

Restoring and promoting urban nature

The plan's origins

The plan to «Restore and promote urban nature» («Restaurer et valoriser la nature en ville») was officially launched by the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport and Housing and its partners on 9 November 2010. It is the concrete expression of commitment 76 from the Grenelle Environment Conference on "restoring urban nature and its multiple functions: runoff prevention, energy, heat, hygiene (water, air, noise, waste), prevention of use of chemical products, aesthetics and psychology".

Findings and stakes

The urban environment exercises many forms of aggressiveness against man and nature: mounting waste, pollution and dwindling natural resources, artificial urban spaces and continuous urban expansion onto farm land, reduced biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem quality, and the territories' risks and vulnerabilities to climate change.

This project, involving all urban stakeholders, is thus designed to tackle considerable challenges. It must improve quality of life and social ties, adapt cities to climate change, preserve biodiversity and ecosystem functions, and thus the services it provides and which we all need. Finally, it must promote sustainable forms of production and consumption which in particular underpin and develop economic sectors close by.

This urban nature dimension therefore fully integrates into the French view of sustainable cities and the urban equity issues highlighted within the scope of the World Urban Forum: by the resulting reduction in energy consumption and costs, by the creation of social ties and by the amenities offered near to living or working areas, etc.

A shared success

The plan is the fruit of several months of joint work carried out within the spirit of the Grenelle Environment Conference. Elected officials, experts, researchers, entrepreneurs, farmers, civil society and professional representatives, urban planners, architects, landscape gardeners, etc. met between June 2009 and June 2010 to discuss the links between man, cities and nature, to rethink the status and functions of urban nature and bring about the sustainable city of the future. Thanks to an initial process launch conference, four workshops and one work presentation conference, dialogue and exchanges on the multiple functions of urban nature took place. This process also mobilised the partners to tackle the changes necessary to their way of cooperating and intervening, to find specific action proposals to promote urban nature, to connect it to neighbouring ecosystems and to quickly and substantially improve quality of urban life. A representative group of urban stakeholders composed of five Grenelle colleges, Chaired by Olivier Thomas, mayor of Macoussis and president of the Ile-de-France regional green spaces agency, met between April and June 2010 to co-produce the "Urban Nature Plan". It identified the priorities and actions to be carried out under this partnership.

The structure of the "restore and promote urban nature" plan

After a year's joint work co-produced by the main urban and nature stakeholders, this plan's objective is to better reconcile cities with nature using 3 main axes, 16 commitments and 37 operational actions to guide public action:



- **Strategic axis No. 1:** Anchoring cities in their geographical and natural environment
- **Strategic axis No. 2:** Developing natural spaces quantitatively and qualitatively
- **Strategic axis No. 3:** Promoting a shared urban nature culture and governance

This action plan is not a regulation. The "Restore and promote urban nature" plan belongs to all of the stakeholders who participated in its design. It was given impetus by the French Government, but most of its operation actions fall to partners who have appointed an action coordinator (whether a professional federation, an association or a State service, etc.).

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A wide range of actions

The plan mobilises a wide range of levers. Across the 37 operation actions they include:

- **REFERENCES and GUIDES** including changes to the specifications for the "ville et villages fleuris" national 'in bloom' competition. In addition to the flowers' aesthetic impact, these specifications now consider whether vegetation is a true tool in urban planning.
- **CALLS FOR TENDERS** including those regarding the "green and blue grids in urban environments", financed by the French Government under the French Strategy for Biodiversity (SNB): it must lead to progress in drawing up the definition strategy and on the implementation method for green and blue grids.
- **RESEARCH PROJECTS and STUDIES** of which one, run by the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS), aims to produce an implementation reference for urban green grids.
- **PROFESSIONAL TOOLS** including the setting up of a web resource centre on urban ecology, run by the Plante-et-

Cités association. It will promote all of the plan's results and provide markers and methods to implement its 16 commitments.

- **EXPERIMENTS and INNOVATIVE PROCESSES** including the creation of an «outdoors laboratory» run by the Hautes-Haies association, in partnership with the National School of Landscaping (ENSP).

- **TRAINING**, for example, to accompany the publication of a reference framework on the ecological management of green spaces.

- **LEADERSHIP-COMMUNICATION ACTIONS** including running a conference on integrating nature into local urban development plans.

Plan implementation and monitoring

The "restore and promote urban nature" plan was implemented between 2010-2013. It showed very positive results with nearly 75 % of the 37 actions conducted. It was also a driving force for new initiatives in support of this joint approach and resulted in new partnerships and new actions. It was also implemented on a local level in numerous projects developed by local authorities, whether involving initiatives on preservation, integration into urban developments, the restoration of nature in spaces or more strategic approaches from a planning point of view.

This plan also widely drove the French approach for promoting sustainable cities, supervised by the French Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing (METL), in particular the creation of an EcoQuartier label, and the majority of local authorities make this a structuring axis for their urban renewal policies. The METL is currently drawing up a new action programme to support local authorities in integrating nature and biodiversity in their operations.

Further information on the «restore and promote urban nature» plan can be found on the dedicated platform:

<http://www.nature-en-ville.com/>