

URBAN NATURE AMSTERDAM

From rooftops and polders, this map invites people to explore the city's landscape and beyond.

COMMITMENTS

2 5

Quote as: Bris, I., Peel, C. Urban Nature Amsterdam. P. 220-225. In: Mejia, M.A., Amaya-Espinel, J.D. (eds.), *BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities with Biodiversity*. Bogotá. Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. 2022. 288 pages.

After launching the first edition of the Green and Blue Map of Amsterdam in 2019 and selling its first 3000 printed copies, Nature Desks launched a second edition in May 2022. This map, which shows all the green and blue spots in Amsterdam and, thus, urban nature in the city and its surroundings, invites people to experience the city in a different manner and hopes to inspire them to make Amsterdam greener, wilder, and healthier.

The city of Amsterdam is growing at a fast pace. However, the data shows that **green spaces** are not following this trend, even though all new housing developments are supposed to include a small percentage of green areas. Amsterdam is expected to grow with at least 150.000 homes - for a quarter-million more inhabitants - by 2050. At the same time, the importance of nature in the city is widely acknowledged: not long ago, the Municipality of Amster-

Based on an interview with **Ioana Bris**
Nature Desks, The Netherlands.

Collaborators
Charlie Peel.



AMSTERDAM,
THE NETHERLANDS

Pop. **17,475,415**

41,540 km²

0 m.a.s.l.

KEY
CONCEPTS

RECREATIONAL GREEN SPACE

NATIONAL PARK CITY

MAP

dam presented its green vision for 2020 – 2050. In this important document, the Municipality depicts further steps showing how the city plans to keep and make Amsterdam green and healthy.

Data is showing a worrisome trend, however. The sustainability platform De Gezonde Stad (The Healthy City) annually monitors how the city is doing in terms of energy, waste, health, and greenery. Based on official data, the platform concluded that Amsterdam had 29.75 square meters of recreational green space per inhabitant (including parks, gardens, and sports fields) in 2020. In 2015, however, the amount of green area per inhabitant was higher: 31.5 square meters per inhabitant, indicating a decreasing trend of green space per person. Moreover, this green space is also unevenly distributed throughout the city.

How do you achieve a sense of balance among the municipality and the people who own land and build vs. the people who live in the city? How can you make people aware of the importance of nature while

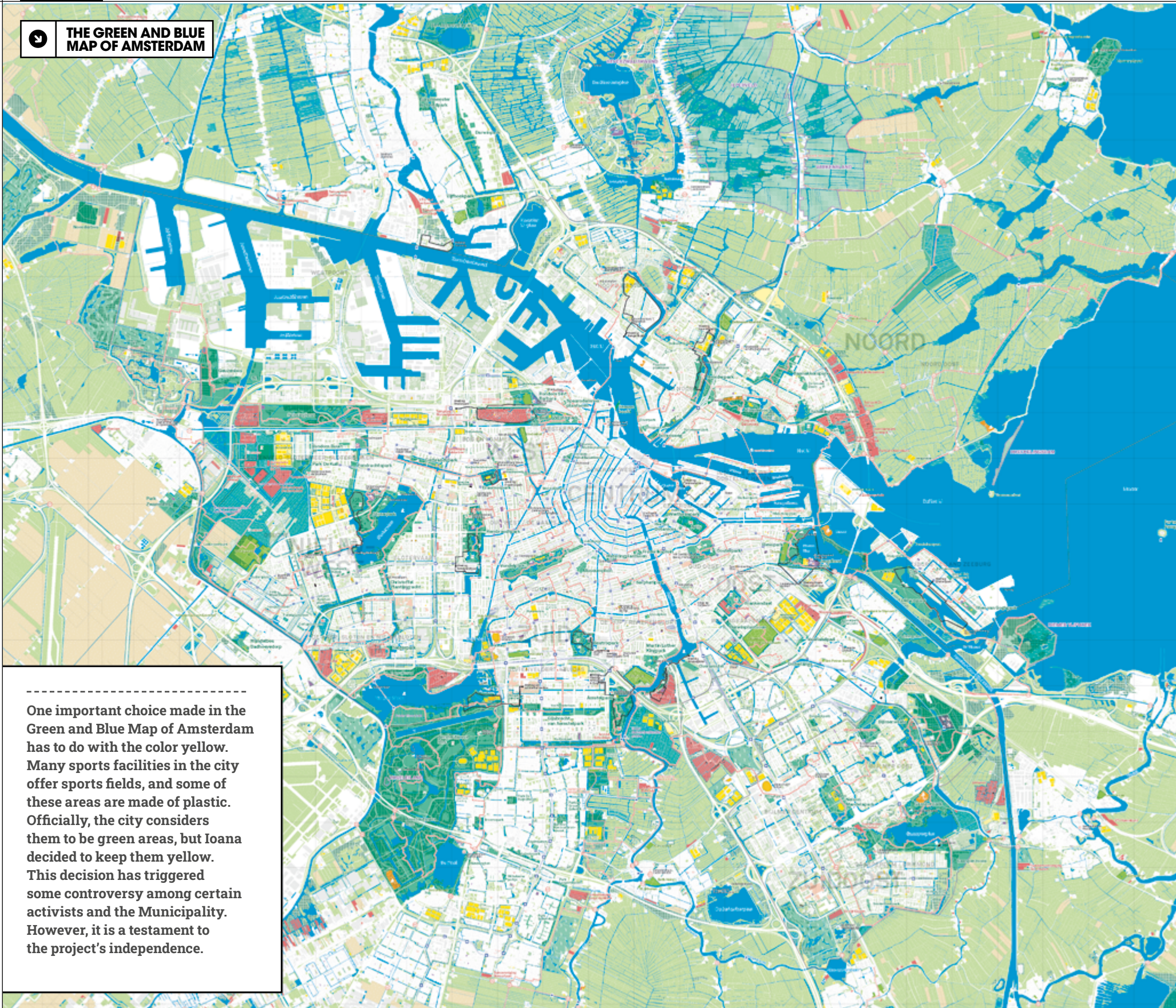
recognizing the need for further urban developments? This is why the Blue and Green Map of Amsterdam was made.

