Analysis of Urban Ecosystem Condition Indicators for the Large Urban Zones and City Cores in EU

Threshold Assessment and Exploration of the Relation to Ecosystem Services through the Application of G.I.S.

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Abstract

As almost three out of four EU citizens live in urban areas and this number is expected to further grow, studies on urban ecosystems and their services are crucial to understand a city's environmental structure and capabilities. The European Commission has published a relative report which suggests an urban ecosystem condition indicator framework, yet without suggesting respective thresholds that might indicate a "desired" environmental condition of the city. The European Commission's report also points up that the relation between the ecosystem condition and the ecosystem services still needs scientific underpinning. The current study estimates 8 (eight) of the suggested by the European Commission, urban ecosystem condition indicators, for 305 EU cities, suggests relative thresholds in Urban and Metropolitan spatial scales and explores their relation to ES and the Urban Heat Island effect. Furthermore, the intermediate zone is studied to assess its contribution to the overall GI and by extension the ecosystem services provided. The estimation of the indicators was mainly based on the processing of land use spatial data of 305 EU cities with population more than 100.000 inhabitants through the application of G.I.S. The assessment of the relative thresholds is based on the method of simple averaging of each estimated indicator values for territories in EU, defined on a case-by-case basis in relation to precipitation and temperature patterns through a cluster analysis. The estimated ecosystem condition indicators and respective thresholds have been visually and numerically juxtaposed to two (2) ecosystem service indicators and the Urban Heat Island effect to examine their relation. The study found a relation between the majority of the studied ecosystem condition indicators and the examined ecosystem services and the Urban Heat Island effect either at the one or at both the examined spatial levels. The study also found a significant differentiation between the examined indicators at urban and metropolitan scale while the intermediate zone that lies in between the two spatial levels presents a considerable contribution to the overall GI and by extension the provided ES, fact that is to be considered when implementing climate adaptation strategies. Another outcome of the study is the revealing of a significant differentiation of the indicator values between the northern and the southern EU countries and the provision of evidence about the imprint that the national urban planning policies may have an on the urban ecosystem condition indicators. The results of the current study are expected to work as an aiding tool of policies and planning purposes that seek to ensure urban resilience and climate adaptation.

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List of Abbreviations

- EEA European Environmental Agency
- EC Ecosystem Condition
- ECI Ecosystem Condition Indicator
- EC-OECD European Commission/ Europe Aid Co-operation Office
- ES Ecosystem Service
- ESI Ecosystem Service Indicator
- EU European Union
- GI Green Infrastructure
- G.I.S. Geographical Information Systems
- GRUMP Global Rural-Urban Mapping Project
- LST Land Surface Temperature
- LUZ Larger Urban Zone
- MAES Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services
- MODIS Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer
- NO2 Nitrogen Dioxide
- PEER Partnership for European Environmental Research
- ROS Recreation Opportunities Spectrum
- SEDAC Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center
- UHI Urban Heat Island
- UN United Nations
- UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (2014), humanity is increasingly urbanizing and it is expected that by 2050, more than 60% of the world population will live in cities. This urbanization trend in combination with the scarcity of land within cities, creates pressure for an uncontrolled expansion outside the city cores, driven by price rather than environmental considerations (European Commission, 2011a). An expansion like that would inevitably transform the land use types of the cities'surrounding areas which might lead to a change in the structure and function of the Ecosystem Services (ES) provided (Zhang et al., 2015). These facts highlight the need for further investigation of the living conditions within the city cores and their surroundings which heavily depend on the condition of the respective urban ecosystems and their services. The interrelation of an urban ecosystem and the quality of the living conditions has been pointed out by Bolund et. al (1999), according to whom "the natural urban ecosystems may contribute to public health and increase the quality oflife of urban citizens".

Bai and Schandl (2010), define an urban ecosystem as "a hybrid of natural and man-made elements, whose interactions are affected not only by the natural environment, but also by human culture, personal behavior, politics, economics and social organization". In the case of the urban ecosystems the "natural" and "man-made" elements correspond to the urban Green Infrastructure (GI) and the Built Infrastructure respectively. According to the European Commission (2013a), GI can be broadly defined as a strategically planned network of high quality natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, which is designed and managed to deliver a wide range of Ecosystem Services and protect biodiversity in both rural and urban settings. On the other hand, the Built Infrastructure is composed of mainly artificial elements such as buildings, roads and pavements, bridges as well as brown fields or dumping and construction sites.

The quality of the living conditions within an urban area depends on the quality of an urban ecosystem and its services i.e. the benefits to the human populations that derive from the ecosystem itself (Bolund et al.,1999). The ES according to "The Economics of ES and Biodiversity initiative" (TEEB, [2010\)](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-7088-1_11/fulltext.html#CR246) can be grouped in four major categories: provisioning, regulating, habitat, and cultural and amenity services. Each category consists of several benefits that are provided to the urban ecosystem: food, fresh water and wood are considered as provisioning services; climate regulation, water purification, pollination and erosion control are considered as regulating services; tourism, recreation, appreciation and spirituality are considered as cultural and amenity services; habitat for species and maintenance of the genetic diversity are considered as supporting and habitat services.

A significant factor that is related to urban Ecosystems' Condition (EC) and their services is climate change. Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of environmental extremes, and cities and their surroundings experience different degrees of warming (Maes et al., 2016). Projections of climate change show an increasing frequency of extreme weather and climate events (IPCC,2014) which coupled with the Urban Heat Island (UHI) are likely to amplify the challenges of an urban growth (Gunawardena et al., 2017). In the case of the urban environments, it is important to focus on the creative use of the GI as it is one of the most promising opportunities for climate adaptation and this fact needs to be recognized in the planning process (Gill et al., 2007).

The European Commission has acknowledged the need for mapping and assessment the urban ecosystems' condition and their services as matter of significance as it is estimated that almost three out of four EU citizens live in urban areas and this number will further grow (Maes et al., 2016). That is why the 4th Mapping and Assessment of Urban Ecosystems (MAES) report (Maes et al., 2016) of the European Commission, exclusively deals with the urban ecosystems and provides some guidelines for their mapping and assessment. These guidelines are more specified through a suggested indicator framework that is expected to be implemented at a local, metropolitan and regional level as a support of policies and planning purposes (Maes et al., 2016). The 4th MAES report suggests three types of indicators: pressure indicators, Ecosystem Condition Indicators (ECI) and indicators for measuring urban biodiversity. Concerning the ECI, the 4th MAES report proposes that "urban ecosystem condition could be assessed along the gradient from built infrastructure to green infrastructure". However, as mentioned in the same report, reference conditions, baselines or target situations are not defined for the suggested ECI. The report suggests that there are three approaches on defining a reference condition of an urban ecosystem: taking into account existing policy targets, taking into account new policy targets and ambitions or scientifically analyze indicators and their associated data to define empirically derived thresholds and reference levels. The latter approach is the one that the current study adopts as its basis. Furthermore, the 4th MAES report states that the relation between ES and EC needs more scientific underpinning.

The **objective** of the current study is the estimation of eight (8) ECI for 305 European cities, the assessment of relative thresholds for each ECI and the exploration of their relation to ES Indicators (ESI) and the UHI effect through the analysis of spatial data in two spatial levels: Larger Urban Zone (LUZ) and city core. Furthermore, the intermediate zone in between the LUZ and the city core is studied to detect the differences between these two areas concerning the ECI.

The main **aim** of the current study is to extort information relative to the current condition of the urban ecosystems in EU that might be used as an aiding tool of policies and planning purposes which seek to ensure urban resilience and climate adaptation.

The main **research questions** that the study will attempt to answer, could be deconstructed as follows: "What are the thresholds that might indicate a desired balance between the green and build infrastructure of a city, according to certain ECI that have been suggested by the 4th MAES report and to what extent are they related to ESI?", "What is the contribution of the city core and its surroundings to the overall GI?" and " Do the indicators' values present any spatial patterns towards the EU cities and where they may be attributed to?"

The ECI that will be studied are the following:

- 1. Proportion of urban green space (%)
- 2. Proportion of impervious surface (%)
- 3. Proportion of natural area (%)
- 4. Proportion of protected area (%)
- 5. Proportion of agricultural area (%)
- 6. Proportion of abandoned area (%)
- 7. Number of inhabitants per area (number/ ha)
- 8. Artificial area per inhabitant (m^2/person)

The ESI whose relation to the afore mentioned ECI will be studied are the following:

- 1. Removal of $NO₂$ by urban vegetation (Tons/ha*year)
- 2. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (ROS classes)
- 3. UHI $(^{\circ}C)$

The study will be developed in the context of the assessment of urban ecosystems as "it is important that the ES in urban areas and the ecosystems that provide them are understood and valued by city planners and political decision makers" (Bolund et al.,1999).

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2. Background

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The eight (8) ECI that will be analyzed by the current study were suggested by the $4th$ MAES report (Maes et al., 2016) which involved an indicator framework for the EC that contains 26 indicators in total. The selection of the indicators by the $4th$ MAES report was based on the results of the survey and a literature survey reported in a report of the Joint Research Centre¹ (Rocha et al., 2015). The two basic procedures of this survey may be briefly described as follows:

- *Online survey*: it has been addressed to researchers and stakeholders and involved policy and mapping related questions. More specifically, the mapping questions were related to the condition of the natural state of urban ecosystems, to the specific features of urban GI, as well as to the ES that are delivered by the urban ecosystems (Rocha et al. 2015)
- *Literature review*: the desired information has been collected by published, strictly scientific articles that focus on urban ecosystems and their services. The data that finally derived from the literature review were relative to the urban GI (type of urban GI, indicators, units of measure), to the EC (urban ecosystem typology, indicators, output types) and to the ES (type of the ES, indicators, output types, units of measure, primary source) (Rocha et al. 2015).

The final selection of the indicators, as reported by the 4th MAES report (Maes et al., 2016), was based on the results of the above-mentioned surveys, on ten case studies of cities that documented what policies related to urban ecosystems and urban GI are in place and how maps of biodiversity, EC and ES are used as well as on an expert workshop where three key issues were discussed: policies related to urban GI; concepts and indicators related to the condition of urban ecosystem and their services. A similar procedure that led to the suggestion of 40 ESI was followed by the $4th MAES$ report (Maes et al., 2016).

Concerning the ES, the need to protect and enhance the benefits they provide to urban ecosystems has been flagged by Target 2 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 (European Commission, 2015). Furthermore, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reports have provided scientific evidence about the degradation of several ES. More specifically, it has been noted that at the global scale, 15 out of 24 examined ES were being degraded and/or used unsustainably including fresh water, capture fisheries, air and water purification, and regulation of regional and local climate (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). The inter-relation between the ES and the EC has been appointed by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment program (2005), which has defined EC as "the capacity to provide ES" i.e. it is assumed that there is a positive relation between EC and ES. However, it should be noted that the 4th MAES report points out that the afore-mentioned positive relation between ES and EC still needs more scientific underpinning.

