

ART & COMMUNITY AND BLUE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

BEGIN

City-to-City Learning Programme 2021: Key Takeaways

Host: The City of Gothenburg

Authors: Amber De La Haye, Sofia Aivalioti, Sebastiaan Van Herk, Pere Giralt
(Bax & Company)



BGI & ART AND COMMUNITY: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Best practices to integrate artistic practice and community groups in the development and delivery of successful BGI

Replacing traditional grey infrastructure with blue and green infrastructure (BGI) often requires entirely new ways of working. Projects need to be interdisciplinary, entailing the cooperation of several city departments. The community also needs to be brought on board, as BGI projects can involve significant changes at street level.

Using artistic output and drawing on the artistic process during development can springboard creative solutions, new ways of working, and deep and meaningful community involvement. While the time investment is higher, effective communication with the community has a multiplicity of benefits – from fresh ideas to acceptance of change and even long-term involvement in BGI maintenance.

During the BEGIN project, the cities participating have found new ways of engaging their communities and weaving art throughout the BGI planning and delivery process. The City of Gothenburg has worked in tandem with local people to prototype and plan a new water-based park for the city, the Jubilee Park. The process behind the Jubilee Park has centred community needs and voices in the planning, delivery and management.

Gothenburg also worked with a local artist from the University of Gothenburg to involve residents in the process to design a new sustainable storm water garden. The outcomes of these and other BEGIN projects demonstrated some crucial considerations when working with art and the community.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Diverse solutions are born from diverse teams

To build BGI solutions that work for everyone, it's crucial that **diverse voices from all sectors of the community are represented**. In Gothenburg, a young team from different backgrounds and neighbourhoods were selected to run the Jubilee Park, ensuring that the park offers opportunities for everybody, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity

– with examples including a graffiti wall and skateboard lessons. With such diverse offerings, the final park will attract more users. Involving art and community groups in BGI implementation can also help **break down silos**, and **cross-disciplinary teams** will lead to better solutions in this sector-spanning space.

Empower communities to create their own agenda

Involving communities takes time and resources but is the **best route to acceptance of the project**. Once a community has contributed meaningfully to the design of a BGI project, **they feel a sense of ownership**, can act as BGI ambassadors, and **are likely to contribute to long-term maintenance**. In Gothenburg's Jubilee park, over 100 residents from

children as young as five to a carpenter in his 70s have been part of the community team building the water-focused 'nose in the mud' playground and classroom. To get the most out of ongoing workshops with the community, it helps to **invest time defining roles, building trust**, and ensuring everyone is open to trying new ideas and methods.



Apply the creative approach to a complex problem

Involving art in BGI means more than simply including a sculpture in the final design. Through [Cultural Adaptations](#) artist Ulrika Jansson was embedded into the development of a Sustainable Stormwater garden for a residential block in Brämaregarden to **catalyse creative thinking with residents**. The artistic process helped ensure sensory, social, and aesthetic effects

were considered alongside drainage and planting. By following an artistic approach, **projects can look deep into the complexities of a place and bend and challenge the ordinary ways of working** and maintaining it. This is especially useful with BGI, which often requires new, innovative ways of working.

Prepare to act fast, be agile, and iterate

When working with artists and the community, it pays to **rethink a project's timescale**. Alongside long-term development, breaking the project down into fast, small **prototype stages** helps get the community excited and involved. Jubilee Park has begun by testing out initial ideas, including a sauna, swimming pool, and sailing to understand if they work for the residents - the prototypes that make the cut will form part of the final park. The young crew are brimming with ideas, and making space for **quick execution** and

adaption to use helps the creativity flow. Similarly, **keeping the options open as long as possible** in the co-planning process helps identify what works, creates ownership of solutions, and results in BGI better tailored to community needs. Artists and community workers highlighted frustrations with the slow timelines of city administration. While on the ground they could transform a space in a week, if permits from the city were necessary projects could stretch into months.

Bring everyone onboard

Just as it's important to consider native biodiversity when replanting, building **BGI informed by local culture can give new developments a real sense of place**, rooted in history. The Sustainable Stormwater project, for example, incorporated local mythic and aesthetic character with design elements drawn from ravens and Islamic gardens owing to a local mosque and a mound named for the bird.

The City of Bradford's Fish on a Bicycle Land Art drew on a **local language** and a love of cycling spurred on by the arrival of the Tour de France to raise publicity for river clean ups. To pave the way for long term engagement, it also helps to **involve an artist already embedded within a local area**, as Aberdeen have done through The Burnie Journey, which works with a local artist using song to raise flood awareness.

BGI & ART AND COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Host City: The City of Gothenburg

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 BGI & Art and Community workshop, The City and University of Gothenburg shared their experiences and results using artistic practice and engaging the community to implement BGI projects. This document outlines the key lessons learnt.

Other workshops and briefs in this series:

BGI & Health, BGI & Biodiversity, BGI Business Cases

Reference this document:

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

