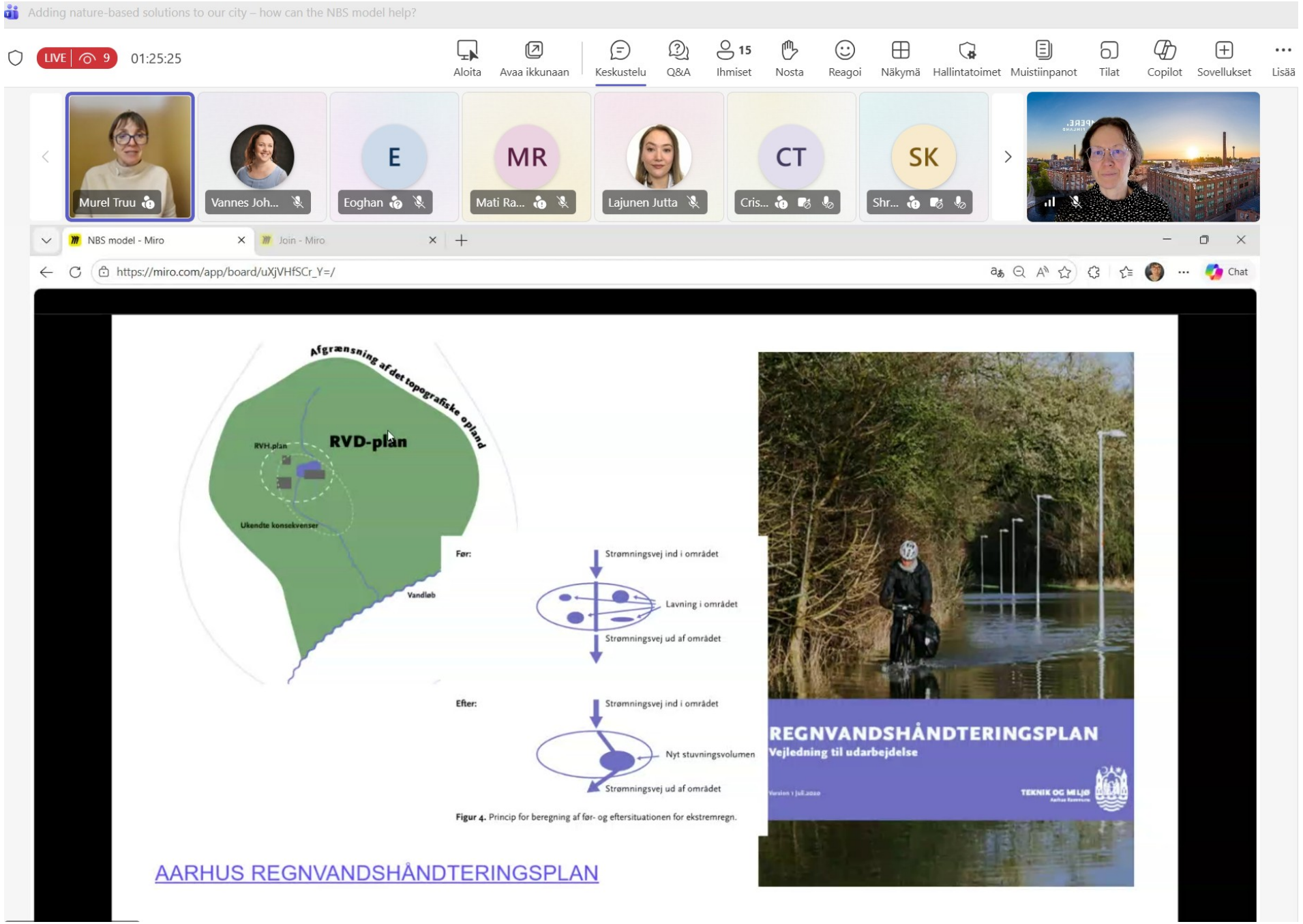
1. What are the **potential scaling-up opportunities of the NBS model** for the partner and other BSR cities in the future?
2. **Who** could use and scale the results and **where**? With whom?
3. What could be the **ideal expected impacts**?
4. What are the specifically important **results and interesting learnings**?