In May 2018, Ioana Biris started a crowdfunding campaign to develop a cartographic tool that displayed the green and blue spots in the city of Amsterdam. Inspired by the Green and Blue Map of London **National Park City**, Ioana made a **map** of her city but with "more green on it." This meant joining forces with green initiatives to put the entire municipality, its bodies of water, its forestry and recreation spaces, and even small initiatives, like some small green rooftops, all on the same map. On the back, the map also included information about biodiversity (flora and fauna) as a call to action, as an invitation to get out and learn more about these exciting green and blue spaces. Because it needed information from many parties and organizations, it became a sort of tool to bring people who love the city together who otherwise might have never been in contact with each other.

The map contains much more than geographical data. The Municipality of Amsterdam is very good at maintaining and feeding databases, so the map uses information from many sources. For example, it includes data on trees, bodies of water, playgrounds, etc. In fact, data is so specific that it can differentiate between natural and artificial playgrounds for children. On the back, more emphasis is placed on information about flora and fauna. This is particularly relevant for an immensely biodiverse city like Amsterdam, which is even more biodiverse than some parts of the countryside, where monoculture is the norm.

Nowadays, cities are playgrounds for kids, workspaces, living spaces, and, obviously, tourist locations. Tourists are also interested in the map because it shows them new places to visit. But there are also spaces for learning, where people can discover new initiatives that can help combat climate change, such as green rooftops and home gardens. When you consider all these spaces and variables, the map becomes a complex and interesting puzzle to put together.

THE GREEN AND BLUE MAP OF AMSTERDAM



One important choice made in the Green and Blue Map of Amsterdam has to do with the color yellow. Many sports facilities in the city offer sports fields, and some of these areas are made of plastic. Officially, the city considers them to be green areas, but Ioana decided to keep them yellow. This decision has triggered some controversy among certain activists and the Municipality. However, it is a testament to the project's independence.

