

# Cookbook on virtual interactive exchange formats for cities

## Tips and learnings for virtual city-to-city exchange



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# Executive Summary

The 'Cookbook on virtual interactive exchange formats for cities' is a collection of virtual collaboration methods tested and evaluated during the Horizon 2020 INTERLACE project. It is however more than just another list of methods and tools, as it is specifically tailored to the needs of cities and public authorities that want to build networks on nature-based solutions (NBS) and ecosystem restoration. It guides the reader through specific interactive exchange formats, describing when and reasons why they were applied during the city exchange process. The reader can then follow the transparent evaluation process to determine the benefits of applying it according to his or her own needs.

Moreover, this report takes a step back and looks at city-to-city exchange processes in larger groups as well as in city pairs, both of which are applied within INTERLACE. The findings from these regular meetings in different group sizes show a clear picture of the advantages and disadvantages of each individual format and guide replicators in their decision of how to organize the exchange between cities.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all meetings were conducted virtually. As a consequence, getting to know each other and setting a common ground and understanding was one of the first and most important tasks of the city exchanges. This is also reflected in the number of warm-up exercises and online methods aimed at this goal. It was a particular challenge to build the collaboration merely online, but the available methods and tools were able to replace the physical meetings to a large extent. This is good news for future projects and cooperation processes that will rely more heavily on virtual exchange mitigating CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from traveling.

So, who is this Cookbook for?

- Public authorities and cities wishing to engage in fruitful exchange with other cities
- City networks aiming to build an inclusive environment for sharing and learning among their members
- Academia, companies and other actors working with a diverse range of stakeholders on the design and implementation of NBS

# 1. Introduction

One of the main success factors of the on-going INTERLACE project is the cooperation and continuous exchange between its city partners that has allowed for first successes of peer-to-peer learning and the organization of joint activities aimed at bringing together the urban ecosystem restoration community across continents.

From the beginning of the project, it was considered crucial to establish effective structures for city-to-city exchange between the six local project partners, from six countries and two continents – Latin America and Europe. Regular meetings were established and their interactive character emphasized among the organizing institutions. Also project meetings were organized in a way to allow for creative thinking and open discussion, rather than hierarchical presentation of past achievements. Accordingly, the project team was keen to test different interactive tools, platforms and methods that foster curiosity and collaboration.

The following chapters describe the methods applied, including the respective feedback gathered from the city partners and the evaluation form used (p.15). In this way, we aim to give practical advice and inspire other cities and public authorities that want to use more interactive features and methods in their networking and learning activities through the experiences made in INTERLACE. This cookbook also contains helpful recipes for intermediary organizations such as city networks that are willing to create spaces for sharing and learning amongst their members.

## 2. Virtual exchange methods

This chapter provides an overview of all virtual exchange methods used and tested during the first 18 months of the INTERLACE project. For some of the methods an evaluation by the participating cities was conducted, both a summary and the evaluation survey is provided. In general, exchange was organized in two different forms: in a large group of six cities or in city pairs, where each pair consisted of two cities from two regions (EU and Latin America). Chapter 2 focuses on the reasons for this distinction and provides insights into the benefits and disadvantages of both city-to-city exchange formats.

### 2.1. Collection of exchange methods and tools

The selected methods and tools, including the warm-up exercises all addressed distinct questions and challenges during the city-to-city exchange. They have been selected for their usefulness in achieving specific outcomes. We divided the chapter into three parts:

- **warm-up exercises** that intend to break the ice at the beginning of the session or to get familiar with the session's topic in a playful way
- the **interactive methods** with distinct goals that are described for each one;
- **tools** that were used to conduct the virtual sessions or parts of them.

For many methods an attempt was made to add a visual component to support the discussions and stimulate creative thinking by **visualizing** the concept, e.g. a tree symbol for the root cause analysis

method. This additional support was beneficial for structuring the contributions and thoughts in many sessions.

Since all sessions took place virtually, the chosen **online collaboration platform** played an important role in preparing the subsequent discussions. The table below provides an overview of collaboration platforms we used most frequently and their respective advantages. Many of them are referenced to in the following descriptions of methods.