Concerning the UHI effect that the current study will discuss through a juxtaposition with the ECI thresholds, its relation to the urban land uses (and by extension to the urban EC) has

 $¹$ The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is the European Commission's science and knowledge service which employs scientists</sup> to carry out research in order to provide independent scientific advice and support to EU policy.

been a subject of several studies (e.g. Stone and Norman, 2007; Alobaydi et al., 2016). According to Stone and Norman (2007), "it is important that landuse planners have a more complete understanding of the role of land use policies in heat island formation".

The decision about the type of the correlation (positive or negative) that the ECI share with the ES is based on scientific literature that the current study consulted. Concerning the ECI which are relative to GI (e.g. proportion of urban green space), the correlation with the examined E is considered as positive, based on the results of the PEER report (Maes et al. 2012) which indicate that policy measures related to the enrichment of GI in urban areas are expected to enhance the provision of ES relative to climate regulation (e.g. UHI reduction), air purification (e.g. $NO₂$ removal by urban vegetation), recreation (e.g. ROS) and other. On the basis of the same report the "Proportion of abandoned area" and the "Proportion of protected area" ECI are regarded as positively correlated to the under-study ES as the first one may represent a potential of a city to obtain more GI and the second one is regarded as the core of European GI (European Union, 2013b). Conversely, the "Proportion of impervious surface" ECI's correlation with the ES is regarded as negative, especially when it comes to climate regulation, as impervious surfaces consisted of brick, concrete, asphalt stone and similar surfaces met in urban areas may intensify the UHI effect (Solecki et al.,2005). On the other hand, but for the same reasons, the "Artificial area per inhabitant" ECI is considered to share a positive correlation to the ES as it expresses the land use intensity and a high land use intensity refers to a small amount of artificial surface per inhabitant, being mainly the result of very compact settlement structures and high population density (Prokop et al., 2011).

Concerning the "Number of inhabitants per area" ECI, its correlation to the under-study ES is considered as negative as the according to Lamsal et al. (2013), the highest levels of NO² are found in heavily populated areas and concerning the UHI, a significantly positive correlation between the population and warming rate of average air temperature has been found by Huang and Lu (2015). As regards the ROS and the "Number of inhabitants per area" ECI, their correlation is considered as negative because the capability of the resource base to continue to provide for recreational use is generally viewed through the concept of "carrying capacity"(Papageorgiou and Brotherton, 1999) which is in the maximum number of people that can be sustainably supported by the recreation resource. Conclusively, when the population of a city grows, the quality of the offered recreational opportunities may present decrease if appropriate measures are not taken. Furthermore, a higher population density, in general, indicates a higher land development intensity (Liu et al.,2012) fact that may lead to a degradation of the GI that could be utilized for recreational purposes.

3. Input Data for Europe

The potentiality for the estimation of the ECI and their relative thresholds is provided by the existence of spatial datasets that involve data relative to land uses, population, environmentally protected areas, ES as well as climate data. In the current chapter are presented the data sources that are used to perform the analysis that will lead to the estimation of the ECI for each of the 305 EU cities with population larger than 100,000 inhabitants, to the assessment of relative thresholds and to the exploration of their relation to ES as well as the background of these data (*[Table 1](#page-15-0)*).

Table 1: Summary table, general characteristics of the datasets that have been utilized by the current study. The data exclusively derive from internet sources and are spatial data in raster or polygon form. The factors that have been taken into account in the data selection procedure, have been the temporal and spatial scale of the data as well as the reliability and credibility of the data providers.

3.1. Urban Audit

The dataset involves the boundaries of city cores, city Kernels and Functional Urban Areas (FUA) as defined by the EC-OECD (*[Figure 1](#page-16-2)*). In general terms, the EC-OECD city definition is based on the presence of an "urban center" which is a spatial concept based on high-density population grid cells. The city Kernel is a concept introduced to improve comparability between large cities and the FUA consists of the city and its commuting zone. A commuting zone contains the surrounding travel-to-work areas of a city where at least 15 % of their employed residents are working within. Finally, the Urban Audit definition concerning the LUZ is based on commuter flows, thus approximating the FUA. Geometry was derived from Eurogeographics EuroBoundaryMap² (EBM) versions 6 and 6.2. The coverage is the EU-28 plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

The "Urban Audit" dataset was used by the current study to identify city boundaries at the level of city cores and city kernels in order to estimate the ECI and ESI in the urban scale. Furthermore, the area of the cores and kernels was used for the estimation of the "Number of inhabitants per area" ECI.

Figure 1 (a): The Functional Urban Area (FUA) which corresponds to the city and its commuting zone, Larger Urban Zone (LUZ) which corresponds to administrative boundaries that approximate the functional urban region and core borders which correspond to the core area of the FUA for the city of Toulouse (France), overlaid by each other. (b) The LUZ, Kernel (an approximation of the built-up area around the core city) and core borders of the city of Copenhagen (Denmark) overlaid by each other. In the case of Copenhagen, the FUA and LUZ borders coincide.

3.2. Urban Atlas

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The primary data that the current study uses to estimate the ECI derive from the "Urban Atlas" data source of the Environmental Agency (EEA) and concern the land uses for LUZ with more than 100.000 inhabitants (305 cities) as defined by the Urban Audit (*[Figure 2](#page-17-0)*).

² <http://www.eurogeographics.org/products-and-services/euroboundarymap>

According to the "Urban Atlas" Mapping Guide (European Comission,2011b) the product contains information that has mainly derived from data backed by other reference data, such as Commercial-off-the-Shelf (COTS) navigation data and topographic maps. As the current study utilizes the different Urban Atlas land use classes to estimate the ECI, it has been considered as purposeful to present them in detail (*[Table 2](#page-18-1)*). The ECI which will directly derive from the "Urban Atlas" dataset are the following: Proportion of urban green space, Proportion of natural area, Proportion of impervious surface, Proportion of agricultural area.

The "Urban Atlas" dataset is a significant source of urban land use data. The dataset has been developed to fill a gap in the knowledge about the land uses of the European cities and to facilitate a policy-making that would be more evidence-based by enhancing the comparison of landuse patterns amongst major European cities. The "Urban Atlas" service offers high-resolution pan-European comparable land use and land cover data adapted to European needs.

Table 2: The codes and corresponding nomenclature that are used by the Urban Atlas dataset of the EEA and represent the different land use classes recorded within Larger Urban Zones (administrative boundaries that approximate the functional urban region). The land use areas will be the basis for the estimation of the ECI. (in bold: classes without any further subdivision)

Urban	Vector Data	Nomenclature
Atlas No.	Code	
$\mathbf{1}$		Artificial surfaces
1.1		Urban Fabric
1.1.1	11100	Continuous Urban Fabric (S.L. > 80%)
1.1.2	11200	Discontinuous Urban Fabric (S.L. 10% - 80%)
1.1.2.1	11210	Discontinuous Dense Urban Fabric (S.L. 50% - 80%)
1.1.2.2	11220	Discontinuous Medium Density Urban Fabric (S.L. 30% - 50%)
1.1.2.3	11230	Discontinuous Low Density Urban Fabric (S.L. 10% - 30%)
1.1.2.4	11240	Discontinuous Very Low Density Urban Fabric (S.L. < 10%)
1.1.3	11300	Isolated structures
1.2		Industrial, commercial, public, military, private and transport units
1.2.1	12100	Industrial, commercial, public, military and private units
1.2.2	12200	Road and rail network and associated land
1.2.2.1	12210	Fast transit roads and associated land
1.2.2.2	12220	Other roads and associated land
1.2.2.3	12230	Railways and associated land
1.2.3	12300	Port areas
1.2.4	12400	Airports
1.3		Mine, dump and construction sites
1.3.1	13100	Mineral extraction and dump sites
1.3.3	13300	Construction sites
1.3.4	13400	Land without current use
1.4		Artificial non-agricultural vegetated areas
1.4.1	14100	Green urban areas
1.4.2	14200	Sports and leisure facilities
$\mathbf{2}$	20000	Agricultural areas, semi-natural areas and wetlands
3	30000	Forests
5	50000	Water

3.3. Natura 2000

The utilization of the "Natura 2000" dataset by the current study, serves the purpose of the estimation of the "Proportion of protected areas" ECI. This ECI is related to several ES as protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites and ecosystems inside and around cities may lead to several tangible benefits such as air quality improvement, noise reduction, mitigation of extreme summer temperatures as well as to non-material benefits such as recreation, education, cultural and aesthetic values and maintenance of social relations (Maes et al., 2016).

Natura 2000 is composed of sites designated under the Birds Directive (Special Protection Areas, SPAs) and the Habitats Directive (Sites of Community Importance, SCIs, and Special Areas of Conservation, SACs). More specifically, the ecological network is based on the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive. Altogether, the sites cover a substantial area – equivalent in size to Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic combined

(European Commission, 2012). The version that was used by the current study covers the reporting in 2015. The data that compose the ecological network derive from national authorities and are filtered by a quality control process that has been developed by the European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity (ETC/BD) which identifies potential inconsistencies in the national reports.

3.4. Population density disaggregated with Corine land cover 2000

The dasymetric³ population density grid of the EU at a 100m. resolution was used by the current study to estimate the population within the borders of LUZ and city cores in order to estimate the values of two ECI: "Artificial area per inhabitant" and "Number of inhabitants per area". The dataset is provided by the EEA and is a result of the application of a disaggregation method which is a modified version of the "limiting variable method" (Eicher and Brewer, 2001). The main ancillary information source was "CORINE⁴ Land Cover 2000" inventory. It should be mentioned that compared with the traditional choropleth maps that represent a homogeneous density in each commune, the accuracy improvement of the disaggregated maps ranged between 46% and 67% (F.J. Gallego et al., 2011).

3.5. Removal of NO² by urban vegetation

The "Removal of NO2 by urban vegetation" regulating ESI dataset was used by this study to discuss the suggested ECI thresholds at the LUZ and city core spatial levels. The grid that represents the ES of the NO₂ removal by urban vegetation is based on the calculation of three different indicators: average concentrations of $NO₂$, deposition velocity, and removal capacity (Maes et al., 2015). These indicators have been evaluated at European scale by using simple GIS map algebra operations. According to Maes et al. (2015), concentrations of NO² were calculated using Land Use Regression (LUR) models. LUR models are used to evaluate the relationship between observed air pollution concentrations and predictor variables (e.g. traffic, land use). The parameters that have been inserted to the LUR models were calculated and evaluated at 100m. resolution. The air pollution deposition velocity indicator has been calculated according to an approach proposed by Pistocchi (2010) where deposition velocity depends on the wind speed at 10m and the land cover type, either forest or bare soil or water. Annual removal capacity was estimated as the total pollution removal flux⁵ in the areas covered by vegetation. From the results that have been obtained by the described processes, total pollution removal flux was calculated for NO₂.

