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Instead of Less – More Nature in Our Towns and Villages

Greener towns and villages are absolutely essential — not only for the preservation of biodiversity, but above all for the quality of life of residents. With the unfortunate but now inevitable overheating of urban areas during summer months, determined action is needed.

For Mouvement Ecologique, this issue remains a top priority. And rightly so — especially since in 2024, the government planned steps that actually represent setbacks in this area.

CONTROVERSIAL PROJECT – “BUILDING FASTER AND FASTER” – NATURE PROTECTION LAW CALLED INTO QUESTION

In 2024, Mouvement Ecologique took a strong and critical stance on the government's project “Méi a méi séier bauen” (“Building faster and faster”).

With the argument that housing construction needed to be accelerated, the new government introduced a package of measures that, in its first draft, essentially questioned the core principles of the existing Nature Protection Law.

There is broad agreement that action is urgently needed — especially in the area of affordable housing. It is also clear that permitting procedures should be simplified and better coordinated. In this spirit, Mouvement Ecologique has repeatedly made concrete proposals in recent years on how nature protection procedures can be streamlined while actually creating added value for biodiversity.

However, the reform initiated by the government is moving in a different and highly problematic direction. Under the pretext of simplifying procedures, biodiversity protection is being significantly weakened, and the quality of life in towns and villages is being put at risk.

Moreover, nature protection is not the main cause of the current housing crisis. There are deeper structural issues — such as infrastructure costs for municipalities — that politics should focus on instead of loosening the protection of nature, which is already under heavy pressure.

The main actions taken by Mouvement Ecologique on this issue throughout the year included:

Early July 2024 – Response to the Presentation of the “Méi a méi séier bauen” Strategy

Just before the summer break, the government presented its housing strategy focused on accelerating approval procedures. In response, Mouvement Ecologique issued a 23-page statement titled “Unbalanced Government Document with One-Sided Focus Raises Numerous Questions,” warning of potentially severe negative consequences for biodiversity and quality of life.

The organization stressed that the proposed package of measures could turn into a Pandora's box, opening the door to far-reaching and unintended environmental impacts.

End of July 2024 – Information Requests to the Ministries of Environment and the Interior

According to Mouvement Ecologique's analysis, a number of the proposed changes — particularly those related to compensation measures and green space requirements in urban areas — appeared to lack a sound scientific basis and seemed difficult to implement realistically.

In order to clarify these issues, detailed information was requested from both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of the Environment. Unfortunately, some of these questions remained unanswered.

November 2024 – Detailed Analysis of the Now Available Draft Law

In October, the draft law to amend the Nature Protection Act was published. Mouvement Ecologique responded with a comprehensive analysis, clearly stating that the proposed changes would not only weaken the protection of nature but also fail to deliver any meaningful simplification of procedures.

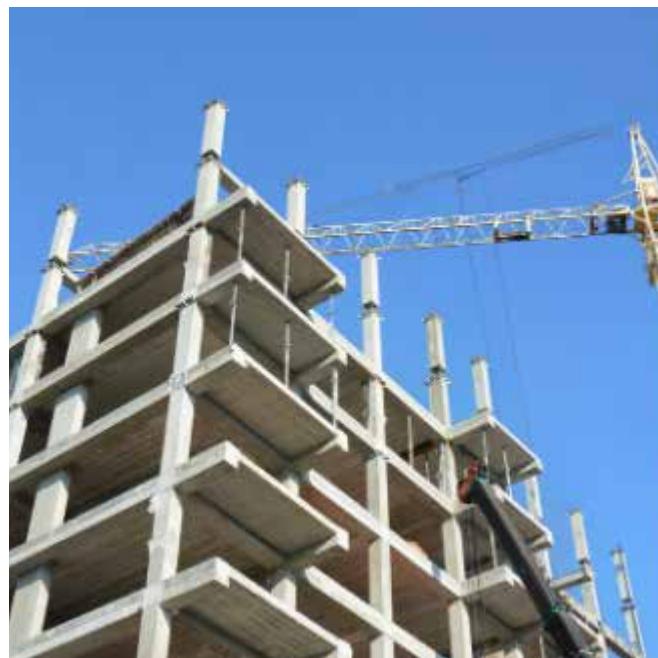
Particularly concerning are the planned reductions in compensation measures for environmental impacts and the potential loss of green structures in villages.

In a letter to the Chamber of Deputies, Mouvement Ecologique called for fundamental changes to the draft law. At the same time, the organization announced that it would pursue all legal avenues to prevent further biodiversity loss — including a possible complaint to the European Commission for non-compliance with EU directives.

By the end of 2024, the state of analysis was as follows:

The Ministry of the Environment has presented a reform proposal for the Nature Protection Law which — despite some commendable improvements, particularly outside of urban areas — still raises serious concerns.

- only offers limited improvements in terms of procedures, while at the same time introducing new problems of interpretation and inconsistencies at various levels. It also contains provisions that do not appear to comply with European directives on the protection of endangered species and habitats — which is particularly problematic given the already poor state of biodiversity.
- provides insufficient compensation for the loss of hedgerows, shrubs, and other green structures in new development plans;
- does not sufficiently contribute to the long-term greening of



our towns and villages, which is essential for combating climate change and improving the quality of life for residents.

Mouvement Ecologique's demands were clear:

- Simplification of procedures — yes, but not at the expense of nature in people's living environments;
- Avoid the risk of infringing on the rights of third parties;
- The newly introduced principle of "temporary nature" within urban areas must not be applied retroactively: incentives to preserve existing green structures in towns and villages must be maintained;
- Ensure genuinely green settlements for people — rather than relying solely on statistical values;
- High-quality green structures for people and nature — not just decorative "architect's parsley";

Through a wide range of actions, Mouvement Ecologique demonstrated in parallel that more greenery in towns and villages is not only possible, but also meaningful and necessary to effectively counter climate change and the biodiversity crisis.

