

Brussels, April 30th, 2025

Position paper

Landscape garden sector vital for green transition urban areas in Europe, vocational training is key

ELCA launches ambition for initiating European network of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) for landscape gardening

Summary

The landscape garden sector is vital for the green transition of the urban area. With greenery and nature-based solutions we add to a better climate, biodiversity and public health. The European Commission has taken different initiatives, amongst others in the European Green Deal and with the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, to make our urban living environment sustainable and a healthy place to live. The landscape garden sector wants to take up its role in making the aims of these initiatives come true. One the key elements of success is the organization of the workforce. We need sufficient and well-trained professionals all over Europe, but we have a problem there. Not in all European member states the vocational training for landscape gardening is well developed. To enhance the level and the structure of vocational training for our sector, the European Landscape Contractors Association (ELCA) wants to initiate a European wide network of CoVEs for landscape gardening. In this position paper we explain the context of this idea, the definition of the problem, the character of the CoVE and what we need to establish this European network.

Alignment European policies

In the political guidelines for the EU Semester 2024 – 2029, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen outlined the societal challenges that we face on our continent and what kind of initiatives she wants to take to address these challenges with concrete actions. One of these actions is the continuation of the **European Green Deal**, which focusses amongst others on climate resilience and the enhancement of biodiversity. In the upcoming semester the implementation of the **Nature Restoration Regulation** will be high on the agenda. In this regulation there is a specific paragraph dedicated to the urban area. Till 2030 there must be a no net loss of green urban spaces and urban tree canopy. Between 2030 and 2050 there must be an increasing trend in urban green spaces and tree canopy till a satisfactory level is reached.

Contribution of ecosystem services and nature-based solutions

The European green sector, and in a broader sense all sectors involved in the production of plant material, landscape design and urban green management, welcome the European initiative to make our urban living environment a resilient and healthy place to live. **It is of great significance that the European Commission emphasizes on the application of nature-based solutions as an efficient and cost-effective way to enhance climate, biodiversity and public health.** We as a sector want to take up our role and responsibility here. We want to act as relevant stakeholder, offer our network and experience and deliver ecosystem services with greenery and concrete nature-based projects. Since the societal benefits of greenery and nature-based solutions blossom at local level and are related to specific challenges that are faced there, it is vital that there is a strong cohesion in policies and in common efforts on European, national, regional and local level.

Challenge landscape garden sector

ELCA is the European Landscape Contractors Association, that has representation in 23 EU-member states and in countries outside of the EU (Canada, Japan, Norway, Saudi-Arabia, Singapore, Switzerland, Türkiye and United Kingdom). **The level of development of the landscape garden sector throughout Europe varies.** In some countries the sector has a long tradition, but in others the sector is in an early stage of development. If we look at the ambition of European urban green policies that must be implemented at national and local level, we find ourselves in a challenge and big assignment.

As ELCA we have been thinking about what we need to take up our role at national and local level in order to deliver a sustainable and healthy green urban environment. **Besides of the recognition by the European Commission of the landscape garden professionals that we are a vital sector for the green transition, one of the key elements will be vocational training and lifelong learning in the organization of our workforce.** The same also counts for the other urban green specialists.

Linking to EU-policies on vocational training

We are very happy with the initiatives that the European Commission will take to support vocational training and bridging the gap of labour market shortage. **In the political guidelines for the EU Semester 2024 -2029, we see the announcement of the Union of Skills and a new European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training.** At this moment there are also the development of a quality framework for traineeships and an EU Talent Pool on the agenda. Later this year there will be a Danish Declaration on VET 2025 – 2030 presented that contributes to a comprehensive approach on vocational training with different actions and on different levels. We as ELCA welcome these initiatives with great enthusiasm and hope that these can also be tailor made for the needs that we feel regarding the future development of our workforce in all European member states.

Vocational training gap in landscape gardening

Regarding the vocational training system for our landscape garden sector we have a big problem. **There is, in most of the European member states, a big gap between the curricula of schools and the needs of the companies. In some countries there isn't even a vocational training program specifically for landscape gardening or are schools insufficiently equipped to meet the needs of companies.**

Vocational training is a national authority but must be further elaborated to bring our sector to the next level. From the European perspective, we know exactly what we need and feel that the sector should be more in demand on what schools can deliver on the content of curricula and the sort and amount of professionals they need.

