

## Overview

This brochure summarises the findings of the Graz-based case study **Bio-/Diverse Edible City Graz (BESt Graz)**, conducted within the Horizon Europe project PLANET4B. It is based on transdisciplinary research, policy analysis, stakeholder workshops and interviews, and a co-creative development process. It also builds on the pilot community garden GAIA Gartenberg, initiated with and for women\*. The BESt Graz brings together ecological, social, cultural, and economic dimensions into one interconnected concept. At its core lies the question of how biodiversity can be strengthened while ensuring equitable access to (edible) green spaces, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups.

The project team gratefully thanks to all who contributed and supported PLANET4B with their knowledge, experience, and dedication.

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## BETTER DECISIONS FOR BIODIVERSITY AND PEOPLE



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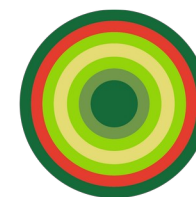
## Bio-/Diverse Edible City Graz

Ideas for Inclusive Policy Measures to Promote  
(Agro-)Biodiversity and Reduce Social Inequality

Let's grow together



Graz-based Case Study  
of the Horizon Europe Research Project



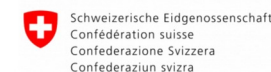
**PLANET4B**  
<https://planet4b.eu/>



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## Biodiversity – Social Justice – Decision Making

The EU-funded research project PLANET4B focuses on the social dimensions of biodiversity. Its goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how people perceive biodiversity and the role this plays in decision-making at individual, political, and societal levels. Together with international partners from academia, politics, and civil society, new approaches have been tested that encourage a change in mindsets and promote transformative agency.

<https://planet4b.eu/case-studies/>

In Graz, IFZ (Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture), in cooperation with Forum Urban Gärtnern (FUG), conducted the case study titled "Bio-/Diverse Edible City Graz" (BEST Graz). The study focused on two interlinked levels:



### Community Level:

A community garden initiated by and for women\* served as a space for exchange, support, and empowerment, and as a setting for engaging with the topic of biodiversity and transformative learning.

### City level:

Further development of the "Edible City" concept to inform policy processes – with an emphasis on enhancing biodiversity and equitable access to green space for all, especially women\* and other disadvantaged groups.



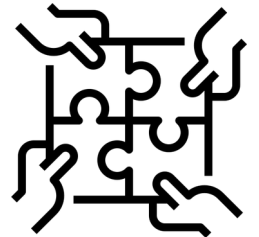
To support this, so-called learning communities were established to explore the various themes of BEST Graz.

## 11. Cross-sectoral Collaboration between Government, Private Sector & Civil Society

The interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, and multi-level concept of the BEST relies on coordinated cooperation among many actors: Graz city departments and offices, companies from various sectors, social enterprises (including cultural), health, education and research institutions, non-profits and civil society groups.

### Proposed Measures:

- A Food Council serves as an interface between policymaking/administration and the economy, social sector, and civil society. It reflects the diversity in both the population and topics related to food. It includes a steering committee and project/working groups and can integrate existing municipal advisory bodies (e.g. on agriculture, conservation, migration, culture).
- Regular formats for dialogue and exchange are established – both within the Food Council and with the public (e.g. aligned with the Climate Pact).
- An information platform and comprehensive advisory system are developed with input from diverse actors and experts, incorporating existing services. All materials and services are barrier-free, practice relevant, and easy to access and understand.
- Organisations receive strong support in implementing measures for the Bio-/Diverse Edible City concept (e.g. through grants, user agreements, and other forms of assistance).
- Specific indicators for the BEST are developed, regularly updated, and continuously evaluated.



## 10. Regional Value Creation and Circular Economy

In a globalised world, competitiveness, resilience, and food security are key – especially in times of multiple crises. A sustainable economy depends on both on ecological transformation (e.g. renewable energy, circular economy, climate neutrality, sufficiency) and on social justice (e.g. affordability, access, inclusive labour markets).

### Proposed Measures:

- The food supply system in Graz is oriented more regionally, with a stronger focus on environmentally friendly production. The supply rate of (organic) food from the Central Styrian region – taking into account transport distances (food miles) – is significantly increased. Food waste is clearly reduced.
- The market share of food from short/direct supply chains and from innovative producer-consumer networks is greatly expanded. Both business-driven and non-profit initiatives are supported with shared infrastructure, coordinated logistics for large kitchens, food hubs, and food incubators, as well as funding for greener operations.
- Both employees and entrepreneurs who face (intersectional) discrimination – whether due to age, origin, disability, or gender – are supported, while discriminatory structures are actively dismantled to ensure equal participation and fair working conditions.
- Circular economy principles are strengthened across sectors through cooperation, product design, and zero-waste principles.
- Graz develops a food-focused tourism sector, such as culinary tourism, positioning itself as a flagship "Edible City".
- New green jobs are created in the food sector.



