

Making the City Green with Civil Society:

Roundtable Meeting Report of IMM-Civil Society Relations within the Framework of Green City Practices

GEF Cities as Places of Hope Project Workshop Outputs



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Design: Güneş Akçay, Green Thought Association

GEF Proje Koordinatörü: Adrián Tóth, Green European Foundation

Green European Foundation

Rue du Fossé – 1536 Luxembourg

Brussels Office: Mundo Madou

Avenue des Arts 7-8, 1210

Tel: +32 2 329 00 50

info@gef.eu

www.gef.eu

Green Thought Association

Türkali Mahallesi

Şehit Nuri Sokak

No:18, Beşiktaş / İstanbul

Tel: +90 543 807 72 25

info@yesildusunce.org

www.yesildusunce.org

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Established in 2008 in Istanbul, Turkey with the mission to proliferate green thought and green policies, the Green Thought Association works on national and international projects and campaigns. The Green Thought Association works on ecology and sustainability, democracy and media, climate change and energy, green economics.

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This report is prepared on the basis of the outputs of the Green Cities Workshops organized under the Cities as Places of Hope Project.

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Roundtable Meeting

Report of IMM:

Civil Society Relations within the Framework of Green City Practices

More than half of the world's population lives in the cities. **In 2018, 55% of the global population lived in cities. It is expected this will increase to 68% by 2050.**¹ The densely populated cities are not only the center of economic, cultural and political activities but also the center of consumption. Cities consume far more than what they produce, **around 70% of the world's resources and more than two thirds of total produced energy are consumed in cities. Furthermore cities cause more than 70% of global carbon emissions.**² For these reasons, the lifestyles and habits in cities play a major role in ecological imbalances and the climate crisis. On the other hand, it seems appropriate to describe the cities as the interface of the relationship between humans and nature. Cities are spaces created with an anthropocentric approach by humans; shaped with technologies that social and economic systems developed; and where all these relationships and structures are crystalized. In this sense, they mirror the domination relationship that humans have with nature. At the same time, cities are the most vulnerable in terms of ecological disasters. **Because they are made of human made infrastructures and buildings, they are vulnerable against many disasters caused by ecological problems and most importantly by climate crisis. In this framework, the term 'Green Cities' comes into prominence.** The work of transforming cities into places that are built over green infrastructure and in balance with nature where all the city's inhabitants are included as important components, will not only make them more resilient against climate crisis and other ecological problems, it will also contribute to a new way for humans to relate with nature.³

Another topic that needs to be addressed together with the term 'Green City' is 'environmental justice/ climate justice'. **This is important because the destructive effects of ecological disasters are experienced differently at the intra-city and inner-city level. The gravity and density of the results of ecological disasters varies between cities according to their social and economic differences.**

1 <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization#what-share-of-people-will-live-in-urban-areas-in-the-future>

2 C40, "A Global Opportunity For Cities to Lead", <https://bit.ly/3afZbPx>

3 Breuste, J. (2020). The green city: general concept, J. Breuste, M. Artmann, C. Ioja ve S. Qureshi (Ed.), Making Green Cities. Concepts, Challenges and Practices içinde, Springer International Publishing.



On the other hand, these effects are not experienced the same within a city either because of similar social, economic, cultural and political inequalities and injustices. The disadvantaged urban groups and communities are far more affected by the ecological problems that they had a smaller role in contributing to.⁴ For this reason, the inevitable and important part of 'greening' the cities is **achieving justice in distribution, recognition and participation**. This is only possible by allowing for a participative process during the creation of Green City policies that are formed with the framework of 'environmental justice / climate justice'. Through the participation of urbanites on the policy making and implementation process, including the groups that were previously excluded from decision making mechanisms, the needs, requests and expectations of that group can be determined. Thus more equal and fair plans and actions can be produced, so that the Green City policies can result with fairly divided benefits and costs.