Illustration: Jatta Ikäheimonen

Collecting information

To answer the questions, we organized several **bilateral and multilateral discussions** and **two workshops**:

1. Adding nature-based solutions to our city – how can NBS model help (23 April 2026)
2. Scaling up the NBS model during our final event (30 September 2026)



1st workshop

The interactive online workshop 23 April 2026 introduced the NBS model and the real life examples it contains. Miro was used as a tool for collaboration. There were 17 participants in the workshop (27 registered).

During the 1st workshop, main barriers hindering the use of NBS were identified – lack of resources and space were often mentioned.



What hinders catchment integration of NBS?

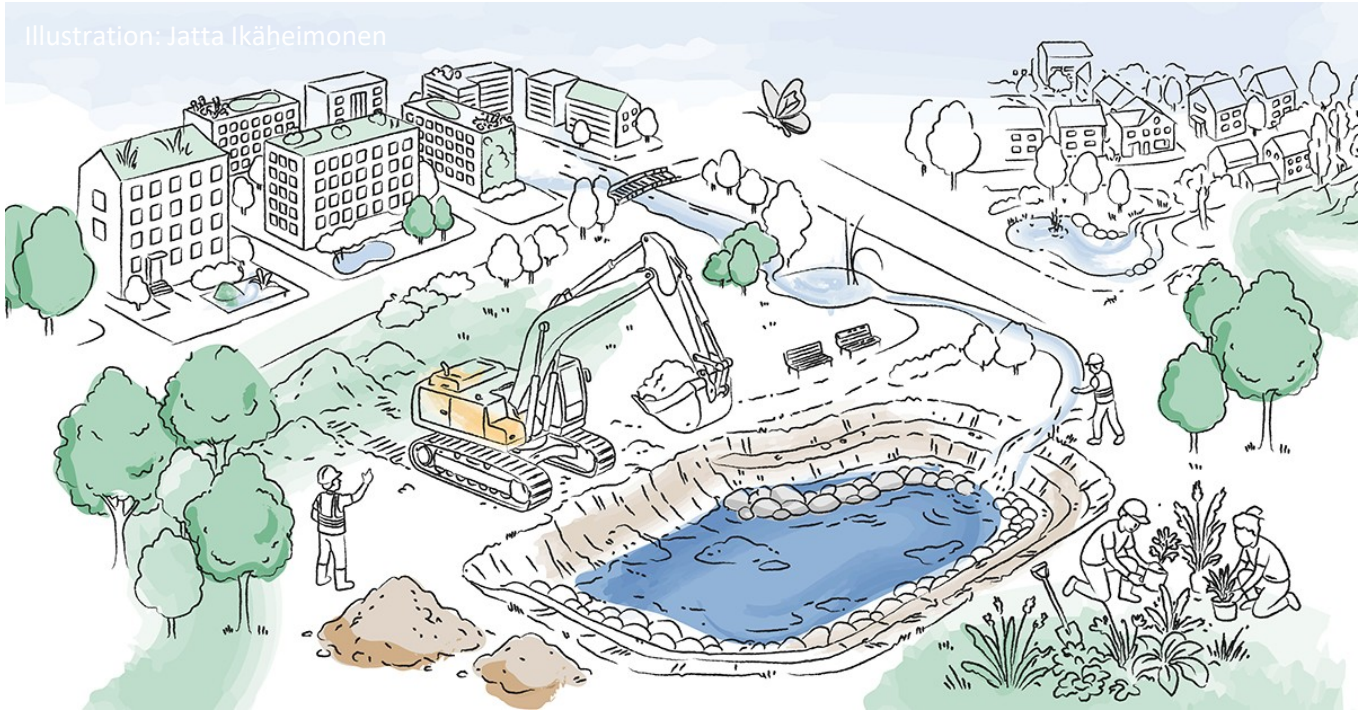
The participant feedback on what hinders catchment integration of NBS clusters into **five key barrier categories**:

1. **Spatial** constraints (lack of space in dense urban areas, competition for land in undeveloped areas, challenges in identifying suitable areas in locations where there's need for NBS);
2. **Financial** limitations;
3. **Governance & stakeholder coordination** (difficulty in engaging all stakeholders, weak stakeholder cooperation, lack of commitment);
4. **Knowledge**, capacity & complexity of the challenges; and
5. **Process & time** constraints (lack of time within projects, integration into existing planning processes).



Best practices enabling the NBS model were shared and the replication potential was identified

1) Aarhus approach to catchment planning

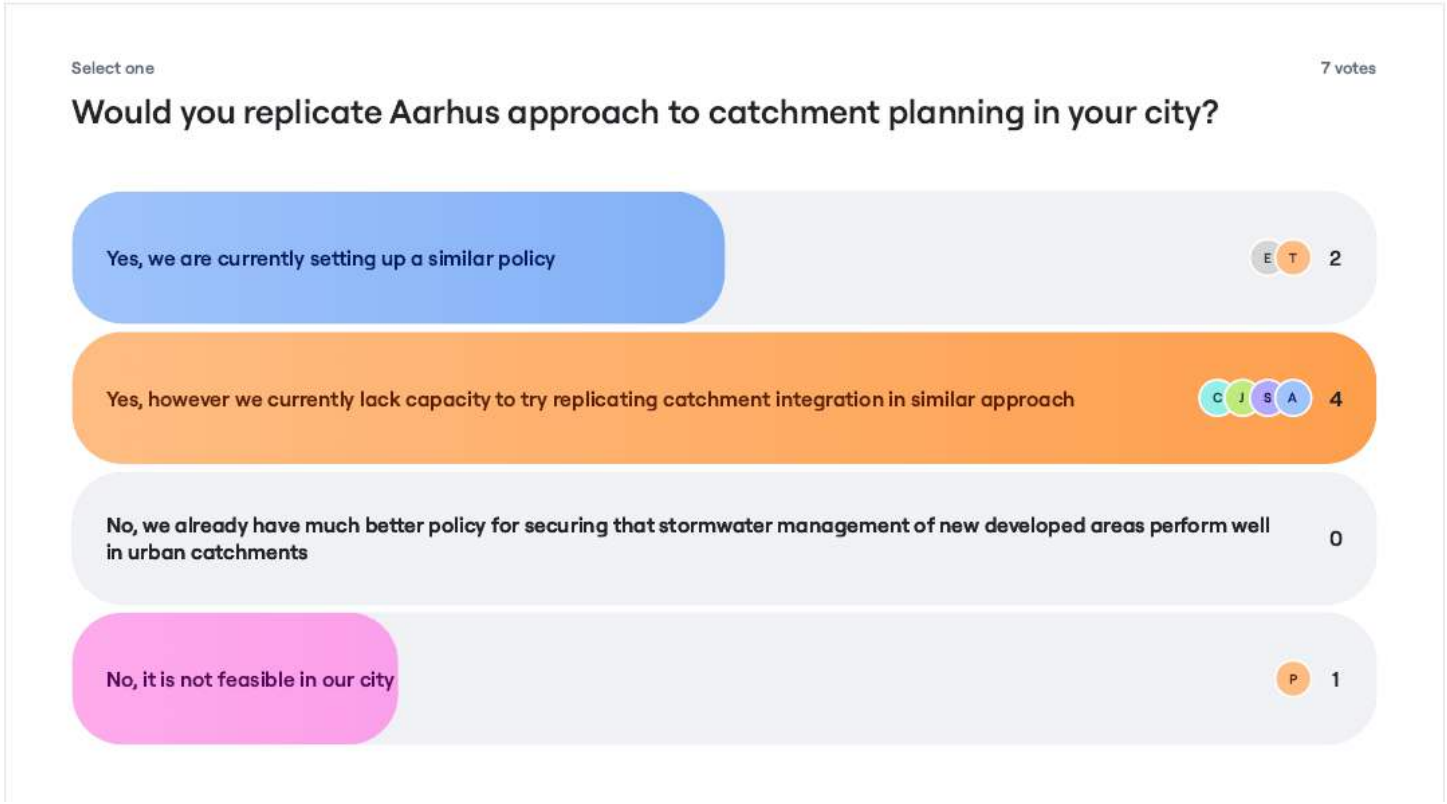


3) Tampere's NBS design guidelines

2) Malmö's technical Handbook

Replication needs more capacity in most cities

Example of catchment integration: Aarhus approach to catchment planning



All voted that they would consider using the materials as proof of concept for their NBS designs

Example of political commitment & strategic planning:
Malmö's technical Handbook and Tampere's NBS design guidelines

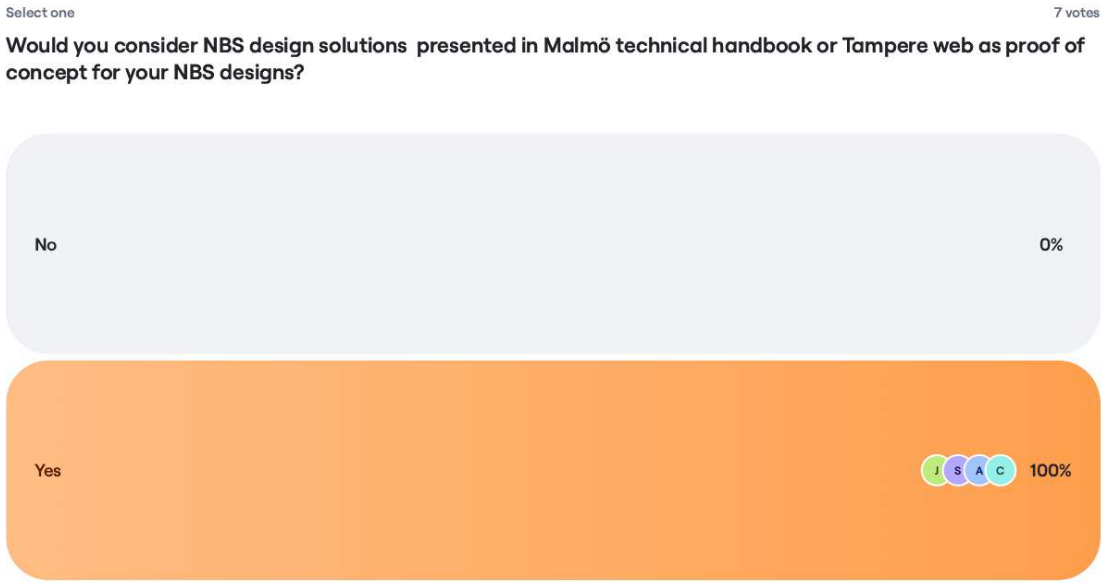




Illustration: Jatta Ikäheimonen

Other discussion

The discussion highlighted the need to help cities get started. The NBS model supports cities in adopting nature-based solutions and works well in cities that are just getting started.

The participants were interested in the impact assessments and their results. These could be shared in bilateral discussions that partner cities organised during the project. Knowledge sharing continues beyond the project life span.

Workshop participants highlighted that practical, transferable case studies as well as access to expert networks and contacts remain important.



Our 2nd workshop during the interactive coffee break 30 September 2026 offered the opportunity to discuss how the NBS model could be scaled-up.

Potential scaling-up opportunities

What was discussed during the final event?

1. Who or what organisation could be scaling up the NBS model or using the results?
2. How could the NBS model be scaled up? Through what kind of actions?
3. What could be the expected impacts?

Malmö

Tartu

EU commission

NBS

Århus + following cities in DK

Other Interreg programs

EUCC Coastal Union Germany

Stavanger municipality

Implementing our catchment plan and tell it to others

EU directive or regulation to force the catchment-based thinking

Workshops, seminars, study trips.

