

A JOURNEY TO NO NET LAND TAKE

PlanningMatters webinars series
Highlights

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COLOPHON

Redaction

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In the framework of PlanningMatters, the unique European platform for exchanges between urban planning agencies from European cities, perspective.brussels organised five webinars in 2025 on how European cities, metropolitan areas and regions are implementing strategies towards no net land take. This document provides a summary of the discussions held during the sessions.

All episodes are available here:



https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEVe5MwTRXRF_BB27f8dM4qj2JXwLz-Xj

More information on PlanningMatters:

<https://perspective.brussels/en/studies-and-observations/belgium-and-international/planningmatters>

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EU

- > **EU governance and spatial planning:** Ensure EU policies and regulations systematically consider land-use impacts and involve urban planners in decision-making to align high-level objectives with on-the-ground realities.
- > **EU funding:** Focus next EU programming period 2028 -2034 on direct EU funding to support circular and compact urban development through innovative projects that reuse, adapt, and upgrade existing infrastructure, rather than building on new land.
- > **EU financing models:** Provide capacity-building activities for planners on better access to blended finance, compensation schemes, and EIB support to make sustainable land use financially viable and incentivize urban recycling.
- > **EU policy coherence and shared baselines:** Shared definitions, databases, statistics, and methodologies to strengthen linkages between EU policies affecting land use and ensure consistent, evidence-based planning across member states.
- > **Knowledge-sharing and capacity building:** Provide training and exchange programmes for planners and local authorities to integrate spatial planning within other EU policies with a spatial impact.

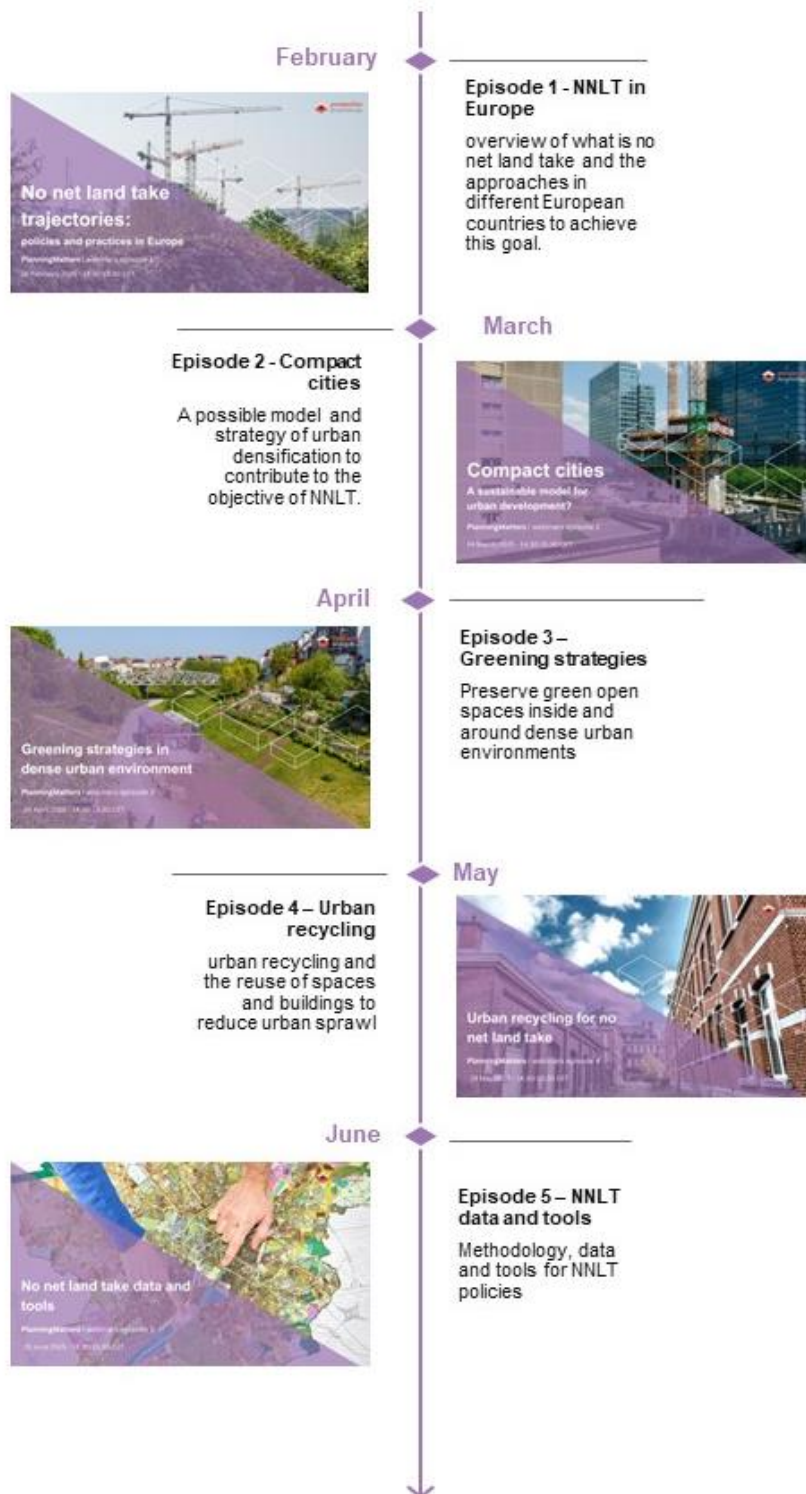
LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE WEBINAR SERIES

