

International Winter School  
**Scaling down Green Transition**  
Co-creating Nature-Based Solutions at the neighborhood level

Deadline for application  
20/01/2025



# International Winter School

## Scaling down Green Transition

### Co-creating Nature-Based Solutions at the neighborhood level

**Deadline for application**  
**20/01/2025**

**Dates of the Winter School:** 17-21 February 2025  
**Location:** Tirana, Albania, Polis University  
**Eligible Candidates:** Up to 10 Students enrolled in POLIS University (3-5 years of study)

Eligible students include those enrolled in the Faculty of Planning, Environment and Urban Management. Also, students from the Faculty of Architecture and Design, especially those in the Energy Efficiency, Construction Engineering, and Architecture curriculums, are encouraged to participate in the workshop.

**ECTS:** The activity provides 3 ECTS credits to the participating students.

#### POLIS University & Co-PLAN organising committee

Fiona Imami, Kejt Dhrami, Anila Bejko, Merita Toska, Elona Karafili, Enkela Poro,

#### Partner Universities and Institutions

Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development (coordinating partner, AL); POLIS University (AL); Politecnico di Torino – R3C Responsible Risk Resilience Centre (IT); Nordregio (SE); University of Belgrade – Faculty of Geography (RS); and Center for Economic Analyses Association (MK).

Project website: Winter School – GreenFORCE ([greenforcetwinning.net](https://greenforcetwinning.net))

Contacts for the WinterSchool: **Fiona Imami:** [fiona\\_imami@co-plan.org](mailto:fiona_imami@co-plan.org) and **Kejt Dhrami:** [kejt\\_dhrami@co-plan.org](mailto:kejt_dhrami@co-plan.org)



## Focus and Activities

The Winter School in Tirana is organised jointly by [Co-PLAN](#), [Institute for Habitat Development](#) and [POLIS University](#) and supported by the [Interuniversity Department of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning](#) and the [Interdepartmental Responsible Risk Resilience Centre \(R3C\)](#) of Politecnico di Torino. The school is supported by the [Center for Economic Analysis Association \(CEA\)](#) in North Macedonia, the [University of Belgrade, Faculty of Geography](#); as the regional partners, and [Nordregio](#), a pan-Nordic research organisation based in Sweden.

The Winter School emphasises Just Green Transitions (JGT), which offers students a dynamic platform to explore, design, and implement localised solutions that align with the SDGs, the EU Green Deal, and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Through the program, participants will enhance their technical competencies by using advanced **environmental modelling** and **ecosystem service assessment tools**, enabling them to evaluate and improve neighbourhood-level environmental performance. Additionally, they will develop **practical problem-solving abilities** by working collaboratively in teams to design Nature-Based Solutions tailored to real cases. The program will also enhance the student's **community engagement skills** as they interact directly with local stakeholders in target neighbourhoods. Participants will refine their strategic decision-making capabilities through the on-site workshop, a series of online and in-person lectures, a scenario-building game, meetings with local authorities, etc., learning to balance cost-effectiveness with social and environmental benefits. Students will be supervised and mentored by an international, multi-disciplinary teaching staff during their activity.

Prepare for an exciting, fast-paced event that brings a unique localised Balkan perspective to the Green Transition discussion!

## Rationale and Context

The global urgency for sustainable growth and climate resilience has brought the green transition to the forefront of policy, planning, and community action. While much of the discourse focuses on national and international strategies, meaningful implementation often occurs at more minor scales—within neighbourhoods and communities where people directly experience the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. Translating broad green transition objectives into localised, actionable initiatives is essential for fostering tangible climate change. Yet, communities often face difficulties incorporating top-down policy changes into their daily livelihood.

This Winter School focuses on **scaling down the green transition** to the neighbourhood level, emphasising the critical role of communities in co-creating solutions. By designing Nature-Based Solutions (NBS), which use natural processes to address environmental, social, and economic challenges, this program seeks to demonstrate how neighbourhoods can drastically improve energy and climate performance, thus becoming true catalysts for change!

### Why work at the neighbourhood level?

Neighborhoods are the closest spatial and social units to individuals. Interventions at this scale offer visible, direct benefits, such as improved air quality, reduced urban heat islands, enhanced biodiversity, and better social cohesion. The Winter School will focus on three target neighbourhoods in Tirana, with particular



socio-demographic characteristics. Extensive research on urban environmental performance and land development in the three target neighbourhoods shows immense potential and feasibility for renovation of the buildings to become as close to net zero as possible. However, this is not enough. Environmental performance at the neighbourhood level is not solely related to the renovation but also to smaller-scale, nature-based interventions in the public space between buildings. This will be the focus of the Winter School.