**Table 1: Online collaboration platforms used in INTERLACE (non-exhaustive)**

Name	Main feature	Remarks
Zoom	Video conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chat function</li> <li>• Breakout room function for smaller group meetings, randomized or manually created groups possible</li> <li>• Access via laptop and mobile phone</li> <li>• Basic poll function (see below)</li> <li>• Simultaneous translation function</li> </ul>
Miro	Whiteboard and visualization tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whiteboard with large possibilities to visualize group discussion processes</li> <li>• Parallel working of different groups</li> <li>• Complex opportunities, needs some time to get acquainted with functions</li> </ul>
Google Jamboard	Whiteboard and visualization tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whiteboard with possibilities to visualize group discussion processes</li> <li>• Parallel working of different groups</li> <li>• User-friendly set-up, easy to navigate</li> </ul>
Google Slides	Presentations and whiteboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slides and presentations can be shared with participants for joint elaboration</li> <li>• Participants can work on slides directly during the meeting</li> <li>• Whiteboard function with text boxes as sticky notes</li> </ul>
Mentimeter	Polls and surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborate poll and survey function</li> <li>• Possibility to track each participants answer throughout multiple questions</li> <li>• Word cloud function</li> <li>• Limited, free version available</li> </ul>
Zoom polls	Polls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple poll function for participants of a Zoom room</li> <li>• Easy to navigate by moderator, limited set-up (single and multiple choice)</li> </ul>

### 2.1.1. Warm-up exercises

<b>Name of the exercise</b>	<b>Impromptu Networking</b>
<b>Main goal</b>	Warm-up method to identify expectations/challenges and trigger new connections and a warmer atmosphere
<b>Online platform used</b>	Zoom
<b>Timeframe</b>	20 minutes
<b>Copy right</b>	Liberating Structures ( <a href="https://liberatingstructures.de/liberating-structures-menue/impromptu-networking/">https://liberatingstructures.de/liberating-structures-menue/impromptu-networking/</a> )

**Description:** The moderator defines one or two questions the participants should focus on (what my expectations are, what I bring into the meeting today, what I wish to see from other participants). Participants now come together in pairs for a certain amount of time to exchange on the questions (encourage strangers to pair up!), ideally for around 3-4 minutes. Repeat three times with new pairings, resulting in an overall networking phase of around 12-15 minutes. Pairs can walk freely around the room or outside, if possible. In a virtual set-up, the moderator creates random breakout session to bring participants together in pairs. This way, all participants establish contacts in the beginning and are encouraged to speak, also participants playfully start thinking about the aim of the session. Helpful to break hierarchies between invited participants.

**Evaluation:** Though not formally evaluated via the feedback survey, this warm-up exercise was used several times at the beginning of the city-to-city exchange at various occasions. It was found useful by the moderators, leading to an open atmosphere and participants were able to express their expectations.

<b>Name of the exercise</b>	<b>NBS Ice-breaker</b>
<b>Main goal</b>	Welcome participants and prepare them to have a discussion about NBS
<b>Online platform used</b>	Zoom & Miro or Google Presentations
<b>Timeframe</b>	10-15 minutes
<b>Copy right</b>	n/a



**Description:** The moderator prepares a Miro Board or a Google presentation with a large picture of a tree (or any symbol of nature) beforehand. When working with Miro, make sure to explain how to apply the post-its. When working with the Google presentation, prepare some boxes of different colours to present the post-its. At the beginning of the session, (s)he shares the link with all participants via the chat and formulates a question like: “How do you connect with or relate to nature?” The participants now have a few minutes (up to 5) to answer the question by using the post-its and sticking them to the picture of the tree. After a few minutes the moderator stops the participants and highlights some of the sticky notes. This way, the session starts with a personal, appreciative and friendly ice-breaker. A possibility is to ask participants to include the city they are from to get an overview geographic representation.

**Evaluation:** This ice-breaker was used in a slightly different version one of the INTERLACE cities, in Chemnitz. During the local project kick-off with city officials and citizens, the moderators asked the question “When did you last experience nature in our city?” via the chat. Participants answered directly in the chat, moderators were then able to comment on the results. This way, all participants can use their voice (in the chat) early on without taking too much time from the agenda.

### 2.1.2. Methods

Name of the method	Exchange in smaller groups
Main goal	Stimulate discussion and create a working atmosphere where participants feel comfortable sharing experiences
Online platform used	Zoom
Timeframe	15 minutes + time for discussion in the plenary (45-60 min)
Copy right	n/a

**Description:** In round 1, two participants discuss one question/topic for five minutes. In round 2, two pairs of the first round are grouped together to discuss the same question/topic for ten minutes. Afterwards, all groups present their outcome to the plenary where questions are answered and main findings reported. It is useful to identify a person to present findings per group in the beginning of round 2. This method allows everyone to speak and to participate and is useful when the audience is very diverse, heterogeneous and participants don't know each other.

**Evaluation:** This method was applied during one of the first city exchange meetings to speak about the cities' understanding of urban ecosystem restoration and their local reference to the concept. It familiarized the participants with each other while at the same time starting first thematic discussions



around NBS, allowing for different notions to be introduced and getting some insights into the local characteristics of the cities. Though not officially evaluated, the method was positively received.