"(MORE) TREES IN OUR STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES"

On January 31, 2024, Mouvement Ecologique and the Oekozenter Pafendall organized a professional seminar titled "(More) Trees in Our Streets and Public Spaces." Held in cooperation with the Ministry of Mobility, the Ministry of the Environment, and the City of Luxembourg, the event brought together around 250 participants from municipalities, administrations, ministries, and environmental commissions.

The event emphasized the growing importance of greening urban areas in response to climate change. Keynote speaker Thomas Roth presented best-practice examples from Vienna and introduced the "sponge city" concept. These were complemented by practical insights from the municipalities of Luxembourg City and Dudelange.

The discussions reflected a positive momentum but also highlighted the significant need for further action.

This seminar was part of Mouvement Ecologique's long-standing awareness-raising efforts to promote greener and more livable communities.



Following the seminar, the Ministry of the Environment organized a workshop to develop a national guide for tree planting in public spaces. Mouvement Ecologique played an advisory role during the early stages and will continue to support the project going forward. In short: a success story.

WOODEN BOXES DON'T REPLACE TREES!

A technology with the misleading name "City Trees" seemed to gain a foothold in Luxembourg in 2024. The idea: a wooden box fitted with moss-covered panels designed to filter air and provide slight cooling — supposedly as a substitute for real urban trees.

In a post on its website, Mouvement Ecologique advised against this costly trend (with reported rental costs of 16,000 euros per "tree" per year). While such installations may be somewhat effective at filtering air, they provide only a fraction of the many benefits that real trees offer: aesthetic value, support for biodiversity, positive effects on mental health, and enhanced public space where people enjoy spending time.

The goal should be to truly green our towns and cities again — creating spaces where people feel welcome, where streets and plazas become living places for all generations, with children playing and communities gathering. Reducing trees to mere filters or carbon sinks overlooks the full range of their benefits.

Mouvement Ecologique advocates for the creation of vibrant, green public spaces rather than relying on "technical solutions." This should be the guiding principle of modern urban planning — especially in times of climate change.

GREEN COMMUNITIES – GREEN SCHOOLYARDS FOR LUXEMBOURG

As early as November 2023, Mouvement Ecologique, together with its youth section *move.*, advocated for greener and more vibrant schoolyards. This took place in the context of an engaging and well-attended seminar primarily aimed at teachers, school leadership, and students.

The event focused on the theme:

"Green and Lively Instead of Grey and Monotonous: Planning and Redesigning Nature-Based and Climate-Friendly Schoolyards for Secondary Schools."

In 2024, the results of the workshop were published in an illustrated brochure, which was distributed to all relevant stakeholders — with the hope that it would contribute to the broader greening of schoolyards across Luxembourg.

Mouvement Ecologique was also able to contribute further in this area. Specifically, the organization took part in a jury tasked with evaluating municipal projects focused on de-sealing and greening, submitted in response to a call for proposals by the Ministry of the Environment.

The initiative was made possible through funding from the “Oeuvre Nationale de Secours Grande-Duchesse Charlotte.”

GREAT INTEREST IN THE LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE “KRAUTGAART”

In June, members of Mouvement Ecologique and other interested individuals had the opportunity to take a behind-the-scenes look at a vegetable-growing operation that works according to the principles of soil-friendly market gardening: producing the greatest possible variety and quantity of vegetables on a small area, marketed directly to the local population.

With over 40 registrations, the visit to the community-supported vegetable farm *Krautgaard* in Steinfort was met with great enthusiasm. The central focus of the visit was the soil-building method of cultivation, which avoids both soil tillage and the use of machinery — and, of course, relies on no chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

Abandoning soil tillage not only significantly reduces labor but also minimizes weed growth and increases the garden’s resilience to weather extremes like drought and heavy rainfall. This is just one of the many cultivation techniques used in small-scale market gardening — many of which can also be applied at home in private gardens.

Course for vegetable garden enthusiasts:

Following the Krautgaard visit, Mouvement Ecologique launched a hands-on course in sustainable vegetable growing. Titled *“No dig Geméisbau”*, the course runs from autumn 2024 to autumn 2025,

teaching participants how to manage their gardens ecologically using soil-conserving methods. The course filled up quickly with 30 participants — a clear sign of the growing interest in sustainable self-sufficiency and vegetable cultivation in Luxembourg. This project is made possible with financial support from the Ministry of the Environment.

BEAUTIFUL WILD PLANTS IN YOUR GARDEN AND ON YOUR BALCONY

In 2024, Mouvement Ecologique continued its awareness-raising efforts to promote nature-friendly greening in towns and villages. In autumn, the organization reminded the public that it’s already time to start thinking about the wildflower meadows of summer 2025 — and that now is the right moment to sow them.

To support this, the Mouvement Ecologique shop offers suitable wildflower seed mixes from “Wëllplanzesom Lëtzebuerg.” These benefit not only pollinators and gardeners, but also local producers.

ATTRACTIVE WEBSITE – WWW.NATURELO.MECO.LU

The website “Natur elo!” brings together all information related to Mouvement Ecologique’s activities concerning nature in and around residential areas. Many of these initiatives are organized in collaboration with the Oekozenter Pafendall and supported by the Ministry of the Environment. Visitors will find official statements, practical guidance, action flyers, concrete tips, recent publications from both Luxembourg and abroad, and inspiring projects that can serve as good-practice examples. The site also features videos from various events related to the topic.