By engaging at the neighbourhood level, participants will experience meaningful citizen participation. Residents have intimate knowledge of local challenges and opportunities, making them invaluable contributors to co-designed solutions. The participatory approach aligns with the principles of a just green transition, ensuring no one is left behind. These neighbourhoods will serve as experimental hubs for testing and refining green transition strategies focused on low-cost, scalable initiatives in other, more complex, urban realities.

### **Measuring Environmental Performance**

Measuring environmental performance at the neighbourhood level is crucial in identifying challenges and opportunities to reach the localised SDG targets and EU Green Deal milestones. This involves employing a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, such as field observations, environmental modelling through GIS-linked software, ecosystem service evaluations, and in-site assessments of different parameters like air quality, urban heat islands, rainwater management, and biodiversity. These methods provide valuable insights into the baseline conditions of neighbourhoods. However, challenges arise from data limitations, such as the availability and accuracy of local environmental data.

During the Winter School in Tirana, participants will work in multidisciplinary teams, navigating the abovementioned challenges and using alternative methods for assessing and observing environmental performance. In the end, each team will provide a design solution for increasing the environmental livability of the areas, tackling the mitigation of flooding, improving air and water quality, reducing urban heat islands, reducing energy savings, enhancing public spaces, etc.

The International Winter School invites students from Politecnico di Torino, University of Belgrade - Faculty of Geography, and Polis University to explore the concept of a Just Green Transition at the neighbourhood level. This immersive program combines theory, practical fieldwork, and design exercises, focusing on developing and implementing Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) to address environmental challenges.

Participants will work with three Albanian neighbourhoods to assess their environmental performance using observation, ENVI-met simulations, and ecosystem service evaluations. The outcomes will inform the co-design of innovative, cost-effective NBS tailored to local community needs. To further engagement, the Winter School will include a collaborative game to develop and refine optimal transition scenarios for these communities.

### **Language Requirements**

The activity will be exclusively held in English. Please specify your English level in the application documents.



## Academic Requirements

Eligible students are enrolled in the “Faculty of Planning, Environment and Urban Management”, or “Faculty of Architecture and Design”, in the 3rd, 4th and 5th year of studies. We encourage the participation of students from multi-disciplinary curriculums, including Urban Planning; Energy Efficiency, Construction Engineering and Architecture. Younger students, attending 1st or 2nd year, will be allowed to participate in extraordinary cases, if high academic performance is proved, exceeding the results of the other applicants. The committee reserves the right to hold verbal interviews with the candidates prior to the notification of the final results.

### **IMPORTANT**

To be eligible, each student must verify and confirm that they are part of POLIS University and will commit to attending the Winter School schedules full time. Failing to attend the online and on-site workshops and activities will revoke the possibility of obtaining the winter school certificate and be awarded the respective credits.

## ECTS Credits

The participating students will be awarded **3 ECTS** credits.

## Fees and Requirements

The programme does not require the payment of any fee. The costs covered by the Winter School include:

- 5-day intensive Winter School in Tirana, with lectures and studio work;
- 1 social dinner;
- 5 lunches and coffee breaks;
- logistics costs for site visits
- multidisciplinary tutoring from teaching staff from POLITO, Co-PLAN, U\_Polis, Nordregio, UB-GEF and CEA during the academic activities of the winter school.

Any personal expenses, extra meals and other costs not specifically mentioned above (i.e. extra commodities, travel to Polis University, etc.) are not included. Participants are required to cover their expenses and must bring their laptops.

## How to Participate

Each candidate should fill out the dedicated [Google FORM](#) and provide, by uploading to the system, the following additional information:

- a photocopy of your passport (the page with pictures, personal info, and expiration date) is needed.
- a signed self-declaration confirming that you fully commit to participating in Winter School Activities.
- a motivational letter (max 800 words) written in English;
- a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and/or a portfolio;



- a list of exams successfully passed and the marks achieved for the academic year 2023-2024.

## Selection Criteria and Ethics

Candidates will be assessed based on the information provided in the motivation letter and the CV or portfolio.

The 10 POLIS students will be selected based on the following criteria:

- interest-driving learning in the contents of the Winter School (i.e., relevance to Just Green Transitions) based on the motivation letter;
- academic background and preparation based on the CV and/or the portfolio;
- research skills and attitudes based on the CV and/or the portfolio;

An evaluation committee of the POLIS & Co-PLAN staff involved in the teaching activity will assess the candidates.