Name of the method	What, So what, Now what? W <sup>3</sup>
Main goal	Gathering knowledge, drawing conclusions and defining new steps
Online platform used	Zoom and Miro
Timeframe	45 minutes
Copy right	Liberating Structures ( <a href="https://liberatingstructures.de/liberating-structures-menue/what-so-what-now-what/">https://liberatingstructures.de/liberating-structures-menue/what-so-what-now-what/</a> )

**Description:** This method allows participants to jointly look back at what has happened and been elaborated in the last months or weeks to draw conclusions on the status quo and define next steps. It was used to create common ground for the newly brought together city pairs, to gather all knowledge that exists and to identify what this means for the city-to-city cooperation between the two cities, including setting the agenda and defining next activities.

WHAT: In a first round, each city collects facts and notions they know about their city pair from previous meetings on a pre-prepared Miro board. This is done in silence and for both cities in parallel. After 5 to 10 minutes, the board is presented to the partner city and open questions are answered. This round refreshes the memory and creates a base for cooperation.

SO WHAT: In a second step, both cities discuss together which conclusions they can draw from the knowledge of phase 1 about their city-to-city cooperation, namely which topics and activities are interesting for both of them. A moderator can support this step by noting down the main ideas on a Miro Board.

NOW WHAT: In the third and final step, the topics are narrowed down to concrete action points and activities to take on. The agenda is set for the next meetings and organizational issues like meeting times etc. are clarified.

**Evaluation:** The method was evaluated to be clear and understandable to most participants, however a few questions remained open. In the evaluation, the participants indicated that the method mostly contributed to warming up and getting to know each other (70%) and brainstorming new ideas (30%), which is what was intended.

90% of participants deemed the method useful or very useful for the goal of the session, only one participant did not find the method beneficial. Similar estimates were made about the quality of results obtained, with a little more doubt about their usefulness. Some explication about these doubts can most

probably be attributed to the fact that one group experienced a high language barrier and found it difficult to communicate with one another.



Figure 1: W³ method applied on a Miro board

Name of the method	Root cause analysis
Main goal	Identify root problems, resulting challenges and present first ideas for solutions
Online platform used	Zoom and Google Presentations
Timeframe	60 minutes
Copy right	n/a

**Description:** The cities are divided into two smaller groups (6 to 10 persons each) to discuss pre-selected topics, more specifically local challenges cities are experiencing related to the topic and the

underlying root causes of those challenges. The two groups are then sent to breakout rooms where the moderator shares the link to a joint google presentation in which the picture of a large tree with roots, branches and leaves is displayed. All participants can access the presentation and work on it.

The participants are asked to write sticky notes with most relevant local problems related to the chosen topic and to stick them to the trunk of the tree. Alternatively, the moderator can follow the discussion and prepare the notes. After ca. 10 minutes, the participants are asked to identify the underlying root causes of those apparent problems and to write them on sticky notes and stick them to the roots of the tree. Understanding the root causes of problems can help to find better solutions. Accordingly, participants were asked how the project partnership could support in addressing those problems and which solutions could be sought. The answers are written again on notes that are stacked to the leaves and branches of the tree. As a result, the problems, underlying root causes and potential solutions are identified and visualized. This can be repeated for further topics.

