

ARE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS GOOD FOR EVERYONE?

PROMOTING SOCIAL EQUITY IN NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Cities are going through great efforts to maintain or create new nature-based solutions (NBS). Not many will argue that this is a winning strategy: Carefully designed and implemented NBS can help cities build climate change resilience, sustain urban biodiversity and become more liveable by contributing to wellbeing and improving attractiveness. And yet it is.

A question that often arises is whether the socio-environmental benefits (and burdens) of NBS are fairly distributed across the urban population. Hasse et al. (2017) points to the alleged paradox of society and urban ecology: when green interventions become a core ingredient of urban renewal, upgrading and revitalization as primarily market-driven endeavors, then it can be expected that they target the middle class and higher-income groups. This can unintentionally happen at the expense of less privileged residents. Vulnerable segments of the population can be displaced.

Urban greening can lead to higher housing rent, particularly if carried out together with real estate upgrades. In studying the evolution of socio-demographic gentrification indicators for green interventions in Barcelona, Anguelovski et al. (2018) found that while some interventions attracted and served vulnerable groups (e.g. elderly and migrants), others contributed to de-



Piero Pelizzaro

Chief Resilience Officer, City of Milan, Italy (outgoing).

mographic shifts towards the middle class.

Research such as the one above from Barcelona offers valuable city peer-to-peer lessons. Milan is trying to address similar concerns over NBS. The city fears that applying the wrong governance model will prioritize projects that serve higher income groups, while simple public oversight can diminish democratic accountability. To cope with this risk, the city is now designing future NBS with three main recommendations:

1. Market-driven hybrid governance strategies, where private actors are included in the governance struc-



Leon Kapetas

Lead for Programs & Climate Resilience, Resilient Cities Network

ture, mainly for efficiency and funding purposes;

2. Networked stakeholder governance, where stakeholders are included in the governance structure to address complex social problems more effectively; and
3. Responsive (interactive) co-governance, where citizens are directly involved in the governance structure.

By formulating these three policy recommendations – slicing a bigger pie, safeguarding democratic control and applying context-sensitive science – the city aims to address these tensions proactively.

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