Green Minds Think Alike

An international awareness campaign for greener cities

In dealing with the hustle and bustle of city life, green spaces offer people a breathing room. A place to recover physically and mentally, and connect with nature. But, finding harmony in urbanisation and nature will be increasingly difficult if we do not change the way we see our cities. World population is expected to reach 9 billion people by 2050, 70% of which will live in cities. With the demand for new housing and urbanisation crossing into nature's playground, green spaces are slowly disappearing. Yet, these green spaces are vital for climate resilience and contribute to a better quality of life for local populations. It's time to take action and create a coexistence of infrastructure, urbanisation and nature.

Let's build greener cities together

The Netherlands is strongly committed to creating sustainable and future-proof cities at home and abroad. And to build greener cities, we need to cultivate greener mindsets. Through this international campaign, which takes place during the month of June, we want to highlight some inspiring concepts and initiatives that enable people worldwide to live sustainably in harmony with nature. And how these projects contribute to cleaner, greener and happier cities, today and in the future.

With green city initiatives popping up around the globe, it's a great time to raise awareness of how greener cities contribute to climate change mitigation, overall physical and mental health, and biodiversity.

What is green and why does it matter?

Research shows that green cities are essential to achieving a climate-proof and sustainable environment. Greener cities reduce air and noise pollution, ensure water storage, and contribute to cooling during warmer periods. According to Wageningen University (WUR), the importance of green cities can be seen as follows:

Positive effects on climate change

With heavier downpours and increasing concrete and pathed areas, rainwater can barely reach underlying soil, increasing the chance of flooding. By creating more green spaces, these peak downpours have a larger surface through which water can disperse into soil, enriching it on its way down.

At the same time, while cities are becoming increasingly warmer in some areas of the world, urbanised areas absorb heat and struggle to cool down. Trees and shrubs can help reduce high temperatures in congested spaces by evaporating water. Trading a traditional roof for a green roof with grass and moss can reduce the roof's

temperature by more than half. More trees also provide more shade, thus cooling down public areas and pathways.

Increased well-being and better health:

Parks, community gardens, riverbanks, trees lining the streets and private backyards - not only do they look beautiful, they also contribute to a happier and healthier living and working environment.

Green spaces reduce stress, increase happiness, boost creativity and vitality, and bring people closer together. Studies also show that hospital patients with views of trees needed less (-30%) heavy painkillers than those without a green view. At the same time, in-bed recovery time was almost 10% less in patients with a green view versus patients without.

Uniting communities:

Green parks, community areas and public gardens also bring people closer together in local neighbourhoods. People can enjoy more places to interact and get to know each other, while also benefitting from reduced nuisance, crime and vandalism. People will feel safer in their own neighbourhood.

Boosting economy and neighbourhood value:

While green spaces need to serve a function in order to be effective long-term, dressing up buildings with innovative green methods also increases the attractiveness of a city. People are attracted to green landscapes near offices and houses. Happier and more attractive working and living environments help companies hire and retain staff. Green spaces also spur green tourism and positively boost housing markets in urban areas. Various studies indicate that the value of real estate is higher when combined with a view of water, public spaces, parks or public gardens.

Supports biodiversity:

Animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms all have an important role to play in nature. Greater variety of species assures natural sustainability for all life forms. Boosting biodiversity within a city contributes to conservation efforts of various species. And a wide range of pollinating insects creates a reliable food source for birds and other animals, all while keeping nature in a perfect balance.

The challenges that come with greening cities and how the Netherlands can help

Moving towards functional green.

Greening a city is so much more than planting various trees and flowers, but often the functional qualities can be overlooked. To unlock the full potential of green spaces, we need to take an integrated approach. This way green

is not perceived as a pretty expense, but as a means to future-proof our cities.

For green solutions to work, they have to be applied to local circumstances. The Netherlands works hard to turn experience and knowledge into practice. In Almere, we do this by creating green walls as seen in Aeres Hogeschool. The wall functions as a cooling agent and supports species variety. In Groningen, the Kempkensberg garden does not only function as a green outdoor space, but also as an important ecological link between city and countryside. In Eindhoven, buildings like the Trudo Tower, with 135 trees and more than 9000 plants, use greening actions to cool the outside of the building, balance energy consumption, increase residents' quality of life and reduce noise pollution.

Green as a means, not as an end

The Netherlands aims at creating long-term solutions, as well as defining ways to maintain them. Together, we have to facilitate businesses across the globe to ensure green solutions can survive the harsh environment to come. In the Netherlands, horticulture companies are already shifting towards new plant materials that are capable of withstanding harsher climate conditions. For example, by creating crops and plants that can grow year round despite weather changes. This applies equally to policy, where tenders are becoming increasingly more functional with a future-oriented mission.

Greening a city should not simply be seen as an end, but as a means to achieve the many goals and benefits mentioned above. Everyone knows green is good, but more needs to be done in finding the optimal way of how, what and when to plant, and how to best maintain the plants continues to be an open question that the Netherlands aims to explore with our international partners.

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While emphasising the importance of green cities, we are highlighting a fraction of the many Dutch innovations contributing to more sustainable urbanised areas. And we invite you to do your part. Only through international collaboration, combining strengths of governments, knowledge institutes, businesses and citizens can we aim to create a cleaner and greener world. Let's propagate the effect of green together!