THE SWEET CITY

Urban planning around pollinators

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COMMITMENTS

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CURRIDABAT, COSTA RICA

Pop. **80,677**

15.95 km²

1,208 m.a.s.l.

KEY CONCEPTS

BACKCASTING

POLLINATORS

HAPPINESS

ASSISTED ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

The vision known as Sweet City has brought happier citizens and changed roles and routines in Curridabat, Costa Rica. By promoting a different relationship with urban spaces and with the other ways of life found there, the inhabitants of this town have developed a long-term sense of identity based on integrity, mutuality, and shared governance.

Curridabat is one of the 31 cities that make up the largest urban agglomeration in Costa Rica (Greater Metropolitan Area), where about three million people live. Despite efforts to promote economic and educational development to benefit the 77,000 inhabitants of Curridabat, there are still social and ecological problems associated with unplanned densification and informal settlements. For example, the city's densely populated areas show a reduced drainage capacity due to the narrowing of the channels of the bodies of water found there and a level of urban vegetation cover that is highly fragmented and asymmetrically distributed.

In 2015 Curridabat implemented the Sweet City program, seeking to respond comprehensively to the social and ecological challenges imposed by the territory's urbanization. The Sweet City model arose then as a response to the challenges brought by urbanization to Curridabat, with significant achievements in terms of public policy. In 2016 Sweet City was included in the local party's Government Plan. The Municipal Strategic Plan also adopted it for the period 2018-2020, and, finally, it was agreed that it become the official brand for Curridabat (García and Muñoz, 2020).

Sweet City promotes the development and planning of a territory that is friendly, receptive, and sensitive to the different forms of life that inhabit the city. To this end, the initiative incorporates pollinating species, more precisely native bees, as the central axis of the city's redesign, not only as part of its productive dynamics but also from an ethical perspective that recognizes the value of life.

Within the program's framework, experiences and actions have been generated that range from raising awareness of the importance of the rational use of water (a drop of water), waste management (earthworm), conscious and nutritious diet (sap), peaceful neighborhood development, and social interactions (ants) or trust (beehive) to the need for physical exercise (hummingbird) or a better relationship with nature (güitite). Thus, Sweet City opens a new city management perspective that includes environmental, political, urbanistic, and pedagogical objectives.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE TYPOLOGIES FOR THE CANTON OF CURRIDABAT.

Systematization of the existing and desirable green infrastructure for demonstrative and educational purposes and as a guide for future developments.

BEFORE AND AFTER - PARQUE DEL RECUERDO [MEMORY PARK][1]

2017 | 2021

Photos: Municipality of Curridabat

FROM OBJECTIVE TO ACTION

Sweet City used **backcasting** as a planning strategy, a methodology that traces actions from the expected result, from back to front. Thus, Curridabat's vision prioritizes what is defined by demand and not by previously established objectives or projects.

Through this scheme, projects were grouped to address five dimensions of work: infrastructure, habitat, biodiversity, productivity, and coexistence. The aim was to structurally and functionally integrate urban infrastructure with biodiversity, reducing segregation and inequity in the opportunities and services that interaction with nature can offer. These dimensions also address urban productivity from a production perspective, not just from a consumption perspective, and ensure a more harmonious and inclusive coexistence between human beings and all other forms of life.