OPEN SPACE

- Park
- Polder (reclaimed land)
- Cemetery
- Green corridor
- Sports area
- Sports pitch
- Allotment vineyard and orchard
- Campsite & caravan park
- Playground

- Botanical garden, Zoo
- Grass meadow & scrub land
- Agricultural land
- Nature reserve
- Forest & woodland area
- Golf course

BLUE SPACE

- Surface water
- Wetland

PLACES

- Town hall
- Civic building (School, university, library, health practice, hospital and religious building)
- Sports hall or stadium (yellow) & watersports building (blue)
- Buildings (grey) & private gardens (light green)

TRANSPORT

- Metro station
- Tram station
- Rail station
- Ferry terminal
- Cycle route node

WALKS

- Amsterdam urban walk
- North Holland trail

SNAIL TRAILS

- Amstelveen Middelpordel
- Amsterdam IJ
- Amsterdam Osdorp
- Amsterdam West
- Halfweg
- Het Twiske
- Ipendam - Watergang

WEETINGS

- (Walking meetings)

ACTIVITIES

ON LAND

- Natural playground
- Local playground
- School work garden
- City farm
- Picnic bench
- BBQ Site
- Beach
- Outdoor gym
- Garden centre
- Zoo - Botanical garden
- Roof garden

ON WATER

- Stand-up-paddleboarding
- Swimming

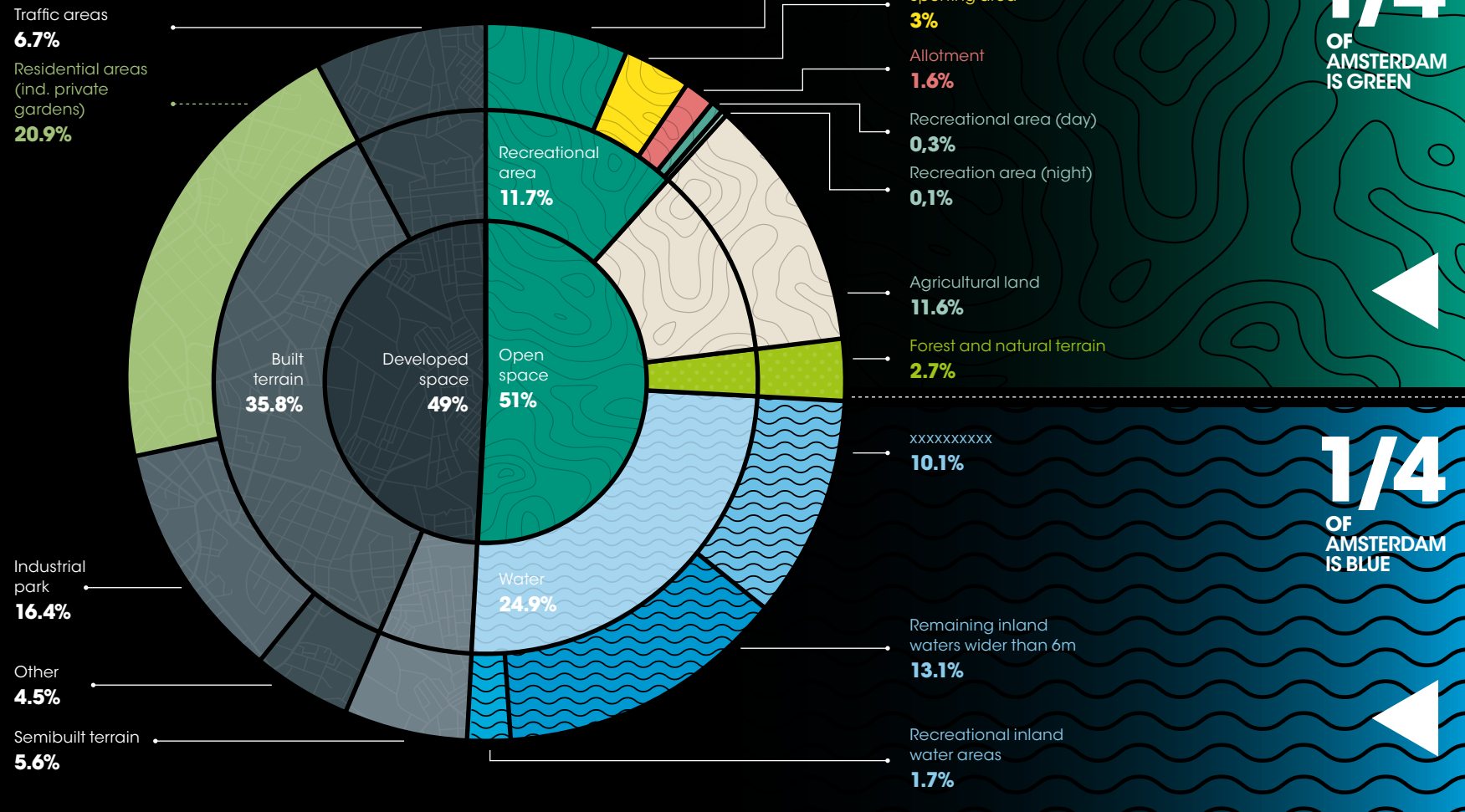
INFORMATION

- Outdoor wi-fi
- Storks nests



Source:
Charlie
Peel - Urban
Good. 2021.