Partnerships & twinnings with 1-2 other cities

EU-collaboration + projects

Develop and implement blue corridors (waterways) and share experience

Will learn from results to rural areas

Pilots will be Polish municipalities

Getting the hole organisation to work towards the same goal

From overarching plans to local projects

Prevent flooding and treat/clean stormwaters in the existing urban areas

More NBS, better stormwater management

Awareness of the flood among possibility to provide this data to technical engineers

Tailored out specific case advise & sharing of experience

NBS models are replicated and scaled up across additional locations through strenghtened institutional capacity, knowledge exchange, peer learning and international partnerships leading to wider adoption and integration of effective NBS approaches into regional and local planning and investment.

Well function stormwater solution, green city and good neighborhods

Climatechange adaptation, enhancing

Scaling up the NBS model 1/2

Who?	How?	Expected impacts?
City of Malmö	Implementing our catchment plan and telling it to others	Prevent flooding and treat/clean stormwater in the existing urban areas
City of Tartu	Develop and implement blue corridors (waterways) and share experiences	Increased awareness of flood risk areas and strengthened institutional capacity to support, review, and provide technical guidance for the planning and design of Nature-based Solutions (NBS).
Aarhus Municipality and following cities in Denmark	Workshops, seminars, study trips, EU collaboration and projects	NBS models are replicated and scaled up across additional locations through strenghtened institutional capacity, knowledge excange, peer learning and international partnerships leading to wider adoption and integration of effective NBS approaches into regional and local planning and investment
City of Tampere	Continue implementing NBS according to catchment scale stormwater management master plans	Climate change adaptation, enhancing biodiversity, improving water quality and preventing flooding, better quality of living environment

Scaling up the NBS model 2/2

Who?	How?	Expected impacts?
Stavanger Municipality	Getting the whole organisation to work towards the same goal from plans to local projects	Well functioning stormwater solution, green sity and good neighbourhoods
City Blues partners and Associated organisations	Partnering and mentoring with 1-2 other cities	Tailored / specific case advice and sharing of expertise to 10–20 other cities
EUCC Coastal Union Germany	Pilots will be 2 Polish municipalities	Will learn from results to rural areas
Other EU projects, Mission cities etc.	Getting familiar with the NBS model	Awareness can lead to use of the NBS model in other cities
EU commission	A directive or regulation to force the cathment-based thinking	More NBS, better stormwater management

NBS model scaling: key findings

Local implementation anchors scaling

Malmö and Tampere link NBS to catchment plans. Tartu adds blue corridors, while Stavanger focuses on alignment across the organisation, and Aarhus continues active cllaboration.

Peer learning extends the model's reach

Knowledge exchange is essential. NBS champions aim to advise 10–20 other cities, and EUCC proposes pilots in two Polish municipalities.

Adoption needs more than awareness

The proposals combine technical support with institutional coordination. The suggested EU regulation represents a possible policy route.





Bilateral discussions

To strenghten the NBS model transfer and uptake, project partners have concluded in 2026 bilateral discussions with different minicipalities, research institutions and other important stakeholders. Some of them were part of multilateral events while other were held as a meeting between two organisations.

Almost 20 documented engagements involved about 30 contacted entities.

Who could use the results, where and with whom?

Based on bilateral discussions

Potential users of the results	Where	Key collaborators
Municipal planning, environment, climate and water departments	BSR cities and municipalities of different sizes	Water utilities, engineering departments and maintenance teams
Metropolitan and county-level authorities	Cluj Metropolitan Area, Rogaland and similar regions	Constituent municipalities and land-management authorities
Catchment partnerships	Segeån and other cross-municipal watersheds	Municipalities, agricultural stakeholders and water organisations
Urban districts and neighbourhood administrations	Berlin districts, Tallinn districts and other built-up areas	Residents, climate managers and local organisations
Universities and research organisations	Across the BSR and wider Europe	Municipal practitioners, consultants and utilities
Residents and community groups	Local NBS sites	Municipalities and citizen-science coordinators

Potential scaling-up opportunities

Based on bilateral discussions

The NBS model shows strong potential for wider adoption.

