



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2020)0241

The importance of urban and green infrastructure - European Year of Greener Cities 2022

European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on the European Year of Greener Cities 2022 (2019/2805(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds¹,
- having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora²,
- having regard to Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks³,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 December 2013 on Green Infrastructure – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital⁴,
- having regard to the 7th Environmental Action Programme,
- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 (COM(2011)0244),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’ (COM(2020)0380),
- having regard to the EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure⁵,
- having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the

¹ OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7.

² OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

³ OJ L 288, 6.11.2007, p. 27.

⁴ OJ C 468, 15.12.2016, p. 190.

⁵ As outlined in the Commission’s EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/strategy/index_en.htm.

Regions of 24 May 2019 on the review of progress on implementation of the EU green infrastructure strategy (COM(2019)0236),

- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 6 May 2013 on Green Infrastructure (GI) – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital (COM(2013)0249),
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 8 October 2013 on the Commission communication on Green Infrastructure (GI) – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital¹,
 - having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 16 October 2013 on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Green Infrastructure (GI) — Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital²,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission of 19 September 2013 on the development of an EU Green Infrastructure (GI) policy (O-000094/2013 – B7-0525/2013),
 - having regard to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters,
 - having regard to the European Green Capital award³,
 - having regard to the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy⁴,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on the importance of urban and green infrastructure – European Year of Greener Cities 2022 (O-000039/2020 – B9-0014/2020),
 - having regard to Rules 136(5) and 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas green infrastructure is understood to be a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas, including environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, and incorporating green spaces (or blue, if aquatic ecosystems are concerned) and other physical features in terrestrial (including coastal) and marine areas in both rural and urban settings;
- B. whereas 72 % of people in the EU live in cities, towns and suburbs, and the share of the urban population is continuing to grow and could reach 80 % in 2020⁵; whereas these figures show that green cities are more important than ever in tackling the major challenges that our planet is facing and that they have growing potential as essential

¹ OJ C 356, 5.12.2013, p. 43.

² OJ C 67, 6.3.2014, p. 153.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/index_en.htm

⁴ <https://www.covenantofmayors.eu/en/>

⁵ European Environment Agency, *Analysing and managing urban growth*, European Environment Agency, Copenhagen, 2019, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/articles/analysing-and-managing-urban-growth>.

hubs for both the implementation of global agendas and for engaging citizens in policy decisions;

- C. whereas cities face an array of challenges, ranging from the impact of climate change on their residents' health to environmental concerns, and whereas green infrastructure has great potential to offer nature-based ecological, economic and social solutions to many of these problems, which are generally low-cost and sustainable and create jobs;
- D. whereas it is important to increase awareness of green infrastructure and the many positive impacts it has on ecosystems and the services they provide to populations, in order to better promote nature-based solutions in land and spatial planning and the creation and regeneration of green spaces, to accelerate the change from a grey to a green infrastructure standard in urban planning and territorial development and to enable cities to better adapt to the adverse effects of climate change;
- E. whereas green infrastructure provides ecosystem services that are crucial to our wellbeing, the production of urban food, water circulation and retention, increase infiltration and reduce pollution through natural processes, regulate ambient temperatures, support biodiversity (including pollinators), improve nutrient cycles, make residential areas look nicer, make it easier for residents to exercise, and improve the wellbeing of residents;
- F. whereas green infrastructure contributes to the development of Natura 2000 networks in urban areas, improving connectivity between ecological green and blue corridors, enhancing the conservation of species and habitats that are essential to the ecosystem, and helping to maintain the provision of ecosystem services in urban areas; whereas the annual benefits of ecosystem services provided by the Natura 2000 network have been estimated to be worth EUR 300 billion across the EU, with the benefits of green infrastructure being worth far more;
- G. whereas greening cities involves more than just implementing initiatives to make cities more verdant given the importance of clean air, water, soil and a cityscape that promotes biodiversity for ensuring the sustainability of verdant spaces;
- H. whereas green infrastructure is a crucial part of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030;
- I. whereas green infrastructure contributes to climate mitigation as it strengthens the resilience of ecosystems to climate change and helps to reduce the volume of atmospheric CO₂ through direct carbon sequestration, especially in peatlands, oceans and forests; whereas it also helps to reduce water and wastewater pumping and treatment and the associated energy demands and to reduce building energy use and emissions thanks to 'smart buildings' that have green elements such as roofs and walls and include new materials that increase resource efficiency; whereas green infrastructure also helps to reduce energy demand and transport-related pollution by making it easier to adopt alternative, clean transport modes such as cycling, walking and clean public transport, including water transport;
- J. whereas green infrastructure contributes to climate adaptation via the protection of natural capital, the conservation of natural habitats and species, an improvement in ecological status, the management of water bodies and food safety; whereas its

development is among the most effective climate change adaptation measures that can be taken in cities, as it mitigates the negative impacts of climate change and increasingly frequent extreme weather phenomena, such as heatwaves, forest fires, extreme rainfall, flooding and drought, evens out extreme temperatures, and improves the quality of life of EU residents living in urban areas;

