



Putting urban soils in the spotlight: A learning experience through the Climate-KIC's initiative

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The European Commission encourages integrating ecosystem-based approaches in the portfolio of adaptation strategies also in the urban areas. However, the renewed interest in the environmental benefits from green infrastructures coexists with the marginality with which they are treated in practice and, especially, where soil is concerned. Despite its critical functions, soils in cities have often been neglected. In fact, urban soil issues rarely get society attention or even from our policy makers. But, how to make urban soils visible?.

From academia we need to extend our communication and networking abilities to engage citizens with projects related to urban soils. Through the Climate-KIC's professional placement programme, Pioneers into Practice, we were able to connect with stakeholders with widely different interests, and engage a broad range of opinions and comments on local circumstances and needs in a semi-quantitative form.

Methodology included an actor analysis, an actor network map and a set of semi-structured actor interviews. This involved a local stakeholder network establishment. This stakeholder network reaches out beyond the usual suspects we would expect to partner and it is represented by the following groups: local administration, local governmental services (e.g., forestry and agriculture extension), relevant non-governmental organizations (e.g., dedicated to environment or development) at local level, planners, developers, and individuals (e.g., long-term local residents).

The approach is focused on the non-technical barriers to success, whether they are social, institutional, financial, behavioral or regulatory, and how to overcome them. In this context, of a raising environmental awareness, the principal response from interviews demonstrated strong support for a strategic approach to soil management at the urban core and the countryside fringe. Herein, the contribution of urban soils to the provision of ecosystem services, in the framework of the Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), aroused a great deal of interest among the different stakeholders interviewed. However, the low level of community awareness and understanding of threats to soil natural capital and the long-term consequences of this were also recognized.