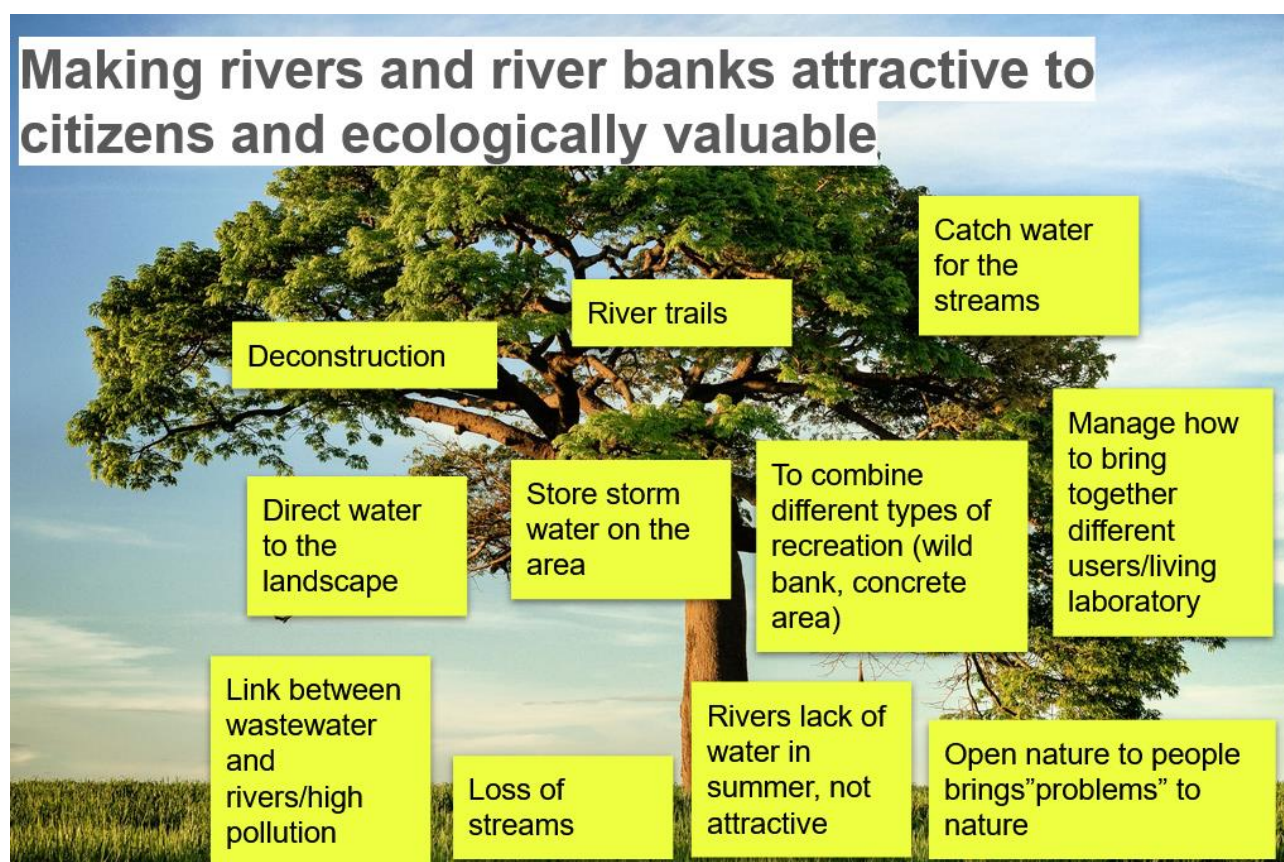


Figure 2: Root cause method applied (Photo by niko photos on Unsplash)

**Evaluation:** The evaluation survey showed that the method was clear and well understood by all participants, with only one exception. Participants indicated that a number of goals were achieved with this method, thereby mainly contributing to peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. Originally the method had been selected to stimulate the identification of concrete solutions for local challenges, but some of the overall exchange was too broad to deliver this goal, also because three cities were present in each breakout session leading to a number of different challenges discussed. Still, one third gave the method



the highest ranking in terms of benefits for the session and two thirds acknowledged the partial usefulness of the method. The majority agreed that the results obtained were useful, yet incomplete due to the way it was implemented. Overall, the evaluation was positive though some parts would require fine-tuning, e.g. more concrete questions to tackle, smaller groups or concentration on one city rather than several.

<b>Name of the method</b>	<b>(Virtual) Poster session</b>
<b>Main goal</b>	Introduction to topics or cities
<b>Online platform used</b>	Zoom and Miro
<b>Timeframe</b>	10-15 min per poster
<b>Copy right</b>	n/a

**Description:** Each city is asked to prepare a virtual poster on a certain topic for an information session. In this session, about 10 minutes are taken to present the poster via Miro and 5 minutes are foreseen for questions from the audience. Depending on the topic the timeframe can be adapted. Possible occasions and topics where posters were applied during the INTERLACE project are a general introduction of the city, an overview of local challenges related to NBS and an update poster after 1,5 years of project duration. The posters remain accessible to all participants via the Miro board and can be visited in breaks or after the session.



Figure 3: Virtual city posters in Miro

**Evaluation:** While no written consultation and evaluation took place for this visualization method, the feedback from participants in the audience was positive as it allowed for a change in presentation style used. The poster format can be more engaging and flexible than the usual instruments and formats as it remains visible during the whole session. It is important to note that for this format to be successful, clear instructions and expectations need to be communicated prior, e.g. what information the poster should contain. Participants should already be familiar with Miro, if this is not the case, more easy-to-use tools could be chosen, e.g. Google Jamboard or Powerpoint.

<b>Name of the method</b>	<b>Virtual city tours</b>
<b>Main goal</b>	Showing participants around in cities and spaces of interventions
<b>Online platform used</b>	Zoom
<b>Timeframe</b>	10-15 minutes
<b>Copy right</b>	n/a

**Description:** This method was applied during an INTERLACE progress meeting. All cities were asked beforehand to take (amateur) videos of their urban environments, possibly covering the NBS intervention sites. While playing the video in the background, the city representatives explained what the audience was seeing. Each video was about 5 to 10 minutes long and the showing was followed by questions by the audience.