The estimation of the "Removal of $NO₂$ by urban vegetation" ESI was facilitated by a

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 $3A$ dasymetric map depicts quantitative areal data using boundaries that divide the mapped area into zones of relative homogeneity with the purpose of best portraying the underlying statistical surface (Eicher and Brewer, 2001) .

⁴ In 1985 the Corine (Coordination of Information on the Environment) programme was initiated in the European Union. Corine means 'coordination of information on the environment' and it was a prototype project working on many different environmental issues. The CORINE land cover inventory is composed of 44 classes, and presented as a cartographic product, at a scale of 1:100 000.

 5 Removal flux = (deposition velocity) x (pollutant concertation)

model called ESTIMAP (Ecosystem Mapping Tool) that was developed by the Joint Research Centre to estimate trends in regulating and maintenance ES. ESTIMAP is a collection of spatially explicit models to support the mapping and modelling of ES at European scale whose main objective is to support EU policies with spatial information on where ES are provided (Maes et al., 2015).

3.6. Recreation Opportunities Spectrum (ROS)

The ROS cultural ESI data are utilized by the current study for the discussion of the suggested ECI thresholds. The recreation opportunity Spectrum is a method to map different degrees of recreation services available according to their proximity to the people (Zulian et al.,2013). In order to assess how the benefit of recreation can be delivered to people, the EU has been classified into zones of remoteness versus proximity to areas of recreational interest. The inputs to this classification have been the distances from roads and residential areas whose data have derived from the TeleAtlas⁶ Database and CORINE land cover classes respectively.

Another parameter that was studied is the RPI (Recreation Potential Index). Recreation potential is mapped through components that have a specific link with people's behavior and have divided in three components: the first relates to the degree of naturalness identified as a proxy for people's preference for more natural areas; the second concerns protected areas as public recreation areas and the third, water attractiveness (Paracchini et al.,2014).

Finally, according to the above-mentioned report, in order to tune the remoteness and proximity concepts to the experience of the EU citizens, a panel of ten European experts of different nationalities have been asked to define thresholds for distances from roads and urban, and assign each combination a label among the following five: neighborhood, proximity, far, remote, very remote.

The final ROS has been computed by a cross tabulation between the RPI and the zoning for the EU in terms of remoteness and accessibility (*[Table 3](#page-21-2)*)*.*

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⁶ Tele Atlas is a Netherlands-based company founded in 1984 which delivers digital maps and other dynamic content for navigation and location-based services

	Low provision-easily accesible								
	Low provision- accesible								
3	Low provision- not easily accesible				Remotenes/Accessibility				
	Medium provision-easily accesible								
5	Medium provision- accesible				Neighborhood	Proximity	Far	Remote	Very Remote
6	Medium provision- not easily accesible			< 0.19				3	3
	High provision-easily accesible	Recreation Potential		$0.19 - 0.25$			5	6	6
8	High provision- accesible		з	>0.25			8	9	9
۹	High provision- not easily accesible								

Table 3:The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes, that have been used to map different degrees of recreation services available according to their proximity to the people. (legend on the left) Source: (Paracchini et al.,2014 modified after Kourdounouli, 2017)

3.7. Global Urban Heat Island (UHI) Data Set

The UHI dataset was utilized by this study to discuss the suggested ECI thresholds. Although, it is not considered as an ES itself, it is closely related to "climate regulation" ES as a low UHI might indicate high values of the said service.

The primal purpose of the dataset is to provide summer daytime and nighttime minimum and maximum surface temperatures (LST) for urban extents and their surroundings as well as the LST difference between them which represents the UHI effect. According to the documentation for the UHI Data Set (CIESIN ,2013), the basic approach was to use LP DAAC's MODIS data on land surface temperature in conjunction with the SEDAC's (Socioeconomic Data &Applications Center) Global Rural-Urban Mapping Project (GRUMP) urban extents data (CIESIN et al., 2011) to estimate the average daytime maximum and average nighttime minimum land surface temperatures within the urban extents during the highest temperature period of the northern and southern hemisphere summers. The same average was calculated for a 10 indexkm. buffer surrounding the urban extents. Nighttime was included in addition to daytime because the health impacts of the urban heat island effect are often most pronounced at night.

The dataset refers to the "urban extents" grid that distinguishes urban and rural areas based on a combination of population counts, settlement points, and the presence of Nighttime Lights.

3.8. E-OBS gridded dataset

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The "E-OBS gridded dataset" is a daily gridded observational dataset for precipitation, temperature and sea level pressure in Europe. The sub-datasets of precipitation and temperature of the "E-OBS gridded dataset" are used by the current study to perform a cluster analysis which will define the territories for which, different ECI thresholds will be suggested.

The "E-OBS gridded dataset" which derives from the ENSEMBLES project, supported by the European Commission's 6th Framework Programme. According to the ENSEMBLES official website (ENSEMBLESFP6_index, 2018), one of the main aims of the project is to develop an ensemble prediction system for climate change based on the principal state-ofthe-art, high resolution, global and regional Earth System models developed in Europe, validated against quality controlled, high resolution gridded datasets for Europe.

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4. Methodology

The general concept of the methodology that was followed is imprinted at the flowchart of *[Figure 3](#page-24-1).* For ease of reference, the Methodology will be destructured and described in five parts: definition of the Study Area, Data Collection and Preprocessing, Estimation of the ECI, Quality Control of the Resulted ECI Values, Selection and Application of the Threshold Assessing Method and Exploration of the relation of the Suggested ECI Thresholds to ES. Appropriate software has been used to conduct the analysis and illustrate the results (*[Table 4](#page-25-1)*).

Figure 3: Flowchart of the basic lines of the methodology that has been followed. The investigation of the existence of notable indicator geographical gradients and their potential relation to a temperature or precipitation pattern defines the territories for which different indicator thresholds will be suggested.

Software	Version	Manufacturer	City Head Quarters	Country
ArcMap	10.3.1	ESRI	Redlands, California	United States
Excel	2016	Microsoft	Redmond, Washington	United States
Paint.Net	4.0.21	dotPDN. LLC	-	\sim

Table 4: The software that has been utilized by the current study to perform the analysis of the ESI and ECI and to illustrate the results.

4.1. The Study Area

The broader study area geographically corresponds to the territories of 27 countries that are members of the European Union (EU) -Croatia excluded. The $4th MAES$ report suggests that the ECI are estimated in three spatial scales: Urban, Metropolitan and Regional. The current study will attempt to estimate the ECI and suggest the respective thresholds in Urban and Metropolitan scale.

Concerning the Metropolitan scale, although the said report suggests that it corresponds to the Functional Urban Areas (FUA), the current study accepts that it will refer to the Larger Urban Zones (LUZ) as defined by the Urban Audit. This is because the relative urban land use data were not yet generalized for the areas within the FUA borders for all the European cities during the prepatation of the current study. However, it should be noted that FUA and LUZ borders do not deviate much in terms of magnitude as "the Urban Audit works with administrative boundaries that approximate the functional urban region" (Bretagnolle et al., 2011).

Concerning the urban scale, the 4th MAES report suggests that it "focuses on the core area of the Functional Urban Area (FUA), the city" and the current study will adapt to this direction. The boundaries of the core cities delineate the corresponding political boundaries, fact that ensures that data will be straightforwardly usable by the policy makers. However, for capitals that are very under-bounded (e.g. Paris, Lisbon), an additional spatial level has been introduced: the "kernel". The kernel is an approximation of the built-up area around the core city (Eurostat, 2009). The kernels provide a more uniform perception of the large cities in terms of area as the corresponding core city makes up less than 20 % of the area of the LUZ. As regards the logic behind the kernel delineation, an exception has been made for London, where the kernel was defined to match the core city of Paris in terms of population, in order to facilitate the comparison between the two largest European cities. It should be mentioned that London and Paris are considered as the largest European cities by the UN (2014), based on the concept of urban agglomeration which takes into account along with the core city, all the suburbs that are linked to the city by continuous urban areas.

The current study will also analyze the intermediate zone that is located at the area in between the LUZ and the city core (or Kernel outlines). The total number of the LUZ and corresponding city cores that will be processed is 305.

4.2. Data Collection, Preprocessing and Grouping

Data collection through reliable internet sources (*[Table 1](#page-15-0),p.5*) was the first process to be transacted. The downloaded data were of several formats and coordinate systems and in many cases, they had to be re-projected to be simultaneously processed by the same software (ArcMap 10.3.1). The main Geographic Coordinate System (GCS) that was used during the data analysis was ETRS 1989, and the projection was Lambert Azimuthal Equal Area. In many cases, the data had to be decompressed or converted in a form that is readable by the used software. For example, some datasets were compressed and packed in ZIP or TAR (Tape ARchive) file formats and some in NetCDF (Network Common Data Form) file format. Finally, the data have been grouped into folders according to the procedure they participate in *[\(Figure 4\)](#page-26-2)*.

Figure 4: The elements of the available datasets that have been used by the current study to generalize the data for each individual procedure of the analysis.

4.3. Estimation of the ECI

The ECI for the two spatial levels, LUZ and city core were estimated using the same methodology. Initially, the six ECI that derive from the "Urban Atlas" dataset were estimated. The first step to the estimation was to decide which of the "Urban Atlas" land uses will participate to the estimation of which ECI (*[Table 5](#page-29-0)*). It should be mentioned that all the LUZ and cores have been studied one by one individually.

The classification (*[Table 6](#page-29-1)*), was transformed into simple SQL^7 expressions that were queried to acquire results in area units for each LUZ and core. In ArcMap terms, the *Select by Attributes* tool was applied to each LUZ and city core's *attribute table* by using SQL expressions (*Table 4*) and a simple Vb script⁸.

Concerning the "Proportion of impervious surface" ECI, it was considered as purposeful to multiply the respective areas of each of its Urban Fabric related components with factors that correspond to the mid-range⁹ of the percentages of soil sealing that characterizes them. For example, the Urban Atlas class "Discontinuous Medium Density Urban Fabric (S.L. 30% - 50%)" has a degree of soil sealing between 30% and 50% and its corresponding area was multiplied by 0.40 which is calculated as follows: $(0.50+0.30)/2$. The multiplication factors of each component of the "Proportion of impervious surface" ECI can be found in the following Vb script which was applied after the SQL queries of *[Table 6](#page-29-1)*:

```
dim x
if ([CODE] = "11100") then 
x = ([area] * 0.90)
elseif ([CODE] = "11210") then
x = ([area] * 0.65)
elseif ([CODE] = "11220") then
x = ([area] * 0.40)
elseif ([CODE] = "11230") thenx = ([area] * 0.20)elseif ([CODE] = "11240") then 
x = ([area] * 0.05)else
x= ([area] * 1)
End If
```
After the SQL queries and Vb script were applied, the sum of the corresponding polygon areas of each ECI were copied into the respective LUZ or core and indicator cell in a spreadsheet. The process was repeated for all the ECI that are found in *[Table 5](#page-29-0)* and the results were two tables (one for LUZ and one for city cores) of 305 lines which correspond to each LUZ or core and six columns which correspond to the area that each ECI "occupies".