Lessons at EU level

The webinar series highlights that achieving NNLT by 2050 requires a coherent EU framework, supportive economic instruments, sustainable urban models, strong protection and expansion of green infrastructure, a shift towards circular urban recycling, and robust monitoring tools:

- > **Shared framework:** Progress towards NNLT requires a common EU-wide definition, clear policy alignment, and attention to spatial justice to ensure that no territory is left behind.
- > **Economic and policy tools:** Incentives, taxes, compensation mechanisms, and the integration of soil health into planning processes are important aspects to consider for steering land use practices.
- > **Sustainable urban models and the balance between multiple needs:** Compact and inclusive cities work best when housing, green spaces, and social integration are addressed together, with an emphasis on quality and cooperation rather than density alone.
- > **Green and circular approaches for resilience:** Protecting and expanding green infrastructure, prioritising renovation over demolition, and applying circular construction practices reduce environmental impacts and optimise resources.
- > **Data and monitoring for informed decision-making:** Geospatial inventories and territorial observatories provide the evidence base needed to monitor land use changes and design effective urban policies.

A JOURNEY TO NO NET LAND TAKE



EPISODE 1

The episode served as an introduction to the concept of No Net Land Take and deep dived into the different policy options available to achieve this European objective by 2050. Nicolas Rossignol, ESPON assistant director 'research and policy' presented the study “No net land take trajectories: policies and practices across Europe” on the implementation of No Net Land Take across nine European countries.



© ESPON

Highlights:

- > The need for well-defined plans and guidelines at the European level regarding EU policies influencing the goal of achieving NNLT by 2050. A shared definition of NNLT at the EU level would facilitate meaningful transnational discourse and collaboration.
- > Apply the “No territory left behind” principle for building NNLT trajectories in a concerted way: Not everyone has the same needs, but all needs must be heard to ensure spatial justice and equity approach.
- > The need for new tools and economic models for NNLT: new compensation tools and taxes or economic incentive mechanisms would be valuable instruments for transforming development and planning policies, which is a necessary condition for NNLT to succeed.

Read more:

<https://www.espon.eu/publications/no-net-land-take-europe-final-report>

EPISODE 2

The compact city model favours relatively high residential density in multifunctional neighbourhoods. Densification is often perceived as negative for quality of life, but this episode explored how Helsinki and Berlin have managed to optimise the use of urban space while preserving their residents' quality of life. Experts shared their experiences and best practices for creating denser, sustainable and desirable cities.



© Janne Hirvonen/ City of Helsinki

In Helsinki:

In Helsinki, inward and upward densification is viewed as an alternative to urban sprawl regionally, in a fast-growing region gaining 20,000 inhabitants every year. More than 60% of the land within Helsinki is owned by the city. Over the past 20 years, its strategy has focused on extending the inner city into former harbours areas, developing socially sustainable neighbourhoods, ensuring a housing mix, urban amenities, connections to the public transport network and access to green spaces. Future developments connect transport and planning: transformation of the 7 entry motorways into urban boulevards and new neighbourhoods connected to the light rail network. The Helsinki Nature Protection Programme aims to ensure at the same time that 10% of the land and the sea is protected by 2038 to avoid the loss of green spaces.

In Berlin:

The abandoned Blumengroßmarkt (flower market) in the centre of Berlin offered the opportunity to

transform a socially stigmatised neighbourhood into a more diverse urban area. The transformation followed the ideal of the mixed city facilitating the coexistence of different actors and using a co-creative approach. In a collaborative effort, in 2010 the local community and the district formulated a strategic urban development concept titled "Art and Creative Quarter" (KuKQ). The city launched a development concept competition focusing on shared spaces for social interaction, mixed uses, and new building typologies.