This report assesses Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's (IMM) actions across Istanbul toward building a Green City, and the relationships and cooperation it forms with civil society organizations by following a participative approach. The report is based on the information collected from two workshops organized by Yeşil Düşünce Derneği in İstanbul as part of the Green Cities Project run by the Green European Foundation (GEF). The first workshop was called 'Cities as Places of Hope' and it was organized online on October 20, 2020. The participants included 28 representatives from 11 different directorates and departments of IMM; 13 participants from 12 different civil society organizations that are working on urban, climate and environmental policies and independent researchers. In total 45 people attended the workshop. During the workshop, IMM's current policies, strategies, plans and practices that can be considered under the framework of Green City policies were assessed. The second workshop which was a continuation of the first, was organized online with the title 'Making a Green City Visible and Accessible' on October 27, 2020. 12 members of 9 civil society organizations and 28 officers from 14 different directorships and departments of IMM attended the workshop. The existing cooperation between the municipality and civil society organizations, possible future cooperation and the ways of developing participative practices were the main discussion points.

1. THE PROJECTS, PRACTICES AND POLICIES OF IMM REGARDING BUILDING A GREEN CITY:

The information gathered through the workshops of the project show that IMM is developing and implementing different projects, plans and actions that can be considered as Green City policies. Based on the account of IMM representatives, these projects and practices are designed, developed and implemented under the framework of 'sustainability'. In addition to the term 'sustainability', they also emphasized, although more limitedly and lacking a determined system in place, the ecological, economic, social and political extents of the 'justice' framework of the actions that they are targeting to

4 Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse, *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), s. 37-55; Bulkeley, H. ve Betsill, M. M. (2013). Revisiting the urban politics of climate change. *Environmental Politics*, 22, s. 136-154.



become a Green City. On the other hand, the plans, projects and practices in different fields are failing to intersect across sectors. Despite some connections; every sector seemed to focus on their own field. In other respects, 'protecting the biodiversity' appears to be well adopted by IMM departments and it is considered one of the parameters in different projects.

Based on the information provided by the IMM Department of Parks, Gardens and Green Areas which is responsible for increasing, protecting and upgrading the green areas in the city, several projects are being implemented across İstanbul in order to increase the number and the size of green areas. One of the projects mentioned is **organizing and increasing green areas so that "it is possible for every urbanite to access a green area in 10 minute."** Some of the other projects in this field are as follows: **creating a recreation center in Çiftalan-Kısırkaya that offers culture, arts, sport and nature; rehabilitating the stream beds; planning and implementing the Valley of Life Projects; assessment of İstanbul's water basins with a perspective of ecological values; increasing the number of play spaces in İstanbul with the brand name 'Play İstanbul'; organizing the activities of 'City meets Arts'; creating city forests in different parts of İstanbul with the participation of citizens.** In the presentation made during the workshops, it was also mentioned that with a change in the organizational structure of the municipality, the Directorate of Urban Ecosystem was established with the aim of setting an '**ecological planning**' approach.

The IMM Directorate of Transportation also mentioned that they are working on a **Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan** in which the environmental and social impacts of transportation are also taken into consideration. The main objective of the plan is to **integrate all transportation systems across the city** by prioritizing the environment and participation. Some of the implemented or continuing projects in this field are as follows: **increasing the micro mobility through biking and public transportation and lane limiting to put pressure on private car usage;** creating micro mobility options through biking and public transportation; removal of obstacles for pedestrians and **enlarging the pedestrian roads and prioritizing pedestrian crossing at intersections.**

It was mentioned during the workshop that the struggle against climate crisis plays an important role for the work that The Directorate of Environmental Protection is doing. According to the bureau representative's speech, they continue to work on revising the İstanbul Climate Action Plan in order to fulfill the promise of making İstanbul carbon neutral by 2050 as promised by the signing of the C40 Deadline 2020 Document in October 2019. The current İstanbul Climate Action Plan that was implemented in 2018 targeted carbon emissions decrease of 33% by 2030 and 55% by 2050. However, these targets are an insufficient contribution to the struggle against climate crisis and the creation of a carbon neutral urban life. According to the promises made during the workshops, it was mentioned that IMM is working on updating and ameliorating these targets. The preparations for setting up the adaptation and mitigation measures are continuing in order to reach the new targets that will be determined. Other than this, they informed the group about the work that they have been doing on air quality, extension and activation of the measurement of noise pollution and increasing the carbon sinks.

IMM Department of Earthquake Risk Management and Urban Improvement and Urban Development's work focuses on the biggest threat for İstanbul, earthquake and urban development.



