



# ActGreen

## Activating green Courtyards for Carbon Neutrality

### ZAGREB, CROATIA

#### Emissions domains addressed by the Pilot Activity



Consumption of non-electricity energy for thermal uses in buildings & facilities



Multi-sector waste management & disposal



Land use (agriculture, forestry & other land uses)



Consumption of electricity generated for buildings, facilities & infrastructure



All vehicles & transport (mobile energy)



#### Key Terms

Green courtyards | Carbon sinks | Nature-based solutions | Co-design | Urban greening | Climate-Neutral Greening Division | GREEN HUB | One-stop shop | Citizen engagement | Heat island mitigation

#### Levers of Change

Data and Digitalisation | Democracy and participation | Financing and funding | Governance and policy | Learning and capabilities | Social innovation | Technology/infrastructure

#### Description of the Pilot Activity

Zagreb leverages its status as one of Europe's greenest capitals to expand climate ambition into previously underutilised spaces — private and semi-public courtyards. While the city boasts abundant green infrastructure, many inner courtyards remain untouched by climate action. ActGREEN activates these spaces as carbon sinks, enhances liveability in dense urban areas to counter heat islands and suburbanisation, fighting urban sprawls and fostering inclusive citizen participation. The approach combines ecological restoration with citizen-driven innovation, positioning courtyard greening as both climate mitigation and urban quality-of-life improvement.

#### Year One Highlights

Year 1 moved from planning to implementation faster than expected. The project launched a Public Call for courtyard greening measures in November 2024, receiving overwhelming response: over 270 applications were submitted and 236 were approved. Due to higher-than-anticipated costs per courtyard refurbishment (reflecting real market prices for landscape design and nature-based solution interventions), the project will finance 7 courtyards directly through NZC funding rather than the originally planned 15 — but the city will fund an additional 17 courtyards through its own budget, demonstrating commitment beyond the pilot.

Year 1 also saw the establishment of the Climate-Neutral Greening Division, held multiple educational events and ideathon workshops to engage citizens, and in Nov 2024 launched the project website. The city is integrating the pilot with existing infrastructure: Zagreb's Smart City Hub (online) and the new Zagreb Energy Centre (physical one-stop shop) will host courtyard greening services, ensuring sustainability beyond the project period. The next phase will focus on enabling GREEN HUB a one stop shop for citizens to provide more resources and information about courtyard and landscape refurbishments, a simple CO2 calculator to demonstrate potential CO2 reduction impact, and GIS data to create better visualisations of their actions.

#### Innovation Highlights

The Public Call model — underpinned by a formal City Decision with documented eligibility criteria and application processes — creates a replicable framework for citizen-initiated greening that other cities can adapt. Integration with existing municipal infrastructure rather than building parallel systems is a deliberate sustainability choice: when the project ends, the service remains. The Climate-Neutral Greening Division connects city administration, university expertise, NGO capacity, and citizen engagement in a structure designed to provide both technical quality and democratic participation.

#### Twinning with Poznań (Poland)

Poznań and Zagreb exchanges focused on sharing learnings on citizen engagement, nature based solutions, and climate governance. The cooperation strengthened knowledge exchange, highlighted challenges like organisational governance gaps, and included site visits to energy and urban sustainability projects.

