

Welcome to the third edition of the GRaBS newsletter, bringing you the latest news from the 'Green and Blue Space Adaptation in Urban Areas and Eco Towns' project



Partner Meeting in Bratislava

Adapting in an age of austerity – can the GRaBS project deliver?

Too often, climate change adaptation is associated simply with biodiversity and the survival of plants and animals. But the GRaBS project is different – we are looking at human existence in our towns and cities in the face of increasing evidence that extreme weather is adversely affecting our socio-economic and environmental sustainability.

The recent heavy snow and freezing temperatures that gripped Northern Europe caused transport and work chaos and reportedly killed dozens of people.¹ In the Balkans, flood emergencies caused hundreds of people to be evacuated as the River Drina's banks were breached.² And it is now clear that 2001-2010 is the warmest ten-year period on record – and 2010 ranks in the top three warmest years globally (with 1998 and 2005) since the start of instrumental climate record-keeping in 1850.³

All this is part of mounting evidence that climate change adaptation in

our towns and cities is a matter of crucial importance.

However, with the debt crisis dominating agendas for governments throughout Europe, will confronting the challenges of climate change continue to be a critical consideration for politicians? How will EU interregional projects like GRaBS survive, and can the GRaBS project itself make a difference?

We believe it can! Human activity, economic stability and the quality of life in towns and cities are all adversely affected by extreme weather. If the GRaBS project is to make a difference, we must continue to work to secure political leadership and commitment and raise community and stakeholder awareness about what needs to be done – and why.

The UN Environment Programme has warned that if national carbon emissions pledges are not increased, temperatures may still rise by up to 4°C during this century.⁴ As we become vulnerable to more frequent regional

climate events and extreme weather, we need to accept that global warming will not be put on hold, and that adaptation to the inevitable effects of climate change is a major priority.

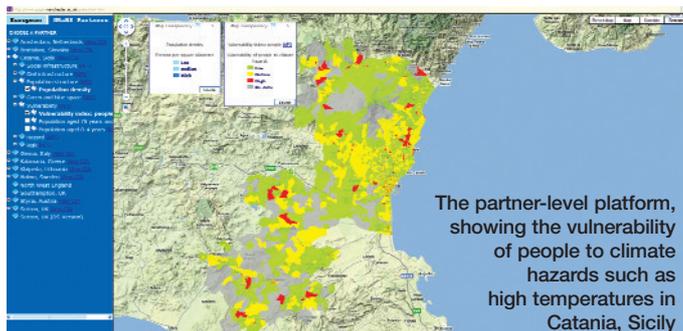
Significant action is needed by individuals, organisations and government in both policy and practice. Pan-European projects like GRaBS, which foster partnerships and facilitate the exchange of good practice and innovative solutions in climate change adaptation, can play a key role in helping to align measures to address climate change with land use planning policies, and in raising awareness at local and regional levels.

With the GRaBS project now in its third and final year, partners are in one of the most productive phases of the project, as they work to unite their experience and knowledge gained from exchanges, study visits, regional networks, data collation and tool development to create individual Adaptation Action Plans for their urban areas.

This newsletter is a summary of the actions and outputs of the GRaBS project to date and is intended to demonstrate that, unless adaptation to climate change is integrated into planning and other policies, people in urban areas are as vulnerable to extreme weather as plants and animals.

- 1 BBC News (Online): 'Europe's deadly cold snap maintains grip'. 3 Dec. 2010. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11907045
- 2 BBC News: 'Balkans flooding prompts emergency call'. 3 Dec. 2010. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11909693
- 3 World Meteorological Organization Press Release No. 906, Jan. 2011
- 4 UNEP: *The Emissions Gap Report*. Nov. 2010. www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/emissionsgapreport/pdfs/GAP_REPORT_SUNDAY_SINGLES_LOWRES.pdf

Unique tool to assess vulnerability



Over the last year, the University of Manchester has worked closely with the GRaBS partners to identify and collate data for the development of a climate change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Tool. The results of a pilot and user

testing exercise have confirmed that the Assessment Tool is innovative, cost effective, intuitive and simple to use and navigate – thus reinforcing its status as a user-friendly, decision-making aid.

A preview is available at www.ppgis.manchester.ac.uk, and the Tool will be disseminated for wider use towards the end of the GRaBS project in mid-2011.

For more information about the Tool, a useful paper written by the University of Manchester team¹ can be found on the News section of the GRaBS website.

1 Gina Cavan, Richard Kingston, Sarah Lindley, Aleksandra Kazmierczak, Jeremy Carter, Yi Gong, and John Handley: *Climate Change and Urban Areas: Development of a Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Tool*. RICS COBRA Research Conference, Paris, Sept. 2010. Available for download at: www.grabs-eu.org/news.php

‘Seeing is believing’ in Basel and Freiburg

Seeing for ourselves physical adaptation measures on the ground most persuasively adds to the rationale to act.