The next step was to estimate the population for each LUZ and city core based on the acquired population grid (*[Table 1](#page-15-0)*). The population is essential to estimate two ECI: "Number of inhabitants per area" and "Artificial area per inhabitant". The first step after inserting the population grid in ArcMap was to apply the *zonal statistics by table* tool in order to estimate the total population within each LUZ and core. The results have been inserted into the same spreadsheet mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The estimation of the "Proportion of protected area" ECI was based on the Natura 2000 dataset (*[Table 1](#page-15-0)*). Initially, the Natura polygons were *clipped* to the boundaries of the LUZ and the cores and then the *intersect* tool was performed between the clipped boundaries and

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⁷ Structured Query Language (SQL) is a standard computer language for accessing and managing databases

⁸ VBScript ("Microsoft Visual Basic Scripting Edition") is an Active Scripting language developed by Microsoft that is modeled on Visual Basic

 9 the mid-range is the arithmetic mean of the maximum and minimum values

the LUZ and cores outlines respectively. Finally, the *summary statistics* tool was applied to the outcome of the intersection and the total area of protected areas for each LUZ and core was inserted to the same spreadsheet mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

The next process was the final estimation of the iECI through calculations that were performed in a spreadsheet. Considering that areas that correspond to each indicator are now estimated, the final step to their estimation was to perform the appropriate mathematical operations to reach the desired results (*[Table 7](#page-30-2)*). Finally, the eight estimated indicators for each LUZ and corresponding city core (or kernel) were converted to shapefiles in order to be further processed in the G.I.S. software.

Table 5: The land uses that participate to the estimations of the six ECI that derive from the "Urban Atlas" dataset and the corresponding vector data codes as defined by the same dataset.

Table 6: *The SQL queries that have been performed by the "Select by Attributes" tool of the ArcMap 10.3.1 software to estimate the corresponding areas of the ECI that derive from the Urban Atlas Dataset.*

Table 7: The calculations that have been performed in MS excel to estimate the final values of the ECI. (the respective calculations have also been performed for the city cores)

4.4. Cross-checking of the Resulted ECI Values

To ensure the validity of the results several checks were performed. The results were examined for duplicate and negative values as well as for formula related errors. The proportional ECI were also examined for values that overcome the 100%.

Another check that was performed, concerns the summary of the 5 ECI whose values strictly derive from the "Urban Atlas" dataset (proportion of urban green space, proportion of natural area, proportion of agricultural area, proportion of impervious surface, proportion of abandoned area) for each LUZ or city core. Since these five ECI cover all of the "Urban Atlas" nomenclatures and none of them is repeated for the estimation of more than one ECI it was expected that their sum should approach the 100%. The check was expected to approach the 100% and not to result to exactly 100%, as the impervious areas which participated to the estimation of "Proportion of impervious surface" ECI have been multiplied by certain factors as previously mentioned. The values that the checks have dug up, were re-checked and finally, corrected when needed. The majority of the errors were due to repetitions of values that occurred during the data transfer from the G.I.S. software to the spreadsheet.

4.5. Selection and Application of the ECI Threshold Assessing Method

According to Mitchell et al. (1995), threshold values may identify problematic, critical and irreversible or uncontrollable levels of an indicator and should be identified and explained especially for indicators of sustainability as "they set limits, so that the indicators relate to development, and not simply growth". The threshold assessing method that will be utilized is the estimation of the average values of the ECI in a European-wide scale or in a scale that will be defined by a cluster analysis of the estimated ECI as well as of temperature and precipitation data (*[Table 1](#page-15-0)*). The main concept behind the selection of the threshold assessing method is the following: *if* the ECI present visible geographical gradients that are related to a respective precipitation or temperature pattern *then* the precipitation or temperature pattern will define the territories for which, different thresholds will be suggested *else* the average European-wide ECI values will be suggested as thresholds.

The *zonal statistics* tool was utilized to estimate the mean precipitation and temperature values for each LUZ. The process is presented only for the LUZ and not for the city cores (or kernels) as the gridded observed climate data would not allow for a discrimination between the temperature and precipitation in the LUZ and city cores.

To verify the existence or not of significant geographical gradients that the estimated ECI may present towards the under study European cities, apart from the visual examination of the data, the spatial autocorrelation of each ECI was studied. That is because a high spatial autocorrelation might indicate the presence of the clusters that form the possible geographical gradients. According to Griffith (2009), "spatial autocorrelation means a dependency exists between values of a variable in neighboring or proximal locations, or a systematic pattern in values of a variable across the locations on a map due to underlying common factors". In this case, the common factors whose relationship with the ECI is under examination, are precipitation and temperature. The ArcMap tool that was utilized to estimate the autocorrelation of the estimated ECI as well as the autocorrelation of precipitation and temperature is the *Spatial Autocorrelation (Global Moran's I)* tool (ESRI, n.d.). According to the official ESRI website¹⁰, this tool measures spatial autocorrelation (feature similarity) based on both feature locations and feature values simultaneously. Given a set of features and an associated attribute, it evaluates whether the pattern expressed is clustered, dispersed, or random. The tool calculates the Moran's I Index value and both a Z score and p-value evaluating the significance of that index. In general, a Moran's Index value near +1.0 indicates clustering while an index value near -1.0 indicates dispersion. The results of the *Spatial Autocorrelation (Global Moran's I)* tool will indicate which ECI correspond to the most notable spatial autocorrelations.

The relationship between the ECI that are qualified as most spatially autocorrelated and the precipitation and temperature will be visually explored through a cluster analysis. The core concept of cluster analysis may be stated as follows: "given a set of data points, partition them into a set of groups which are as similar as possible" (Aggarwal, 2014). The logic behind the *Cluster and Outlier Analysis tool does* not deviate much from the *Spatial Autocorrelation (Global Moran's I)* tool that has already been performed, but it also facilitates a visual juxtaposition of the gradients as it produces illustrated results.

4.6. Exploration of the relation of the Suggested ECI Thresholds to ES

The reliability of the suggested ECI thresholds is discussed through a juxtaposition of the with the respective ESI for each LUZ and city core. As the current study accepts that the ES and the ecosystem condition are related to each other, the results of the examination of their relation may give credence to the suggested thresholds. More specifically, the ECI will be compared to one regulating $(NO₂$ removal) ES, one cultural (ROS) ES and to the UHI effect which is linked to climate regulating ES.

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¹⁰ http://resources.esri.com

The main question that is to be answered here could be formulated as follows: *Do the majority of the LUZ or city cores whose ECI values surpass the suggested thresholds (in a positive way) also surpass the average values of the respective ESI?* A positive answer is considered to give credence o the suggested ECI threshold. It should be clarified that an ECI surpasses the suggested threshold in a positive way when it presents a positive correlation to the ES provided i.e. it acts supportively to them and that it has been accepted that that "majority" of the LUZ or cores corresponds to percentages greater than the 50%. The reason why the exploration of the relation between the EC and the ES has been decided to be based on the threshold values and formed classes and not, for example, on the estimation of the correlation across the entire range of values, has to do with the aim of the study which looks forward to enhancing decision making towards planning procedures. A categorization like that may facilitate an urban planner to immediately form an opinion about whether or not the LUZ or core is amongst the ones with the "best" or "worst" EC and ES performances and to be acknowledged with the extent of the credibility of the threshold concerned to obtain a broader perception of the city's planning needs.

The UHI effect was estimated through the application of the ArcMap's *Identity* tool within each LUZ. The features of the UHI effect dataset have been used as identity coverage to obtain only their attributes that overlap the LUZ. The NO² removal and ROS ESI were estimated through the utilization of the *Zonal Statistics tool* by calculating the mean values within each LUZ and core. The *Select by Attributes* tool was applied to select the LUZ and city cores which surpass the suggested threshold values. The same tool was applied to the ESI to select the LUZ and city cores whose values are above the average (and below the average for the UHI effect). The results of the *Select by Attributes* tool have been exported into shapefiles. Finally, the *Select by Location* tool was applied to select the LUZ and city cores that present values which surpass both the suggested ECI thresholds (in a positive way) and the average ESI values.

Finally, it should be mentioned that although the "proportion of agricultural area" ECI corresponds to three suggested thresholds in accordance with the temperature cluster that the respective LUZ or core belongs to, it has been decided that this categorization is of minor importance for the current evaluation and that is why the European-wide mean values of the ECI have been used.

The results of the analysis are presented in two spatial levels: the LUZ and the City Core (or Kernel) which will be juxtaposed to each other. However, the ECI are also estimated for an extra spatial level that is the area in between the LUZ and cores outlines. The reason why it has been decided to perform the analysis of the intermediate zone is to highlight each ECI's differences between the core and its surroundings and furthermore to offer the possibility of a further analysis of the data that might concern the extent to which the environmental conditions of the surroundings may affect the cores and vice versa. Additionally, an analysis like that might reveal the value of the intermediate zone concerning the ES provided.

The results are presented in the form of maps, graphs and tables. Concerning the maps, the method that was used for the classification of the ECI and ESI values is the "natural break method", modified to incorporate the mean EU wide value of each indicator as the lower limit of the class that corresponds to "medium" values". This modification was carried out to clearly visualize which LUZ or cores surpass the thresholds i.e. the LUZ or cores that appear in the maps to correspond to "medium", "high" and "very high" classes surpass the suggested thresholds. According the ArcMap 10.3.1 user guide, "Natural breaks classes are based on natural groupings inherent in the data. Class breaks are identified that best group similar values and that maximize the differences between classes. The features are divided into classes whose boundaries are set where there are relatively big differences in the data values." It should be mentioned that in most cases the mean values of the indicators did not deviate much by the lower limit of the classes that corresponded to "medium values" with the natural break method.

All the individual indicator values can be found at the Appendices A, B and C at the end of the paper that correspond to the LUZ, city core (or Kernel) and area in between the core and the LUZ outlines spatial scales respectively. It should be noted that for the latter spatial scale the number of the relative areas is 282 and not 305 because there are cases where the LUZ and the city core coincide.

5. Results

5.1. Estimated ECI

The **"Proportion of urban green space"** ECI significantly deviates for the LUZ and cores in terms of magnitude (*[Figure 5](#page-35-0)*). More specifically, the highest and lowest values for the cores are almost double than the ones for the LUZ (*Table 6*). However, the spatial distribution of the classes appears to be quite similar for the two spatial levels: the majority of the LUZ and cores which present the highest indicator values are met within the borders of four countries: United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium. As regards the core spatial level (*Figure 5b*), Poland also presents medium to high values. Aggregates of very low percentages for both spatial levels are observed within the borders of Sweden, Hungary, Greece, Serbia, and Spain while the Baltic countries present relatively low percentages at LUZ level and relatively high at core level. The LUZ of Liverpool (United Kingdom) presents the highest percentage (13.19%) and the LUZ of Potenza (Italy) presents the lowest one (0.09%) while at core level the highest percentage corresponds to Karlovy Vary of the Czech Republic (25.94%) and the lowest one to Kalamata (Greece) and is 0.25% (*[Table 10](#page-38-0)*).