- K. whereas more than 22 % of European species are now threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species; whereas greening cities helps to promote biodiversity and can play an important role in mitigating the biodiversity crisis; whereas promoting biodiversity in cities can bring co-benefits by way of increasing the resilience of ecosystems and carbon sequestration potential;
- L. whereas good urban planning, planted soil and permeable pavements are better at increasing water retention, managing seepage, preventing soil erosion and combatting urban run-off than asphalt and concrete; whereas high-quality green infrastructure reduces the risk of flooding;
- M. whereas well-designed green infrastructure is one of the best ways to increase the number of ecological green and blue corridors, and thereby protect biodiversity;
- N. whereas plants purify the air by filtering out small particles and producing oxygen; whereas the quality of air in our cities has become one of the biggest health challenges facing the EU today; whereas cleaner air would improve the quality of life of millions of people, including asthma and airway disease sufferers; whereas every year, 430 000 people die prematurely as a result of breathing polluted air in the EU; whereas improving air quality must be a priority for the EU, the Member States, regions and municipalities, in order to protect people and ecosystems from the impacts of air pollution; whereas an improvement in air quality could significantly reduce the number of premature deaths;
- O. whereas the use of trees and vegetation can reduce noise pollution in urban areas; whereas noise is the second largest environmental cause of health problems, after air quality; whereas the EU-funded research project HOSANNA found that natural plant sound shields are better at shielding residents from traffic noise than the straight-sided sound barriers commonly used; whereas biodiversity and nature are negatively impacted by noise pollution and efforts to green cities should include initiatives to reduce noise pollution;
- P. whereas green infrastructure should also be promoted in coastal cities, which are usually adjacent to wetlands, in order to preserve marine and coastal biodiversity and ecosystems and to enhance the sustainable development of the coastal economy, tourism and landscape, positive developments that in turn improve resilience to climate change impacts in these vulnerable areas, which are particularly affected by the rise in sea level;
- Q. whereas green infrastructure should be promoted in port areas as they are an important part of coastal cities and usually cover vast land areas that are also part of the Natura 2000 network; whereas doing so will better address environmental issues such as pollution and biodiversity loss and help to promote the development of new infrastructure projects, such as the electrification of ports;

- R. whereas green infrastructure offers access to nature for those who might otherwise have little contact with it – such as children, older persons and persons with disabilities – and contributes to their education on and awareness of nature and ecological challenges;
- S. whereas greener cities can provide significant health benefits as they improve air quality, encourage residents to move and exercise more, help to prevent and cure depression, improve the immune system, and ultimately increase happiness and well-being¹;
- T. whereas a higher number of urban parks and gardens, greener streets, green roofs on buildings, bus stops covered in vegetation and greener playgrounds, among other things, increase the attractiveness and comfort of neighbourhoods and cities; whereas they also increase social contacts between residents, encourage positive behavioural changes and create a stronger sense of community; whereas publicly owned green spaces can bring incalculable benefits to inhabitants of cities;
- U. whereas greener neighbourhoods have been shown to increase the economic value of properties, as they make areas more desirable to prospective buyers, making it essential to take measures to mitigate gentrification and ensure equitable access to greener neighbourhoods;
- V. whereas the greening of cities can facilitate more sustainable small-scale food production and reduce the footprint of food by reinforcing short supply chains, thereby enabling new micro businesses to emerge and encouraging residents to become active in this field and understand the food chain better, especially organic and environmentally sustainable farming;
- W. whereas 80 % of the waste found at sea comes from cities, including upstream waste from river basins; whereas it is important to improve waste management systems in urban areas, especially the management of diffuse pollution, litter and macro waste, for example by strengthening filtration in wastewater treatment plants in order to make cities greener and tackle ocean pollution;
- X. whereas citizens need to be engaged in and feel empowered to provide input on urban planning and the design of green infrastructure, taking into account local environmental, social, economic and technological features;
- Y. whereas the development of green infrastructure goes hand in hand with its sustainable management, especially with regard to water resources; whereas it is important to link green and blue infrastructure in an environmentally responsible manner, including by reusing water and rainwater and managing water effectively;
- Z. whereas the ecosystem services provided by trees become far more important the older they get; whereas the healthy and integrated management and planning of urban areas is essential in order to maximise their development potential and enable citizens to take full advantage of the potential and of the services provided by green infrastructure;

¹ European Commission, *Urban Green Spaces Increase Happiness*, European Commission, Brussels, <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/space-increase-happiness/>.

