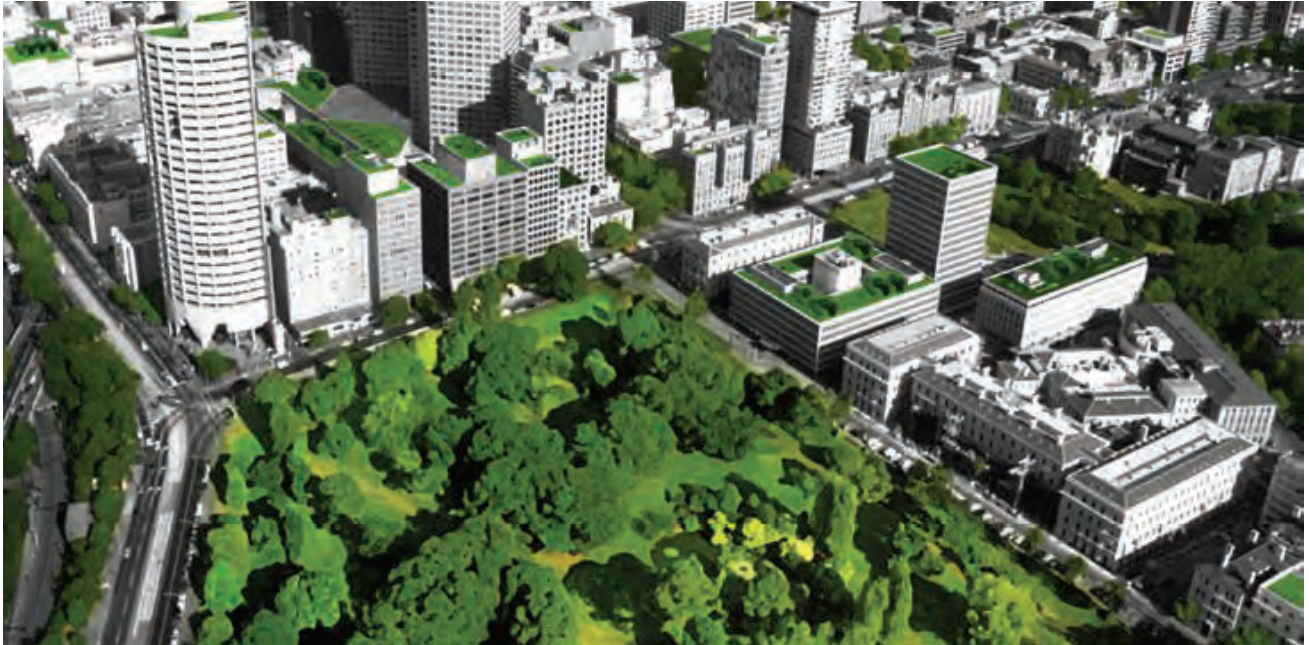# NATURVATION
cities – nature – innovation

SNAPSHOT - MELBOURNE: URBAN FOREST STRATEGY

KEY POINTS

- **The aim of the Urban Forest Strategy is to create a resilient, healthy, and diverse forest that Melburnians love**
- **The strategy links biodiversity with socio-ecological resilience**
- **The strategy promotes a reflexive, multi-level, and collaborative governance approach**
- **Its implementation relies on a balance of technical expertise, community's sense of place, and continuous citizen engagement**
- **The strategy and its actions, such as the *'e-mail-a-tree campaign,'* are being replicated both nationally and internationally**

ABOUT THE PROJECT

NATure-based URban innoVATION is a 4-year project involving 14 institutions across Europe in the fields of urban development, geography, innovation studies and economics. We are creating a step-change in how we understand and use nature-based solutions for sustainable urbanisation.

Sustainability challenges and opportunities

The City of Melbourne is faced with both strong population growth and increasing climate extremes, such as heavy rains, floods, heatwaves, droughts, and bushfires. These challenges affect urban greenspace and undermine the quality of life and well-being of citizens.

Melbourne is the second-most populous city in Australia and Oceania with a growing, relatively young and international population. Densification is seen as a key measure to reduce urban expansion, which places increasing pressure not only on the built environment and urban services, but also on the unevenly distributed green spaces. The Urban Forest Strategy is a timely and effective response to Melbourne's sustainability challenges. Its aim is the systematic provision and maintenance of green space in combination with soft and grey infrastructure approaches to improve the liveability of the city and the health and well-being of its inhabitants.

Solution story and key actors

The Urban Forest Strategy (2012-2032) "*has been the strongest success in climate adaptation and mitigation.*"[1] It is a central part of a comprehensive and innovative policy framework and governance approach, which is the first of its kind in the City of Melbourne. The strategy's main aims are to adapt the city to current and future climate change impacts, mitigate the urban heat island effect, create healthier ecosystems, create a more water-sensitive city, and engage and involve the community in these endeavours to support long-term sustainability.