## Relevance for Cities like Graz.

Biodiversity among wild and domesticated animals is declining at an alarming rate. The main causes include ecosystem destruction, monoculture, and climate change. Additionally, non-native plant and animal species are altering landscapes and habitats.

These ecological changes also have social consequences – particularly in the form of social inequalities. Disproportionately affected groups include:

- Women\* compared to men,
- People on lower incomes compared to those who are better off,
- Older people compared to younger individuals.

These inequalities are especially evident in the unequal access to high-quality, healthy food and green spaces; and in many cases, they do not occur in isolation, but intersect and reinforce one another – meaning that individuals belonging to multiple disadvantaged groups face even greater challenges.



The Graz case study therefore aims to support and initiate initiatives that promote biodiversity in the (urban) region in ways that benefit all, with a particular focus on empowering disadvantaged population groups.

The BESt builds on and connects existing potential:

- Activities by various departments and units within the City of Graz that support the edible city concept (e.g. fruit trees in parks),
- Existing urban strategies, mission statements, and action plans that support diversity and sustainable urban development,
- Social gardening as a visible element of the edible city (e.g. more than 30 community gardens, school gardens, etc.).



## The Bio-/Diverse Edible City Graz – 11 Fields of Action

BEST Graz includes cross-sectoral goals and policy proposals across 11 identified fields of action, representing the various dimensions of sustainable and regenerative urban (and peri-urban) development.

These fields were derived from:

- Analysis of overarching goals at EU, federal and regional level,
- Existing strategies of the City of Graz,
- Interviews and participatory co-creative processes involving local stakeholders from environment, education, social affairs, and culture,
- Previous findings from IFZ research projects and
- Practical experience from FUG, especially the GAIA Gartenberg pilot project.

The ideas presented here are a condensed summary rather than an exhaustive account of all developed proposals. Many measures relate to multiple fields or are interlinked across categories.



The proposed actions are potentially relevant to all actors involved in the implementation of a BEST. From a municipal perspective, they can be understood as follows:

- actions are implemented directly within the city's own operations (City of Graz),
- influence is exerted at higher decision-making levels,
- and a supportive framework for the private sector created through incentives, funding, and regulations.

Partners – such as associations, businesses, and farms – support the implementation.



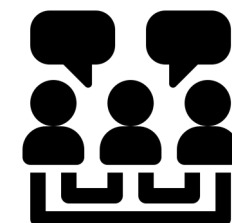
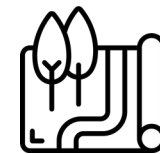
## 9. Urban Development



Urban planning plays a central role in ensuring the availability of and access to food from different sources. The City Development Concept and zoning plans provide a legally embedded, long-term strategic framework and are key levers for implementing the Bio-/Diverse Edible City.

### Proposed Measures:

- The green network (green spaces and corridors) and farmland (e.g. through no new zoning for construction, or by reverting building land to open space) is protected and expanded, biodiversity-friendly and climate-friendly land management is ensured.
- Food production for both markets and self-sufficiency is supported by allocating space, simplifying administrative procedures, harmonising or reducing fees, and, where appropriate, linking them to agroecological standards.
- The “15-minute city” concept is realised in planning: ensure access to food, gardens, markets, and educational sites within walking distance.
- Fruit trees, biotopes, and community gardens are promoted in housing developments (neighbourhood gardens), care facilities (e.g. hospitals, elder care), social institutions (e.g. day workshops), and educational institutions (nurseries, schools).
- Disadvantaged groups are actively included in shaping food infrastructure (e.g. co-design of community gardens).
- Shared infrastructure for neighbourhood-based food activities, such as food hubs with open kitchens, composting sites, storage spaces, and workshops, is further developed and strengthened.



## 8. Living Together in Diversity

A diverse society – shaped by differences in age, origin, and lifestyle – brings with it varied needs around food and nutrition, as well as valuable resources such as knowledge, skills, and lived experience. Inclusive, barrier-free, and multilingual spaces and services strengthen social cohesion and empower people to lead self-determined lives, especially those with disabilities.

### Proposed Measures:

- “Food” is firmly anchored in the city as a cross-cutting issue across all sectors and scales, and communicated as such.
- “Food-based neighbourhood networks” (Essbarschaften) are created – low-threshold, food-related community initiatives that can be connected to community centres, neighbourhood hubs, or other local institutions.
- Neighbourhood projects, such as communal cooking, seed and harvest festivals, community gardens, are supported with attention to factors like income, origin, gender, age, disability, etc.
- Accessibility is improved – both in terms of infrastructure for gardens and markets (e.g. wheelchair accessibility, visual accessibility), and barrier-free, multilingual information systems (e.g. maps, apps, brochures).
- Partnerships and cooperative projects are promoted between self-advocacy groups (e.g. migrant councils, disability councils), NGOs, neighbourhood initiatives, schools, health centres, gardens, hospitality, markets, libraries, museums, and cultural institutions – for community building, health promotion, and showcasing food traditions.
- The diversity of the population is reflected in decision-making bodies (e.g. Food Council) and processes.

