NATURVATION
cities – nature – innovation

Mainstreaming Urban Nature-Based Solutions

Regulate for No Net Loss

Urban greening regulation to reduce Net Loss, or to increase Net Gain, of biodiversity provides ongoing investment flows for green infrastructure, and recognises the value of biodiversity in urban landscapes rather than just rural ones. Germany has biodiversity offsetting regulations for new developments and the UK's upcoming requirement of 10 percent Biodiversity Net Gain is expected to create new financing for nature-based solutions. The multitude of building regulations poses a challenge for integrating urban nature-based solutions into new developments. Thus developing harmonised regulation across Europe could upscale these solutions and strengthen monitoring and sanctioning to increase effectiveness. The challenges of effective offsetting include limited urban space, locating offsetting projects in central urban areas without greenery, delays in implementing natural habitat offsets, and ensuring that offsets are actually implemented.

Biodiversity Net Gain is one example of regulating for No Net Loss. Rather than the usual approach of mitigating negative environmental impacts, Biodiversity Net Gain incentives developers to enhance natural habitat in their projects, by adapting the design of their project, enhancing biodiversity on-site, or offsetting impacts off-site. In the UK, many developers are already adopting voluntary commitments and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is considering a mandate of 10 percent biodiversity Net Gain in projects, a threshold that is debated as either too low or too high. The approach shifts development from a detriment to nature to a potential driver of enhancing biodiversity, smoothing planning processes and reducing costs for developers.

Mainstreaming Nature Based Solutions

Promising Pathways for Sustainability Goals

Climate Change

With the race to reach 'net zero' targets and build back resilience, nature-based solutions are increasingly seen as a critical tool for responding to climate change. Whether by cooling cities and reducing energy demand or providing new ways of managing flooding, nature-based solutions are gaining support globally. We identify four pathways through which mainstreaming is taking place: recognising their potential as a climate solution; investing to reduce climate risk; integrating climate action with other sustainability goals; and learning through practical experience on the ground.

Biodiversity

As the world seeks to develop a transformative agenda for biodiversity over the next decade, we explore how mainstreaming nature-based solutions can enable cities to conserve, restore and thrive with nature. Four pathways are identified based on regulating for 'no net loss' of biodiversity, developing co-governance arrangements for public-private finance, integrating biodiversity with existing sustainability priorities, and integrating biodiversity into urban development and the built environment.

Social Inclusion

Nature-based solutions such as new parks, rooftop gardens, and tree-lined streets play an important role in improving wellbeing and enhancing community spaces. However, the potential for gentrification and displacement of lower income groups means that these solutions must actively foster social inclusion and tackle inequalities. We identify three pathways that strengthen social inclusion: broadening community participation, securing genuine political commitment and policies that support social inclusion, and pursuing social inclusion measures as a way of achieving health and wellbeing.

Economic Regeneration

Nature-based solutions can create economic regeneration through increasing economic activity and employment and by improving the quality of life. Nature-based solutions both directly contribute to economic vitality and well-being, and leverage new forms of economic activity in cities that generate opportunities. Mainstreaming for economic regeneration takes place through developing partnerships for investment, increasing our knowledge of their economic value, seizing opportunities emerging from other sustainability initiatives, and stimulating market demand for nature-based solutions.

Sustainable Development Goals

To achieve the SDGs, urban development must prepare for growing populations while also creating sustainable and inclusive cities. Nature-based solutions can address a range of sustainability goals from climate resilience to health to economic development. For example, green space provides cooling, reduces pollutants, and encourages physical activity. Pathways that engage urban nature-based solutions to address SDGs include: involving diverse actors, strengthening local engagement, addressing multiple sustainability objectives simultaneously, establishing institutional arrangements that integrate sustainable development, and monitoring and assessing sustainable urban transformation.