

The future of biodiversity in the hands of EU cities and regions

[15th meeting of the Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment](#)

Wednesday 9 October; 14:30-17:00; Brussels, BE

This interactive event moderated by Holger Robrecht, Deputy Regional Director of ICLEI Europe, discussed **cities' and regions' contribution to the formulation and implementation of the post-2020 global and European biodiversity policy framework.**

- Their potential for biodiversity action is not fully utilised at present, although it is increasingly recognised.
- The ongoing preparatory process for the post-2020 biodiversity agenda represents a major opportunity for local and regional authorities to shape future biodiversity targets and contribute to their delivery, as well as to having their efforts formally recognised by the Member States and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Setting the scene: biodiversity's future from local to global

The meeting started with the speech by Roby Biwer from the European Committee of the Regions, who believes that “*Kunming must become the Paris moment of biodiversity*”. However, Mr Biwer added that cities and regions will need to take responsibility to implement the necessary measures in order to meet targets and objectives of the post-2020 biodiversity framework that will be adopted at the 15th meeting of the Conference Of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in Kunming in 2020. He further emphasised the importance of clear inclusion of local and regional stakeholders in global and European biodiversity strategies and the necessity to provide them with knowledge and financial support.

Karin Zaunberger from the DG Environment of the European Commission stressed the need for a systemic, transformative change that will enable us to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss in an integrated way, since these are “two faces of the same coin”. In her speech, Ms Zaunberger also addressed cities and regions specifically saying that “*we need active actors and implementers on the ground*”.



Oliver Hillel from the UN CBD Secretariat pointed out an increasingly important role of cities and regions in the CBD and in the preparatory process towards the post-2020 biodiversity policy framework. They are able to create bridges from global to local context and between urban and rural areas. They also play a crucial role in defining economic incentives. *“Fundamentally, regions and national governments are part of the same governments planning together and taking up responsibilities in the Convention. Their contributions to the CBD are complementary and equally important”* – summarised Hillel.

Roundtable discussions

The four tables addressed different aspects of the role of cities and regions for biodiversity and the post-2020 CBD framework:

- Improving the implementation of the EU Nature directives in the post-2020 framework (table 1, chaired by Roby Biwer);
- Urban targets for biodiversity (table 2, chaired by Holger Robrecht);
- Local and Regional Authorities Biodiversity Practices (table 3, chaired by Sandra Müller-Volk and Lennart Kümper-Schlake);
- Protecting or mainstreaming existing biodiversity through Nature-Based Solutions (table 4, chaired by Renata Gomez).

Challenges and possible options for the future have been discussed, which can be structured around four main cross-cutting axes: connecting people, stakeholders, cities and regions; targeting actions for biodiversity; financing these actions; and transforming cities' societies.