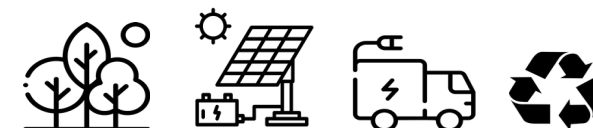


## 1. Preservation of Natural Resources as a Guiding Principle

Most natural resources are finite, and fossil resources in particular disrupt ecological balance. Their consumption must therefore be reduced, and waste of resources is curtailed through the implementation of circular economy principles.

### Proposed Measures:

- The energy demand of the food system is reduced (sufficiency), optimised (efficiency, effectiveness), and powered by renewable energy sources – especially in food production and transportation.
- Soil is preserved, and humus is regenerated. Forest and agricultural management follow regenerative, organic, agroecological principles. Water is used carefully, while ensuring its quality.
- Food waste is minimised through more conscious procurement policies, food sharing, dedicated processing infrastructure, and new cooperation models (e.g. using food waste as a resource in other sectors).
- Regional, sustainable, and affordable food offerings are established city-wide following the “city of short distances” model.
- Sharing of operational resources, infrastructure, and joint procurement is promoted in both the professional/profit-driven and non-profit/private sectors.
- Small-scale material cycles are established, supported by suitable infrastructure and staffing (including community-based approaches).
- Comprehensive information and advisory services complement public campaigns. Existing advisory services (e.g. on energy, nutrition, climate, etc.) are built upon.

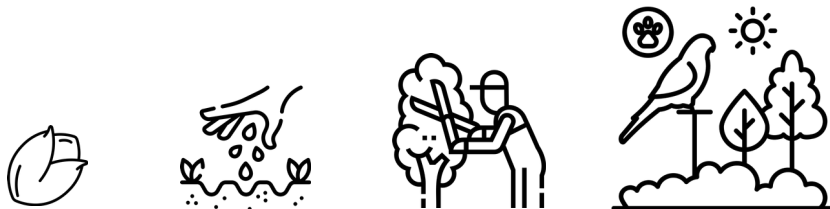


## 2. Biodiversity of Cultivated and Wild Plants, Livestock and Wildlife

Biodiversity is in sharp decline across both natural and agricultural ecosystems, yet it is essential for society and for diversity on our plates. Biodiversity encompasses agricultural and forestry land, parks, riparian zones, roadside greenery, cemeteries, and public and private gardens.

### Proposed Measures:

- Natural and semi-natural ecosystems are preserved or restored and connected via ecological corridors. Flowering areas with site-appropriate, climate-resilient wildflowers are established across the city, particularly in edge and transition zones. Diverse, natural nesting and retreat spaces are preserved.
- Graz's Green Space Protection Programme is continued and, where necessary, expanded or adapted to increase biodiversity in the city.
- Public and private green spaces are equipped, where possible, with fruit trees and bushes, as well as vegetable and herb beds – using both traditional, site-specific and climate-resilient varieties.
- Maintenance is carried out by municipal departments, contractors, or in cooperation with the public (or community groups). Staff is trained in biodiversity-friendly practices.
- The public is engaged through awareness-raising and training, citizen science projects, and innovative management models (e.g. community gardening, community parks, "garden godparent" schemes).
- Biodiversity is made visible (e.g. via "FruitMap 2.0") and celebrated (e.g. Seed Festival Graz, Rare Plant Market, Nature-in-the-Garden Award).



## 7. Gender Justice & Intersectional Discrimination

Food is deeply gendered – from roles in housework, cooking, and shopping to body ideals and eating behaviours. Gender differences also influence health and food insecurity. The BEST Graz explicitly addresses these inequalities, burdens, and forms of intersectional discrimination.

### Proposed Measures:

- "Intersectionality Checks" are introduced for BEST Graz projects to systematically consider the diverse life situations of target groups (e.g. older people in poverty, people with migration histories, single parents, people with disabilities). Projects that engage underrepresented or marginalised groups are prioritised for funding.
- A network of multipliers is built to share food-related knowledge with marginalised groups, complementing existing offerings.
- Gender-sensitive food education is implemented in schools, youth centres, and adult education to raise awareness of body image, nutrition, and media literacy in the context of self-worth and health. This includes cooking, eating, and gardening activities.
- Empowerment spaces ("brave spaces") are created and supported for marginalised groups (e.g. women with migration backgrounds, young people facing discrimination). These may be group-specific or open to all.
- Gender-specific dimensions of healthy nutrition are considered in all related programmes and policies.
- Stereotypical or sexist representations in educational materials and advertising are avoided.
- Inclusion standards are introduced for participatory bodies (e.g. the Food Council).