Proportion of urban green space						
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (%)	
		1	Liverpool	United Kingdom	13.19	
		2	Manchester	United Kingdom	10.47	
	LUZ	3	s' Gravenhage	Netherlands	10.25	
Cities that		4	Portsmouth	United Kingdom	9.61	
correspond to the		5	Waterford	Ireland	7.97	
highest indicator						
values from highest	CORE	1	Karlovy Vary	Czech Republic	25.94	
(1) to lowest (5)		$\overline{2}$	Hannover	Germany	20.65	
		3	London	United Kingdom	16.66	
		4	Kaunas	Lithuania	16.04	
		5	s' Gravenhage	Netherlands	15.75	
		1	Potenza	Italy	0.09	
		$\overline{2}$	Campobasso	Italy	0.13	
	LUZ	3	Toledo	Spain	0.13	
Cities that		4	l'Aquila	Italy	0.13	
correspond to the		5	Umeå	Sweden	0.13	
lowest indicator						
values from lowest		1	Kalamata	Greece	0.25	
(1) to highest (5)		$\overline{2}$	Badajoz	Spain	0.26	
	CORE	3	l'Aquila	Italy	0.28	
		4	Sassari	Italy	0.29	
		5	Foggia	Italy	0.29	

Table 8: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Proportion of urban green space" ECI for the LUZ and city core (or Kernel) spatial levels

Figure 5 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Proportion of urban green space" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.
The **"Proportion of natural area"** ECI (*[Figure 6](#page-37-0)*), presents from medium to very high values at north-east Europe and especially at Sweden and Finland which present almost exclusively very high values at both the spatial levels of LUZ and core. The spatial distribution of the different classes along Europe looks similar for the two spatial levels at first glance, however for certain countries there is a significant differentiation concerning the classes their LUZ and cores belong to. Examples are Poland and the Baltic Countries. Significant aggregates of exclusively low to very low indicator values are observed for the LUZ and cores of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Italy, Spain and Greece mostly present from medium to very low values for both spatial levels.

As regards the magnitude of the indicator for the two levels, there is a slight precedence of the LUZ. The city of Umeå (Sweden) presents the highest indicator values for both spatial levels [\(](#page-36-0)

[Table 9](#page-36-0)), while Lefkosia (Cyprus) and Bari (Italy) present the lowest percentages for the LUZ (0.46%) and core (0.11%) spatial level respectively. It is noticeable that the highest indicator values are observed at Sweden and Finland while the lowest ones at countries of the southern Europe.

Proportion of natural area						
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (%)	
		$\mathbf{1}$	Umeå	Sweden	85.65	
		$\overline{2}$	Jönköping	Sweden	76.67	
	בע	3	Tampere	Finland	74.79	
Cities that		$\overline{\mathbf{4}}$	Uppsala	Sweden	71.39	
correspond to the		5	Oulu	Finland	68.90	
highest indicator						
values from highest		1	Umeå	Sweden	81.29	
(1) to lowest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Tampere	Finland	75.67	
	CORE	3	Jönköping	Sweden	74.98	
		4	Oulu	Finland	65.62	
		5	Uppsala	Sweden	64.20	
		$\mathbf{1}$	Lefkosia	Cyprus	0.46	
		$\mathbf{2}$	Valletta	Malta	0.56	
	צטו	3	Gozo	Malta	0.90	
Cities that		4	Iraklion	Greece	0.98	
correspond to the		5	Bari	Italy	1.07	
lowest indicator						
values from lowest		$\mathbf{1}$	Bari	Italy	0.11	
(1) to highest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Iraklion	Greece	0.13	
	CORE	3	Valletta	Malta	0.31	
		4	Alicante/Alacant	Spain	0.42	
		5	Foggia	Italy	0.51	

Table 9: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the

"Proportion of natural area" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels.

Figure 6 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Proportion of natural area" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

In broad terms, the **"proportion of impervious surface"** ECI presents relatively low values along Europe for the LUZ (*Figure 7a*) while for the cores the presence of medium to high values is frequent (*Figure 7b*). Aggregates of LUZ that present high to very high values are only observed within the borders of Belgium and Netherlands. As regards the city cores, the majority of them that correspond to the highest indicator values are concentrated in Central Europe and especially at Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Poland. The Scandinavian countries show very low values for both spatial levels and the Baltic countries just for the LUZ. The city cores of the European capitals, as a rule, correspond from high to very indicator values as for example London, Paris, Rome, Athens or Berlin with certain exceptions (e.g. Helsinki, Stockholm). The core indicator values are of significantly larger magnitude than the LUZ. In fact, we may notice that the values that correspond to core classes are approximately double than the respective values for the LUZ (*Figure 7*).

The highest percentages for the LUZ and city core spatial level correspond to s' Gravenhage (Netherlands) with a percentage of 45.09% and Thessaloniki (Greece) with a percentage of 82.70 % respectively (*[Table 10](#page-38-0)*). The lowest percentages correspond to Umeå (Sweden) for both spatial levels with a percentage of 1.73 % for the LUZ level and 2.82% for the core level. It is notable that the country that prevails when it comes to the LUZ and cores with the lowest percentages is Sweden.

Proportion of impervious surface						
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (%)	
		1	s' Gravenhage	Netherlands	45.09	
		$\overline{2}$	Napoli	Italy	39.34	
	LUZ	3	Liverpool	United Kingdom	37.89	
Cities that		4	Portsmouth	United Kingdom	37.82	
correspond to the		5	Nancy	France	36.57	
highest indicator						
values from highest		1	Thessaloniki	Greece	82.70	
(1) to lowest (5)		2	Paris	France	66.48	
	CORE	3	Bucuresti	Romania	62.57	
		4	Kingston-upon-Hull	United Kingdom	62.03	
		5	Valletta	Malta	60.20	
		1	Umeå	Sweden	1.73	
		$\overline{2}$	Liepaja	Latvia	2.47	
	ZUT	3	Uppsala	Sweden	2.92	
Cities that		4	Pamplona/Iruna	Spain	3.09	
correspond to the		5	Oulu	Finland	3.19	
lowest indicator						
values from lowest		1	Umeå	Sweden	2.82	
(1) to highest (5)		$\overline{\mathbf{2}}$	Jönköping	Sweden	3.68	
	CORE	3	Uppsala	Sweden	3.92	
		4	Padova	Italy	4.20	
		5	Örebro	Sweden	4.37	

Table 10: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Proportion of impervious" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels.

Figure 7 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Proportion of impervious surface" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

The **"Proportion of agricultural area"** ECI shows large aggregates of low values at north-east Europe while central Europe presents relatively moderate values and south Europe presents high values for both the LUZ and core spatial levels (*[Figure 8](#page-41-0)*). The majority of the LUZ and corresponding cores that are located within the borders of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark present high to very high indicators values. The LUZ within the borders of Sweden and Finland show very low indicator values for the LUZ and low to very low for the core level. We may also observe that most of the LUZ and corresponding city cores that are found within the borders of the southern European countries present from high to very high indicator values capitals included (e.g. Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Greece). Concerning the magnitude of the indicator values, it is significantly larger for the LUZ spatial level.

The cities with the highest indicators percentages are the Badajoz of Spain with a percentage of 92.12 % (*[Table 13](#page-44-0)*). It should be noted that the percentage is exactly the same for both scales because Badajoz is one of the few cases where the LUZ and core coincide. The lowest indicator percentages for the LUZ and core levels correspond to Umeå (Sweden) and Thessaloniki (Greece) respectively and these are 11.70 % and 0.75% respectively. A general note on *Table 9,* is that all the cities that present the highest percentages are located at southern Europe.

Proportion of agricultural area					
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (%)
		1	Badajoz	Spain	92.12
		2	Lefkosia	Cyprus	90.71
	LUZ	3	Toledo	Spain	90.44
Cities that		4	Cordoba	Spain	89.80
correspond to the		5	Foggia	Italy	89.62
highest indicator					
values from highest		1	Badajoz	Spain	92.12
(1) to lowest (5)		2	Cordoba	Spain	89.80
	CORE	3	Foggia	Italy	89.73
		4	Sassari	Italy	85.81
		5	Ajaccio	France	83.44
		1	Umeå	Sweden	11.70
		$\mathbf{2}$	Tampere	Finland	14.56
	בע	3	Jönköping	Sweden	17.89
Cities that		4	Stockholm	Sweden	18.60
correspond to the		5	Wuppertal	Germany	20.22
lowest indicator					
values from lowest		1	Thessaloniki	Greece	0.75
(1) to highest (5)		2	Bruxelles/Brussel	Belgium	2.73
	CORE	3	Zielona Gora	Poland	3.29
		4	Paris	France	3.54
		5	Padova	Italy	3.67

Table 11: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Proportion agricultural area" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels.

Figure 8 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Proportion of agricultural area" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

The **"Proportion of protected area"** ECI mainly presents very low values across Europe for both the LUZ and the core spatial levels (*[Figure 9](#page-43-0)).* Furthermore, there are some LUZ and several cores which do not have any protected areas within their territories (28 out of 305). LUZ and cores that present from medium to very high percentages are mainly located within the borders of Spain and Greece. Concerning the capitals, we may see that Madrid and Wien present relatively high indicator values for both spatial levels. Significant differentiations between the two spatial levels are observed at Slovakia and Poland. As regards the magnitude of the indicator values, the LUZ level seems to generally involve higher percentages.

The city of Aveiro (Portugal) presents the highest percentage (87.02%) for the LUZ level while the city of Cagliari (Italy) presents the highest percentage (98.97%) for the core level (*Table 10*). It is notable that, especially concerning the core level, the territories of the cities that correspond to the highest percentages are almost completely characterized as protected areas. The cities with the lowest indicator values are Modena (Italy) for the LUZ level and Wuppertal (Germany) for the core level with 1.03% and 1.10% respectively (*[Table 12](#page-42-0)*).

Proportion of protected area							
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (%)		
		1	Aveiro	Portugal	87.02		
		2	Santa Cruz de Tenerife	Spain	79.81		
	LUZ	3	Trieste	Italy	79.65		
Cities that		4	Venezia	Italy	74.90		
correspond to the		5	l'Aquila	Italy	73.51		
highest indicator							
values from highest		1	Cagliari	Italy	98.97		
(1) to lowest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Ioannina	Greece	97.35		
	CORE	3	Aveiro	Portugal	97.28		
		4	Santa Cruz de Tenerife	Spain	94.95		
		5	Valencia	Spain	84.65		
		1	Modena	Italy	1.03		
		2	Rennes	France	1.07		
	ZUT	3	Wuppertal	Germany	1.10		
Cities that		4	Milano	Italy	1.15		
correspond to the		5	Edinburgh	United Kingdom	1.22		
lowest indicator							
values from lowest		1	Wuppertal	Germany	1.10		
(1) to highest (5)		2	London	United Kingdom	1.10		
	CORE	3	Glasgow	United Kingdom	1.11		
		4	Rzeszow	Poland	1.12		
		5	Radom	Poland	1.13		

Table 12: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Proportion of protected area" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels. Values below 1% have been excluded from the ranking and can be found at Appendices A and B.