AMSTERDAM BY LAND USE



DO SOMETHING FOR NATURE

YOU CAN CREATE 1M² OF NEW GREEN SPACE

Make your home, garden, street, courtyard, park and neighbourhood 'rainproof'

- 1 DO YOU HAVE A GARDEN?**

 - If you have tiles in the garden, take them out and use grass or gravel
 - Collect rainwater to water your garden
 - Get information about water-friendly gardens.
 - Make a worm hotel for compost and an insect hotel for pollination
 - Do your gardening without using pesticides
 - Plant trees in the garden
- 2 DO YOU HAVE A GREY ROOF?**

 - Green it. Do you look out on a grey roof? Try to convince the owner to green their roof.
- 3 DO YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD**

 - Start yourself with a pocket park, a Tiny Forest or a Park around the corner, make sure you have a small front garden or a balcony full of flowers and herbs, green your children's schoolyard, be part of a neighbourhood allotment or make compost from vegetable, fruit and garden waste.
 - And share your ideas and experiences with your friends and your neighbours.

TOP FIVE BIRDS IN THE CITY

- 1 GREAT TIT**
- 2 HOUSE SPARROW**
- 3 ROSE RINGED PARAKEET**
- 4 BLACKBIRD**
- 5 FINCH**

URBAN NATURE AS A SOLE REFERENCE POINT

"When you open the map, you can't say things like 'Oh, this is the street I live on' or 'Here's a museum,' because it works differently: it demands you look at the city through new eyes and in light of its parks and blue spaces. This, in turn, helps you appreciate it even more and want to find ways to make it better, especially because the map also displays information about flora, fauna, species, and biodiversity."

When people see the map and interact with it, they start to have a better understanding of what the city is and what it means to them. The key concept behind the map is then, basically, to trigger change – to get people to rethink their relationship with the spaces around them and to view their city in a new way. Here are some examples:

- › When some students were given copies of the map, they embraced it and created their own walking routes to their school. Some students have used the map for digital education hackathons, while others have designed Pokemon Go-styled videogames with educational implications - if you see something on the street and correctly guess whether or not it is plastic, you get points in an augmented reality-based map based on the actual Green and Blue Map.
- › Managers who have taken the map to their employees have seen them discovering nature close to their offices and organizing group activities to go out and enjoy nature. Or a daycare with 'nature in their DNA' that ordered their maps as gifts for all their 'client' parents and kids.
- › Inspired by the Urban Nature Amsterdam map, the city of Breda ordered the second green and blue map

and used it to inspire their ambition to become the first National Park City in the Netherlands and 'A City is a Park' by 2030. It is now an official tool used by a municipality and has become a symbol of their commitment to the project. A third map – another city – is being discussed at this moment.

KEY LESSONS

→ People still need a tactile experience, and paper can be an answer. While making use of existing data, the urban nature map is telling a story. In this crazy digital era where everybody's running around and clicking through thousands of images, it is soothing to have something you can touch and show. It is extremely rewarding to see a child getting on their knees and discovering things or even drawing on the map, or to hear about peo-

ple who take the map from their bookshelves to proudly show friends their city. On the other hand, the making and printing process poses the biggest challenge, as it has a serious financial impact on the whole project.

→ Even if the Green and Blue Map is a small initiative (Ioana works together with Charlie Peel from Urban Good), it has had an impact on the city and some parts of the world. Other maps are being ordered, and the topics included on the map – urban nature as a workspace, playground, or holiday location – are now more relevant than ever. However, endeavors like this map can have a greater impact when working together with more people. Somebody can focus on research while others work on developing educational projects with the kids. A smaller neighborhood map can be made, or a festival can be organized, among other ideas. This would all help when scaling up.