BETWEEN SWEET SIDEWALKS AND ECOLOGICALLY ASSISTED RESTORATIONS

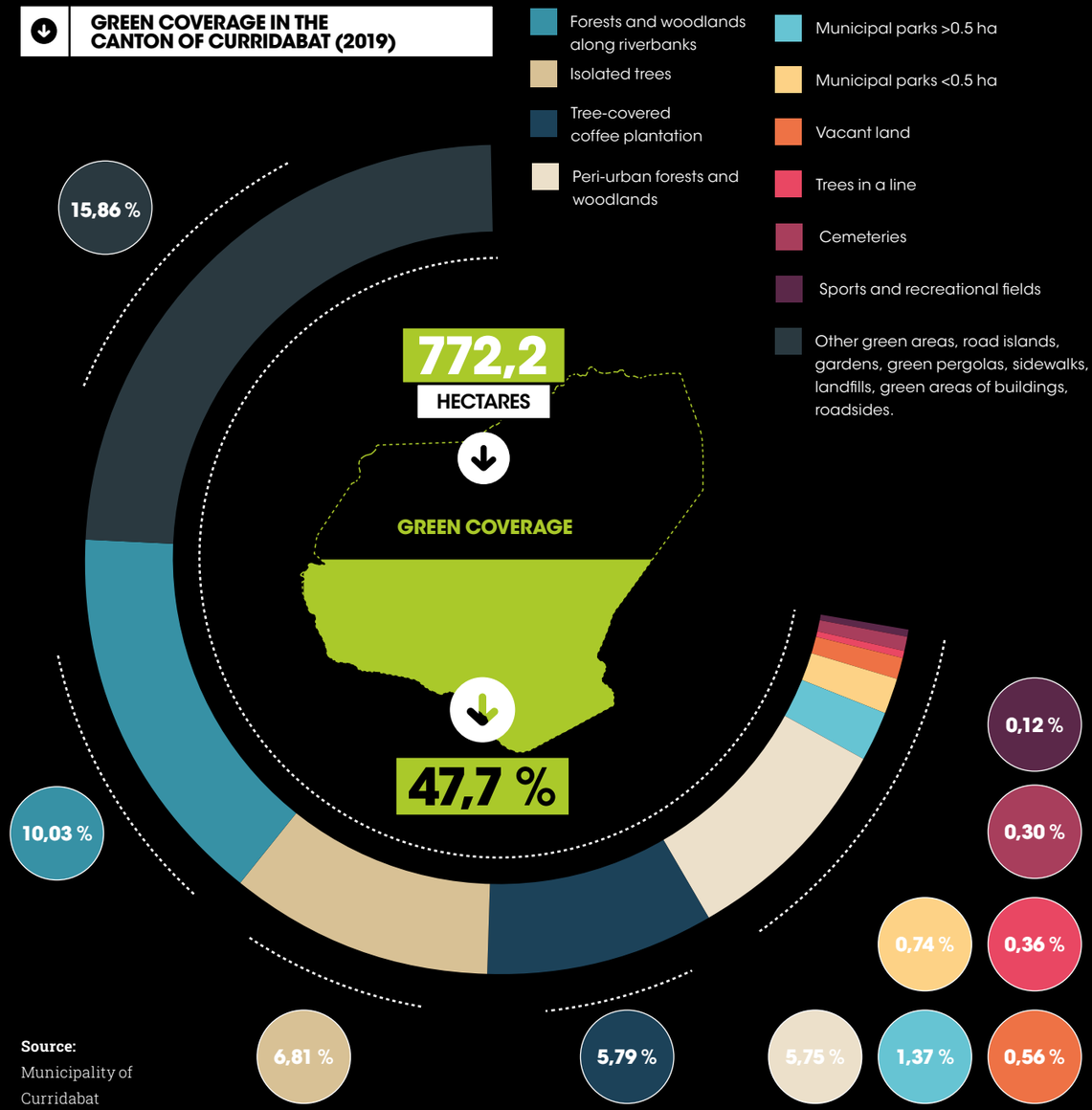
An action that exemplifies the transformation Sweet City entailed in the planning and management of public spaces, roads, and buildings is the call to live in a forest inside the city. To this end, the planting and use of sweet plants was proposed to increase the presence and integration of pollinating species in Curridabat's infrastructure. By providing better conditions for these species to do their job, it is possible to create a more diverse, comfortable, and colorful city, where the inhabitants are aware of its biodiversity, its functioning, and its contributions to the population's quality of life.

As a fundamental part of the planting and use of sweet plants, the concept of **assisted ecological restoration** was incorporated. This is a strategy aimed at recovering biodiversity in the city and the functional

integrity and health of the ecosystems in which it is located in areas that have lost their natural dynamics due to constant human disturbances.

