

CASE STUDY

REPORT

Integrated development in action!

PROJECT

PUJ - Prato Urban Jungle

📍 Prato, Italy

TOPIC

Sustainable use of land and nature based solutions

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Prato - PUJ

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About PUJ

Prato Urban Jungle (PUJ) project carries out urban regeneration projects by developing areas with a high density of green, the so-called urban jungles. Urban Jungles are green re-designed areas, immersed in the urban structure, that multiply the natural capacity of plants to abate pollutants, while restoring unused soil and space to community fruition, turning buildings into urban jungles. By doing so, PUJ aims to achieve two main objectives, (i) the regeneration of disused and declining urban areas through the reallocation of buildings and spaces to new, more creative and sustainable use, (ii) the creation of community green hubs, providing open spaces, social quarters and cultural nodes.

The Prato Urban Jungle was selected as a case study because of its adoption of a community-led approach to designing, developing and maintaining the Urban Jungles.



Illustration of the Master Plan for the Municipality of Prato developed by Boeri Architects in 2018 @ City of Prato

Like other European cities, the City of Prato is facing several challenges related to poor air quality, heat island effects, social exclusion, poverty and degraded urban environments. Next to this, Prato hosts many abandoned industrial sites, resulting from the economic crisis of the last ten years. Therefore, Prato Urban Jungle tackles issues related to the urban environment and challenges connected to the climate crisis that many cities are currently facing. More precisely, Prato Urban Jungle enhances urban greening, by delivering direct and tangible environmental, economic and social benefits to the entire city.

Context

Prato Urban Jungle was developed following the new master plan adopted by the [Municipality of Prato](#) in 2018. Among its themes, the environmental objective is articulated in the urban forestry strategy that includes the

analysis of the benefits of urban green environment by the Florence-based think tank [PNAT](#) and a Forestry Action Plan developed by the Milanese [Boeri Architects](#). In the framework of Prato Urban Jungle, urban jungles are tested in three pilot areas: (i) in a company-owned area - Consiag Estra Headquarter (ii) in a highly populated and social housing area - via Turchia and (iii) in a former industrial area with underutilised spaces - Macrolotto 0. By dint of the involvement of innovative start-ups and experts in environmental issues, such as [greenApes](#), [Treedom](#) and [Legambiente](#), these urban jungles will be developed together with citizens and local enterprises through co-creation workshops, educational activities, gamification practices and innovative governance models.

In this case study will be described how Prato Urban Jungle was delivered in accordance with the Integrated Territorial Development approach, meaning as bringing together spatially sensitive policies programme plans to support economic, social, and environmental change. In detail, it will be analysed how place-based, multi-sectoral and multi-governance and participation principles were taken into account.

Description

Co-designing place-based solutions

Prato Urban Jungle is strongly rooted in the three pilot areas. Apart from the innovative design, which catalysed great public interest, these pilot areas worked as interfaces spaces, in which innovation and experimentation took place. In this regard, one of the main achievements of the project was the [Junglathon LAB](#), held in each of the three areas. The Junglathon LAB was an innovative approach applied to a design thinking process, aiming at raising awareness, citizen participation, civic imagination and co-planning of sustainable futures. The Junglathon represents a fundamental path of the Prato Urban Jungle project, dedicated to the participation and involvement of citizens, which involved ethnographic research with observation and interviews that brought to the development of co-creation workshops. Through the Junglathon LAB it was possible to target the specific circumstances of the places and engage local residents as active participants in development and implementation. Therefore, the Junglathon LAB was held in order to grasp the local needs, challenges and opportunities in the three pilot areas, and adjust the initial designs made by PNAT and Boeri Architects accordingly. In fact, from the research in via Turchia and Macrolotto 0, emerged that without a stimulus to community life, relationships internal and external, the project is bound to run aground. Net of the possible positive effects on the climate and environmental point of view, it is the cohesion among people that makes it possible for the intervention to not only survive, but even regenerate and incubate new virtuous practices for the neighbourhood and for the city.

A digital platform for a good urban governance

Another strength of Prato Urban Jungle is the engagement in the consortium of innovative start-ups, like Treedom.

[...] since the co-designing of Prato Urban Jungle, we thought that one element that would make our project well appreciated and evaluated by the program was the involvement of innovative start-ups and companies.

Besnik Mehmeti, Municipality of Prato

Treedom, together with the Municipality of Prato, developed [Prato Forest City](#): the new strategic approach to urban planning. The platform empowers citizens, associations and local businesses to promote urban greening, by presenting an urban forestry initiative or through direct donations. Prato Forest City is the new strategic approach to urban planning developed by the Municipality of Prato together with [Treedom](#), a technical partner of Prato Urban Jungle. Prato Forest City allows every citizen to monitor and actively participate in the actions of the Municipality for the promotion of urban green. The platform helps in finding information on how to collaborate with the Municipality. Everyone can either donate in support of an urban forestry intervention, but also propose a new forestry initiative themselves. Prato Forest City represents a new form of participation that can help the City of Prato to manage conflicting interests, share responsibilities and find innovative solutions while also reshaping and maintaining urban spaces and forming new alliances to create integrated city spaces. In this regard, Prato Forest City acts as an organisational interface between municipality, civil society and private partners, allows cooperation towards the ambitious goal of planting 190.000 trees in Prato, one for every citizen, as foreseen by the [Action Plan on Urban Forestry](#) inserted in the new [Operational Plan](#) of the City back in 2018.

Through Prato Forest City we are trying to ease the existing procedure to allow an easier collaboration between the Municipality, association and citizens.