Figure 9 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Proportion of protected area" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

The **"Proportion of abandoned area"** ECI generally presents very low values towards Europe for both the examined spatial levels (*Figure 10*). Very few LUZ present high and very high indicator values and they are mainly met within the borders of Hungary, Netherlands and Belgium (*Figure 10a*). Concerning the core level, several cores of Germany present medium percentages while a few that correspond from medium to high percentages are located at Netherlands, Belgium and the Baltic countries (*Figure 10b*). In general, the indicator values of the LUZ present significantly larger values than the ones of the cores.

The city that presents the highest percentages for both spatial levels is Rotterdam (Netherlands) with percentages of 3.05 % and 1.85% for the core and LUZ respectively while the city of Örebro (Sweden) presents zero percentages (*[Table 13](#page-44-0)*). It is notable that Sweden is the country that prevails amongst the ones that present the lowest percentages for the core level.

Proportion of abandoned area					
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (%)
		1	Rotterdam	Netherlands	1.85
		2	Milano	Italy	1.17
	LUZ	3	Napoli	Italy	1.06
Cities that		4	Oporto	Portugal	0.90
correspond to the		5	Lille	France	0.87
highest indicator					
values from highest		1	Rotterdam	Netherlands	3.05
(1) to lowest (5)		$\overline{\mathbf{2}}$	Santander	Spain	2.44
	CORE	3	Liepaja	Latvia	2.43
		4	Utrecht	Netherlands	2.41
		5	Lefkosia	Cyprus	2.30
		$\mathbf{1}$	Örebro	Sweden	0.00
		$\mathbf{2}$	Olsztyn	Poland	0.00
	LUZ	3	Umeå	Sweden	0.01
Cities that		4	Linköping	Sweden	0.01
correspond to the		5	Oviedo	Spain	0.01
lowest indicator					
values from lowest		$\mathbf{1}$	Örebro	Sweden	0.00
(1) to highest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Linköping	Sweden	0.01
	CORE	3	Umeå	Sweden	0.01
		4	Uppsala	Sweden	0.02
		5	Derry	United Kingdom	0.02

Table 13: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Proportion agricultural area" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels.

Figure 10 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Proportion of abandoned area" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

The **"Number of inhabitants per area"** ECI mainly presents from medium to very low values for both the examined spatial levels (*Figure 11*). The capital cities that are distinguished because of their high values for both levels are London and Athens. A large majority of the city cores that present medium indicator values are observed within the borders of Poland and Germany (*Figure 11b*). Concerning the magnitude of the indicator values, the city cores present significantly larger values according to the distribution of the classes of (*Figure 11).*

The LUZ that presents the highest indicator value is Napoli (Italy) with approximately 39 inhabitants/ ha and the one with the lowest value is Umeå (Sweden) with 0.14 inhabitants / ha . The city core with highest indicator value is clearly Thessaloniki (Greece) with an estimated value of approximately 223 inhabitants/ ha while the lowest indicator value corresponds to Umeå (Sweden) with 0.43 inhabitants/ ha (*Table 12*). It is also notable that the cities which correspond to the lowest values for both the examined spatial levels belong to Sweden.

Number of inhabitants per area					
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (number/ ha)
		1	Napoli	Italy	39.24
		2	Portsmouth	United Kingdom	24.54
	<u>בחר</u>	3	s' Gravenhage	Netherlands	22.72
Cities that		4	Barcelona	Spain	22.14
correspond to the		5	Milano	Italy	22.10
highest indicator					
values from highest		1	Thessaloniki	Greece	223.32
(1) to lowest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Paris	France	80.81
	CORE	3	Athina	Greece	80.71
		4	Bucuresti	Romania	79.68
		5	Pamplona/Iruna	Spain	72.41
		$\mathbf{1}$	Umeå	Sweden	0.14
		2	Uppsala	Sweden	0.35
	בע	3	Liepaja	Latvia	0.37
Cities that		4	Jönköping	Sweden	0.42
correspond to the		5	Linköping	Sweden	0.43
lowest indicator					
values from lowest		1	Umeå	Sweden	0.43
(1) to highest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Jönköping	Sweden	0.60
	CORE	3	Uppsala	Sweden	0.76
		4	Örebro	Sweden	0.76
		5	Linköping	Sweden	0.85

Table 14: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Number of Inhabitants per area" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels.

Figure 11 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Number of inhabitants per area" indicator, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

The **"Artificial area per inhabitant"** indicator generally presents from medium to very low values for both the LUZ and core spatial level with the distinguished exceptions of (*[Figure 12](#page-49-0)*) of the Scandinavian countries which exclusively present high to very high values. The majority of the LUZ that are located within the Baltic countries present high values (*Figure 12a*), while the respective cores present medium values (*Figure 12b*). Most of the European capitals present very low values at both spatial levels as for example London, Madrid, Paris, Rome and Athens.

The city with the largest indicator value for both spatial levels is Umeå (Sweden) with 1903.91 m² /inhab. at LUZ level and 1137.76 m² /inhab. at core level (*Table 13*). The lowest indicator value for the LUZ is observed at Napoli (Italy) and for the cores at Thessaloniki (Greece) with values 140.25 m²/inhab. and 43.27 m²/inhab. respectively (*[Table 15](#page-48-0)*).

Table 15: The cities and the respective countries that correspond to the highest and lowest values of the "Artificial area per inhabitant" ECI for the LUZ and city core spatial levels.

Artificial area per inhabitant					
	Level	Rank	City	Country	Value (m2/inhab)
		1	Umeå	Sweden	1903.91
		$\mathbf{2}$	Aalborg	Denmark	1370.83
	LUZ	3	Uppsala	Sweden	1368.94
Cities that		4	Limerick	Ireland	1341.51
correspond to the		5	Linköping	Sweden	1314.71
highest indicator					
values from highest		1	Umeå	Sweden	1137.76
(1) to lowest (5)		$\mathbf{2}$	Jönköping	Sweden	1028.91
	CORE	3	Örebro	Sweden	1000.34
		4	Linköping	Sweden	942.48
		5	Aalborg	Denmark	894.62
		1	Napoli	Italy	140.25
		2	Bucuresti	Romania	149.19
	צעו	3	Barcelona	Spain	159.22
Cities that		4	Braila	Romania	161.23
correspond to the		5	Stara Zagora	Bulgaria	167.59
lowest indicator					
values from lowest		1	Thessaloniki	Greece	43.47
(1) to highest (5)		2	Valencia	Spain	77.41
	CORE	3	Bilbao	Spain	86.54
		4	Athina	Greece	89.00
		5	Bucuresti	Romania	92.80

Figure 12 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "Artificial area per inhabitant" ECI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

5.2. ECI Values Differential between the City Core and its Surroundings

In *[Figure 13](#page-50-0)* are presented the average percentages of the contribution of each ECI to the cumulative indicator value of the city core and the intermediate zone that lies among the LUZ and core outlines. The detailed results of this analysis i.e. each ECI's value for the city core and each surroundings are presented at Appendices B and C respectively.

Figure 13: The contribution of each ECI at "City core" and "Area in between the city core and LUZ outline" spatial levels to their cumulative value. The percentages correspond to the average ECI values of the understudy cities whose LUZ does not coincide with their core (282 cities).

The "Proportion of urban green space" ECI appears to be much higher for the city core in accordance with the surrounding area (*[Figure 13](#page-50-0)*). The same is also valid for the "Proportion of impervious surface" and "Proportion of abandoned area" ECI which appear to be clearly higher for the city cores. The ECI which appear to be significantly higher for the surroundings than for the city cores are the "Proportion of natural area", Proportion of protected area and "Proportion of agricultural area."

Finally, the ECI that involve the population of the city core or surrounding area seem to equally contribute to their cumulative value and these are the "Artificial area per inhabitant" and the "Number of inhabitants per area".

5.3. Identification of the Territories that will correspond to the ECI Thresholds

The results that concern the spatial autocorrelation of the ECI as well as of precipitation and temperature, indicate that the most notable spatial autocorrelations correspond to the variables whose Moran's I index is greater than 0.09 and whose z-scores are greater than 10. Subsequently, the Proportion of urban green space, Proportion of natural area, Proportion of agricultural area and Number of inhabitants per area ECI as well as to the mean temperature (*[Table](#page-51-0) 16*) are subjected to a cluster analysis which defines the territories to which different indicator thresholds will be applied (*Figure 14*).

indicator	Moran's Index		
		z-score	p-value
Proportion of urban green space (%)	0.313255	41.453855	< 0.001
Proportion of impervious surface (%)	0.053507	7.948471	< 0.001
Proportion of natural area (%)	0.15524	20.49507	< 0.001
Proportion of protected area (%)	0.082460	9.361405	< 0.001
Proportion of agricultural area (%)	0.099363	13.256068	< 0.001
Proportion of abandoned area (%)	0.041045	6.158351	< 0.001
Number of inhabitants per area (number/ha)	0.111579	15.024278	< 0.001
Artificial area per inhabitant (m2/person)	0.075255	10.220107	< 0.001
Mean Daily Precipitation sum (mm)	0.050041	7.050154	< 0.001
Mean Temperature (^O C)	0.22122	29.082607	< 0.001

Table 16: Moran's I index, z-scores and p-values for each ECI per LUZ, as well as for precipitation and temperature. The values in bold correspond to Moran's Index and z-score greater than 0.09 and 10 respectively and are considered as the most spatially autocorrelated.

By examining *Figure 14*, the following can be noted for each indicator:

- *Proportion of urban green space*: we can observe that the majority of the LUZ at south-east Europe (within Italy, Greece and Bulgaria) belong to a low-low cluster while the corresponding mean temperature to a high-high cluster. However, this fact may be considered as incidental as this ECI is mainly related to the urban planning policy that is followed within each LUZ
- *Proportion of natural area*: This ECI presents a high-high cluster of a large magnitude at north-east Europe and another significant low-low cluster at north-west Europe. An insignificant low-low cluster is presented towards the south coastline of Europe. However, these clusters do not seem to be related in their largest parts with the corresponding temperature clusters expect from the opposed trends that are observed at north-east Europe.
- *Proportion of agricultural area:* This ECI presents low-low clusters at north-east and north central Europe and a smaller high-high cluster at south Europe. We might say that this ECI could be correlated to temperature as it follows the pattern of temperature clusters.
- *Number of inhabitants per area:* This ECI presents a low-low cluster at north-east Europe and a smaller one at north-central Europe. However, these clusters do not seem to be related in their largest parts with the corresponding temperature cluster.