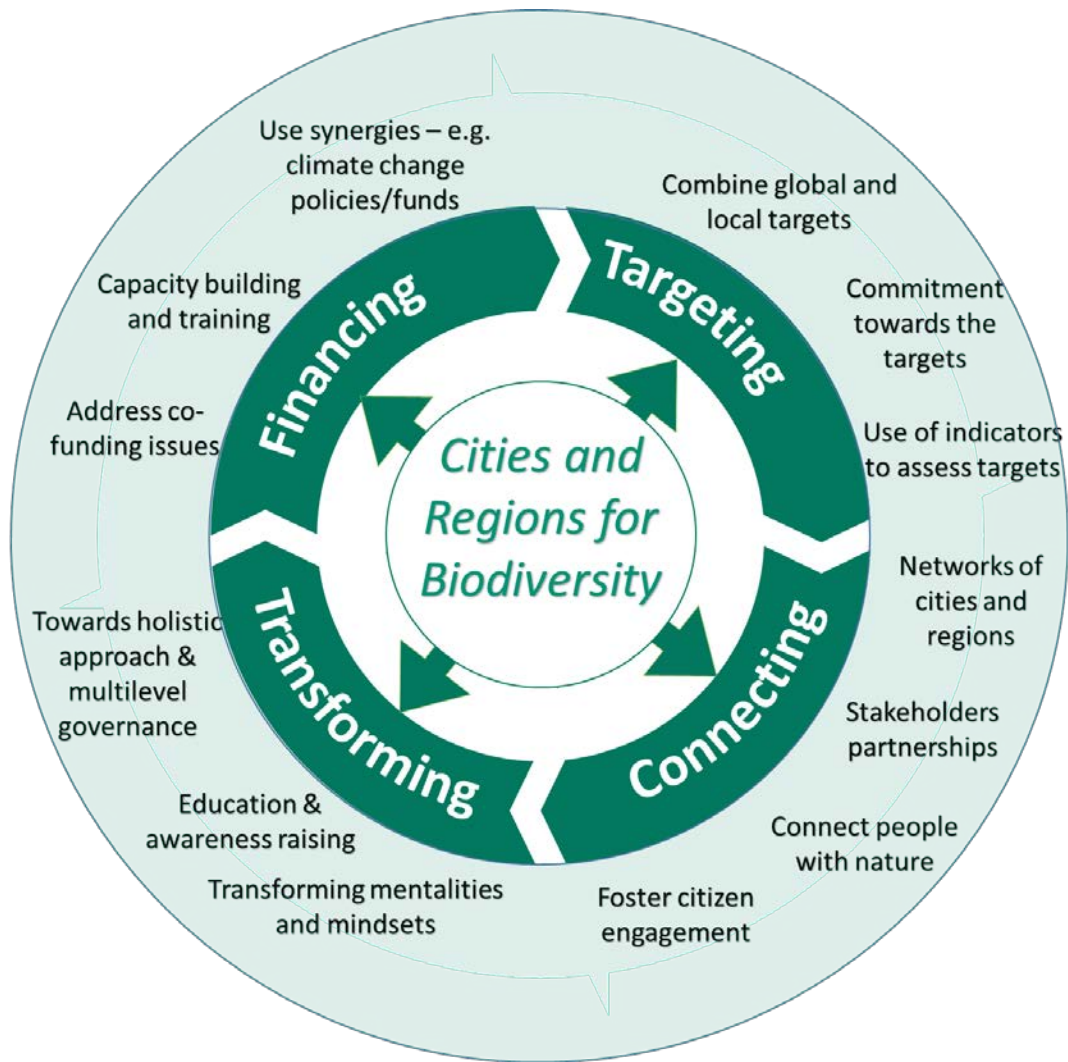


Figure 1 The future of biodiversity in the hands of EU cities and regions



Table 1: *the role and needs of EU regional and local authorities in improving the implementation of the EU Nature directives in the post-2020 framework.*

Participants discussed the concept of the national commitments as part of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and how EU regional and local authorities could contribute to implementing them. These commitments should aim in improving the conservation status or trends of EU protected species and habitats as well as in avoiding deterioration. Discussions focused on the aspects mentioned below:

- **The idea of biodiversity action plans at the regional level** was put forward. Regional biodiversity action plans should translate these national commitments at a regional level and should be linked with an obligation to take action on the ground at the local level.
- **Awareness** is crucial to bring people closer to nature in order to see its importance in their daily life. EU regional and local authorities have an important role to play in increasing awareness and outreach, but also increasing acceptance of the Natura 2000 network and other biodiversity-related initiatives. Promoting the health and recreational benefits for the locals could contribute to this direction. The need to work more closely with the managers of the Natura 2000 sites was also stressed.
- **EU funds** for conservation projects and especially LIFE are currently not sufficient and most importantly difficult to access for regional and local authorities, which can be demotivating for potential applicants. There is a need for capacity building and trainings to help tackle this obstacle.
- **Cooperation among municipalities:** Networks of regions and cities while identifying a model of incentives where municipalities work together could generate win-win solutions and cost savings for sharing the same resources, e.g. same expertise.
- **Ecosystem approach:** The need for a holistic approach to nature & biodiversity conservation and for solutions tackling both biodiversity loss and climate change was stressed. Regional and local authorities can contribute by ensuring that nature and biodiversity objectives are integrated in the urban and landscape planning from the beginning.

Table 2: *Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions for biodiversity protection and conservation: towards ‘urban targets’?*

The discussion at this roundtable revolved around three main issues: (1) green infrastructure and its correlation with the society; (2) the idea of urban targets in support of the EU Biodiversity Strategy; (3) the use of nature-based solutions for greenwashing purposes.

- Public opinion and awareness can strongly influence the provision of green infrastructure by national and subnational authorities. Hence, there is a great need to recognise **green infrastructure as a public good** that may perform a variety of functions and provide multiple benefits to communities;
- The participants attempted to answer the question whether the targets on biodiversity should concern cities specifically or rather focus on action areas. The views were varied, however, many considered the combination of both a good solution. It was also argued that, in case of **localised targets**, they should be accompanied by adequate funding and legal framework;
- **Nature-based solutions**, like green rooftops, can sometimes be used by local authorities as an excuse to not take real action on biodiversity. In order to prevent this situation, we must constantly foster awareness and engagement of citizens. Moreover, targets and precise indicators need to be developed in order to carry out assessments of governmental actions.

Table 3: *Local and Regional Authorities Biodiversity Practices and the Road to Post-2020*

The table discussed what is the role (and benefits) of urban biodiversity and ecosystem services in the context of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework?; What will be the role, commitments and ambitions of local and sub-national governments in the post 2020-Global Biodiversity Framework?; How can the science-policy interfaces with respect to biodiversity at the local level be improved? and, Who are the key actors to make this happen?

The main conclusions are:

- **Communication** was raised as one of the most important issues. Some of the main solutions proposed where: raising the awareness and connecting people back to the nature; changing the ‘old mentality’ and mindset; educating young generation about biodiversity.

- Transforming what is discussed on the UN level to the local level, to cities and regions. Specifying **clear targets/indicators for implementation** in the biodiversity arena. The engagement and commitments should not only be voluntary.
- **Finances and budgeting** also emphasized as a problem (in some cases). There is not enough funds available for including biodiversity issues into the local agenda (also, authorities do not want to take burden of dealing with the EU funds).
- **Climate change** pathway, which is gaining ground, should be integrated with various disciplines, including biodiversity and nature conservation.
- One of given recommendations/solutions: **multi-level governance**.

Table 4: *Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) and initiatives to protect and/or mainstream biodiversity already in place at local and regional levels*

Participants shared good practices that can inform the post-2020 biodiversity policy framework. They also shared lessons learnt and benefits obtained by implementing NBS and initiatives to protect and/or mainstream biodiversity. Main outcomes of the discussion are:

- **Urban-rural linkages** remain to be an important element of NBS;
- The biggest issue with NBS continues to be the **upscaling**;
- Main **challenges** to address: capacity building, lack of data on implementation, access financial support, support creation of partnerships, increase knowledge exchange, trade-off with economic and demographic growth ;
- Use of **EU funding** is enormously important to achieve better results – however is also the problem because it only accounts for 55% (on average) of each project, meaning that the co-funding rate is still perceived as very high;
- **Institutions** need to change their mind-set as well as society and implementers to influence policy and project design. It is necessary to have a change in the mind-set and thinking on how to reach transformative change and influence global biodiversity.