



A Participatory and Transdisciplinary Approach to promote Nature-based Therapy Uptake: Identifying Barriers & Solutions in Germany



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Background

NATURELAB is an EU-funded project that develops and tests nature-based therapies (NBT) to improve health and well-being.

Although NBTs are increasingly recognized for their potential to support mental health, there are currently few examples of their successful and sustainable integration into existing general healthcare systems.

To address this, NATURELAB conducted an exploratory multiple-case qualitative study, collecting data in five countries: Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Peru, and Portugal.

Objectives

- 1 **Explore visions** for future sustainable implementation and integration of NBTs
- 2 **Understand the perspectives** of potential systemic actors and the factors influencing NBT uptake
- 3 **Develop strategies** for multi-stakeholder awareness raising, engagement, and co-creation

Methods

- **Design & setting:** exploratory qualitative case study in Germany using a transdisciplinary approach
- **Conceptual framework** drawing on *interactive learning & action* and *system innovation perspective*
- **Data collection (FGDs):** 2 focus group discussions (FGD1 + FGD2) with 10 participants held between Oct 2024 and Jan 2025 build on the actors and factors identified in the KII
- **Analysis & synthesis:** Framework approach (thematic), structured summary sheets, synthesis by Athena Institut
- **Ethics:** Approval from VU Amsterdam Faculty of Science (BETHCIE) on 9 Nov 2023 (ref: 23-017). All participants provided written informed consent.

Results

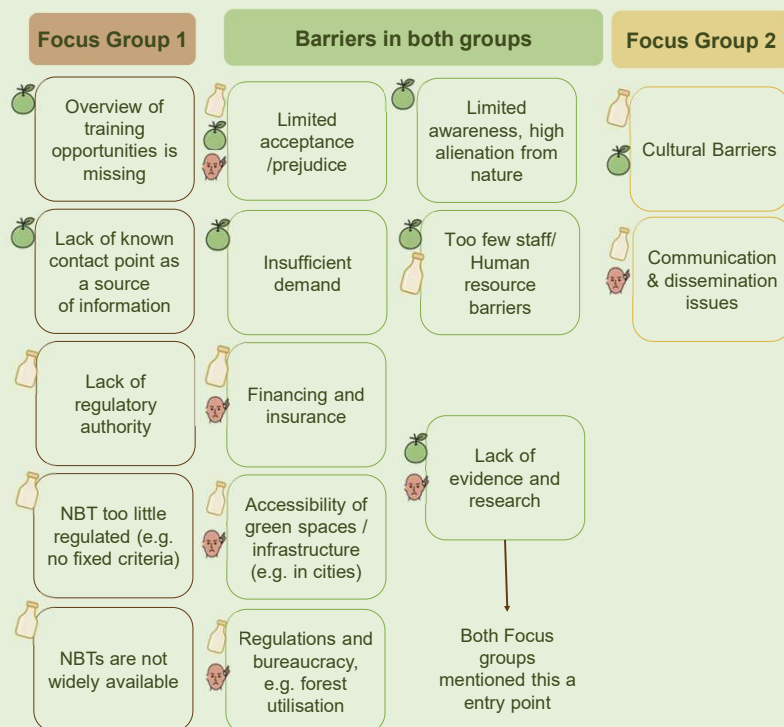
Participants were presented a list of barriers previously identified from the KII (Woodward et al., 2025), which were firstly discussed. Some new barriers were further identified and then this were sorted according to the order in which they could be addressed. Then, they were categorised into: **Low-hanging fruit**, those barriers easy to address; **bottleneck**, those barriers that present a challenge for further advancement; and **pain point**, those barriers that are most challenging.

Barriers most discussed in the two FGDs combined were :

- **Limited acceptance of NBTs and regulation**
- **Lack of awareness**
- **Limited financing**
- **Insufficient research evidence**

Identified **barriers** were perceived as **highly interconnected** therefore a phased and holistic approach was considered necessary. The most often discussed recommendations were awareness raising on the benefits of nature/NBT, generating and communicating knowledge/evidence on NBT/NBI, and developing partnerships. Some other unique solutions are presented in the table.

Barriers for the integration of NBTs in Germany



Solutions

- Lack of a known contact point as a source of information: *Establish Central Point of Contact (CPC) for providers and end-users*
- Questions about insurance cover: *Joint-committee at federal level*
- Overview of training opportunities is missing: *Develop overview of training opportunities, establish CPC.*
- Limited awareness: *Identify possible stakeholders through LinkedIn and snow-ball sampling; Advertise NBT/NATURELAB approach in effective ways, such as through thought-provoking images of nature and contemplative texts on adds at bus stops.*
- Limited acceptance doctors/policy makers: *Promote nature connection in universities, local (vocational) schools and Kindergartens*

Recommendations

As Germany has a favourable climate for NBT adoption, **six tailored recommendations** are presented.

1. Generate and communicate research evidence.
2. Develop an overview of sustainable access routes to NBT/NBI for potential providers and end-users
3. Adopt a phased and holistic approach when tackling barriers.
4. Develop partnerships.
5. Raise awareness on the benefits of nature/NBT.
6. Engage various powerful stakeholders.

This Study examined barriers and solutions and developed recommendations.