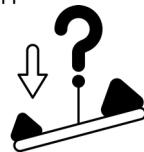


## 6. Food Justice

Access to good food (healthy, sustainably produced, culturally appropriate) is not equally available to all. In addition to cost, spatial and temporal access, food literacy, food cultures (e.g. taste preferences, dietary rules, intolerances), and the setting (e.g. local atmosphere, social environment, sense of belonging) all shape food access for different people and groups.

### Proposed Measures:

- A city-wide network of access points for healthy, sustainably produced, culturally appropriate food is established. Emphasis is placed on regional produce through direct marketing (e.g. markets, mobile shops, vending machines), open-access green spaces with edible plants, and opportunities for self-sufficiency (e.g. community gardens).
- Physical, mental, and digital barriers to food access, and to analogue and digital information and learning opportunities, are addressed. The approach considers diverse life situations and related challenges (e.g. disability, language, cultural background).
- Existing services (food, education, information) are combined with other objectives, such as community building through neighbourhood work.
- Cooperation between social economy and charitable organisations and food production/distribution actors is encouraged.
- The needs and capacities of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups are included in local resilience strategies (e.g. blackout contingency planning).
- Stigmatisation of affected individuals and the individualisation of systemic issues are actively countered.



## 3. Climate Protection and Adaptation to Climate Change

The effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures and extreme weather events, are transforming ecosystems and putting people, society, and infrastructure at risk. The food sector significantly contributes to climate change, yet is also severely affected by it. Climate protection and adaptation measures are therefore both crucial.

### Proposed Measures:

- Food production (agriculture, processing) and transport are shifted to renewable energy sources. Organic and agroecological practices are key to improving the climate footprint of regional food.
- Avoidable transport distances, such as empty or duplicate journeys, are eliminated through improved logistics (e.g. route coordination or the creation of food hubs). E-vehicles and cargo bikes are promoted.
- The share of organic and regional food in public canteens (schools, hospitals, etc.) is increased.
- A city-wide supply of regional food is established across the city, ensuring timely access, while existing services are expanded.
- Climate-resilient plant and animal species are promoted in agriculture, gardening, and green spaces. Research and development of such species is supported, e.g. through experimental stations and pilot projects.
- Climate-friendly consumption is encouraged through targeted information and educational offerings. Barriers are directly addressed (e.g. language, cultural dietary habits, learning styles).



## 4. Education, Awareness, and Skills

Awareness, knowledge, practical skills, and lived experience around food and food systems are vital for informed decisions – from healthy, eco-conscious eating to sustainable lifestyles and appreciation of biodiversity. Formal, non-formal, and informal education offerings are all essential and must be tailored to the needs and realities of their target audiences (e.g. language, content, learning settings, accessibility).

### Proposed Measures:

- Diverse city spaces are transformed into accessible learning environments for children, young people, and adults – offering engaging and interactive programs.
- Knowledge and skills about food and food systems are taught in all schools in Graz. School gardens support experiential learning. Teachers receive networking opportunities, training, and access to ready-to-use teaching materials.
- Neighbourhood facilities offer regular food literacy programs, linking them with broader community goals such as social cohesion and inclusion.
- Community representatives and organisations working with specific population groups are engaged as practical experts and multipliers.
- A clear, accessible digital information platform is created.



## 5. Individual Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Both our diet and living environment significantly influence physical and mental health. Health and well-being are not just individual conditions but are also closely tied to social and ecological contexts.

### Proposed Measures:

- The availability of healthy meals made from minimally processed, organically grown ingredients with a high proportion of plant-based components is expanded in public and private communal catering (e.g. schools, hospitals, company canteens, restaurants).
- Low-threshold and affordable meal options are made available to all – especially to those with limited access to good, healthy food – in community centres, club venues, schools, food establishments, gardens, and public spaces (e.g. community lunches, “kitchen for all,” healthy snack breaks, community picnics).
- Healthy food offerings are combined with low-threshold, everyday-relevant educational and community-building activities. These take place regularly, creating structures that support specific population groups.
- Healthy living environments at the neighbourhood and districts level are fostered through increasing greenery and biodiversity in the city.
- Physical and mental activity is promoted as a preventive measure across the lifespan – for example, through community gardening, walks in nature, and sensory awareness activities. The expansion of (edible) green infrastructure is actively supported.
- Meal cultures with proven health benefits are highlighted and promoted.

