

ENHANCING URBAN VITALITY: INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMISING BLUE-GREEN SPACES

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This workshop, developed by partners of the HEART consortium, for the International Congress "Public Health - Achievements and Challenges of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia 'Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut'", is situated within the theme of 'Environment and Health' and brings forth a blend of social sciences, health management and urban planning competences.

The proposed 90-minute workshop will be showcased within the framework of the HEART project, which seeks to systematically enhance urban health and address health disparities through innovative Blue-Green Solutions in urban planning, with a strong emphasis on health and wellbeing as fundamental criteria. This workshop will serve as a platform for scholarly discourse among experts in public health, health management, and urban planning.

1st Phase: The session will commence with a welcome presentation that sets the stage by outlining the workshop's objectives and agenda. Participants will be introduced to the critical role BG spaces play in enhancing public health and wellbeing, supported by key statistics and data visualisations demonstrating their impact on multiple health outcomes such as mental health, mitigation of urban heat effects and more.

Following the introductory remarks, the workshop's 3-phase structure will be detailed, including the later division of participants into groups on the basis of frequency of their visits to BG spaces. The presentation will also provide a succinct overview of the HEART project, highlighting its goals, methodologies, current progress, and relevance to the workshop.

To initiate engagement and facilitate a smooth audience categorisation, a poll titled 'How often do you visit BG spaces?' will be conducted, dividing participants into four categories: *Frequent Users*, *Occasional Users*, *Rare Users*, and *Non-Users*. This segmentation will facilitate targeted discussions, with each group assigned a moderator to guide the conversation and capture key insights and recommendations.

2nd Phase: Thereafter, moderators will distribute group-specific QR codes to attendees, who will respond individually and anonymously to a series of key questions and deliberate on the results within their groups:

1. ****Proximity to BG Spaces**:** Participants will share how close they live or work to a BG space.
2. ****Motivations for Visiting BG Spaces**:** Participants will rank their reasons for visiting BG spaces in order of importance, covering aspects such as exercise, relaxation, socialising, nature, and events.
3. ****Barriers to Access**:** Participants will prioritise the factors preventing more frequent visits, including time constraints, lack of company, inconvenient locations, safety concerns, insufficient facilities, poor maintenance, weather conditions, and overcrowding.
4. ****Desired Improvements**:** Participants will arrange potential improvements or additional features in order of how much they would enhance their experience, considering aspects such as security, lighting, recreational facilities, landscaping, and activities.

5. *****Health and Wellbeing*****: Participants will indicate how BG spaces most contribute to their health and wellbeing, including aspects such as reducing stress and improving mental health, providing opportunities for physical exercise, offering a place for social interactions and community building, enhancing air quality and reducing pollution, and offering a sense of connection to nature.

6. *****Non-Users' Reasons*****: Non-users will classify the reasons for not visiting BG spaces, such as lack of interest, information, accessibility, and preference for other leisure activities.

Focus groups 'participants will be invited to formulate hypotheses and draw conclusions based on their responses. These hypotheses will be deliberately provisional, intended to provide a foundation for subsequent discussions on the relationship between BG spaces and health. After reconvening, each of the four moderators will take turns to provide a brief summary of their group's discussion points and conclusive remarks, with each summary lasting approximately five minutes.

3rd Phase: Lastly, each group's aggregated responses will be casted on a screen for all participants. This visual presentation will offer a comprehensive overview of the diverse perspectives gathered, helping to identify common themes and significant differences. By examining and comparing the responses, we can discern user behaviour patterns, motivational drivers, barriers to access, alongside a nuanced understanding of how BG spaces interplay with wellbeing. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the various motivations behind others' visits to BG spaces and how individuals with differing motivations interpret and experience the same barriers.

This workshop promises to deliver valuable insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing BG spaces, significantly contributing to public health and urban wellbeing, while also amplifying participants' understanding of societal behaviours and perceptions regarding public spaces. Simultaneously, it aspires to enrich the analysis conducted within the HEART project and to foster citizen engagement, encouraging participants to reflect on their relationship with nature.

Keywords: urban planning, blue-green solutions, public health