**Evaluation:** These tours, partly done by bike giving a very lively atmosphere, were successful in delivering a very visual impression of the cities involved – especially important when physical site visits are not possible. The video tours are more impactful than photos. From the cities' point of view, the video-making was deemed relatively easy to implement, as filming with mobile devices was encouraged. In order to ensure a smooth technical roll-out during the session, the moderator is encouraged to test the technical showing of the videos before the session. If problems like lacking audio occur, it might be a better option to store the videos in a commonly accessible cloud and to ask the audience to watch the video on their devices locally.

<b>Name of the method</b>	<b>Interview-style presentation</b>
<b>Main goal</b>	Present achievements in a lively, alternative way
<b>Online platform used</b>	Zoom
<b>Timeframe</b>	10-15 minutes
<b>Copy right</b>	n/a

**Description:** This method was applied to loosen up the atmosphere in sessions where the main goal was to transfer knowledge and new information to a larger audience. In order to not follow the usual process of delivering input in an oral presentation supported by a few slides, the team opted for an interview-style presentation. More specifically, the information was delivered by a tandem of two people, one taking the role of an interviewer and one of an interviewee. The latter conveyed the input after being asked questions in a casual interview style, with the interviewer being able to ask follow-up questions in a natural way. The questions were agreed upon beforehand with the tandem. A few slides with only picture and very few words accompanied the interview presentation.

**Evaluation:** Interviews are an easily applied method to change up the way knowledge is conveyed. It was positively evaluated by the audience. One recommendation: Practice the interview style beforehand with your partner to make sure the interaction is authentic and smooth! A little bit of getting used to it will work wonders.

<b>Name of the method</b>	<b>Quiz</b>
<b>Main goal</b>	Playfully test the knowledge about a project, process or topic
<b>Online platform used</b>	Zoom and zoom polls
<b>Timeframe</b>	10 minutes
<b>Copy right</b>	n/a

**Description:** At the beginning of the virtual meeting, the moderator announces a quiz via Zoom polls to bring the audience's attention to the topic of the meeting. The pre-defined questions can serve as a recapitalization of activities that have been performed in the past or test the participants' knowledge on project-related topics. As the polls are anonymous, no participant needs to feel like they are being

personally tested. The questions are shown to the audience, giving them 1 minute to read and choose their answer. In a next step, the results are shown and the moderator shortly discusses them, giving the correct answer. This method is a fun way to engage and activate the audience and brings the participants to the same level of knowledge. Organizers of this method may consider different tools for this method, zoom polls are a simple way to apply this method. However, for example Mentimeter offers a few more possibilities to collect and display poll and survey information.

### 2.1.3. Tools

<b>Name of the method</b>	Wonder
<b>Main goal</b>	Simulate a virtual coffee break to allow informal exchange in smaller groups, which participants can change freely
<b>Online platform used</b>	Wonder ( <a href="https://wonder.me">https://wonder.me</a> )
<b>Timeframe</b>	15 minutes until open end
<b>Copy right</b>	n/a

**Description:** Participants enter the Wonder platform and choose different tables to group themselves. Topics of tables can be chosen by the moderators beforehand. In order to open a 'circle' / a video chat in smaller groups, the icons of participants need to move onto each other. Other participants may then join the circle. Several circles exist simultaneously and participants can choose to leave their circle at any time and switch circles. It is useful to set the stage beforehand to get the discussions going, e.g. by providing topics to discuss. This should only be an offer. In the example below, participants were pre-assigned to their first table, where they would start of the conversations by answering the question "What is your favourite meal?". Answers as seen below were Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner, also being the names of the circles.

**Evaluation:** The platform was very well received by the participants as it represented one of the first opportunities for informal virtual exchange since the project kick-off. After a few moments of orientation and getting to know the technicalities of the platform, the participants found it easy to navigate and took advantage of moving around between the different circles.





Figure 4: Wonder platform

## 2.2. Evaluation

In order to examine the usefulness, comprehensibility and general acceptance of the methods used, an evaluation questionnaire was developed. With the main goal of producing comparable results, the same questionnaire was distributed shortly after each of the interactive exchange formats were applied in meetings and reunions. It was decided to conduct the survey via Google Forms, which was accessible by all participants. Instructions and questions were formulated in English and Spanish to ensure understanding and clarity.

As can be seen below, one focus of the evaluation form was on the suitability of the method to the objective of the session, i.e. whether its format and structure produced useful results and advanced the discussion forward. Cities were also asked to reflect the aim of the method from their point of view – to see whether instructions were clear and led to the desired outcome. Additionally, it was important to us to avoid that any of the participants felt unsure or uncomfortable during the session in order to collect ideas and knowledge from all participants and to yield the best possible results from the discussion.