Concerning the clusters that are formed by the mean temperature towards the LUZ, the mean temperature within the LUZ presents low-low clusters at north Europe, insignificant clusters at middle Europe and high-high clusters at south Europe.

On the basis of the above, it has been decided that the thresholds that will be proposed will correspond to their European-wide mean values expect from the Proportion of agricultural area ECI for which three thresholds will be proposed according the temperature cluster to which the LUZ belongs to.

Figure 14 (a) to (e): The formed clusters of each of the indicators that present significant spatial autocorrelation and the temperature cluster, as defined by the application of the Cluster and Outlier Analysis method.

5.4. Suggested ECI Thresholds

The suggested thresholds are addressed to the entire territory of Europe except from the one that corresponds to the "Proportion of agricultural area" ECI (*[Table 17](#page-53-0)*) which is assigned three thresholds in accordance with the temperature cluster that the LUZ or core belong to (*[Figure 14](#page-52-0)*). It is noticeable that the suggested thresholds for the said ECI decrease while moving from South to North Europe for both spatial levels.

A general perception of the results indicates that the land uses that prevail over the other for the LUZ as well as for the core spatial levels are the agricultural land uses but though for the LUZ the natural areas come second, for the cores the impervious surfaces follow. We may notice that the greater deviation between the thresholds of the different spatial levels is observed for the "Number of inhabitants per area" ECI (71.95%) while the smallest difference is observed for the "Proportion of natural area" ECI.

The suggested thresholds for the city cores appear to be larger than the corresponding for the LUZ in the cases of the "Proportion of urban green space", "Proportion of impervious surface", "Proportion of abandoned area" and "Number of inhabitants per area" ECI.

				Spatial Level	Deviation	
No	ECI	Units	Territory	LUZ	City Core	(%)
1	Proportion of urban green space	%	Europe	1.69	5.27	67.93
2	Proportion of impervious surface	%	Europe	14.99	30.06	50.13
3	Proportion of natural area	%	Europe	25.00	18.74	-33.40
4	Proportion of protected area	%	Europe	17.76	11.49	-54.57
			South Europe	67.88	56.18	-20.83
5	Proportion of agricultural area	%	Central Europe	56.21	38.07	-47.65
			North Europe	50.02	32.52	-53.81
6	Proportion of abandoned area	%	Europe	0.16	0.43	62.79
7	Number of inhabitants per area	(num./ ha)	Europe	4.96	17.68	71.95
8	Artificial area per inhabitant	(m2/inh.)	Europe	509.80	314.26	-62.22

Table 17: The suggested thresholds for each ECI for the LUZ and city cores spatial levels and their corresponding territories. The South, Central and North Europe territories correspond the respective HH, not significant and LL temperature clusters that are presented in [Figure 14](#page-52-0). The deviation column expresses the proportional difference of the city core thresholds in accordance to the LUZ thresholds.

5.5. Juxtaposition of the Suggested ECI Thresholds to ES

The outcome of the juxtaposition of the suggested thresholds to ES, which will be a measure for the suggested thresholds (*[Table 17](#page-53-0)*) credibility, is heavily dependent on the type of the correlation that the ECI with the ES which is based on scientific literature (*[Table 18](#page-54-0)*). We may notice the differentiation of the UHI effect correlations in relation to the ROS the NO² removal by urban vegetation ESI which is attributed to the fact that the UHI effect is not an ES itself, but it is linked to climate regulation ES in an inversely proportionate way.

		Type of correlation to ES	
ECI	$NO2$ removal by	ROS	UHI effect
	urban vegetation		
Proportion of urban green space			
Proportion of impervious surface			
Proportion of natural area			
Proportion of protected area			
Proportion of agricultural area			
Proportion of abandoned area			
Number of inhabitants per area			
Artificial area per inhabitant			

Table 18: The correlation between ECI and ESI based on scientific literature.

Concerning the **"NO² removal by urban vegetation"** ESI values' spatial distribution, both the examined spatial levels present a similar pattern (*Figure 15*). A general perception of *[Figure 15](#page-55-0)* indicates that the majority of the European LUZ correspond to relatively low or medium values. However, the majority of the LUZ and cores that are located within the borders of Finland and Sweden as well as Portugal present high to very high percentages. Furthermore, according to the same figure, Stockholm is the only European capital with high values at both spatial levels. In general, the magnitude of the LUZ values does deviate much from the respective magnitude of the cores.

As regards the "NO₂ removal by urban vegetation" ESI and its relation to the suggested thresholds, the threshold which is given credence for both the spatial levels of LUZ and city cores corresponds to the "Proportion of natural area" ECI (*Table 17*). That is because the percentages that represent the number of LUZ and cores that positively surpass both the threshold and the average ESI value, to the total number of the said LUZ and cores are 68.42% and 70.87% respectively. Furthermore, there are two ECI whose respective proportions also surpass the 50% and these are the "Proportion of impervious surface" and "Proportion of protected area" ECI.

Τhe majority of the proportions presented at *[Table 19](#page-56-0)* exceed the 40% for both the examined spatial levels, except from the ones that correspond to the "Proportion of agricultural area" ECI. Finally, the total number of LUZ and cores which surpass the average "NO² removal by urban vegetation" ECI values are 133 and 131 respectively.

Figure 15 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the " ΝO² removal by urban vegetation " ESI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

Table 19: The number of LUZ and cores which positively surpass the suggested ECI threshold as well as the number and proportion of them which also surpass the average "NO2 removal by urban vegetation" ESI values. An ECI value positively surpasses the threshold when it is greater than the threshold for the indicators that share a positive correlation with the ES and less than the threshold for the indicators that share a negative correlation with the ES. Proportions equal or greater to 50% are considered to give credence to the respective suggested ECI threshold and are in bold.

Concerning the **"ROS"** ESI values' spatial distribution, aggregates of LUZ and cores that correspond from high to very high indicator values are mainly found within the borders of Germany, Sweden, Finland, the Baltic countries and Greece (*[Figure 16](#page-57-0)*). LUZ and cores that are lagging behind concerning this ES are mainly observed at southern United Kingdom and northern France. In general, the magnitude of the ESI values that refer to the LUZ does deviate much from the respective magnitude of the cores.

Concerning the "ROS" ESI relation to the suggested ECI thresholds, three thresholds are given credence for both spatial levels and these correspond to the following ECI: "Proportion of natural area", "Proportion of protected area" and "Proportion of impervious surface" (*[Table 20](#page-58-0)*). In fact, the "Proportion of natural area" ECI corresponds to very high percentages for both the LUZ and city core spatial levels which are 70.68 and 70.08 respectively. Furthermore the "Number of inhabitants per area" and "Artificial area per inhabitant" per area ECI correspond to percentages higher than 50% only for the LUZ spatial level (*[Table](#page-58-0) [20](#page-58-0)*). The lowest proportions for both spatial levels correspond to the "Proportion of agricultural area" ECI.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the total number of LUZ and cores which surpass the average "ROS" values are 136 and 12 respectively.

Figure 16 (a) LUZ spatial level (b) city core spatial level: the "ROS " ESI, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value of the indicator as the lower limit of the "medium" class.

Table 20: The number of LUZ and cores which positively surpass the suggested ECI threshold as well as the number and proportion of them which also surpass the average "ROS" ESI values. An ECI value positively surpasses the threshold when it is greater than the threshold for the ECI that share a positive correlation with the ES and less than the threshold for the ECI that share a negative correlation with the ES. Proportions equal or greater to 50% are considered to give credence to the respective suggested threshold and are in bold.

Figure 17 : LUZ spatial level, the UHI effect, classified in five classes by the natural break method, modified to incorporate the mean value as the lower limit of the "medium" class. The UHI effect values concern the LUZ as well as the core spatial levels.

Concerning the **UHI effect's** values spatial distribution, an aggregate of very high values is observed at northern Italy (*[Figure 17](#page-58-1)*) while aggregates of high values are mainly observed at central United Kingdom, northern Spain, southern France, west Germany, central Italy, southern Poland and northern Romania. As regards the European capitals, the majority of them correspond from medium to low values with the Exception of Sofia (Bulgaria) which corresponds to very low UHI values. There also cases of some LUZ where there is an absence of the phenomenon and these are mainly found within the borders of Spain and Bulgaria.

As regards the relation between the UHI effect and the suggested ECI thresholds, the thresholds that are considered that are being given credence by the current juxtaposition for both the examined spatial levels, correspond to the "Proportion of impervious surface" and "Artificial area per inhabitant" ECI *(Table 21)*. The lowest percentage corresponds to the "Artificial area per inhabitant" ECI for the LUZ spatial level and is 31.50% meaning that the 30% approximately of the LUZ that have high indicator values also have high UHI values. Furthermore, percentages less than 50% also correspond to the "Proportion of protected area", "Proportion of agricultural area", "Proportion of abandoned area and "Number of inhabitants per area" ECI for the LUZ spatial level and to the "Proportion of urban green space" and "Proportion of natural area" for the city core spatial level.

Table 21: The number of LUZ and cores which positively surpass the suggested ECI threshold as well as the number and proportion of them which also surpass the average UHI effect values. In the case of the UHI effect, an ECI value positively surpasses the threshold when it is greater than the threshold for the ECI that share a negative correlation with the UHI effect and less than the threshold for the ECI that share a positive correlation with the UHI effect. Proportions equal or less than 50% are considered to give credence to the respective suggested threshold and are in bold.

6. Discussion

The current study is very much dependent on the available spatial data that were used as input for its analysis. The primary source of these data, which were freely available and easily accessible, was the EEA. For the data to be relevant and usable, they need to be comparable based on agreed standards and concerning the EEA 's spatial data, there are EU initiatives aimed at addressing spatial data standardization, interoperability and availability issues (Jensen, 2014). In any case, special care was given by the current study to incorporate data of comparable scales that would facilitate the analysis for all the examined spatial levels (LUZ, city core, intermediate zone). An exception were the data that concerned the temperature and precipitation which did not allow for a discrimination between the LUZ and the city core spatial levels.

The study provided a comparative perspective for the EC of the EU cities with population larger than 100.000 inhabitants. What makes these different cities across Europe environmentally comparable is the fact that the respective countries are all members of the EU and should conform to the EU's environmental regulation and directives to reach an objective of common interest. The comparability amongst the under-study cities is enhanced by the fact that the same specification for the "city-area" is used for all of them either for the LUZ or for the core spatial level. However, it should be noted that the city cores which correspond to political and administrative boundaries are not always strictly comparable between countries because economic activity, health services, air pollution etc. cross a city' s administrative boundaries (Feldmann, 2008). On the other hand, the LUZ may capture this extended spatial level as it is based on commuter flows and includes the core city and its commuter belt. Yet, it is important to mention that data at a city level are sometimes less comparable between countries than regional or national statistics despite the efforts to harmonize concepts definitions and the response behavior may differ. (Feldmann, 2008).

