

HEALTH & BLUE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

BEGIN

City-to-City Learning Programme 2021: Key Takeaways

Hosts: The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council & The City of Dordrecht

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BGI & HEALTH: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Best practices developed to implement effective BGI and deliver improved health benefits

The scientific evidence that BGI can deliver multifunctional health benefits is clear. Pleasant green spaces encourage cycling, walking and running, while well lit, well-connected parks offer a safe space for sports. When they have green, shaded walking routes right on their doorsteps, populations tend to be more active, with knock-on benefits for obesity, cardiovascular disease and emotional wellbeing.

There are correlations with life-long improved health outcomes when children spend early years in nature. When local parks have biodiverse spaces and infrastructure to play, children enjoy health benefits. Multiple generations are also drawn to green spaces, creating opportunities for community building.

BGI also has benefits for environmental health. Trees and water reduce the heat of the summer sun on the city with a stronger cooling effect than that from artificial shade. Green spaces also help dampen the noise of urban living and filter pollution, increasing air quality and improving associated asthma and cardiovascular risks.

The following key takeaways were demonstrated during two recent projects to improve public spaces with BGI. In Bradford the city is co-producing BGI projects with local communities to improve health outcomes and support equality, while the Dutch city of Dordrecht is using BGI to revitalise the Dordwijkzone, a large park in the center of the city.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Mainstreaming BGI for health in planning

Mainstreaming health considerations in the design, planning and implementation of all BGI projects would maximise the positive impact of BGI. Bradford and Dordrecht highlighted the importance of **considering the multiplicity of health impacts of any given project** – from biodiversity to water quality and mobility to mental health. A **Health in All Policies** approach would ensure that health is mainstreamed by systematically assessing the health implications of decisions across all policy areas. This could mean

working closely with local health authorities during the BGI planning process to ensure that health impacts are considered from early design stages. Bradford, for example, are taking a whole systems approach to improving health, looking at the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the population and using **using BGI to address health inequalities**. As BGI also has the potential to impact socioeconomic factors, it should be considered and incorporated from a multiplicity of policy angles.

Changing mindsets and achieving buy-in from all groups

For effective BGI, **it's crucial to engage the public and local communities every step of the way**. By working with communities to co-produce BGI, the results should meet the real needs of local residents and will be better utilized and accepted. During an **effective co-production** process citizens feel 'equality of input, agency to change, and a sense of reciprocity' (Shahid Islam, Senior Research Fellow, ActEarly Bradford). This means that local residents feel that

their input is valued highly, are able to effectively change the results, and that they will benefit from the project. To achieve this, **citizens should be involved from the early stages**, through consultation and citizen science projects. By running sessions with the general public, planners and project leaders can ensure that the long term BGI vision is relevant, and can empower the public to recognize the potential their blue and green spaces hold.



Building political support and securing initial funding

Political support and initial funding are crucial for launching BGI initiatives. By **involving universities and research centers** to evidence the health benefits from incorporating BGI into planning, BGI advocates can build support. Bradford's ActEarly, for example, conduct community-driven research and robust evaluation of projects to support health interventions. Additionally, the Born in Bradford project has tracked thousands of children from birth to better understand the causes of illness, providing valuable data that can help **make healthy living environments an important part of the political agenda.**

By thinking big and linking local BGI ambitions to regional and national plans, projects can build political support. In Dordrecht BGI interventions are linked to local plans to grow and densify the city by building 10,000 new households. By combining population growth with BGI for health, the city's growth plan can also be an opportunity to increase quality of life. BGI interventions can also be effective at smaller scales. **By baking BGI ideas into building regulations and policy,** it is possible to ensure that climate adaptation, health, and biodiversity initiatives are standard in every project.

Ensuring future maintenance of BGI

For BGI to continue to have a positive impact on health, it needs to be properly maintained and looked after into the future. Fundamental to this is **ensuring a continuous source of funding.** For example, in Dordrecht BGI interventions are being parcelled in with upcoming road maintenance projects to ensure long term sustainability. It's also important to achieve

buy-in and **support from the local community or sports groups to ensure BGI is looked after.** In Dordrecht, local sports groups who use the BGI spaces are involved in their management and long-term upkeep, helping ensure maintenance while offering additional co-benefits for community and social health.

Working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders

BGI projects are by their nature multidisciplinary, requiring **input from multiple different departments and a wide spectrum of stakeholders.** These could include health agencies, research organisations, universities, multiple departments at regional or national governments, and utility companies. It's also important to **engage with local citizen groups and grassroots organisations.**

An effective, integrated approach that addresses the needs of all stakeholders is crucial for success. Although engaging with such a range of stakeholders can be challenging, **by effectively collaborating relevant organisations can share expertise, networks and strengths.**

BGI & HEALTH WORKSHOP

Host Cities: The City of Bradford & Dordrecht

This City-2-City Online Learning Workshop was organised in the framework of the BEGIN project. BEGIN's aim is to create more attractive, enjoyable and sustainable climate-proofed cities. The workshop is part of a series of peer-learning workshops during which host cities from the BEGIN network learn from each other's best practices in various blue green infrastructure (BGI) challenge areas, brainstorm new ideas and think about the next steps for their BGI practices.

During the interactive BGI & Health workshop, Bradford and Dordrecht shared their experiences and results implementing BGI projects in their cities. This document outlines the key lessons learnt.

Other workshops and briefs in this series:

Past workshops: BGI & Biodiversity, BGI & The Business Case

Coming up: BGI & Art and Culture

Reference this document:

De La Haye, A., Van Herk, S., Aivalioti, S., Giral, P., (2021): Blue Green Infrastructure & Health: Key Takeaways; BEGIN city-2-city learning programme 2021