The questionnaire is provided below in English and Spanish and may be used for inspiration.

### Evaluation form: Interactive methods // Formulario de evaluación: Métodos interactivos

Dear City Focal Points, please fill out this evaluation form to give us (Climate Alliance) feedback about the sessions organized as part of T.4.2, testing of interactive methods for city-to-city exchange. Your feedback will help to improve our session planning and will be fed in the deliverable "Cookbook of interactive methods". //

Estimados City Focal Points, le rogamos que rellene este formulario de evaluación para darnos (a Climate Alliance) su opinión sobre las sesiones organizadas en el marco de T.4.2, prueba de métodos interactivos

<p>para el intercambio entre ciudades. Sus comentarios nos ayudarán a mejorar la planificación de las sesiones y se incluirán en el documento "Cookbook of interactive methods".</p>
<p><b>1.</b> Was the interactive method of identifying challenges and solutions via a visualized tree structure clear to you? // ¿Le resultó claro el método interactivo de identificación de retos y soluciones mediante una estructura de árbol visualizada?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes, it was clear to me. // Sí, me quedó claro.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Partly, I had some open questions. // En parte, tenía algunas preguntas abiertas.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No, it was not clear to me. // No, no me quedó claro.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b> Did the method mainly contribute to: // El método contribuyó principalmente a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Peer-to-peer knowledge exchange // Intercambio de conocimientos entre iguales</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Warm-up and getting to know other participants // Conocimiento de los demás participantes</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Joint finding of solutions // Búsqueda conjunta de soluciones</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Brainstorming new ideas // Luvia o tormenta de ideas</li> <li><input type="radio"/> I don't know // No lo sé</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.</b> Do you think that the method benefitted the goal of the session? // ¿Cree que el método ha beneficiado al objetivo de la sesión?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes, it benefitted the session overall. // Sí, benefició a la sesión en general.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> In parts yes, but other methods could have been more successful. // En parte sí, pero otros métodos podrían haber tenido más éxito.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No, it was counterproductive. // No, fue contraproducente.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> I don't know // No lo sé.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.</b> In your opinion, were the results obtained via the method useful? // En su opinión, ¿han sido útiles los resultados obtenidos mediante el método?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes, very useful. // Sí, muy útiles.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes, but results were incomplete due to the chosen method. // Sí, pero los resultados fueron incompletos debido al método elegido.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No, the method was not suited to obtain relevant results. // No, el método no era adecuado para obtener resultados relevantes.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> I don't know. // No lo sé.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.</b> Did you feel uncomfortable during any part of the interactive session? // ¿Se sintió incómodo durante alguna parte de la sesión interactiva?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes // Sí</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No // No</li> </ul>

<p>6. If you answered "yes" in the previous question, why and when? // Si ha respondido afirmativamente a la pregunta anterior, ¿por qué y cuando?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Open text box</i></li> </ul>
<p>7. Would you apply the method within your work if the occasion arises? // ¿Aplicarías el método en tu trabajo si se presenta la ocasión?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Yes // Sí</li> <li>○ No // No</li> <li>○ I am not sure yet, I need more information and practice with the method. // Todavía no estoy seguro, necesito más información y práctica con el método.</li> </ul>

### 3. City-to-city exchange formats

From the beginning of INTERLACE, a regular exchange between a) the cities themselves and b) with the projects' scientific partners was established. For about 12 months, all six cities participated in the meetings and the focus was put on getting to know each other's cities main challenges and ambitions regarding NBS. All meetings are documented by the minute taker of each session. After this first year, it was decided to enter the second phase of city-to-city exchange, namely the cooperation in city pairs, each consisting of a European and a Latin American city to dive deeper into certain topics with high relevance for both cities involved. The following sections describe the experiences made in both the larger group and the city pairs. The table gives a brief overview of key facts for both exchange formats.

**Table 2: Summary of key facts**

Cohort of six cities	City pairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose: Getting to know all cities and their NBS activities; building a common ground</li> <li>• Type of participants: Representatives of all six INTERLACE cities and their scientific supporting organizations</li> <li>• Number of participants: Between 18 and 30</li> <li>• Facilitation: Host and co-host facilitating the city-to-city exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose: Acquire detailed knowledge about the sister city and organize joint activities</li> <li>• Type of participants: Representatives of two INTERLACE cities (EU/CELAC regions) and their scientific supporting organizations</li> <li>• Number of participants: Between 5 and 15 depending on the topic</li> <li>• Facilitation: 1 Host facilitating the city-to-city exchange per city pair</li> </ul>

#### 3.1. Experience in larger groups

Due to the large geographical distance between the cities, accompanied by the pandemic making physical meetings difficult to organize, the regular meetings were held virtually, via the Zoom platform. It

was suggested and agreed to rotate the host function of the meeting among the cities to give each the chance to introduce the team behind the city name and to find a playful and entertaining way to get familiar with each other's local activities.

