



THEMATIC BRIEFS SERIES

Rethinking the Mediterranean cities: the role of urban forests and green spaces for resilient urban communities

Local administrators have the mandate and responsibility to foster an enabling environment for the establishment, implementation and sustainable management of urban forests and green spaces. A coherent urban forestry strategy can help governments and communities to design, manage, protect and restore urban forests and green spaces with a view to optimize the benefits they can provide to the people, and the environment. Investing in a green vision can also help local institutions to address internationally agreed protocols and conventions on cross-cutting issues regarding climate change, forest cover, water quality and control, soil erosion, fight against desertification, biodiversity conservation, culture, human health and wellbeing, nature protection, making them key actors on the global scene and promoters of the transition towards sustainability.

Indeed, in most Mediterranean cities, the lack of sound, integrated, and long-term urban policies and planning has led to unsustainable urban development patterns and unsettled urban sprawl, which in turn have generated habitat fragmentation and severe biodiversity loss, decreasing human wellbeing and environmental health, inefficient use of resources, high degree of soil sealing, and increased vulnerability of Mediterranean cities to climate change. Despite the increased awareness of most policy makers of the wide range of **ecosystem services provided by urban forests**, more efforts are needed to ensure that these resources are better integrated and properly considered and valued in the decision-making processes in the Mediterranean region. In most cities, in fact, urban and peri-urban forests are far from being recognized and valued as strategic assets towards a more sustainable and resilient city, still ranking too low in the local agenda.

Creating an enabling environment for urban forests and green spaces means contributing to the livelihood and well-being of local communities. Decision makers will have to take the following steps and civil society will have to actively promote them:

- define – through participatory processes – a **long-term green vision** to which all the stakeholders involved are strongly committed;
 - activate a **co-governance** approach to sustainable and resilient planning, designing, and managing Mediterranean cities while recognizing new and existing green spaces as the strategic infrastructure for future cities;
 - make a **long-term financial commitment** through the allocation of a dedicated budget for the life-cycle-costs of urban forests and green spaces, financial resources needed for their planning, design and management;
-

- raise **public awareness** on the multi-functional role of urban and peri-urban forests, and on their specific environmental, social, and economic benefits;
- mainstream **urban forestry** into all sectoral policies;
- integrate **policies, tools and procedures governing urban land use** (particularly those related to urban forests, urban agriculture and public green spaces) with the aim of strengthening the integration between different types of green spaces (natural, semi-natural, and artificial green areas);
- promote **community engagement** and adopt **participatory tools** in planning, designing, and managing urban and peri-urban forests and green spaces in general;
- build collaborative **partnerships and alliances** – based on multi-stakeholder approaches – between local and decentralized authorities, mayors, civil communities, private sector, practitioners, NGOs and researchers in the various disciplines involved;
- develop and implement **comprehensive planning** and **monitoring tools** to guide informed long-term investment decisions towards **adaptive management**; and,
- disseminate and share **knowledge and information on good practices** through the creation and support of multi-stakeholder and multi-sectorial dialogue **platforms**.

The development and implementation of national strategies and local policies addressed to increase urban natural capital and to expand public access to and stewardship of semi-natural resources in cities can have relevant impacts on public health, employment, safety and enjoyment of the urban environment.

In view of the above, the *Silva Mediterranea Working Group on Urban and peri-urban forestry* is developing a **series of thematic briefs** to support administrators, communities and all relevant stakeholders of the Mediterranean Region in developing and implementing concrete policy actions to maximize the contribution of urban forests and green spaces to address key urban environmental and social challenges within the Region.

Briefs will be released on a four-month basis and will focus on specific issues of major interest and concern within the Region.