© City of Berlin

Highlights:

- > Trade-offs in urban planning: No urban model is perfect; every approach involves trade-offs. The discussion emphasized the need to mitigate trade-offs to achieve sustainable urban development and plans.
- > Helsinki's approach: Special attention is given to the housing mix and the social structure of newly developed areas. Sectorial policies (housing, green spaces) are integrated with urban planning to ensure the compact city model works effectively.
- > Berlin's Strategy: Berlin focuses on qualitative approaches when selling public land, prioritizing project quality and cooperation between public and private sectors. The emphasis is on mixing and integration rather than densification, aiming for sustainable urban planning.

Read more:

<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-and-creative-sectors/architecture/living-spaces/catalogue/berlin>

EPISODE 3

The focus of this episode was on green infrastructure and the preservation of open spaces inside and around dense urban environments. Turin and Brussels are inspiring examples of projects that integrate nature into the city and protect green spaces. Participants discovered how these initiatives contribute to improving urban resilience and the living environment of residents.

In Turin:



© City of Turin

Turin is part of the CoFarm4Cities project, which aims to combat urban sprawl by turning peri-urban agricultural, mixed-use or abandoned areas into land for urban farming in European cities using sustainable methods and stakeholder engagement. Turin has developed a network of urban gardens on land owned by the Municipality but with different governance models to manage them (managed by a citizen or managed by an NGO). In the case study presented Cascina Falchera, Turin is experimenting a new model of co-management by NGO and the municipality with a strong involvement of communities.

In Brussels:

The Brussels Canal runs for about 14 km across the Brussels-Capital Region through the valley of the river Senne, forming the region's longest undeveloped open space. The canal area is a

former industrial, socially deprived zone, characterised by many diverse, forgotten spaces. In 2015, the Canal Plan was launched to transform it into a productive, sustainable and inclusive urban mixed-use network of centralities. Since 2019, a complementary plan, the Canal Open Space Plan, has helped strengthen social and ecological coherence, and the quality of open spaces in the canal area. The Canal Open Space Plan guides open and green space developments, aiming to strengthen the canal area's identity, provide quality public spaces, and improve social links between districts divided by the canal.

Barcelona and Lyon

Barcelona and Lyon's own experiences and practices include the green infrastructure proposal of the Urban Master Plan (PDUM) of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area or the Lyon Metropolitan Territorial Cooperation Strategy to develop wooded and agri-natural spaces.

Highlights:

Preserving green open spaces requires:

- > Innovative governance models to facilitate the cooperation between different partners (public actors, NGOs, inhabitants, private actors)
- > Dedicated land-uses to protect and extend green infrastructures and deal with the competition between built functions and unbuilt functions. Land ownership is also important to consider.
- > Multi-scalar actions within the dense part of the city but also on the outskirts of the city.
- > Combining different types of greening strategies to combat land take and soil mineralization.

Read more:

www.cascinafalchera.it

<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/cofarm4cities/>

<https://urbact.eu/good-practices/canal-open-space-plan>

EPISODE 4

Urban recycling takes the form, among other things, of redeveloping brownfield sites, existing spaces and buildings for new uses. This episode focused on urban recycling and the reuse of spaces and buildings to reduce urban sprawl, with examples from Bratislava, Prague and Brussels. This webinar offered perspectives on how to bring abandoned spaces back to life and integrate them into the urban fabric.

In Bratislava:



© Metropolitan Institute of Bratislava

Bratislava is currently mapping unused sites as part of a larger strategy for reuse and brownfield development, currently under finalisation. The Metropolitan Institute of Bratislava, a think tank focused on architecture, urban planning, participation and strategic development, began the mapping of brownfields in 2016. This mapping effort is a key step in Bratislava's broader strategy to revitalize underused areas and manage urban growth. As part of this strategy, Bratislava plans to transform the former industrial zone in Mlynské nivy into a new city district, built on the principles of a compact and sustainable city with the emphasis on public green spaces parks and soft mobility modes. The "contribution methodology" for public infrastructure on privately-owned parts of brownfield may take the form of investment from private developers in key public assets like parks or schools.

In Prague:

Prague Institute of Planning and Development is involved in the redevelopment of Holešovice-Bubny, formerly the site of a freight station and shipping facilities into a new, modern district. To help determine the future layout of the area, IPR Prague commissioned a planning study in 2018. The resulting plan for one of Prague's largest and most important brownfields includes 11,000 apartments for 25,000 people. The first buildings could break ground in 2025, while completion is anticipated for 2040.