1. Acknowledges the contribution that greener cities can make to achieving the goals set out in the Paris agreement and strengthening the EU's resilience and ability to adapt to climate change; underlines the important role greener cities can play in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling the commitments of the New Urban Agenda, particularly when it comes to improving the use of water resources and improving biodiversity in the urban environment;
2. Calls on the Commission to devise a new EU strategy for greener cities and green infrastructure to help cities play their part in climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as improving the wellbeing of people living in cities;
3. Calls on the Commission to put forward measures under the European Green Deal to specifically address the role of cities and to promote investment in green infrastructure;
4. Stresses the importance of effectively mainstreaming climate and environmental perspectives into local, regional, national and global urban policymaking;
5. Stresses the need to adopt an adaptation strategy for cities exposed to the consequences of climate change based on a new innovative ecosystem approach to risk prevention and management, in particular by identifying areas where water will retreat, areas where flooding will be absorbed, areas with natural protection and, in cases where it is essential, areas that require artificial protection;
6. Calls on the Member States, local and regional authorities to devise action plans and actively engage in activities designed to promote and maintain green urban areas in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including civil society;
7. Acknowledges the great importance of public green spaces for the physical and mental wellbeing of urban dwellers, particularly in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic; calls for local, regional and national authorities to protect and promote urban green spaces, improve their quality, and ensure that their residents have easy access to public green spaces in their localities;
8. Insists that the potential of cities to help protect biodiversity and ecosystem services is underestimated; recalls that enhancing biodiversity, ecosystem services and urban green infrastructure in cities and peri-urban areas improves human health; recalls that developing and implementing nature-based solutions for preserving biodiversity and incorporating and further integrating biodiversity and ecosystem functions in urban design, policy and planning can play an important role in mitigating and adapting to climate change in cities, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote these practices;
9. Welcomes the fact that the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, as part of the European Green Deal, includes a strong focus on greening urban and peri-urban areas and increasing biodiversity in urban spaces; welcomes in particular the new Urban Greening Plans and calls on the Commission to ensure that European cities are highly ambitious in creating these plans and that they are effectively implemented; calls on the Member States to also promote greening in urban areas with populations of less than 20 000;
10. Proposes that the year 2022 be designated a European Year of Greener Cities;
11. Proposes that the aims of the European Year of Greener Cities 2022 are to:

- a. raise awareness of the benefits of green spaces in a built environment; introduce initiatives to increase the provision of green spaces, including near residential areas;
- b. increase the quantity and quality of research and the development of new innovations in various fields of expertise, creating greener added value and enhancing quality of life in cities; provide targeted support for sustainable digitalisation in the EU and thus for start-ups and digital innovations; enhance the upscaling of green infrastructure projects;
- c. encourage local authorities and citizens to take action and improve their neighbourhoods and environment, bringing them together as a community to increase their resilience and to reshape the future of their cities; increase the involvement of citizens in other actions and decision-making on the environment and the overall life of the city;
- d. create a culture of appreciation of green spaces and blue-green infrastructure; encourage urban development that respects the need for green spaces as an important aspect of quality of life in cities;
- e. promote the use of climate-friendly materials and services through public procurement;
- f. increase the number of green infrastructure projects; continue and add resources to the EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure;
- g. connect existing initiatives and share best practices across the Member States, as provided for in numerous initiatives and strategies, inter alia on urban planning, sustainable urbanism and infrastructure, nature-based solutions, green architecture, cleaner energy, pedestrian and cyclist mobility, efficient water resource management and sustainable and circular waste management on the basis of the waste hierarchy, which aims to achieve the target of zero waste or to reduce waste to a minimum through maximum use of recycling;
- h. create a roadmap for greening EU cities and maintaining green spaces by 2030, conveying the principle of ecological urbanism as a means to encourage harmonious links between rural and urban environments and to acknowledge their interdependence and the need for a bidirectional relationship;
- i. undertake educational activities aimed at various audiences with content tailored to the target group, in particular children;
- j. encourage initiatives to reduce urban traffic, and promote and invest in public transport;
- k. phase out the use of pesticides and herbicides in urban areas to protect residents and urban biodiversity;
- l. ensure the broadest possible participation of environmental NGOs in environmental protection and education activities;

- m. significantly increase urban roofing and facade greening to improve the urban climate, air quality and insulation;
 - n. support urban gardening and the safeguarding and development of allotment areas as well as urban school gardening facilities throughout the EU, as these are an important pillar of environmental education for children;
12. Calls on the Commission to take swift action to improve air quality in cities, particularly by reducing emissions through new urban mobility solutions that favour more efficient and environmentally sustainable public transport options;
 13. Highlights the importance of promoting and enabling citizen participation in the greening of urban areas and the maintenance of green areas through their involvement in sustainable spatial planning and implementation phases as appropriate, in order to achieve sustainable urban planning solutions, create ownership of relevant actions and have socially inclusive, resilient and low-emission cities that are attractive to their citizens; considers it important to ensure that members of the public are aware of how they can contribute to greening their cities, maintain green spaces and transform them into healthier environments; encourages municipalities and regions to support green initiatives submitted by citizens to the greatest extent possible and develop sponsorship projects for open spaces; urges municipalities and regions to adopt and implement ambitious initiatives for green cities;
 14. Urges the Commission to continue supporting ambitious measures to improve energy and resource efficiency; urges the Commission to help secure adequate funding for actions that contribute to sustainable urban development and green infrastructure, such as innovation partnerships and joint procurement schemes between EU cities; urges the Commission to help enhance the collective power of cities in order to quickly scale up efficient solutions; urges the Commission to support private sector participation via public-private partnerships, a more ambitious European Investment Bank programme and incentives for SMEs, which can play a crucial role in developing innovative sustainable solutions;
 15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and to the national parliaments.