**Ethics disclaimer:** The list of selected candidates will ensure a balanced gender representation. No discrimination is allowed to any ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual, religious, or political orientation. GreenFORCE Team will guarantee the maintenance of a selection process that is fair and equitable and support the informed and responsible decision-making of candidates.

## List of Participants

An email will be sent to the selected candidates by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2025. The list will comprise up to 10 selected students + 2 eligible candidates (reserve list).

The 10 selected students must send their confirmation to [fona\\_imami@co-plan.org](mailto:fona_imami@co-plan.org) and [kejt\\_dhrami@co-plan.org](mailto:kejt_dhrami@co-plan.org), communicating their acceptance by the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2025. The email should include:

- a specific written communication on any possible disclaimers regarding allergy, communication issues, disabilities and/or special needs, health issues, security issues, and accommodation restrictions (if there are no disclaimers, please indicate as well).

If one of the 10 selected students cancels or does not confirm the above request in their participation in time, the first eligible candidate in the reserve list will be offered their place.

## Disclaimer

A minimum of five (10) participants from POLIS is required to activate the programme. The organisational team is NOT accountable if the activity is cancelled for any *force majeure* reason.

## General Timeline:

Dates	Before the winter school
20 <sup>th</sup> of January 2025	Deadline for students' application
23 <sup>rd</sup> of January 2025	Notification of the results
25 <sup>th</sup> of January 2025	Deadline for acceptance and finalisation of the list of participants
	Winter school and after

28 <sup>th</sup> of January 2025	1-day kick-off event (online)
5 <sup>th</sup> of February 2025	1-day lectures event (online)
12 <sup>th</sup> of February 2025	1-day lectures event (online)
17 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> of February 2025	Winter School activities in Tirana (5 days)
TBD	1-day feedback event (online)

## About GreenFORCE Project:

This winter school is part of the HORIZON-WIDERA project "[GreenFORCE. Foster Research Excellence for Green Transition in the Western Balkans](#)" (HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-02-02). The five partner organisations are [Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development](#) in Albania as the coordinating partner; [University of Belgrade - Faculty of Geography \(UB-GEF\)](#) in Serbia and the [Center for Economic Analysis Association \(CEA\)](#) in North Macedonia as the two regional partners; and [Nordregio](#), a pan-Nordic research organisation based in Sweden, together with [Politecnico di Torino \(PoliTO\)](#), in Italy, as the leading EU Research Institutions. POLIS University (U\_POLIS) in Albania is the affiliate partner of Co-PLAN.

GreenFORCE aims to foster excellence in the Western Balkans' Green Transition scientific research and innovation of Co-PLAN (Albania), CEA (North Macedonia), and UB-GEF (Serbia); to enhance their research profile, strengthening the research and management capacities of their staff, and contributing to convergence between the Western Balkans and the European Union research capacities, as well as to broader policy initiatives for the region. This objective is reached through the twinning partnership of five organisations that work closely to produce territorial knowledge through exploratory research and institutional learning; transfer and exchange knowledge among partner organisations through applying the knowledge management cycle; and engage in networking for sharing, cross-fertilizing and amplifying knowledge at the societal level.

The researchers of the consortium engage in building a joint research project with objectives related to (i) the conceptualisation of Green Transition in the Western Balkans (WB), (ii) the assessment of possible impacts and costs of Just Green Transitions, focusing on components of the pillars of the EU Green Agenda for the WB; (iii) the proposal of a continuous monitoring and assessment framework on Green Transition impacts and costs in the WB, to be used by scientists, researchers and policy-makers in facilitating the Just Green Transitions.

This winter school is the third and final of three stand-alone teaching events that contribute to the co-design, co-evaluation, exchange and sharing of the research practice and results conducted in the project. The events are open to students from U\_Polis, UB-GEF and PoliTO. Each event will host up to 20 students, of which 10 will be from the hosting institution; in this case, **U\_POLIS will have ten participating students**. Students attending at least one of the stand-alone teaching events may decide to work more thoroughly on this topic through the development of their master thesis under the supervision of one or more professors involved in the winter school.

\* For any clarification, please email both [fiona\\_imami@co-plan.org](mailto:fiona_imami@co-plan.org) and [kejt\\_dhrami@co-plan.org](mailto:kejt_dhrami@co-plan.org).

This activity is organised with the support of Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development and POLIS University.

