**Overview current activities and views on the future – IUCNs cooperation with local and regional governments**

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February 2015

**World Environmental Hubs project**

The World Environment Hubs is a framework for evaluating and certifying cities and regions which place environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and ecosystem services at the heart of urban and regional development strategies.

Population growth and urban expansion have increased the challenge of ensuring that citizens have access to basic needs such as food, water, and energy, and are protected from more frequent and intense natural disasters resulting from climate change.  The aim of this global initiative is to demonstrate how cities and regions can use nature to tackle these challenges, and show that investing in nature can contribute to economic prosperity and social well-being. WEH gives recognition to cities and regions which have demonstrated their commitment to biodiversity conservation, and establishes a global framework for exchange and dissemination of best practices to facilitate the transition towards sustainable and resilient urban societies.

The World Environmental Hubs initiative is led by the IUCN Brussels Office and financially supported by the government of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province and finds its foundation in resolution WCC-2012- Res 126: The development of an Evaluation and Certification System for World Environmental Hubs.

**Cooperation with European regions on nature-based solutions**

Last year, IUCN Brussels hosted a meeting with representatives of European regions to discuss opportunities for collaboration to promote ecosystem services and nature based solutions within regional sustainable development strategies, and to find ways for IUCN to support inter-regional collaboration.

To strengthen the potential of European regions to contribute to achieving our European and international biodiversity targets, and to integrate the values of nature in societal and economic decisions, IUCN is establishing [a mechanism for exchange](http://www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/europe/european_union/local_and_regional_authorities/knowledge_hub/) to gather evidence on nature-based solutions, showcase actions of regions participating in this platform, as well as best practices. This year a series of technical workshops will be organised, focusing on specific topics that intend to increase the understanding of nature-based solutions and to turn them into action, including knowledge and conceptualisation, effective communication, mapping of ecosystems and their services, and financing opportunities. The aim of these workshops is to provide regional representatives with an opportunity to develop their conceptual understanding of nature based solutions and give practical guidance for their successful implementation through partnerships for action.

Current partners in this initiative are: Catalunya, Ile de France, Nord Rhein Westfalen, Provence Alpes Cote D'azur (PACA), Reunion, Rheinland Pfalz, Rhône-Alpes Scotland, Wales.

**URBIS**

The [Urban Biosphere Initiative](http://urbis.iclei.org/) (URBIS), lead by ICLEI, is a global alliance of partners focusing on the sustainable use of regional biodiversity and ecosystem services to support social development in a rapidly urbanising world. The URBIS initiative emerged as a platform to increase under-standing of cities in a regional context, as well as the social linkages and opportunities with regards to biodiversity and ecosystem services. Chantal represents IUCN in the URBIS Advisory Board.

This year, URBIS will start with a series of monthly webinars for urban planners and practitioners, to share ideas and tools for progress in the urban biosphere. IUCN is one of the partners and will organize two webinars: 1) Reconciling economic development, investment attraction and urban green – identifying policies and incentives for livable cities and 2) Connecting cities and their natural areas regional networks of green spaces.

**URBIO**

[URBIO](http://www.fh-erfurt.de/urbio/cms/index.php) is an open worldwide scientific network for education and research with the aim to promote urban biodiversity and design through a continuing dialogue with the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Within the CBD programmes URBIO is the scientific initiative of the Major Group "Local Authorities". Since the founding of the URBIO network in 2008, it has grown to a community of over 1000 members, representing scientists from more than 60 countries.

In 2014, Chantal has been invited to represent IUCN in this platform as a member of the URBIO Advisory Board in the role of Deputy Vice President for Communication.

**URBES project phase II**

The [Urban Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](file:///C:\Users\vanhamc\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\LTFSJQGT\urbesproject.org) (URBES) project (2012-2014) aimed to increase the scientific knowledge and bridge the gap between scientists, policy-makers, experts and practitioners on the role of urban biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being. Focus has been on urban areas, urbanization trends, biodiversity and ecosystem services in the European cities Stockholm, Berlin, Rotterdam, Barcelona, Salzburg and the affiliated cities Helsinki and New York. Special attention was given to identify innovative ways of integrating monetary and non-monetary valuation techniques in urban planning and decision-making and to enhance ecosystem service benefits in urban landscapes.

IUCN has been actively involved in the science-policy interface and ensured strong visibility of the project across Europe, enhancing the promotion and awareness of the URBES objectives and partnership among a variety of external international stakeholders. Throughout the project IUCN has developed various communication materials, such as factsheets and videos, organizing training sessions jointly with ICLEI, and participated in events as well as other opportunities for broader stakeholder engagement at EU level.

With the URBES partners, under leadership of Stockholm Resilience Center, we are currently preparing a proposal for the next phase of the URBES project for the [Biodiversa](http://www.biodiversa.org/) call for proposals in May.

**Views on the future for cooperation with local and regional governments**

Effective conservation cannot be confined to remote and pristine natural areas, but should take a holistic view and include all relevant actors. Many decisions which affect biodiversity are taken at the local and subnational level. These levels of government are often responsible for significant tracts of nature and play an important role in achieving the national and international biodiversity targets.

The growing urban population has a large impact on biodiversity, but at the same time represents opportunities for connecting people with nature. The services biodiversity and ecosystem services provide to cities and urbanized regions are essential for citizen’s quality of life and can provide solutions for challenges such as water and energy supply, air pollution, natural disasters and climate change.

Mobilising the strength of IUCNs network of knowledge, presents unique opportunities in this context:

* Provide expertise, guidance, best practices and examples to integrate nature’s values in urban and regional planning and promote the implementation of nature-based solutions for local and regional governments
* Assessment of the benefits of ecosystem services at local and regional level can improve decision-making and strengthen investment in nature-based solutions
* In partnership with a selected group of cities, local or regional governments, demonstrate the potential of nature-based solutions, especially in cooperation with the European Commission, DG Research and Innovation [Horizon 2020 programme](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/news/e-consultation-nature-based-solutions) which will invest in nature-based solutions

The cooperation with local and regional authorities links closely to various areas of IUCNs work. Here some examples:

* Forest restoration in and around urban areas, deploying the IUCN Forest Landscape Restoration approach can deliver contributions to climate adaptation and mitigation, improve biodiversity and provide other valuable ecosystem services.
* Connecting the benefits of protected areas near urban areas to urban and regional planning and land use development, promoting services such as clean drinking water supply, prevention of floods and erosion, health and well-being.
* Ecosystem based approaches to climate adaptation are of great interest to strengthen coastal resilience, while increasing the functional connections and ecological values of previously disconnected habitats and natural areas.