# Creating the conditions for healthy urban soil practices: a regional perspective from Flanders

## From regional knowledge and policy to place-based urban action

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# The Flemish governance context on (urban) soil health

| Amsterdam | Brussels-Capital Region | Flanders |
|---|---|---|
| One city | City and region overlap | One region, many cities |
| Local soil data | Integrated soil index | Multiple regional data layers in dataplatform |
| Local decision-making | Assessment linked to urban development | Shared regional (policy) framework for place-based local action |

**=> Different governance scales require different approaches to urban soil health**

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# Multiple data layers, not one integrated Flemish soil ‘score’

- **Soil health information in Flanders:**
  - **Available**
    - **OVAM**: soil contamination ‘identity card’: public, parcel-specific information known soil contamination + PFAS-viewer
    - **DOV (database of the subsoil of Flanders)**:
      - Regional soil maps and thematic datasets
      - Observed and modelled soil characteristics
  - **In progress**
    - Exploring how public soil information can be broadened and made more useful for soil-conscious decisions
    - Guidance for translating soil information into soil-conscious action
      - Soil-conscious depaving
      - Soil-conscious earth movement (excavated soil)
      - Soil-conscious infiltration
      - Nature-based solutions for soil management
      - …

**=> Aim: provide the right information for the right decision**

(Excerpt from bodemkwaliteit.be)




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# Cities need more than data …

- **What Flemish cities and municipalities tell us they need:**
  - **Clear direction**
    - Workable policy frameworks
    - Practical soil criteria for urban projects
  - **Tools for implementation**
    - Guidance for protecting soil before, during and after works
    - Model clauses for public procurement and tendering
    - Practical tools and checklists
  - **Capacity and continuity**
    - Training for municipal staff, designers, consultants and contractors
    - Expert support for complex projects
    - Long-term safeguards after redevelopment
  - **Integrated cooperation**
    - Peer learning between cities and municipalities
    - Cross-sectoral project support
    - Support for soil stewards



**=> The challenge is to turn information into lasting capacity and action**

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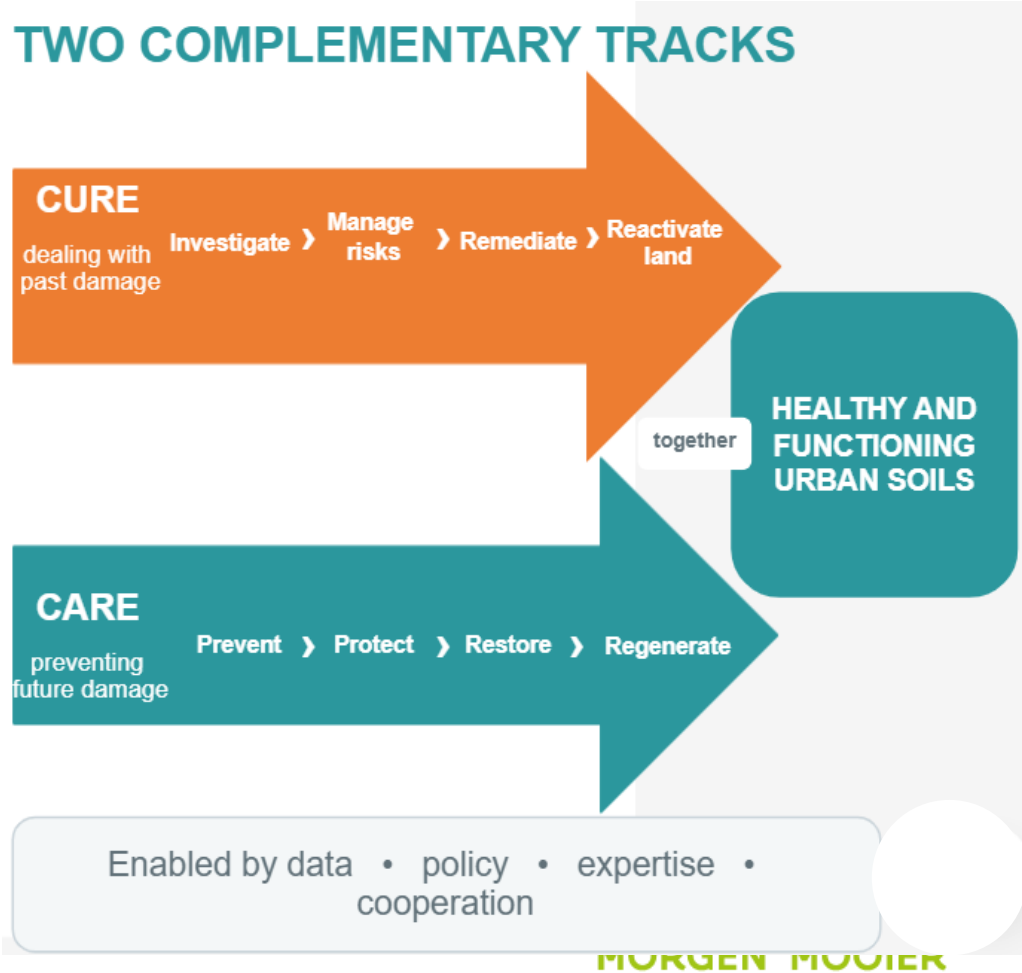
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# Supporting healthy urban soil practices: cure and care

