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ELCA



WE TAKE CARE
FOR A GREEN
AND LIVEABLE
EUROPE

ELCA is the European association of the landscape professionals. Together we work on the design, construction and maintenance of gardens, public green and green buildings. 24 countries are affiliated to ELCA, together representing 13 000 companies and 125 000 employees. ELCA calls on the importance of greenery with societal benefits in Europe and is the voice of the green professionals who take care for this important work. In the past years ELCA has participated actively in various European discussions and policies.

For example we have contributed to initiatives related to Horizon 2020 nature based solutions, green infrastructure, waste regulations, invasive species and biodiversity. We are eager to work together in facing societal challenges in which greenery can be a solution. We are not standing empty handed. Scientific research supports us with clear results in the effect of greenery and helps to develop new green concepts such as The Living Garden and The Living Building.

EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

At this moment we are facing big challenges in keeping our world liveable. Climate is changing. Heavy rain and drought will lead to all kinds of damage. More and more plants and animals are disappearing. This will affect in the end also our food chain. It is to be expected that in future the majority of people will live in cities.

How do we keep cities a sustainable place to live and work in? All this kind of topics are related to greenery. The time that greenery was decoration, is over. Greenery offers important benefits for the quality of our lives.

CAN WE CREATE MORE GREEN OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER?



Greenery is part of the answers to the great societal challenges that we face in keeping our world liveable. We want to speed up while time is running. To reinforce the development of more green and sustainable solutions ELCA calls on:

PROMOTING GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ALL OVER THE EUROPEAN UNION

Cities and communes all across the European Union are facing challenges from climate change and urbanization. Whereas politics often focuses on grey infrastructure, we advocate for more green spaces in cities. Landscape gardeners provide multiple solutions and can contribute in many ways to an agreeable and sustainable living environment. Building with green helps to mitigate consequences from climate change, absorbs CO₂, fine dust particles, rain and offers cool areas. Biodiversity and health are further key reasons to promote building with nature. In 2013, the European Commission has issued a Communication on Green Infrastructure (COM (2013) 249 final) with the aim to encourage investments in green spaces in cities and in the countryside. It considers Green Infrastructure to be a network of healthy ecosystems which often provides cost-effective alternatives to traditional 'grey' infrastructure and offers many other benefits for both EU citizens and biodiversity. The EU promotes the use of nature-based green infrastructure solutions.

ELCA calls for more concrete actions and funds from the EU. Whereas the EU has launched new financing instruments such as the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCFF), the strategy on Green Infrastructure needs more attention.

FROM A LOCAL POLICY TO SHARED POLICY

Greenery and green spaces are clearly a local topic, but large social challenges don't end at a municipality boundary or a neighbour's fence. It's important that greenery plays a leading role in the design and development process and that it becomes a horizontal topic that runs through policy fields such as education, inclusivity, healthcare and spatial planning. Green and blue (water) should be the pillars on which every spatial planning and construction development should be built, with a result based on the advantages of a green and blue environment. ELCA is calling for the various layers of government – local, regional, national and European – to look at how they could work together by connecting the varying policies on green infrastructure and as such facilitate a major shift towards sustainability and liveability.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Further commitment is needed to innovation and development of nature-based solutions to improve the social environment, biodiversity, people's health and the circular economy. To achieve this requires that this topic is specifically included in the Horizon 2020 programme. The work can be done with a broad green agenda in conjunction with the issues facing society where greenery can play a role. ELCA wants to instigate this, together with other stakeholders.

DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES

The time that all things green were merely decorative is now over. Expertise in design, construction and maintenance in the green sector has developed rapidly. Working in nature is all about people. Member states should organise good green educational programmes to ensure inflow into this sector. Companies can provide an excellent learning environment within a framework of European exchange. ELCA wants to facilitate this development from a business platform. Besides students from standard vocational education, this network should also be open to students switching from other disciplines and to professionals. Securing skilled labour is key in today's markets. Companies in landscaping provide attractive and safe jobs, but face a strong competition for workers. The European Commission should continue to support projects focusing on the qualification and the vocational training of young landscape gardeners in order to promote the green sector and enhance career possibilities for young people.

BUY GREEN

It's important that green innovations and green knowledge can be included in projects. Governments have massive purchasing power and can as such encourage greening further. European tender rules clearly define the rules for tendering. At ELCA, we advocate partnerships between clients and contractors that are founded within market consultations and buying with green impact.

GREENING WITH VAT

An important stimulus for greening gardens could be created by reducing the VAT for gardening services. The European VAT directive for this does not currently offer any options. The European Commission is working on a new VAT directive that will also address rates. If the list of options for a low VAT remains as it is, then the ELCA will call on gardening services to also fall under this regime. ELCA would, however, prefer to let go of this list and give member states the flexibility to determine themselves what rate of VAT they want to set per product or service.

THINK SMALL FIRST

Companies in the green sector are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It is important that they can work with laws and rules that are aligned with the scale of their businesses. ELCA is calling for new legislation and regulations to be subject to an SME test. Following the approach "big in big things, small in small things" the EU should focus on major common topics to promote European cohesion rather than regulate many aspects of businesses in detail. Pragmatic solutions that simplify the daily work of green companies should be the goal of European law-making. To give a concrete example: obligations to deliver a lot of statistical data seems un-



essary and is an additional burden for green businesses. The European Commission's initiative on better regulation is to be welcomed. Existing instruments and principles should be strictly applied by EU institutions in order to avoid and reduce bureaucratic burden. There should be additional consideration for supporting these companies in terms of digitalisation and making their company and operating processes sustainable.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There are many more topics in which greenery plays a role and in which the knowledge of ELCA can help. Think about invasive species, pesticides and the waste directive. We are looking forward to the working programme of the new European Commission, based on which we would be happy to become sparring and project partners, using the above-mentioned input.