In summary, their projects consist of producing the urban development master plan and strategy, determining the temporary shelters and gathering areas and creating earthquake parks in neighborhoods such as Ataşehir and Topkapı. The planning work especially focuses on systematizing the planning of green areas'. The green areas that will also be used as gathering spaces during earthquakes will be determined and enlarged with the cooperation of the IMM Department of Parks, Gardens and Green Areas.

2. IMM-CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP AND INTERACTION

During the workshop, the representatives of IMM Directorates and Departments made a summary of their work by giving examples from practices and projects that are done and are being planned together with civil society actors and urbanites. They put a special emphasis on the importance of the principals of 'participation', 'cooperation' and 'transparency'. Based on the information that they provided, the causes and objectives of adopting participative practices by IMM departments are as follows: **a) to strengthen the ownership of IMM's actions and practices by the public; b) to determine the needs of local communities; c) to collect new ideas and propositions that can support and contribute to the creation of new projects.** In order to reach these objectives, the main method that is used by IMM is organizing workshops, conferences and panels where they can collect their shareholders' opinions and recommendations. Lately, the number of workshops that are open to public with strong attendance are increasing and the topics are becoming more varied. Some of the workshops that IMM is planning to organize in the field of Green City are as follows: Green Areas, Urban Ecosystem and Play Istanbul Workshops by IMM Department of Parks, Gardens and Green Areas on February 05-06 2020, Bicycle and Transportation Workshops organized by IMM Department of Transportation on February 7, 2020, Canal Istanbul Workshop organized by IMM Department of Housing and Urban Development and BİMTAŞ (IMM's affiliate company) on January 10, 2020. Outside of these workshops, IMM's departments are using workshops, activities, competitions and surveys as mechanisms for participatory governance. There are several examples of civil society actors contributing to IMM's project based practices.

IMM Directorate of Environmental Protection is also conducting several projects in partnership and communication with the district municipalities and affiliate companies as well as representatives of civil society organizations and different social groups. IMM Department of Housing and Urban Development also mentioned that they adapted a participative approach that is shaped by experts and authorities. Princes' Islands planning process is one the examples of this approach where the local communities, civil society organizations and professional bodies are contributing their work through working groups. Survey studies in which the opinions and suggestions from local communities are collected and the whole process is explained transparently online is also presented as part of the 'participatory' planning process. Similar work has been done with the participatory planning approach such as urban squares design and protection of 'protected' areas in Beyoğlu, women participation in decision-making mechanisms in Avcılar. The IMM Department of Housing and Urban Development also continues to do



raise awareness on their websites and social media channels about the government's mega projects such as Canal Istanbul and the 3rd Airport, which are causing major ecological destruction.

The IMM Department of Transportation points out that they created a series of urban mobility projects with the participation of civil society organizations and individuals. An example was given that they work on including civil society actors and urbanites into the projects for popularizing the usage of alternative vehicles such as bicycles and electric vehicles using clean energy sources. Some of these projects are as follows; organizing a well attended Bicycle Workshop across town, organizing meetings and surveys to collect opinions from civil society organizations and local communities, construction of biking lanes and meetings with NGOs and sector representatives in order to prepare the regulations for electric scooters. A **Bicycle House** was opened by the Department of Transportation as a regular gathering space where different biking groups, organizations or individual bikers can organize meetings and other activities. This step can be seen as an initiative, which can go beyond the traditional unilateral and one-off relationship that usually occurs between civil society and municipalities. Through Bicycle House, IMM didn't only ensure a continuous relationship with civil society organizations but also helped them to strengthen the ties between each other. This example also shows how IMM can play a 'facilitator' role to increase the capacity and social capital of civil society organizations.

Among the different departments of IMM, The Directorate of Energy Management and Lightening seems the least inclusive one in terms of civil society participation in the governance. The reason they gave for this is that energy is a 'new issue' for the municipality. Still, they work together with NGOs especially on the strategy planning through workshops and competitions.

Besides the projects that the IMM departments are carrying out themselves, there is a Vizyon 2050 office that works under the Istanbul Planning Agency that is responsible for designing and planning the participatory process across IMM. Their objective is to develop '**participatory and democratic governance policies**' and '**planning a administrative transformation**'. Under this framework, they continue to work on infrastructural preparations of creating a shareholder map and starting relations with these shareholders.