Climate impacts in the City of Melbourne and associated community concerns increased considerably between 1995 and 2009, and led to a strategic process of developing a comprehensive policy framework. As a result of this process, the Urban Forest Strategy was launched in 2012, with close links to other policies, such as the Melbourne Open Space Strategy. It is composed of six strategies to promote proactive and adaptive management of green structures while setting concrete targets; these include (1) increase canopy cover, (2) increase urban forest diversity, (3) improve vegetation health, (4) improve soil moisture and water quality, (5) improve urban ecology, and (6) inform and consult the community. The design and implementation of these strategies is based on both technical expertise and local (citizen) knowledge and draws actively on *"the community's sense of place and capacity for change."*[2]

Concrete implementation actions related to these strategies include the development of neighbourhood-scale strategies (Precinct Plans) with intense citizens involvement, Tree Capital Program (planting 3,000 trees per year), Urban Forest Visual (the municipality's individually mapped tree data), and the E-mail-a-tree campaign.

Governance strategies

The Urban Forest Strategy supports reflexive, multi-level, and collaborative governance approaches, which links biodiversity with socio-ecological resilience, such as human well-being and community-based decision making.

"The true success in maintaining our urban forest depends on continuing support from the public sector, developers, businesses, and the wider community. The City of Melbourne recognises that effective implementation of green infrastructure throughout our urban environment depends on a coherent public policy supporting it – financially, administratively, and legally."[3]

The City of Melbourne is working with a variety of governance approaches that facilitate reflexive decision-making, the legitimation of local knowledge, and co-production. A strong leadership intertwined with environmental sustainability stewardship, demonstrations, and inter-city competition are some of the key elements of Melbourne's approach to green space policy development and implementation.

The Urban Forest Strategy is a thorough policy document, including master plans, guidelines, management plans, and monitoring measures for the strategy's implementation. Sitting beneath, there are ten *Precinct Plans* for a 10-year neighbourhood-level implementation, which were developed in close collaboration with the community and guided by the *Urban Forest Diversity Guidelines*. The Urban Landscape Policy and Design branch of the City of Melbourne has explicitly taken responsibility for the implementation of urban forestry actions by establishing new approaches to urban greening that are less constrained by business-as-usual on-ground practices.

Business models

The implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy consists of multiple outcomes, which are run by the City of Melbourne on dedicated budget posts. Business partners are considered as powerful contributors to the expansion and success of urban forestry – through financial support, planting and maintenance of trees on commercial property, and support of civic organisations involved in forestry.

It is acknowledged in strategy that for a successful implementation *"a long-term funding commitment is required over the next two decades."[4]* The primary implementation outcome of the Urban Forest Strategy is the *Capital Tree Planting Program* to enable the annual planting of 3,000 trees. This program is a separate budget line, created to complement other general parks and gardens capital budgets. There is also a dedicated capital budget for managing *Urban Forest Health* and a minor operational budget to support the team of six *Urban Foresters* who directly implement the outcomes of the strategy. The Urban Landscapes Policy and Design branch, as a leader of the strategy's implementation, is now faced with the challenge of employing existing on-ground subcontractors, that operate within set budgets and maintenance regimes.
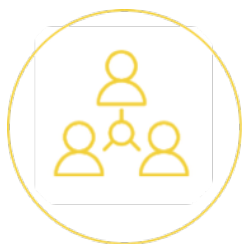
Citizen engagement

The Urban Forest Strategy outlines a scientifically-vetted, long-term process to re-nature the city for and with citizens. It supports stakeholder involvement by fostering citizen rights and responsibilities and legitimising their diverse knowledge of urban ecosystems.

From the 2010, citizens have been increasingly involved in contributing visions and suggestions for the city's green future in various co-governance forums, such as the on-line *Participate Melbourne*, pop-up face-to-face sessions, and stakeholder workshops. Locals were involved in developing the *Precinct Plans* based on sense of place, hopes, and aesthetic preferences on streetscape design, canopy cover, and tree placements. Working with e-governance tools, such as the *e-mail-a-tree campaign* and social media exchanges between citizens, at a site-specific level allowed the city to engage with voices often silenced (children, elderly) by dominant groups. The city organised trainings for interested "*citizen foresters*" in urban tree care and made the municipality's tree data accessible for the public, the *Urban Forest Visual* allowing residents to e-mail trees. ***"Although this function was originally designed to allow tree damage to be reported, it became a vehicle for people to express their connection with, and love for particular trees."[5]*** The strategy has received great citizen support; amongst others a vote of confidence from the People's Panel of Melbourne, consisting of residents, businesses, and students, which secures Council funding for the next ten years.

Innovation pathways

The Urban Forest Strategy is part of an innovative local policy framework and governance approach inducing large scale multi-functional interventions in the city's public open space through extensive citizen participation.

The Urban Forest Strategy is a systemic knowledge-driven innovation, underpinned by a wide range of academic research and international urban greening strategies. It induces changes in a) social values, by changing narratives around trees being friends rather than barriers, b) regulative frameworks and related actions, via co-developed neighbourhood strategies, c) attitudes, via community engagement actions, and d) technical dimensions, by combining green and grey infrastructure. The *Urban Forest Visual* provides a platform for social learning and supports citizen co-management of urban greenery. The strategy has also led to different upscaling processes: ***"The strategy has already led to numerous policy makers from local governments around Australia seeking advice from policy officers of the City of Melbourne. The e-mail-a-tree started to inspire similar programs in other cities, including New York."[6]***

[1] Councillor, City of Melbourne, 2017; [2,3,4] Urban Forest Strategy, 2012, p. 35, 58; [5] Urban forester in Bush (2017), p. 146; [6] Team leader in Bush (2017), p. 144-146; Photo credit: City of Melbourne, 2012.

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