Concerning the methodology that has been followed to identify the territories for which different ECI thresholds are suggested and was based on the spatial correlation that climate factors may share with the under study ECI, it should be noted that the results of the cluster analysis may, in some measure, be biased by for example national legislations or towards cities with large amounts of natural areas. However, the main concept behind the selection of this method is that in regions prone to high temperatures and heavy precipitation, the need of ES to handle these events is larger than other regions and that is why the ECI thresholds should differentiate. In fact, Fang et al. (2018) proved that the value of certain ES is significantly affected by meteorological factors, especially precipitation. The climate conditions that have been presented by the current study*,* showed a notable spatial correlation between the "Proportion of agricultural area" ECI and the temperature for the examined LUZ. However, these climatic conditions are dynamic and continuously changing as climate change is already happening and according to UNFCCC (1992), it is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. Increased anthropogenic activities that are relative to the cities and their surroundings such as

industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, agriculture, change in land use pattern etc. may lead to emission of greenhouse gases due to which the rate of climate change is much faster (Mahato, 2014). It could be said that the estimation of the ECI and respective thresholds that the current study suggests quantifies these anthropogenic activities, mainly in terms of urban landuses, and could function as an alarm for the authorities to proceed to the incorporation of climate adaptation strategies when needed.

Climate adaptation strategies may involve a wide variety of practices that mainly promote the boost of the urban GI. The climate adaptation benefits of GI are generally related to its ability to moderate the expected increases in extreme precipitation or temperature (Foster et al., 2011). Some wide known contemporary practices that are implemented to enhance urban GI include green, blue, and white roofs; hard and soft permeable surfaces; green alleys and streets; urban forestry; green open spaces such as parks and wetlands; and adapting buildings to better cope with floods and coastal storm surges (Foster et al., 2011) (*Figure 18*). Taking into consideration the ECI and their thresholds, the policy makers could form an opinion about the condition of the respective urban ecosystem while acknowledging that the "good condition" of a city, reflects a "good" or "desired" balance between green and built infrastructure (Maes et al., 2016).

Figure 18 : Possible actions that the cities could take to enhance the urban GI according to Foster et al. (2011)

The fact that the study estimated relative and not fixed impact ECI thresholds subserves the thresholds to have relevance in all parts of the EU, fact that may allow the results of relative studies from different parts of the EU to fit together seamlessly (Zhang et al., 2011). Concerning the acceptance that has been made by the current study that the "suggested ECI thresholds are given credence if the majority of the LUZ or city cores whose ECI values surpass the threshold values also surpass the average values of the respective ESI", we might say that it involves the risk of generalization although it is used in the context of the comparative perspective that the study attempts to provide.

Amongst all the examined ECI and respective thresholds, the one that seems to share the strongest relation with the studied ES and the UHI effect is the **"Proportion of natural** **area"** for both the examined spatial levels (*Tables 19 to 21*). On the other hand, the results indicate that the **"Proportion of urban green space"** may only play a critical role in the counterbalancing of the UHI effect at city core level (*Table 21*). This dominance of the natural areas against the urban green spaces, in relation to the ES, is largely connected to the "Urban Atlas" land use classification as well as to the selection of the "Urban Atlas" landuses for the estimation of the ECI by the current study. However, if combined, the land uses that these two ECI involve, compose the urban GI of each LUZ or core which "influences the capacity to provide services across a range of scales" (Maes et al., 2014). Actually, *Figure 5* and *Figure 6,* if juxtaposed show that the two ECI may compensate one another in several cases. As regards the relation between the GI and UHI effect which is underpinned by the current study (*Table 21*), it confirms the statement of Gill et al. (2007) that greenspace is an 'environmental capital' that can be utilized to mitigate the adverse effects of the UHI, extreme heat events, and climate change. Concerning the **"Proportion of Agricultural area"** ECI, the results show that is related to the UHI effect for the LUZ spatial level (*Table 21*). In fact, according to Dubbeling and de Zeeuw (2011), Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (UPA) may provide services of reducing the UHI effect by providing shade and enhanced evapotranspiration. As regards the **"Proportion of impervious surface"** ECI, it seems to be related to both the two examined ES and more strongly to the UHI effect, fact that confirms the findings of Xu (2010) which have revealed a strong positive exponential relationship between impervious surface and LST which suggests that an increase in built-up land percentage would exponentially accelerate LST rise and UHI development.

The results show that **"Proportion of protected areas"** ECI is related to the ROS ES at both the examined spatial scales as well as to the "NO₂ removal by urban vegetation" ES and the UHI effect in LUZ spatial level. These results support the claiming that although the primary purpose of Natura 2000 network is the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable development of activities, the network also provides a range of ES and cobenefits related to health and social well-being (Brink et al.,2016). It is worth to mention here that "Urban areas are surprisingly rich in biodiversity, hosting a great variety of species and habitats, some of which are rare and threatened on a European scale" (Sundseth and Raeymaekers, 2006). Furthermore, the Natura 2000 network, which appears to cover large areas of several LUZ and cores (*Figure 9*), could act as a protective shield to the existent GI of the European cities as the cities that involve Natura 2000 sites are obliged to conform to the relative legal provisions which should be considered within a wider urban policy context. For example, Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and Article 4 of the Birds Directive require Member States to ensure that, within Natura 2000 sites damaging activities are avoided that could significantly disturb the species or deteriorate the habitats for which the site designated and that positive conservation measures are taken, where necessary, to maintain and restore these habitats and species to a 'favorable conservation status' in their natural range (Sundseth and Raeymaekers, 2006).

An ECI that, according to the results, has no obvious connection to the ES services and is weakly related to the UHI effect (*Table 21*), is the **"Proportion of abandoned area"**. However, the abandoned areas of a city could contribute to a future enhancement of the

urban GI as they could be regarded as a further potential that the cities have to obtain more urban GI. In other words, the indicator could express the proportion of the areas that are "waiting to be used" or re-used as parks, sports or leisure facilities etc. An example of a city that is planning to take advantage of its vacant land to obtain more GI is Bari (Italy). An amount of vacant residual places in Bari which are selected by the respective initiative, are to be turned into properly managed green spaces that are integrated into new neighborhoods (DeBellis and Lubisco, 2016).

The **"Number of inhabitants per area"** ECI is related to the ROS ES and UHI effect for the LUZ spatial level (*Table 20, Table 21*). Concerning the relation to UHI, it has been supported by a case study (Mallick and Rahman, 2012), which showed that population density is one of the main contributing factors for the high surface temperature, UHI intensity and also micro-climate. Finally, the **"Artificial area per inhabitant"** ECI which is related to landuse intensity i.e. it is a combination of the population density with the proportion of impervious surfaces is, according to the findings of the current study, related to the UHI effect in both the examined spatial levels (*Table 21*).

Overall, the results that concern the exploration of relation between the ECI thresholds and the ES, imply that there is a positive relation between the EC and the examined ES which according the 4th MAES report requires more scientific underpinning (Maes et al., 2016).

Another outcome of the study is that, according to the results, the national legislations regarding the urban planning policies, play a determinant role to the cities' EC. More specifically, the results show that in most cases there is a homogeneity of the ECI's classes within the national borders. On the other hand, a general heterogenicity is observed between the northern and southern countries regarding their EC: the northern countries generally present higher ECI values that are positively correlated to ES and lower ECI values for the ones that are negatively correlates to ES. In fact, it has been noted by the NALAS Urban Planning Task Force (2011), that many of the countries in South-East Europe are challenged by an insufficient legal framework and insufficient implementation of plans which amongst other produce dysfunctions in terms of green spaces. In any case, urbanization in Europe should be accompanied with additional growth of GI which provides services that are as important as other urban infrastructure (Maes et al., 2014).

Updating the "Urban Atlas" dataset at regular intervals and re-estimating the under-study ECI might create the conditions of a successful monitoring of the ECI and maybe to reveal potential trends in their values. Furthermore, the monitoring of the under-study ECI, in long term, might enhance the answering of questions like the following:

- Are each ECI values increased or decreased?
- What is the spatial distribution of the LUZ or city cores that present the most noteworthy changes in their values?
- What are the factors that these changes may be attributed to? Did the corresponding LUZ or cores implemented climate adaptation strategies?
- Do the respective ESI and the UHI effect present proportionate changes of their values?
- Do the European-wide averages of the ECI present an increase or a decrease?

The answers to the above questions could be the basis to form managerial decisions that may concern either the EU as a whole or each city as a unit. These decisions should of course pay respect to the national and international legislation and should look ahead to the future of the EU as a whole and its cities individually in terms of environmental sustainability.

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7. Conclusions

The study has attempted to define empirically derived relative thresholds in two spatial levels (LUZ, city core) for eight urban ECI that the 4th MAES report proposes and to juxtapose the results to two ESI and the UHI effect to examine their relation. According to the 4th MAES report, the assessment of the thresholds in different spatial levels, serves the purpose of providing a structured framework that can be implemented at a local, metropolitan and regional level as a support of policies and planning purposes. Apart from this objective, the study has pointed out contradictions that the ECI present between the examined spatial levels. A significant outcome of the study is the quantification of the large deviations of the ECI between the urban (city core) and metropolitan (LUZ) scale, which points out that there are fundamental differences relative to the land use types and respective areas between them and by extension to their EC and deriving ES. This differentiation has been further explored by estimating the ECI for the area in between the city core and its surroundings which revealed an added value that this intermediate zone has to the ES provided, fact that needs to be considered when implementing climate adaptation strategies.

Since growing cities heavily depend on the supply of the ES which are necessary to sustain healthy urban living conditions and vibrant commerce (Ervin et al. 2012), the assessment of the urban EC through an indicator framework could be a useful aiding tool for the policy-makers to safeguard the ES provided. The study concluded that the relative national policies may have an imprint on the ECI at the LUZ and city core spatial levels and that most commonly countries of southern Europe are lagging behind concerning their urban EC in accordance with the northern ones. A significant differentiation between the southern and northern EU countries concerns their climate and especially their temperature which showed a notable spatial correlation to the examined ECI which is based on agricultural land uses.

The majority of the suggested ECI thresholds, are related to the examined ES and UHI effect either in LUZ or city core spatial levels or in both. Amongst the examined ES and the UHI effect, the latter is the one that seems to be more affected by the under-study ECI.

The current study looks forward to work as an aiding tool for policy makers to form a general overview of the EC of the LUZ or core, yet it should be noted that the incorporation of existing or new policy targets and ambitions would lead to a more legitimate and justifiable decision-making.

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APPENDICES

A : ESTIMATED INDICATORS /LUZ SPATIAL LEVEL

B : ESTIMATED INDICATORS /CORE (OR KERNEL) SPATIAL LEVEL

C : ESTIMATED INDICATORS /AREA IN BETWEEN THE CORE AND THE LUZ OUTLINE

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