On the other hand, workshop participants from civil society organizations mentioned that they are ready and willing to work together with local governments. Based on their account, many of the members of these civil society organizations are in communication with different levels of local governments. These civil society organizations mentioned they prefer to cooperate with local governments in order to have a greater impact and move faster in regards to air pollution, creating green areas and 'Green City.' For example, one of the participants of the workshop, a member of an NGO, mentioned that they delivered their request about installment of air quality monitoring stations to a district government instead of The Ministry of Environment and Urbanization whom they think works slower. So now they work together with the district municipality on this issue.

Another positive developments that the NGOs mentioned about IMM's latest practices are about data sharing. IMM started sharing more data on ecological questions with more diverse tools. For example, it was well received when **they shared online the data they gathered from 26 different Meteorology**



Observation Stations. However, the number of stations that do PM 2.5 measurement was found insufficient by one NGO representative. They are also expecting an increase in usage of different information sharing technologies and media such as mobile applications.

Finally, among IMM's active stakeholders, there are international networks and organizations as well. Different departments of IMM are in partnership and carrying out projects with international and global institutions and foundations. The Department of Transportation is preparing the urban transportation master plan, which they approach with the principles of 'sustainability' and 'participation', with the partnership of the UK Prosperity Fund. They are also collaborating with international NGOs such as World Resources Institute or transnational urban solidarity networks such as C40 in different fields and projects. They also receive the financial support of certain consulate generals and EU funds for different topics.

3. CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

Although it was mentioned that IMM is gradually becoming more inclusive to NGOs in their policy-making processes, and this is certainly a positive development, some participants of the workshop from NGOs also pointed that there are still challenges and obstacles. On the other side, IMM representatives confirm that there are challenges caused by both sides. These challenges and obstacles that both sides are mentioning can be summarized under the titles of resources (information, time, capacity etc.), organizational structure and relationship. These challenges and obstacles are:

Difficulty in coordination: One part of the NGO representatives say that their relationship with IMM is mainly based on workshops. Despite the high number of workshops or meetings that IMM is organizing in different topics, they are often disconnected from each other, with a resulting inefficiency. According to this claim, some topics are being discussed over and over again under different titles, or the result of one workshop is not transferred to another. One of the suggestions to tackle this challenge and increase the efficiency of these workshops is **to take the intersectionality of the issues into account while organizing the workshops**. As a response, IMM representatives affirmed that they will continue to work on the planning and coordination of these workshops in a more cohesive way. Civil society representatives also expect IMM to handle environmental issues by forming relationships with different sectors. As they supported their proposition with some projects carried out with a cross-sector approach, they demand IMM to address the issues such as energy and air quality in an integrated way. In response, IMM pointed to the preliminary works that the Istanbul Planning Agency is doing such as determining the shareholders at the urban level and planning on how to ensure the continuity and efficiency of shareholder activities that will be done in the future. They also mentioned that the structure and the content of the workshops vary based on the needs of that sector and topic and they are different in number, frequency and structure. As an example, they observed that the bicycle transportation workshops were organized easily and successfully thanks to the contribution made by participating NGOs, groups, collectives and individuals.

Difficulty of follow-up and supervision: Another difficulty pointed out by participant NGO



representatives was the difficulty to follow up the processes after the meetings and workshops that IMM organizes. NGOs claim that they cannot access to any information about whether their opinions and suggestions were taken into consideration during implementation or how they were implemented. Although these workshops are successful at bringing NGOs together, the necessary tools and mechanisms to inform the participants about the results and to evaluate the process, are found insufficient.

Quality of Cooperation: Another remark made by civil society participants during two workshops about the obstacles was about the quality of the relationships that IMM establishes with civil society organizations. They described this relationship as 'unilateral' and 'unidirectional'. Many NGO representatives agree that in general the relationships formed with municipalities cannot go beyond that of being a one sided exchange of ideas. An example given by one NGO representative was describing the workshop on health impact assessment conducted with a municipality out of Istanbul. This cooperation showed that by ensuring the full participation of the experts in these projects, they observed an increase in general knowledge and capacity. This resulted in a more grounded cooperation.