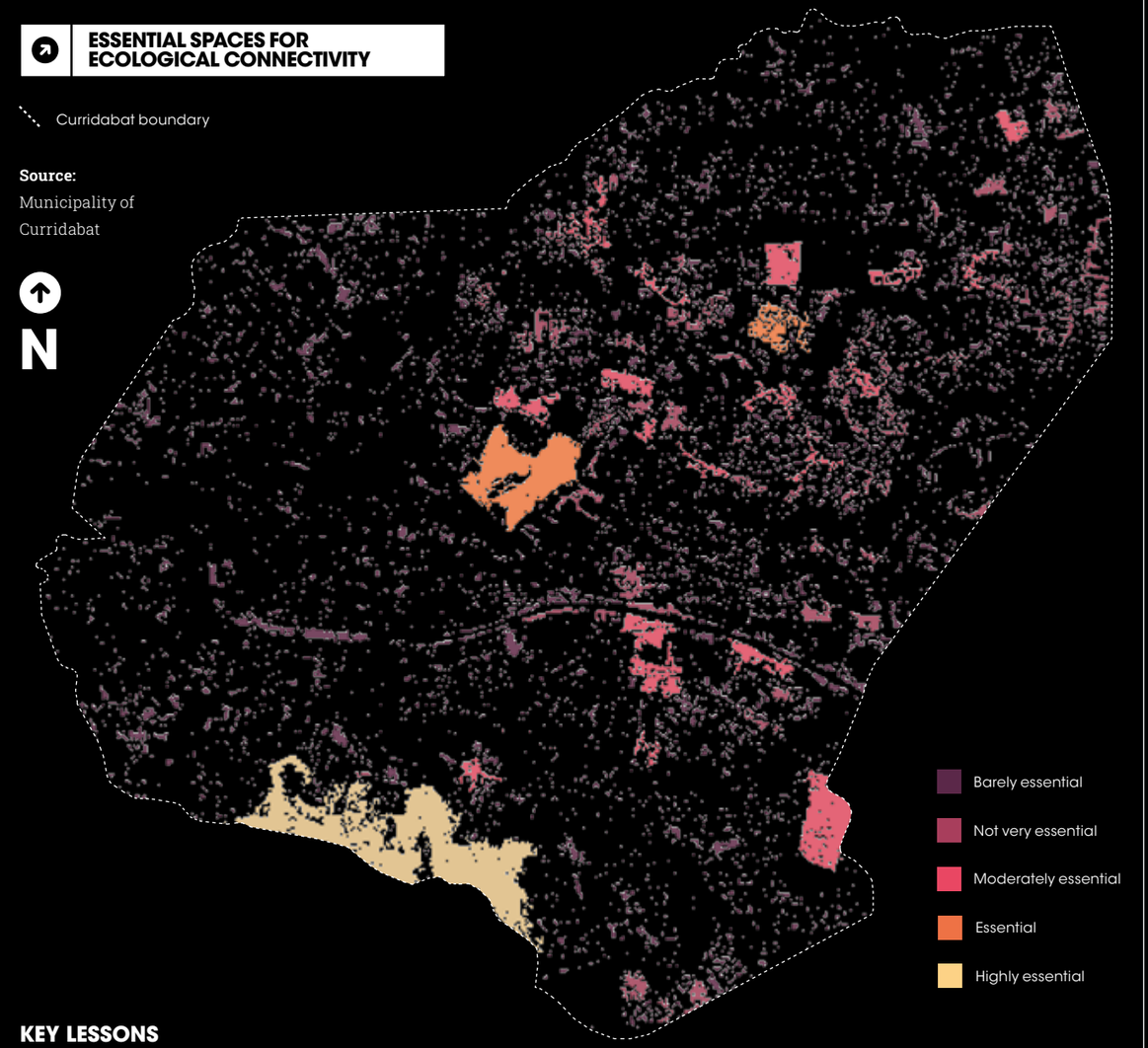
As a result, native species have been planted in the Parque del Recuerdo since 2017, not only as a way to commemorate deceased inhabitants but also as a strategy to recover the plant structure and habitat for the city's biodiversity. This is in addition to initiatives such as sweet sidewalks, which have a detailed guide that invites inhabitants and real estate developers to plant native plants considered sweet along the city's pedestrian corridors. It is hoped that these sweet sidewalks will promote the variety of sweet plants in the city, expand public awareness of their value, and ultimately ensure the presence of **pollinators** in the city.

GREEN COVERAGE IN THE CANTON OF CURRIDABAT (2019)



Source:
Municipality of Curridabat

ESSENTIAL SPACES FOR ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY



Source:
Municipality of Curridabat

KEY LESSONS

Understanding community activism and the origin of rebellion in Curridabat served as the basis for building the city's vision that would later be implemented there.

After gaining power and municipal management capacity, a leadership model was proposed based on the question "How many people have we made happy today?" which arose from the understanding that the city must produce well-being. **Happiness** gave a new objective to city management and the provision of specific services, generating measurement instruments such as the "happiness map," which functioned as a tactical foundation for identifying problems and seeking creative solutions around a common objective.

Projects are not enough. By 2015, projects had been implemented in Curridabat. However, there was still no vision for the city's planned future. Faced with this void, imitation of and inspiration from nature's processes was adopted as a design path to generate suitable conditions for biodiversity.

Before, the city made decisions without taking into account citizens' demands. Now, the municipality has begun to govern by demand, transformed its budget, and incorporated new institutional ramifications. To this end, it was essential to propose a change in the administrative language: now, the administrative documents produced under this vision use a radically different tone.