- Cities need shared procedures, clear responsibilities and political support—not only successful technical pilots.
- The NBS model could be embedded in municipal routines as it contains planning guidance and maintenance procedures.
- The model can be applied across municipal boundaries, especially for stormwater management, nutrient retention and climate adaptation.
- In the future development, a self-assessment tool for NBS practioners could be launched: Cluj Metropolitan Area, Hemnes Municipality and Rogaland County Council explicitly expressed interest in using it.
- Practical tools are found useful. The BGI (Blue and green infrastructure) Inspector developed by KWB could support professional inspections and citizen-science campaigns.
- In knowledge sharing peer-learning formats are found valuable: Field visits, practical demonstrations, seminars and exchanges between cities can accelerate replication.

EUSBSR Policy Area Nutri and Policy Area Innovation as complementary enablers for scaling the City Blues NBS model across the Baltic Sea region

Policy Area Nutri provides the water-management and environmental policy framework.

Policy Area Innovation provides the mechanisms for collaborative innovation, replication, digitalisation and scaling through new partnerships and projects.

EUSBSR
EU STRATEGY
FOR THE BALTIC
SEA REGION

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (eusbsr.eu)

EUSBSR PA Nutri: Policy framework and cooperation for scaling the City Blues NBS model

From individual urban NBS pilots to integrated catchment-based water management across the BSR

Updated PA Nutri Action Plan (2026) provides strategic alignment

- Promotes holistic, cooperative catchment-based water management and integrated land- and water-management solutions.
- Connects stormwater management with nutrient reduction, water retention, climate adaptation and biodiversity.
- Supports multilevel policy dialogue, capacity-building and co-operation between municipalities, particularly smaller and medium-sized cities.

Concrete opportunities for City Blues scaling

Mainstreaming

Integrate the NBS model into municipal stormwater strategies, catchment plans, urban planning and investment processes.

Replication

Transfer City Blues practices and guidance to additional BSR cities and watersheds, including cross-municipal catchments.

Knowledge transfer

Use PA Nutri cooperation to disseminate the model and connect it with complementary water-management solutions.

Future projects

Develop collaborative initiatives combining urban NBS, nutrient retention, water quality, flood prevention and water resilience.

Expected contribution

Wider uptake of catchment-fit NBS, improved water quality and flood resilience, stronger municipal capabilities and more integrated water governance.

EUSBSR PA Innovation: Scaling City Blues through collaborative innovation and new EU projects

From local NBS solutions to replicable models across the BSR and Europe

Updated PA Innovation Action Plan (2026): three complementary pathways

Action 1 – Place-based innovation: Joint city pilots integrating NBS, climate adaptation and sustainable urban development.

Action 2 – Digital transformation: Climate data, flood monitoring, interoperable digital tools and evidence-based planning to improve NBS design, monitoring and replication.

Action 3 – Connected innovation ecosystems: Cross-border co-creation involving cities, universities, SMEs and innovation actors, helping move successful solutions from pilots towards wider adoption.

Concrete opportunities for City Blues scaling

Collaborative mission approach

Mobilise City Blues partner cities as experienced demonstrators and mentors for new follower cities and watersheds.

Joint replication projects

Develop new EU-funded initiatives, including the 2027 Horizon Europe Missions opportunities and post-2027 Interreg programmes.

Common evidence and tools

Strengthen comparable environmental, economic and social impact indicators, monitoring approaches and practical replication guidance.

Cross-macro-regional cooperation

Connect BSR cities with partners in the Danube, Adriatic–Ionian and Alpine regions to extend the reach and transferability of the model.

Expected contribution New collaborative projects, broader NBS adoption, stronger innovation and implementation capacity, and more systematic integration of blue-green solutions into urban investment and planning.