Besnik Mehmeti, Municipality of Prato

Promote widespread sustainable development

Prato Urban Jungle, additionally, aims to increase social inclusion and promote widespread sustainable development of the urban environment. This makes Prato Urban Jungle approaches multi-dimensional challenges, like education, awareness raising and leadership and responsibility. In order to overcome these difficulties it is often required a cross-sectoral partnership. In this regard, partners like greenApes and Legambiente have joined the consortium.

[greenApes](#) supports virtuous behaviour through gamification and real-life rewards by local producers, for example targeting organic producers, local stores, sustainable brands and providers, which were app features further fostered within the Prato Urban Jungle project. Citizens will earn points by inspiring the community with their green actions. The city will benefit from this incentive-based citizen engagement scheme because it enables the achievement of broader environmental objectives. The application enhances access to, and use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT), fostering the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors, promoting climate change adaptation, and preserving the environment.

greenApes bridge the individual actions with the common results of the city, trying to deploy a more sustainable infrastructure, engaging people on broader environmental objectives, and enabling a radical forestation approach.

Gregory Eve, greenApes

Legambiente, instead, sowed a new environmental culture capable of understanding the importance of greenery in our cities. Accordingly, Legambiente delivered urban walks, seminars, talks, courses and toolkits all aiming to underline the importance of trees and biodiversity in our urban environment. In addition to that, the main actions of Legambiente took place in schools. Ad-hoc educational activities and materials were prepared and made available to students and teachers. By doing this, the Municipality of Prato is investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning in order to form a new responsible and sustainable generation of citizens.



The "Green Generation" toolkit developed by Legambiente @ City of Prato

Sustainability and upscaling

Most importantly, the specific in greenApes of Prato, as well as the digital platform Prato Forest City are designed to remain at the disposal of the citizens and the Municipality. With this the Municipality of Prato will continue to spur sustainable behaviours and urban forestry activities, also through the use of AIRQino, the environmental monitoring units installed by [CNR-IBE](#), together with the digital-twin tool of the city which provides instruments for the analysis and perspective vision of environmental phenomena. These will continue to provide useful information for decision-making choices and directing investments where there will be a greater impact. The City of Prato has already created a network for exchanging good practices. One partnership was created with the City of Taichung in Taiwan, but also is now partner of an H2020 project - UPSURGE - concerning the analysis, selection and evaluation of Nature Based Solutions (Nbs) that help cities reduce environmental pollution and restore the urban environment.



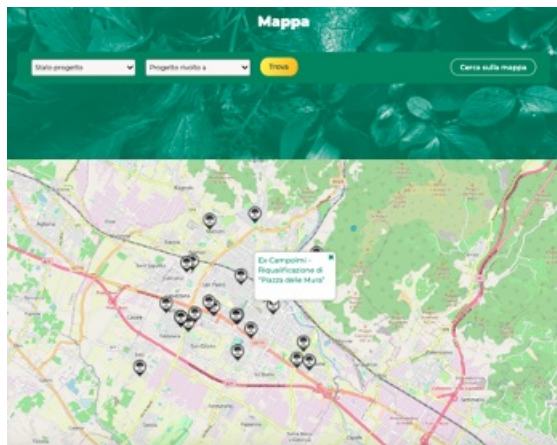
greenApes has created a specific section for the Municipality of Prato @ City of Prato

Nature of integration

Sustainable urban development requires a shift in how urban authorities approach urban and regional planning. In this regard, the Integrated Territorial Development approach proposes relevant alternative solutions. It relies on the “simultaneous and fair consideration of all concerns and interests relevant to urban development”.

In this vein, the three pilot areas of Prato Urban Jungle were designed in a way to become iconic places in Prato and beyond, also highlighting the strong place-based approach. This was achieved by focusing urban strategies at a coherent scale, in order to foster endogenous urban transformation and reduce socio-economic inequalities, as evident in the forestation of the Via Turchia social housing estates of the Macrolotto 0 market in the neighbourhood of the chinese community. It is so that by involving all urban actors to strengthen local democracy and letting citizens have a say in a process that would affect their daily lives.

Importantly, such development and approach require tackling challenges jointly across all levels of urban and spatial policy. Accordingly, the ambition of the Municipality of Prato of planting one tree per every citizen, as foreseen by the [Action Plan on Urban Forestry](#), is very challenging. This calls for the cooperation of all societal actors, including the civil society and the private sectors. For that matter, Treedom, together with the Municipality, have developed Prato Forest City, allowing horizontal cooperation and co-governance processes.



Through Prato Forest City everyone can initiate an urban forestry project or donate @ City of Prato

Lastly, Integrated Territorial Development requires a multi-sectoral approach that aims to overcome the political silos that do not take into account co-dependencies or interdependencies with other sectors. Accordingly, Prato Urban Jungle intersected different kinds of professionalism, among others social scientists, architects, urban planners, designers, environmental researchers and botanists, but especially with the multi-actor partnership and the nature of cross-sectoral integration.

Takeaways

- All activities from the Prato Urban Jungle project try to reach out to different segments of the population. For instance, the pilot areas reach out to employees, inhabitants and tenants. Prato Forest City and greenApes, reach out to citizens as well, but also to local businesses.
- The digital application greenApes shows us how engaging citizens through fun activities where competitions and challenges are followed by awards is a successful strategy for promoting widespread sustainable development of the urban environment.
- The activities employed and the materials developed by Legambiente both provide a theoretical framework which is supported by practical activities that allow people to get their hands dirty and learn by doing the importance of greening in the urban environment.
- Prato Forest City eased the current procedure of collaboration between public bodies and citizens, associations or private businesses, by empowering the latter to take action and to promote urban forestry initiatives.

Further reading and selected key resources

- [A Junglathon to imagine your urban forest](#)
- [Urban Jungle: Prato truly means it](#)
- [Prato Forest City: a tree for every citizen](#)
- [Prato rewards sustainable behaviours](#)

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