At the same time we see a large commitment of landscape garden companies throughout Europe to contribute to the work of the school by providing traineeships, project/company visits, knowledge sharing on innovations, taking care for lessons and offer their facilities and equipment for training purposes. As ELCA we encourage that. **A close cooperation between schools and companies will lead to a unique cooperation that results in the support of the development of the workforce at companies and that will lift our capability as a sector to fulfil our role in the societal challenges we see on climate, biodiversity and public health in the urban area.**

Better cooperation schools and companies in Centres of Vocational Excellence

To the question what we need, we can give a clear answer. Our ambition would be to build, together with the European Commission, national governments, vocational training schools, our national member associations and their members, on a European network of CoVEs for landscape gardening. **The concept of Centres of Vocational Excellence for landscape gardening consists of a regional school with a cluster of companies.** On this regional level, they have a strong cooperation on the influx of potential students (also adult students who have/had another career before), creating innovative vocational education and lifelong learning from EQF-level 1 to 5 and promoting the attractiveness of the profession and the school. The concept of this green CoVE, already exists in The Netherlands and is very successful with a network of 17 active clusters. Our ambition is to lift this example up to a European level.

Towards a European network

We have already some very positive first experiences on how successful a European network of CoVEs for landscape gardening can be. **We were partners in the EU-funded project *European Platform for Urban Greening (EPLUG)*, which was concluded last October. As part of this initiative, Centres of Vocational Excellence were established across six EU member states: The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Romania, and Spain.** Schools and companies worked together on the exchange of knowledge and experiences and the development of new curricula. ELCA took up the role as knowledge hub in the dissemination of expertise, contacts and European traineeships from its Exchange Network. Through this network ELCA provides facilitation for students, teachers and professionals to go for a traineeship abroad. Besides EPLUG, ELCA participated in the EU-funded project ARtemis. This project is completed in August 2024 and aimed at the introduction of virtual reality and other digital techniques in landscape gardening education.

ELCA willing to initiate a European wide network of green CoVEs

To support the further development of the landscape garden sector and to meet with the ambitions to tackle societal challenges by European, national and local policies for a resilient urban area, **ELCA is willing to take the initiative to organize and promote a European wide network of green CoVEs and to start up a proactive exchange between these CoVEs on how to organize clusters between schools and regional companies, to determine the regional labour market needs, to define common interest in vocational training and the organization of the workforce at companies, to develop innovative curricula on different EQF-levels for vocational training and lifelong learning etc.** Together with our national and associate member associations we will work on an introduction plan with a focus of having an operational European wide network of CoVEs for landscape gardening by the end of 2028. To start with this we need to:

1. Make a situation report on the status of the vocational training system for the sector in the different EU member states;
2. Create an overview of the labour market needs in the different EU member states;
3. Map problems companies face in organizing their workforce in the different EU member states;
4. Link to current or upcoming initiatives from the European Commission that enhance the development of vocational training in the EU member states;
5. Seek for support from the European Commission in any kind of form that can support the work of ELCA in preparing, organizing and promoting a European network of green CoVEs;
6. Adjust with the other sectors of urban green specialists, working together in the SoGreen Alliance (www.onthegreenmove.com), to determine common needs and actions.

Your input and inspiration

We hope that this position paper gives an impression of where we stand as landscape garden sector in our future professional development and how much we value the role of vocational training and lifelong learning to achieve this aim. There is a lot of work to be done and our idea can grow by your input and inspiration. **We keep ourselves recommended for a presentation of our idea for a European wide network of green CoVEs and to exchange with you on ideas and possibilities to make this idea stronger and to make it become reality.**

Contact

Egbert Roozen, secretary general of the European Landscape Contractors Association

Phone: (+32) 468 35 11 91

Mail: contact@elca.info

Thank you very much for attention, interest and cooperation.

Good to know:

ELCA is appointed by the European Commission as an expert in the expert sub-group on the Nature Restoration Regulation.

The SoGreen Alliance consists of the following European associations of urban green specialists:

- European Arboricultural Council (EAC),
- European Federation Green Roofs and Living Walls associations (EFB),
- European Interior Landscaping Organization (EILO),
- European Landscape Contractors Association (ELCA),
- European Nurserystock Association (ENA),
- International Federation of Landscape Architects Europe (IFLA),
- International Organization of Natural Bathing Waters (IOB),
- World Urban Parcs Europe (WUP).

The EU transparency number of ELCA is 446688050016-05.