In June, GRaBS partners, politicians and land use planners visited Basel and Freiburg to see how these cities were achieving ambitious sustainability standards, and to develop an



understanding of the policy context and processes in which these solutions

were delivered. Both cities feature exceptional examples of green and blue infrastructure being incorporated into new and regenerated development, facilitated by pragmatic planning officers.

Learn more from the *Study Visit Report* on the News section of the GRaBS website at www.grabs-eu.org

How is GRaBS delivering?

Over the last year, a range of activities have taken place to meet the objectives of the GRaBS project (see the back page), including:

- mentoring visits to London, Amsterdam, Malmö and Kalamaria, to exchange knowledge and assist in the development of partner Adaptation Action Plans;
- an external study visit to Basel (Switzerland) and Freiburg (Germany), to see how adaptation measures such as green roofs, SUDS and community approaches to communal green spaces have helped to create exceptional places in which to live;

- site visits, thematic seminars and workshops associated with the biannual Project Steering Committee meetings in Graz and Bratislava;
- working with the University of Manchester to pilot and refine the climate change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Tool;

- community and regional stakeholder meetings and workshops;
- the production of Briefing Papers, Policy Guidelines, Expert Papers, articles and reports on delivering adaptation to climate change; and
- presenting GRaBS project work at several national, European and international

conferences, as well as through media channels such as radio, websites, printed journals and the local and national press.

The experience and knowledge flowing out of these activities have been essential ingredients in the development of partner Adaptation Action Plans.

Details on these outcomes, as well as the reports, Expert Papers, Briefing Papers, articles, case studies and updates described in this newsletter are all available on the **GRaBS project website at www.grabs-eu.org**. The News and Case Studies sections of the website are particularly relevant.

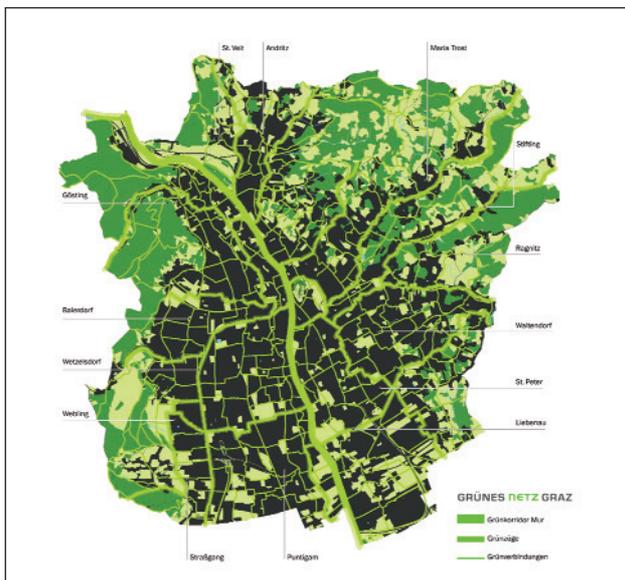
A database of international case studies on adaptation to various climate change impacts with the use of green and blue infrastructure is now available on the GRaBS website. Developed by the University of Manchester, the database provides a range of examples of adaptation responses and captures lessons learnt in the development of these initiatives.



Green and blue infrastructure is critical infrastructure

In policy guidelines produced in June as part of the Northwest Climate Change Action Plan, Community Forests Northwest argue how and where green infrastructure (GI) can help the Northwest of England to mitigate and adapt to climate change. According to a *Green Infrastructure Prospectus* published by Natural Economy Northwest, 'green infrastructure should be seen as a critical infrastructure, like roads or waste disposal, and as such should be well planned and maintained, and viewed as integral to new development'.¹

GRaBS is helping to raise awareness of the linkages between all the various GI benefits in realising a range of objectives – such as when GRaBS Project Manager Diane Smith spoke at the EC Green Infrastructure Conference in November. Many of the presentations at the event focused on the role of GI to curb biodiversity loss, but Diane introduced the urban adaptation agenda as an additional driver for the integration of GI into all appropriate strategic plans and policies – thereby improving the quality of life and



Graz Green Network, connecting Graz's green and open spaces

economic viability of our cities while sustaining biodiversity.

Through GRaBS activity, project partners are recognising and embracing the critical role of GI, and are exchanging ideas ranging from the 'Green Net' initiative in Graz, to the 'Green Space Factor' planning tool used in Malmö, to the 'Toolkit on Green Infrastructure' produced by the London Borough of Sutton. See the GRaBS website for more details on these and other outcomes (particularly the Case Study Database section).

¹ *Green Infrastructure Prospectus* is available at www.greeninfrastructurenw.co.uk/resources/Prospectus_V6.pdf

Adaptation Action Plan update

The fundamental principle of a climate change Adaptation Action Plan (AAP) is to protect and enhance the quality of life in each GRaBS partner area and to help partner organisations and their communities to prepare for the impacts of climate change and extreme weather. During 2010, partners have been drafting their AAPs (including a 'High-Level Policy Statement'), using feedback from stakeholder and community networks and the experience and knowledge gained from exchanges, study visits, meetings and mentoring.

