

Nature Within Cities and Cities within Nature

(30 June 2021, 16h00 CEST)

OUTCOMES AND SUMMARY OF THE EVENT

On the 30 June 2021, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with the support of the Geneva Environment Network, co-hosted the high-level online conference “*Nature Within Cities and Cities within Nature*”. The event builds on and follows up to the German Presidency event held on 14 December 2020, which focused on how ecosystem conservation, management and restoration can address the three planetary crises: climate, biodiversity, and pollution.

The event focused on exploring the multiple benefits of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for cities, highlighting opportunities and challenges to advance and scale up NbS, from local action to global solutions, accelerating impact in 2021 and beyond. A call-to-action speech from the UN Secretary-General inaugurated the Nature Within Cities and Cities within Nature event. In his written statement, read at the event, the UN Secretary General highlighted that while “cities are on the front lines of environmental degradation and climate disruption... urban planning currently overlooks ecosystems and nature found in and around cities.” Further noting that “without bold policies, we risk missing the opportunities cities offer, especially given the growing concentration of populations in urban areas. It is essential that we address the drivers of urban biodiversity loss and conserve and restore nature so that urban populations can thrive.” Further opening remarks, highlighting the policy relevance and timeliness of NbS implementation, were delivered from João Pedro Matos Fernandes, Portuguese Minister for the Environment and Climate Action, Inger Andersen, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the UNEP, Ana Abrunhosa, Portuguese Minister of Territorial Cohesion, Svenja Schluze, German Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, and Andrej Vizjak, Slovenian Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning.

This was then followed by discussions between Philippe Tulkens, acting Head of Unit, DG Research & Innovation Healthy Planet Directorate, EC, Ana Daam, Head of Division of Sustainable Finance and Adaptation, Portuguese Environment Agency and Rosário Oliveira, Researcher, Institute of Social Sciences – University of Lisbon regarding the opportunities and challenges to advance NbS. The panelists spoke of the cost-effectiveness of NbS, inclusion of NbS in urban planning and design and scalability of NbS.

Two examples from Lisbon Municipality and Campinas City were presented by Duarte d’Araújo Mata, Landscape Architect, Lisbon Municipality and Angela Cruz Guirao, Director of Green and Sustainable Development, Campinas City Hall, respectively. These interventions illustrated models for using NbS within an ecological landscape approach and elaborated on how coordination and cooperation between cities, central governments and implementing partners can foster the scaling up of solutions.

The following key messages were raised:

- **Cities drive but also are vulnerable to the triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.** Therefore, cities play a key role in the fight against these challenges and must prioritize actions to deliver common goals. Cities and NbS cannot be forgotten in the upcoming 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26).
- **There is increasing evidence of connectivity between human health and nature.** The COVID-19 pandemic is the more recent and clear evidence of this. It has reinforced the importance of ensuring a symbiotic relationship between inhabitants of our planet.
- **NbS are a win-win solution that delivers multiple environmental benefits and socio-economic outcomes.** By restoring nature, we can mitigate and adapt to climate change and simultaneously improve

public health, reduce air pollution, save water and recover landscapes. It will also foster more sustainable economies, create green jobs and make urban areas more livable and equitable.

- **Cost-effective NbS can help us to scale climate action and deliver on SDGs.** Every dollar that we spend in ecosystem restoration and conservation can yield up to 70 times that amount in the larger economy. Therefore, economic recovery packages are an important opportunity to redefine our relationship with nature at all levels and foster nature-based solutions to enhance resilience in cities. Going back to a business-as-usual scenario is not an option.
- **The role of science, research and innovation is crucial.** Science has shown over time that nature-based solutions can help address multiple challenges: climate change, land degradation, natural disaster risk, biodiversity loss. Nevertheless, there are still knowledge gaps, so investments in this domain are urgently indispensable.
- **Urban planning frequently overlooks ecosystems and nature found in and around cities.** Therefore, more national and sub-national policies on sustainable urban development are needed. These policies must be directly linked to territorial active management and recognize the value of ecosystem services.
- **Important commitments, investments and actions promoting NbS are taking place at global, national and subnational levels,** including the German Act, Portugal's Climate Adaptation Plan, the EU Biodiversity and Adaptation to Climate Change Strategies, approved in 2021, EU Horizon 2030, among others.

In conclusion, cities must work with the natural world and not against it. **To bring nature back to cities** we need to let nature back in, rebalance cities' relationship with suburban areas and reduce pressure on natural ecosystems everywhere. The momentum for NbS has grown. These solutions are going beyond a small circle of researchers and increasingly attracting the attention of policymakers and of the private sector. To let nature take some space we need to change our mindsets, and they are changing. Cities should now build back better and seize the opportunity to boost nature in urban planning.

Link to the recording:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdtwHQUeFME&ab_channel=GenevaEnvironmentNetwork