In Brussels:



© Brussels Bouwmeester

The BMA promotes spatial quality in urban development projects throughout Brussels from an independent position. Brussels was once known for tearing down its buildings and replacing them with new ones, but mindsets are quickly shifting. If in the past we preserved buildings mainly for their heritage value, today, even the most banal buildings such as office buildings hold a new kind of value: the value of the embodied energy stored in their materials. Over the past few years, many urban practitioners in Brussels have been actively experimenting with circular principles, each in their own way: experimenting with material reuse, creating new materials, anticipating future adaptation of the building as well as adapting the reuse of structures and buildings.

Highlights:

- > Despite very low city owned housing stocks and no percentage of affordable housing mandatory by law, Prague and Bratislava plan for a growing population by developing their cities on many remaining brownfields – mostly owned by private investors, while cities own roads, public spaces and transport lines. It adds complexity to the transformation process but allows for creative solutions.
- > Buildings renovation will always be more advantageous than demolition in terms of CO2 emissions, because it reuses part of the energy that was once invested. Extending the life of existing structures through renovation and re-use of materials is a key solution for reducing environmental impact and optimizing available resources.
- > Circular architecture starts from what's already there and builds on the qualities of what already exists. It requires changes at different levels: to integrate circular construction into existing regulations, rewire the construction industry, rethink the logistics chain of materials, and adapt the way we conceive architecture projects.

Read more:

<https://iprpraha.cz/project/66/bubny-zatory>

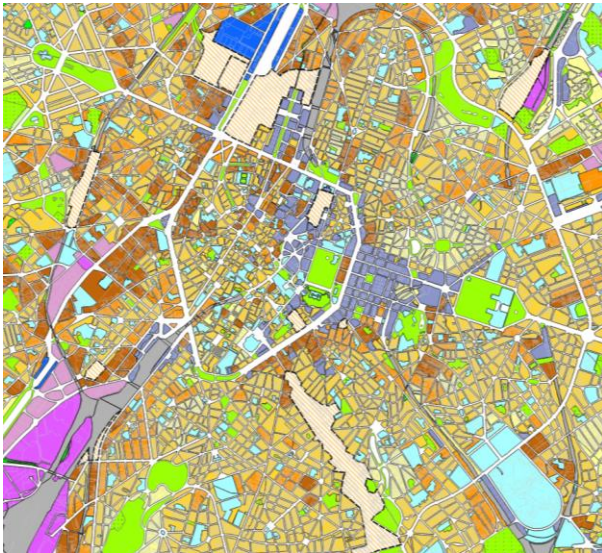
<https://bma.brussels/en/publications>



EPISODE 5

This episode focused on tools and data for no net land take.

In Brussels:



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The SitEx (Existing Situation) is an inventory of the actual occupancy of land and buildings throughout the Brussels region. The first SitEx map was published in Brussels in 2001 and precisely identifies the effective predominant activities by building and by plot, as well as a functional classification of green spaces and unbuilt areas. The data is based on field survey, and the resulting map is used to define the regulatory zones of the Brussels' Regional Land Use Plan (PRAS). The current PRAS regulates land use at block level, and sometimes even within blocks. It was published in 2001 and 25 years after its publication, it has become essential to rethink it in depth. As part of the process of amending the PRAS, the Brussels planning agency needs to produce a new SitEx map, but this time coupled with an evolving database that can become a tool for monitoring urban change, with a focus on urban density, functional mix and soil sealing. The main challenge of the project is completeness, as it is very difficult to obtain the same level of details for each building.

SPADES (European funded project):

In soil science, soil health is understood as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem. Soils are essential for ecosystem services, biodiversity & sustainable land use. But spatial planning has often overlooked soil functions, leading to problems such as erosion, loss of biodiversity & soil sealing and degradation. Partners in SPADES are working with 17 pilot regions and cities to identify and test spatial planning and soil assessment tools and ultimately equip planners with the capacity to integrate soil as a key element in spatial planning and contribute to improving soil health. SPADES takes a systemic and co-creative approach, using spatial planning as a starting point and integrating soil science to develop sustainable, soil-inclusive strategies.

Highlights:

- > Geospatial inventory of the actual occupation and use of the built and unbuilt areas in European cities are ambitious projects. Their initial aim is not necessarily to monitor land take but can help for it by allowing the monitoring of urban land-use changes. In the longer-term, the Brussels SitEx and its evolving database should provide the Brussels region with a territorial monitoring system to track changes in land-use and the built-environment and develop urban policies based on typologies.
- > 60% of European soils are unhealthy, which is why the EU set the goal to improve soil health by 2030. The problem is that soil health is still missing from spatial planning and design. Mainstreaming soil health considerations into local, national and EU policies and providing tools for planners to incorporate soil information into decision making processes will allow a better integration of soil into spatial planning.

Read more:

<https://geodata.environnement.brussels/client/view/?lang=fr>

<https://www.spades4soils.eu/>

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