Cross-macro-regional opportunities

The strong strategic alignment between City Blues and EUSBSR Policy Areas Nutri and Innovation, together with the outcomes of the City Blues cross-macro-regional webinar “Nature-Based Solutions in Action: Scaling Innovation Across Europe” (17 September 2026), provides a solid foundation for scaling the City Blues NBS model across the BSR and other European macro-regions (EUSDR PA4, EUSAIR Pillar 3 and EUSALP Action Group 6).

From exchange to common demonstrations, evidence and projects

1 City twinning

Matching BSR cities with Danube, Adriatic–Ionian and Alpine peers facing comparable water, heat or biodiversity challenges

2 Common NBS evidence

Aligning indicators for water retention, heat, biodiversity, health, costs and citizen value

3 Replication

Comparing governance models and procurement models, maintenance, financing and technical design

4 Joint new EU projects

- Using macro-regional networks to build lead + follower cities –based proposals
- Macro-regional strategies can be the consortium-building layer between local pilots and EU-wide scale

Upcoming EU funding calls as scaling opportunities

FINAL EVENT DISCUSSIONS

Upcoming EU funding calls offer opportunities to further develop and scale up the City Blues NBS model, replicate its results and implement new nature-based solutions in cities across Europe.

At the City Blues final event, project partners discussed shared needs, interests and opportunities for future collaboration. Building on these discussions, the partners intend to explore new joint initiatives, both within the existing partnership and with new partners, to further develop the NBS model and promote the wider adoption of effective nature-based solutions in European cities.

EXAMPLE OF NEAR-TERM SCALING OPPORTUNITY IN 2027

An example of an attractive scaling opportunity is the call **HORIZON-MISS-2027-07-CLIMA-CIT-NEB-01** – "Urban nature: supporting restoration of urban ecosystems, along urban transport networks and in the built environment".

CALL OPENS
9 February 2027

DEADLINE
22 September 2027

Instrument	It is a sizeable Horizon Europe Innovation Action jointly serving the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, Adaptation Mission and New European Bauhaus.
Focus	It is essentially a large-scale urban greening and NBS demonstration call, with cities at the centre.
Fit with City Blues	There are clear thematic links in the call to the experience and results of City Blues—particularly NBS, climate adaptation, urban pilots, co-creation and transfer between cities.
Requirement	The call itself specifically requires applicants to build on relevant previous EU-funded projects.

Summary of the results – Collaborative mission potential of the NBS model

1 Scaling-up opportunities

- **Embed in city routines:** stormwater strategies, catchment plans, planning and maintenance procedures.
- **Peer learning and mentoring:** partners aim to advise 10–20 other cities; pilots planned in two Polish municipalities.
- **New EU projects:** EUSBSR Policy Areas Nutri and Innovation, cross-macro-regional twinning and the 2027 Horizon Europe Mission call.

2 Who, where and with whom?

- **Users:** city planning, environment and water departments, regional authorities, catchment partnerships, universities, residents.
- **Where:** BSR cities of all sizes (e.g. Cluj, Rogaland, Segeån, Berlin and Tallinn districts) and wider Europe.
- **With:** water utilities, neighbouring municipalities, research bodies, EU Mission cities and the EU.

3 Ideal expected impacts

- **Less flooding and cleaner water:** stormwater treated at catchment scale, better water quality.
- **Climate-resilient, greener cities:** adaptation, biodiversity and a better living environment.
- **Mainstream NBS:** stronger institutional capacity and catchment-based thinking built into planning and investment.

4 Key results and learnings

- **Barriers:** space, finance, governance, knowledge and time – the model helps cities just getting started.
- **Local implementation anchors scaling;** peer learning extends reach. All workshop voters would use the materials as proof of concept.
- **Technical pilots are not enough:** shared procedures, clear roles and political support are needed.

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Find out more about the NBS model on the website nbsmodel.eu

This document is part of City Blues project that was ongoing between 2023 and 2026.
Project has received funding from the EU's Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme.