



GREEN CARE MANIFESTO

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Universitatea
Transilvania
din Braşov



CONSIDERING that

Increasing frequency of extreme events and changes in environmental conditions due to climate change and biodiversity loss deeply affect human health and well-being, accentuate social inequalities and require working with nature and ecosystems for finding solutions;

urban dwellers will comprise 2/3 of the world population by 2030 and urban lifestyles are often connected to sedentary life-styles, higher use of technological devices, deteriorated social connections, higher crime rates, inequality, unemployment, lower air quality. While rural outmigration leads to a decrease in services and employment opportunities, loss of social ties and abandonment of rural landscapes;

worldwide Non-communicable Diseases (NCD) such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, stress, cardiovascular diseases, neurodegenerative diseases, depressive disorder, substance abuse, are becoming principal causes of death and of an increase in years lived with disabilities;

the incidence of NCD coupled with the current and expected ageing of the population (particularly in Europe), drastically increases private and public expenditure for health and long-term care;

CONSIDERING ALSO that

there is a growing recognition about the positive benefits of the interaction with natural environments on stress related, chronic and psychological diseases increased by urbanisation processes, modern lifestyles and working conditions;

contact and proximity to healthy green spaces are recognized effective in providing physiological, psychological and social health benefits to people;

the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic have shifted the focus towards and have amplified recognition of these benefits;

CONSIDERING ALSO that

the concept of Green Care helps to embed individual and collective health, well-being and social inclusion in natural, restored and newly created ecosystems and natural elements;

Green Care initiatives provide health, wellbeing and social care services to a wide variety of beneficiaries and also create broader positive social, economic and environmental impacts;

Green Care initiatives represent new type of entrepreneurship opportunities, innovative professions and green jobs both in rural and urban areas;



WE, the partners and Alliance members of the GREEN4C project, invite other EU projects, researchers and practitioners on the field Green Care and Nature-Based Therapies, TO JOIN US IN SIGNING THIS MANIFESTO that represent key points for action. The purpose of these recommendations is to centre multi-sectoral attention on the health, wellbeing, and social inclusion benefits of nature, with a focus on green spaces in both urban and non-urban areas. The recommendations are provided for different stakeholders but mainly for policy makers, Green Care services and their direct beneficiaries, professionals, land managers, funders, supporters, and researchers and scientists involved or interested in Green Care.



KEY ACTION POINTS:

1

Recognize, promote and communicate the effectiveness of Green Care interventions and the importance of contact with Nature for Public Health

Policy makers should recognise and give more visibility to the health, well-being, and social inclusion benefits provided by nature to achieve healthier, more inclusive and resilient communities. Disseminating and communicating the importance of these benefits to the public would highlight the multiple positive impacts of Green Care initiatives and promote diverse financing opportunities.

Public health authorities should acknowledge preventive health, mental health and social care as central aspects of public health and provide adequate funding, including implementation of nature-based interventions for addressing related challenges.

All relevant Green Care stakeholders and practitioners should make efforts to communicate to the wider public about the importance of nature-based interventions for health, well-being, and social inclusion and increase citizen awareness about the topic.

Scientists should continue to gather evidence of the effectiveness (also economic) of nature-based interventions and also tailor dissemination of research results to policy makers. The potential of preventive nature-based health and social care interventions to reduce public health related costs should be more seriously considered and further promoted.

Besides public actors, **private healthcare and insurance companies** can promote the application of Green Care approaches by recommending them to their clients and actively collaborating with service providers and practitioners to develop innovative collaborations.

2

Integrate health, well-being and social inclusion concepts into nature management planning and practices

In collaboration with Green Care providers and healthcare professionals, researchers and practitioners in the field of natural resource management should develop and integrate the criteria and principles focusing on human health and well-being into the natural resource management planning and practices (e.g., through the assessment of accessibility and adequate trails, suitable forest structure, species selection, etc.)

Local governments should support the creation, identification, and management of green spaces in rural, urban and peri-urban areas (e.g. unused/abandoned and brownfield sites) with the special attention to health, well-being and social inclusion benefits, aiming to build more resilient communities in urban and peri-urban areas.

Landscape architects, urban planners and local governments should integrate the perspective of green care and nature-based interventions for health and well-being into the conceptualization, design and development of smart cities and urban regeneration to enhance health, well-being and social benefits while keeping an eye on issues of green and health equity.

3

Be mindful of issues of access, equity and fair distribution of benefits

Policy makers should develop policies and regulations to facilitate public access to both public and private resources (i.e., land, natural resources, infrastructures) recognising the right to clean environment and health, well-being, and social inclusion benefits of nature. State, local public authorities, forest communities, and non-profit organizations should pay special attention and obtain support to promote Green Care activities on their land.

Local authorities should be mindful of risks of green gentrification and address related social inequalities in the access to green spaces and consequently, access to better health and well-being. Better governance to avoid the possible negative outcomes should be achieved by, for example, equal green distribution in urban planning strategies.

4

Recognize the diverse range of contributions by Green Care providers, encourage their development, and facilitate access to funding

The direct impact of Green Care initiatives is mostly connected to individual health, well-being and social inclusion. **Policy makers** should support the study and encourage the broader societal, environmental, and economic impacts (e.g. enhanced responsible forest management, improved social capital in rural areas, support to local development, creation of green jobs, etc.) brought by Green Care initiatives highlighting their multifunctionality.

