

The importance of urban and green infrastructure

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SoGreen Symposium, 30 April 2021

What is urban and green infrastructure?

- For example...
 - green rooftops or plant walls
 - green streets areas = plants and trees at street sides or in the middle of bigger boulevards
 - parks and other vast green areas in the city



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Why do we need urban and green infrastructure?

By 2030, urban areas are projected to house **60% of people globally** and **one in every three people will live in cities** with at least half a million inhabitants.



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Four types of benefits

- 1) Health benefits, accessibility
- 2) Social benefits
- 3) Environmental benefits
- 4) Economic benefits



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Health benefits

- Improving air quality
 - bad air quality is one of the biggest health risks in Europe: according to the WHO, in 2012, every 8th death was related to bad air quality
 - plants purify air by filtering air particulates and producing oxygen
- Direct contact with nature can strengthen the immune system through a vaster exposure to microbes
- Spending time in the nature decreases stress, lowers blood pressure, reinvigorates brain and memory, prevents depression and enhances mental health and well-being
- Accessibility: nature and green areas are accessible also to people with limited moving capacity (f.ex. disabled people) or people with less transport options (f.ex. not owning a car)



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Health benefits: coronavirus

- The global pandemic has emphasized the need for safe, green areas where people can move and spend time safely while maintaining physical distance
- During pandemic, green infrastructure has played a role in upholding citizens' mental health:
 - spending time in nature has been one of the rare activities outside home
 - nature has been a way to take care of one's physical and mental health and a facilitator in maintaining social relationships



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Social benefits

- Ageing societies
- Accessibility
- Children
- Shared, strong sense of community
 - participatory approach, co-creation



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Environmental benefits

- Green infrastructure...
 - absorbs carbon dioxide from air
 - mitigates the impacts of adverse weather conditions
 - when well planned, protects biodiversity
 - balances heat waves and other extreme weather conditions
- Accessibility: nature and green areas are closer to daily living areas and therefore accessible with non-polluting or less polluting ways of moving - by walking, biking or public transport
- Climate change is accelerating and biodiversity deteriorating -> acute need for green infrastructure in urban environments where the majority of people already live globally.



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Economic benefits

- Green infrastructure adds to the value of real estate and improves the reputation, attractiveness and quality of life of the neighbourhood
- Planning, building and maintaining urban and green infrastructure is a significant industry that plays into the economy of the region and the country
- Creating jobs: green infrastructure has the potential to employ long-term unemployed persons



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European Year of Greener Cities

- On my initiative, the European Parliament's environment committee ENVI prepared an own-initiative report on designating the year 2022 as the European Year of Greener Cities
 - the report was adopted in ENVI in January 2020
 - in September 2020 the report was also adopted in the plenary session of the parliament
 - due to the current coronavirus situation, the launching of the theme year might be postponed until 2023 or 2024.
- The aim of European Year of Greener Cities is to emphasize all the elements that have been presented during this presentation:
 - add to the amount of green infrastructure and green environments in urban areas and cities
 - raise awareness on the health benefits, environmental benefits and economic benefits of green infrastructure and environment
 - increase research and scientific developments
- European Year of Greener Cities emphasises the role of green infrastructure in improving the quality of life of the European citizens.
- The idea of European Year of Greener Cities is also connected to the idea and principles of the European Bauhaus.



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Thank you! Questions?

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