Consequently, the establishment of the host city function led to six meetings chaired by each of the cities, given them the chance to introduce colleagues and departments involved in the project, but also going deeper into their NBS activities and ambitions. Moreover, the host cities included social and cultural characteristics of their countries and cities in their presentations, showing pictures or videos of landscape, nature and food typical of the regions. This additional component successfully conveyed a feeling of comradeship and created a warmer, more familiar atmosphere during the meetings. Starting the work sessions with this informal welcome and introduction had positive impacts on the following exchanges and discussions, which benefit from participants that feel comfortable and welcome. Often the host cities' presentations were followed by a cascade of questions about the local ecosystems, the legal framework in which the cities operate or the experiences with implementation of NBS. This exchange was useful to identify interest and main challenges to be addressed within INTERLACE.

At the same time, it was noticed at some point, that in-depth exchange was challenging to accommodate during those discussions with 18 and more participants speaking two different languages. They were not suited to go into detail on specific local topics only relevant for one or two cities or plan concrete activities between certain actors within the project.

### 3.2. City pairing

The city-to-city exchange has so far been taking place via the biweekly city meetings. All exchange was organized for all six INTERLACE cities and their respective scientific supporting organizations – named knowledge brokers. As has been described, all cities were able to present themselves and their activities as host city of those meetings once. All activities contributed to identifying common ground, getting to know each other and establishing a good working atmosphere. Now that these are in place and the local activities with external stakeholders from citizen associations, the business sector and social organizations are beginning to take shape, it was a good point in time to move towards a second phase of fostering EU-CELAC exchange in INTERLACE, whose aim is to strengthen the ties between city pairs and intensify collaboration on specific topics.

It was suggested to adapt the existing exchange format where all cities exchange in a large group, to a format of city pairs. Each pair consists of one EU and one CELAC city and their knowledge brokers, leading to an average group size of eight participants. Moreover, each pair is supported by an additional project partner who is in charge of facilitating the cooperation, including translation where necessary.

In a first step, the cities were paired together based on a short profile that the cities filled out, indicating their main interests and challenges concerning INTERLACE topics. Afterwards, the pairs came together to set up a working agenda for their collaboration.

For example, city pairs were able to choose from the following possible activities:

- Organization of small projects and activities together
- Exchange on best practices and challenges

- Organization joint activities for their inhabitants
- Supporting each other in implementing tools/strategies etc.

The specific focus depended largely on the common interests of the cities involved with supporting colleagues helping to identifying topics, working structure etc. in the first meeting of the pairs.

The goal of the pairing was to deepen the exchange between the cities and to support the implementation of activities on the ground while at the same time promoting the exchange of NBS between the two continents.

It was agreed to keep the biweekly meetings structure of all cities. Every third meeting was then reserved for the city pairs. Here, pairs could either work on their own topics or discuss inputs by external partners or invited guests. This way, a minimum meeting frequency of the city pairs at least every six weeks was established. On top of that, the pairs were strongly invited to exchange in self-organized meetings. The moderators were responsible for encouraging further meetings and the set-up of an organized working structure.

The facilitators also supported the reduction of the language barriers. Where possible, pairs were invited to speak in a common language. However, if a common language could not be found, all participants were encouraged to support with translation. Furthermore, a professional simultaneous translation has been considered for one city pair where language barriers are especially paramount.

### 3.2.1. City profile and matching

The following short profile provided the basis for the matching of city pairs. Intentionally kept short, it asked cities for a self-estimation of expertise in terms of NBS, to potentially group mentor and mentee cities together. Furthermore, main interests and relevant sub-topics of NBS were provided to pick from according to local preferences. Own interests differing from the list provided could be added if considered very important. Last but not least, cities could indicate whether they would be interested in organizing joint activities with their respective city pair, and if so, had to give examples of such small, low-budget projects that could range from high-level political exchange, art projects or virtual workshops and more. During the match making process, the two last questions resulted to have the biggest influence on the pairing. It was realized in a way that a) one European and one Latin American city would be represented in each pair and b) several of the same topics had been indicated by the cities.