Policy makers and public health authorities should contribute to distributing the positive impacts at a large scale in a systematic way. They should also foster in-depth studies of successful examples to better inform policy leading to the uptake and replication of similar approaches and to the recognition of the contributions and positive impacts of Green Care initiatives in achieving international targets, including the Sustainable Development Goals, on both environmental and social dimensions.

Policy makers should recognize the potential for diverse innovation (i.e. technological, organizational, institutional, social, and nature-based) by Green Care providers, in line with the European Green Deal. Green Care initiatives can be understood as one of the change agents of the new socio-economic welfare system. Innovation and entrepreneurship in Green Care should be facilitated and nurtured through knowledge hubs and innovation accelerators. There is a need to create environments and settings that support prototyping, development, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed Green Care activities and provide access to learning, mentorship, grant and initial investments in Green Care initiatives.

In order to contribute positively to the society and engage in continuous innovation, Green Care providers need adequate recognition. **Policy makers** should work towards more institutional and legal clarity and recognition on the role and responsibilities of Green Care providers. It is important to understand the needs of these actors to secure the sustainability of their initiatives over time.

Public actors should ensure financing opportunities for Green Care initiatives, through diverse means. **Policy makers** can also support innovative payment mechanisms, such as payments for ecosystem services. It must be clear that not all Green Care activities can sustain themselves based on market demand and be financially sustainable through beneficiaries' payments alone. Health budgets can contribute to making public funds available for complementary health care and social inclusion programmes, managed by local organisations and associations of relevant stakeholders with new ideas and means. Structural funds, such as those connected to the implementation of Community-Led Local Development, can support Green Care initiatives and make them easily accessible to a wider set of beneficiaries at a local level.

5

Avoid silos, create multidisciplinary and multi-departmental collaborations and involve citizens

Green Care service providers, researchers, and the conventional health care sector, as well as all other Green Care stakeholders should seek collaborative arrangements and interdisciplinary learning for gathering evidence on the effectiveness of Green Care approaches. Integrating green prescriptions into conventional treatment options of health professionals, for example written advice to a patient to be physically active in a green space - should be encouraged.

Researchers should support Green Care initiatives in monitoring and evaluation of the impacts, as well as in conducting longitudinal and systematic impact studies. The health, well-being, and social inclusion-related impacts of Green Care initiatives should be scientifically evaluated, e.g. through randomised clinical trials or natural experiments, and documented for comparative analysis across countries and populations groups. Scientists can support practitioners by developing robust methodologies and user-friendly impact assessment tools to collect data and monitor their impacts.

Policy makers should focus on making funds available for the development and continuous research on the topic of Green Care and nature-based interventions, to ensure the development of science-based results.

Researchers, landowners/managers, and policy makers need to identify, analyse, and address trade-offs, possible conflicts, as well as synergies between traditional land uses and Green Care activities to improve governance, land use management and planning. It is important that innovative arrangements enable the creation and recognition of new values, and that there are mechanisms in place for compensating land managers when there is a possible or temporary economic loss.

Policy makers should aim to facilitate these processes by creating spaces and providing platforms for promoting knowledge transfer within and among initiatives, sharing good practice and evidence of impacts across initiatives, as well as enabling continuous experimentation, monitoring, and evaluation of the results. These platforms should support greater networking opportunities at different levels and across sectors.

Policy makers and municipalities should encourage social innovation and citizen participation in Green Care activities. This ranges from access and active use of green spaces by citizens to direct involvement in green space management (e.g., park and community garden management, trail maintenance), citizen science (e.g., bird watching, recognition and reporting of invasive species), open-source nature trails or biodiversity, and database development. Citizen engagement enhances good governance and empowers a wide range of target groups and can also enable creative ways to monitor the impacts with new and inclusive approaches. In addition, citizen awareness on ecological issues and land use management should be promoted.

6

Collaborate for the development of common quality standards and protocols for clinical interventions using nature

National authorities and research organisations should lead the process of defining common quality standards and systems of quality assurance and periodically revise them to ensure quality of the service providers and of the Green Care services. Standards and certification have to be developed through consultation with different parties (including the Green Care practitioners) to avoid stifling innovation processes, support the emergence of innovative ideas, and to help communicate the validity of Green Care approaches to the broader public.

Through stakeholder consultation processes, scientists and health care practitioners should lead the process of creating protocols for clinical interventions that fall under Green Care.



ABOUT GREEN4C

The Green4C (Green for Care) Knowledge Alliance, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, is a three-year long project (2020-2022) that aims to promote nature-based health and social care through university business alliances, and to support innovation and entrepreneurship. In this project, we use Green Care as an umbrella term, covering a range of organised activities that promote the intimate connection between nature and human well-being and the use of natural environments in a conscious, ethical, and active way, to address different public health and social challenges and needs, i.e. for health and wellbeing, social inclusion, education, and recreation.

The partners involved in this project include the University of Padua (UNIPD – coordinating institution) in partnership with Etifor | Valuing Nature, Elevate Health, the Universitatea Transilvania din Braşov (UNITBV), Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS), Meath Partnership, Bundesforschungszentrum für Wald (BFW), the European Forest Institute (EFI), Wageningen University and Research (WUR), Forest Design, the University of British Columbia (UBC) and University College Dublin (UCD).



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