Draft AAPs have emerged in different forms owing to the diverse political and governance conditions of the partners, including:

- guidance documents to aid decision-making, or a statutory policy or plan;
- a stand-alone document or one integrated into existing plans or strategies; and
- those directed at a neighbourhood or regional or sub-regional scale.

The last six months of the GRaBS project will see AAPs being published and showcased at the Final Conference on 8 June 2011 (see the back page for more details).

Expert Paper on community participation

In November, the GRaBS project launched its second Expert Paper, *Participation in Climate Change Adaptation*, produced by the Amsterdam City District of Nieuw-West. The Paper explores the connection between climate change impacts in urban areas and how we can best involve communities in adaptation plans and their implementation – and, in particular, how we can develop adaptation measures that are socially and environmentally just.

With help from the City District Nieuw-West, GRaBS partners have organised a range of community and stakeholder network events aimed at raising awareness of the issues, stimulating debate about adaptation planning, and consulting on the development of Adaptation Action Plans.



The Expert Paper and (right) a flyer produced by the Province of Genoa for a local workshop

See the News section of the GRaBS website at www.grabs-eu.org for the full Expert Paper and the Executive Summary.

Other news and events

The GRaBS project has featured at several international and local conferences, stakeholder meetings and seminars held to raise awareness and understanding of planning for green and blue infrastructure to adapt to a changing climate.

The University of Catania presented GRaBS project work at Resilient Cities 2010 – the First World Congress on Cities and Adaptation to Climate Change, and at the SIDT2010 International Conference, held in June in Rome; REC Slovakia highlighted GRaBS at the International Conference on Landscape Ecology, held in September in Prague; and the TCPA presented GRaBS work at the EC Conference on Green Infrastructure Implementation, held in November in Brussels.

Such events are crucial in raising awareness of the urgency to act on adaptation, and several articles and papers written in preparation for, or as a result of, these events have also been produced – these are available from the News section of the GRaBS website.

In its partner role to improve UK policy on planning for climate change impacts drawing on European exchange of experience, the TCPA (jointly with the Friends of the Earth) formed a cross-sector Planning and Climate Change Coalition of planners, local authorities, developers and environmental organisations. In November 2010, *Planning and Climate*



House of Commons launch of the *Planning and Climate Change Guide*

Change Guide: Guidance and Model Policies for Local Authorities was launched in the House of Commons. The guide is a vital tool to enable local authorities and communities to tackle climate change by creating effective adaptation and renewable energy policy. The document can be downloaded from the TCPA website at www.tcpa.org.uk

Final Conference

The **GRaBS Final Conference** will be held on **8 June 2011** in **London**. The conference will see the partners showcase key outputs of the project and describe how they were achieved. It will coincide with a UK Study Visit and includes a Reception in the House of Commons. More details are available on the GRaBS website, including an outline itinerary and booking form.

GRaBS in summary

The GRaBS project has four main objectives:

1 To **raise awareness** and increase the **expertise** of key bodies responsible for spatial planning and development on how green and blue infrastructure can help new and existing mixed-use urban development adapt to projected climate scenarios.

2 To assess the delivery mechanisms that exist for new urban mixed-use development and urban regeneration in each partner country and to develop good practice **Adaptation Action Plans** to co-ordinate the delivery of urban greening and adaptation strategies, as well as co-operation among planners, policy-makers, stakeholders, and local communities.

3 To develop an innovative, cost-effective and user-friendly **Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Tool**, to aid the strategic planning of climate change adaptation responses.

4 To improve stakeholder and community understanding and involvement in planning, delivering and managing green and blue infrastructure in new and existing urban mixed-use development, based on **positive community involvement** techniques.

The Project Partners

- Austria:** ■ Provincial Government of Styria
- Greece:** ■ Municipality of Kalamaria
- Italy:** ■ Etnambiente SRL
■ Province of Genoa
■ University of Catania
- Lithuania:** ■ Klaipeda University
■ Coastal Research and Planning Institute
- Netherlands:** ■ Amsterdam City
■ District of Nieuw-West
- Slovakia:** ■ Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, Country Office Slovakia
- Sweden:** ■ City of Malmö
- UK:** ■ London Borough of Sutton
■ Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA)
■ Southampton City Council
■ Town and Country Planning Association
■ University of Manchester

GRaBS Briefing Papers

- *Understanding the Environmental and Social Impact of Garden Development* – February 2010
- *Delivering Green Infrastructure Benefits to Communities and Places through Planning* – June 2010
- *Delivering Adaptation in the UK – Key Themes and Messages* – June 2010
- *Best Practice Case Studies in the City of Graz* – October 2010
- *Water Management and Adaptation to Climate Change* – January 2011
- *Approval of Sustainable Drainage Systems* – January 2011

The Briefing Papers are available at www.grabs-eu.org/news.php

Contact details

More information can be found on the project website: www.grabs-eu.org
Or contact the lead partner, the TCPA, through the GRaBS Project Manager, Diane Smith, on:

e: diane.smith@tcpa.org.uk
m: +44 (0)7920 280 370

t: +44 (0)20 7930 8903
skype: dianesmith152