

Putting citizens at the core of more liveable cities

People's central role for developing sustainable cities was discussed at the **BY&FORCITIZENS** conference in Valladolid from the 20th to the 21st of September 2018



By being home to the vast majority of the European population, cities have converted into critical causes of pollution, resources consumption and low life quality. Countermeasures can only be successful if citizens take an active role in preserving their cities and making them more sustainable. This and the actions undertaken so far have been discussed at the [BY&FORCITIZENS](#) event, which took place in late September in Spain.

BY&FORCITIZENS consisted of a number of discussion panels and presentations focusing on how to involve citizens in urban challenges such as: circular economy, citizen-centric models to transform urban areas, innovation ecosystems, renaturing cities, sustainable mobility, climate changes and zero energy buildings. The programme covered two full days of presentations and discussions involving over 240 experts.

URBAN GreenUP coordinator, Fundación CARTIF, and the Frontrunner city of Valladolid were among the conference organisers. Along with its fellow Nature-Based Solutions projects GrowGreen, Connecting Nature, UNaLab, PHYSICS and URBiNAT, URBAN GreenUP contributed to the panel discussion on the importance of renaturing cities for new city ecosystems.

“The participation of NBS projects at BY&FORCITIZENS conference and the close collaboration among them reveal the crucial importance of re-naturing cities for public administrations and the citizenship,” stated URBAN GreenUP Project Coordinator Raúl Sánchez during his speech in the session on “New methodology for re-naturing cities”. *“NBS Projects cover all the scopes related to the application of Nature Based*

Solutions as a way to re-naturing urban, peri-urban and rural ecosystems.” Sanchez also underlined that the global re-naturing approach includes environmental, social and economic aspects from a technological and social innovation point of view, and how this applies co-creation and co-development concepts.

Paul Nolan, Director of The Mersey Forest, involved in the URBAN GreenUP NBS implementations in the city of Liverpool, gave a keynote speech on “City renaturing: integrating nature to create new city ecosystems”. In his presentation, Nolan outlined that higher levels of green infrastructure in our towns and cities have been shown to lead to improved health of citizens, and that projects like URBAN GreenUP help to demonstrate and quantify how NBS can make a difference. Following Nolan’s view, with 75% of the EU population living in urban areas NBS help restructure cities to deal with the range of issues they face, increase resilience to future change and create healthier places for us to live and work.

Elisabeth Schmid, director of the iCube programme of Fondazione iCons, leading the communication and social engagement activities in URBAN GreenUP, was one of the speakers in the panel session on “Citizen-centric models for transforming urban areas”. Schmid highlighted that the technology to make our cities smarter is already there most of the times, but: *“we need to involve and engage with citizens to transform our urban environment. New behaviours, new ways of living have to be encouraged and adopted too. This green revolution won’t take place unless citizens can better understand the often complex issues and co-design their cities’ transformation. This means citizen engagement and empowerment – something pivotal to this conference”*.

Conferences like BY&FORCITIZENS demonstrate the importance and willingness to include all societal players, here including citizens, in decision-making processes aimed at protecting our urban environment, which can only be successful with the contribution of all.

MORE INFORMATION

[URBAN GreenUP](#) is an Horizon2020 project started in June 2017 and running until May 2022. Its goal is to design and implement a number of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in the three Front-Runner cities of Valladolid (Spain), Liverpool (United Kingdom) and Izmir (Turkey). Five Follower cities (Chengdu in China, Ludwigsburg in Germany, Mantua in Italy, Medellin in Colombia, Quy Nhon in Vietnam) will help develop a sound NBS replication strategy.