- **Cure (dealing with past damage)**
  - Legal framework
  - Soil investigation: identify contamination and risks
  - Risk-based remediation
  - Support for complex cases
  - Publicly initiated remediation
- **Care (prevent future damage + step further)**
  - Prevention
  - Sustainable soil use and management
  - Restore and regenerate soil health
  - Together with partners: cross-policy and multi-actor cooperation

**=> Complementary approaches: Cure provides a strong foundation. Care extends the ambition towards prevention, sustainable management and regeneration**



# CURE - From contaminated land to urban opportunity – case brown- and blackfields

- **Urban challenge – brownfields and blackfields**
  - Contaminated and underused urban sites
  - Complex responsibilities and financial barriers
  - Pressure on urban space
- **Regional support for brownfield development**
  - Legal framework and contamination information
  - Tailored support and expertise
  - Collaboration with partners (OVAM, VLAIO, local authorities, other partners, …) when the market cannot unlock the site
  - Opportunities for housing, economic activity, public space, nature and green space, water, …
- **OVAM's black field approach**
  - OVAM taking an active role when needed (too high remediation costs)
  - An opportunity to integrate soil care into redevelopment

(Blackfield Alvat Buggenhout)



# CARE – Soil-conscious actions for healthy urban soils – case depaving for climate resilience

- **Regional support on soil care linked to depaving (OVAM, DOMG, …) – Ontharden, vergroenen en/of meer water? Denk ook aan de bodem**
- **Before: understand and design**
  - Consult available information on soil contamination
  - Clarify which soil functions are needed
  - Obtain advice if site-specific expertise is required (*framework contract*)
- **During: protect**
  - Prevent compaction and disturbance
  - Protect reusable topsoil
  - Include soil protection criteria in procurement and site supervision
- **After: restore soil health and manage for long term**
  - Restore soil structure
  - Support infiltration, vegetation and soil life

(Moermanpark Roeselare)



**=> Depaving creates space. Soil care helps turn that space into healthy, functioning soils**

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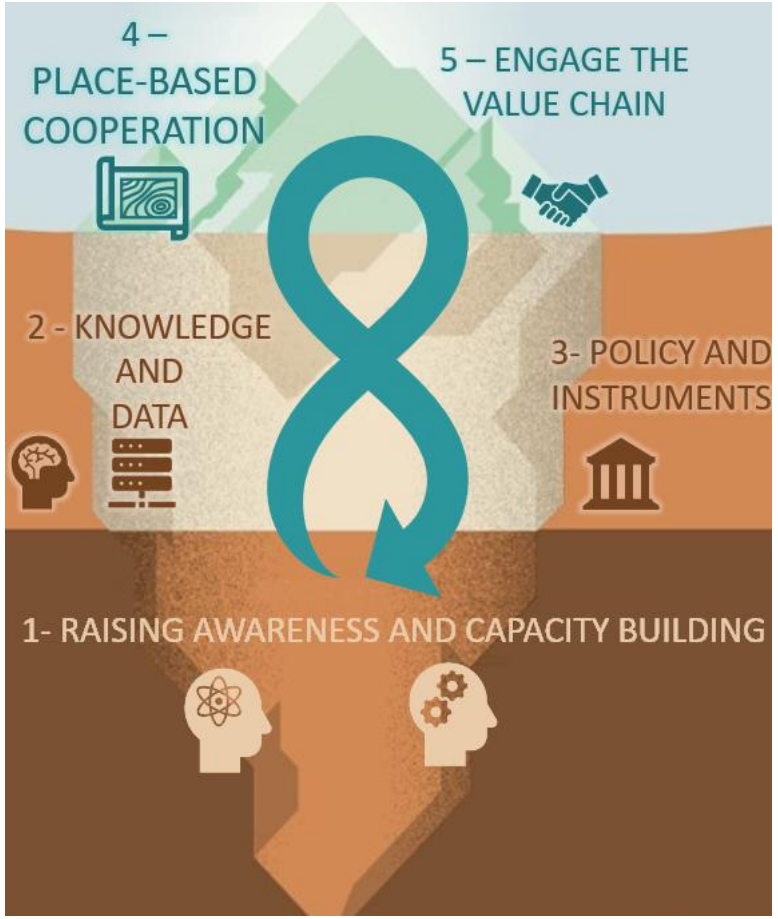


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# Flemish soil care plan: a regional framework for (local urban) soil care action

- **Flemish soil care plan:**
  - 2026: Shared vision, mission and strategy for integrated, cross-policy soil care
  - 2027: First action programme
- **5 strategies**
  1. Raising awareness and capacity building
     Training, good practices and peer-learning networks
  2. Connecting and sharing knowledge and data
     Connect and translate available evidence into useful information
  3. Soil care in policy and instruments
     Embed soil care in regulation, planning, permits and public procurement
  4. Soil care and place-based cooperation
     Connecting soil with water, nature, climate and urban development
  5. Embedding soil care in the value chain
     Engage the value chain actors (developers, designers, contractors, landowners,…)




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# What cities can expect from Flanders

- **Available foundations**
  - Public contamination information
  - Regional soil data through DOV
  - Regulatory framework for soil remediation
  - Support for complex contaminated sites
- **Regional support in progress (OVAM and transversal partners)**
  - Practical soil care guidance
  - Better translation of soil information into action
  - Capacity building and peer learning
  - Integration into planning, procurement and projects
  - Cross-policy and place-based cooperation (putting soil at the heart of landscape planning)

**=> Healthy urban soils are created ‘locally’, supported ‘regionally’ and strengthened through ‘shared learning’.**




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