NATURVATION
cities – nature – innovation

Mainstreaming Urban Nature-Based Solutions

Facilitate community-based action

Support structures for active citizenship can build awareness and upscale nature-based solutions. In the Hegyvidék district of Budapest, the municipal green office provides assistance to residents developing small plots of land into urban green spaces. In the UK, community trusts driven by volunteers are an important source of support for existing nature-based solutions. Funding for community-based initiatives is also critical. The Dutch crowdfunding platform For Your Neighborhood (Voor je Buurt) helps citizen-led initiatives fundraise for greening projects by securing matching provincial and philanthropic funding, which also helps these larger donors distribute their grants to smaller projects. Environmental education is also key to citizen mobilisation, for example Barcelona's Empty Spaces competition to generate alternative ideas for public space and 'bioblitz' event challenging youth to record living species in designated areas.

Madrid implemented a novel policy measure allowing residents to submit an application to develop areas labelled as green zones into public urban gardens. While urban nature has not been the subject of major public interest in Madrid, urban farming has grown significantly driven by city residents requesting land for this purpose. Every two years, applications are renewed if certain conditions are met, including no commercial or private use of the space. The rise of urban agriculture dovetailed with a growing social justice movement mobilised to make significant demands of the city council. Government support for community initiatives such as these could be leveraged to create incentives and opportunities for implementing urban nature-based solutions.

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.