#### City profile

Name of the city	Exemplary answers from PORTOVIEJO
Estimated level of readiness and expertise in NBS in your city.	MEDIO:



<p>(Choose from: low, medium, high)</p> <p><i>You may include examples of your previous NBS activities.)</i></p>	<p>La intervención de las vegas es un claro ejemplo de la aplicación de NBS. También existen proyectos a futuro como es el corredor del río con su manual. El proyecto Río de Oro.</p> <p>MEDIUM:</p> <p>The intervention of the vegas is a clear example of the application of NBS. There are also future projects such as the river corridor with its manual. The Rio de Oro project.</p>
<p>Main interests for cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy development</li> <li>• Stakeholder involvement</li> <li>• Financing of NBS</li> <li>• Water pollution</li> <li>• Environmental education</li> <li>• Citizen participation and engagement</li> <li>• Communication on NBS</li> <li>• Blue/green networks</li> <li>• Green space management</li> <li>• Heat stress</li> <li>• Flood risk</li> <li>• Air quality</li> <li>• Tools and models</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul> <p><i>Please choose the 3 most important ones from the list and add others, if applicable.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financiación de las NBS Portoviejo tiene un sin número de planes para aplicar NBS, uno de las limitantes es la falta de financiamiento para hacerlas una realidad.</li> <li>• Redes azules/verdes Uno de los planes de Portoviejo en cuando NBS es el corredor del río, el cual justamente busca generar estos espacios o corredores continuos verdes para la ciudad.</li> <li>• Riesgo de inundación Al ser el río una columna vertebral que atraviesa a Portoviejo no tan solo en su zona urbana sino también en la zona rural, esto genera grandes vulnerabilidades y zonas de riesgo debido a la escasez de planificación urbanística de sus inicios.</li> <li>• Financing the NBS Portoviejo has a number of plans to implement NBS, one of the constraints is the lack of funding to make them a reality.</li> <li>• Blue/green networks One of Portoviejo's plans for BSS is the river corridor, which seeks to generate these continuous green spaces or corridors for the city.</li> <li>• Flood risk As the river is a backbone that crosses Portoviejo not only in its urban area but also in the rural area, this generates great vulnerabilities and risk zones due to the scarcity of urban planning in its beginnings.</li> </ul>
<p>Are you interested in organizing small local projects on NBS? If so, which activities or projects do you imagine?</p> <p><i>Examples could be: joint communication activities, joint workshops, cooperation and exchange between local schools, etc.; e.g. small-scale activities requiring no additional funding</i></p>	<p>SI, actividades informativas con colegios y universidades locales, espacios para dar a conocer sobre las NBS al público en general (semana del desarrollo sostenible).</p> <p>YES, information activities with local schools and universities, spaces to raise awareness of the NBS to the general public (sustainable development week).</p>

### 3.2.2. Evaluation of city pairing

The most important aspect of such interactive processes and exchange formats is the usefulness for the user, in this case the city representatives. Hence, a first feedback from the cities was gathered after

the first three months of working and meeting in city pairs. A short survey was conducted online in English and Spanish. In general, 75 % of participants indicated that the work in city pairs had a high or medium-high value for their work so far and 64% preferred the work in pairs over the exchange with in a larger group. The main reasons for this choice was the higher extent of close interaction and direct exchange, the availability of a space to plan specific actions for just two cities such as joint local stakeholder events and the possibility to get a better sense of on-going activities within the partner cities.

Interestingly, the three city pairs have opted for different topics to debate and discuss: While some have chosen to go into technical details of planned interventions and their transferability to the other city, others are exchanging on a more methodological level on best practices of stakeholder engagement. In the coming months, more concrete joint activities will be discussed in some of the pairs.

Many participants also expressed the need for a good balance between the two formats and reiterated the usefulness of the work with all six cities, in order not to surpass opportunities of cooperation with others. The evaluation showed the complementarity of both formats. For the future, it was suggested to include fun and engaging methods to further promote cultural exchange and to change the city pairs after six months to give all cities the opportunity to work with each other.

## 4. Summary

The networking and exchange lies at the core of the INTERLACE project and many thoughts and ideas have shaped the way in which it is implemented within the community. A major shaping factor has also been the pandemic, which has made it even more crucial to find effective virtual formats that foster exchange and mutual learning. So far, most of the methods tested and presented in this Cookbook were well received within the audience – even though there is a risk to overburden meetings with methodological structures where simple discussions can bring out the most useful spontaneous results. Overall, the balance of introducing new interactive methods and giving open, non-facilitated spaces is key when bringing together different cities or local actors that wish to learn from each other.





INTERLACE is a four year project that will empower and equip European and Latin American cities to restore urban ecosystems, resulting in more liveable, resilient and inclusive cities that benefit people and nature.

[interlace-project.eu](http://interlace-project.eu)

INTERLACE es un proyecto de cuatro años que busca empoderar y soportar ciudades de Europa y América Latina en la restauración de ecosistemas urbanos, resultando en ciudades más vivibles, inclusivas y resilientes para el beneficio de la gente y la naturaleza.

## Project Partners



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