Inclusion: Despite the general upgrade in civil society partnerships, some of the NGO representatives said that they were not included in workshops and learned about these workshops indirectly. A platform that is bringing different NGOs together mentioned that they learn about the developments and projects in their field from other member organizations and they try to communicate indirectly to learn more about the processes. Another issue raised about inclusion was about including the shareholders that have expertise in different topics according to the extents of that issue. For example, one participant from the Clean Air Platform commented on the project that the Department of Transportation is thinking about implementing. The project was about 'installing benches at road sides where green landscaping is applied.' The participant said that for this project the possible impact of air pollution on pedestrians needs to be taken into consideration and expert advice from institutions such as Turkish Medical Association should be demanded and health impact assessment reports should be prepared. Similar processes should be followed for other projects as well.

Difficulties at Reaching out to the Municipality: Some civil society members mentioned that the internal organizational problems of IMM are causing difficulties for NGOs. According to their opinion, the malfunctioning of internal relations and lack of coordination between departments, disconnection at the flow of information between them and lack of communication between IMM and district municipalities are impacting NGOs' relationship with IMM in a negative way. The main cause of this is a coordination problem between municipality and civil society. Another similar difficulty occurs due to lack of information on which department NGOs need to address in their field of work, offer partnerships and do requests. This problem points out the lack of information about the organizational structure, internal operation and distribution of authority-responsibility within IMM.

Open and Transparent Data Sharing: One of the topics that really matters for civil society organizations is whether the data is shared openly and transparently for public access. During the workshops, IMM informed the participants about the projects that have been implemented or planned in the recent period: Lately, IMM put a new open data portal into service of all urbanites (<https://data.ibb.gov.tr/>);



Istanbul Planning Agency started sharing regularly with the public the data that the Statistics Office collects or gathers from other sources. Even so these developments are well received, there are continuing needs and requests for more comprehensive, deep and detailed data in the fields that NGOs have expertise in or advocate for. One participant from an NGO working on urban health and gentrification suggested that creating ' a database that allows transparent presentation' could work as an encouraging mechanism for NGOs to cooperate with the municipality.

Other than these difficulties, representatives from different IMM directorates and departments talked about some of the obstacles and challenges they face on environmental policies and implementations. These challenges and obstacles are as follows:

Difficulty at communicating and sustaining the relationship with NGOs: Even though the municipality representatives aim to include civil society actors into participatory processes, they claim that they are having difficulty reaching out to the NGOs. The main cause of this problem seemed to be lack of information in the database. They also mention that the expectations of the NGOs about the content and the result of cooperation with IMM can sometimes be unclear. This problem appears as one of the causes of unhealthy and inefficient relationship between NGOs and IMM.

Limits to Legislation and Authority: IMM is facing limitations in their realm of authority and responsibility for the projects they do in the scope of Green City. In many fields, including energy and water management, municipalities are dependent on national policy, plan and legislations. Their capacity to carry out independent operations are limited and they need to act in coordination with different actors and authorities from different levels. Other than this, the authority and responsibility should be distributed between different municipalities (district and metropolitan). An example to one of the problems that this distribution of power causes is the difficulty implementing the IMM's project on creating green areas within 10 minutes of every urbanite. Because, the small scale neighborhood parks are not under the authority of IMM Department of Parks, Gardens and Green Areas. Similarly, IMM Directorate of Environmental Protection has very limited power on preventing the industrial air pollution, which is an issue under the authority of Ministry of Environment and Urbanization. IMM Directorate of Energy Management and Lightening representative agrees and adds that the central government didn't give enough power to the municipalities in the field of energy planning for the period of 2017 and 2023.

Time Pressure: Another challenge mentioned by the representatives from IMM departments is time pressure. Many of the problems and risks that Istanbul is facing are in need of urgent action. For this reason, the plans, projects and implementations need to be produced and carried out immediately. In order to carry out the decision-making processes to determine the steps of a certain project in a participatory way, they need to plan everything fast. This time pressure is causing them to miss some components of the issues. The Canal Istanbul Workshop in which they had to prepare shareholder lists and invite them very fast was an example of this difficulty. Even though they had to move fast during the planning, the workshop was attended by 2500 people and the results were shared with public.



4. RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS:

In light of the facts collected through workshops of this project, we can say that there is an upgrade of IMM's approach to the topics of participation, transparency and data sharing. In general, it was mentioned by IMM representatives that these principles and practices play an important role in their job on making Istanbul a Green City. It can be observed that the usage of different tools and mechanisms to ensure participation of NGOs and local communities into planning, project developing and implementation processes, are gradually increasing. Similarly, there are projects that IMM departments are conducting in cooperation with transnational and international networks, institutions and foundations. The majority of the civil society representatives in the workshops confirmed that IMM departments are getting better at ensuring participation and data sharing on ecological matters. However, certain obstacles and difficulties are said to be continuing on the issues of resources, organizational structure, operation and about the quality and quantity of the relations they establish with NGOs. Below you can find some policy and implementation suggestions that can help IMM and civil society organizations cooperate to produce green politics and implementations; and to increase the capacity, depth and efficiency of their partnerships:

- **Capacity Building for Municipality Employees:** There is a need for capacity building activities for the municipality employees in order to create participatory practices and make them embedded into general operation and continuation. One way of doing this is organizing trainings where good examples from around the world are presented, general principles on participation are discussed and a chance to put them into practice is given to the participants. Especially for the topics like climate crisis where there is a need for an integrated struggle, it would be helpful to increase the capacity of municipality departments in order to help them connect the issues.
- **Holistic Approach and Extending the Area of Intersections:** The ecology issues needs to be addressed with a cross-sectorial approach. Although some IMM representatives confirmed this in their speech, it is necessary for them to develop a holistic approach while addressing extensive issues such as climate change.
- **Designing Participatory Processes through Participatory Practices:** Instead of limited number of experts designing the participatory practices in different sectors and fields, it should be thought of and developed together with the shareholders who are going to take place in the participatory mechanisms. That's how needs and expectations can mutually be met. Moreover, when examining the framework of 'environmental justice / climate justice', enabling NGOs to transfer all the information and experiences they collected about the issues and the actors they advocate for, would contribute to finding solutions that can remove the injustices that disadvantaged groups are facing in the city. Vizyon 50, which was established under the Istanbul Planning Agency, is carrying out projects that aim to ensure participation and produce participatory governance policies. These practices should be more comprehensive and should include urban shareholders; all planning and implementation processes should be open to



revisions upon newly appearing needs and should be designed and implemented dynamically.

- **Coordination between Municipality and NGOs:** The coordination problems that are caused both by the bureaucratic structure of the municipality, and by the quality of the relations between NGOs and Municipality should be addressed with permanent mechanisms, which should be put in place together. This would help ameliorate the efficiency, continuity and scope of the cooperation.
- **Spreading the NGO-Municipality Cooperation into Time and Space; Policy Based Cooperation:** As it was highlighted during the workshops, civil society organizations are expecting municipalities to work together not only project based but also on policy making processes. For example, one NGO representative suggested that if the common models can be created in the field of renewable energy, municipalities could be an important driving force to provide incentives on the issues of 'decentralized energy' and 'community energy'. These types of cooperation should be spread into time and space and made permanent. Projects such as the Bicycle House should increase. If similar approaches could be applied in other fields, cooperation and collaborations could be more continuous.
- **Upgrading and Developing Tools and Mechanisms for Inspection and Monitoring:** In the field of Green City, accountability and transparency has an important role. Preparing measurable targets and action plans by urban local governments, determining the measurement and evaluation criteria and sharing these measurements and evaluations publicly in regular time frames are critically important in order to put transparency and accountability principles in practice. Not only related indicator sets should be developed, but also the international indicator sets should be shaped according to local conditions, needs and requests.
- **Increasing, Ameliorating and Popularizing the 'Open Data' Approach and Practices:** Similar to the other issues, 'open data' practices should be designed through a participatory process which includes the actors from civil society and academia and different shareholders. In this way, not only will the general data be provided but also data in different fields and issues that NGOs need to use in their job could be provided. It is also important to make the data accessible and understandable and shared through different tools and medias.



Contact us:



GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION
Rue du Fossé 3, L-1536 Luxembourg
Brussels Office: Mundo Madou,
Avenue des Arts 7-8, 1210 Brussels
t: +32 2 329 00 50
e: info@gef.eu

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