

Exploring Urban Sustainability in COP15

Contemporary Challenges

ACNA4004

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1. Introduction

The United Nations Biodiversity Conference, also known as COP15, is the fifteenth Conference of the Parties ('COP') that has been held to focus on the prevention of biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse (Blanchard & Williams, 2022). Included in this, the meeting discusses the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity ('CBD'), which is an international agreement from 1992 regarding the fair and equitable use and protection of resources (Ashworth, 2022).

During COP15, governments from a huge variety of countries, as well as representatives from businesses, scientific organisations and Indigenous communities, met to decide on the goals and targets for the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework initiative (United Nations Environment Programme, 2022). The meeting resolved with an agreement to both halt and reverse biodiversity loss by protecting 30% of coastal areas, oceans, and land, and to cut the amount of food being wasted by half, aiming to accomplish these goals by 2030 (WWF-UK, 2022).

This report focuses on the topic of urban sustainability, as discussed under the umbrella of biodiversity in COP15, and will explore what decisions were made and targets set in place with regards to the topic.

2. What is urban sustainability?

The United Nations (2018) predicted that by 2050, 68% of the world's population could live in cities. This means that ensuring cities are sustainable is important for climate change mitigation. There are many issues that urban areas have to navigate, such as access to green space, waste disposal, and the urban heat island effect (European Environment Agency, 2023), and managing environmental, economic and social issues in concert is crucial for achieving urban sustainability (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016).

Urban sustainability is also part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring that cities have equitable access to public transport, breathable, non-polluted air, and affordable and safe basic services are all part of Goal 11 (United Nations, n.d).

3. Urban sustainability in COP15

3.1 Goals & Targets

4 overarching goals and 23 targets were laid out during COP15. They cover a wide range of aspects, many beyond the scope of this report, however there is much that is relevant to the

topic of urban sustainability. In table 1, the 4 goals of the Biodiversity Framework are identified (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022).

Goal:	Goal Contents:
A)	• Protection and enhancement of ecosystems. • Halting human caused extinction. • Protection of genetic diversity.
B)	• Sustainable use of biodiversity. • Ecosystem services maintained and enhanced.
C)	• Fair and equitable distribution of genetic resources and associated information.
D)	• Equitable access to technology to implement the Framework, especially for developing nations.

Table 1: Explanation of Goals.

There are a lot of potential opportunities for enhancing ecosystems and in turn slowing human-induced extinction when it comes to the creation of sustainable cities. This also goes hand in hand with maintenance of ecosystem services, as urban environments such as parkland, urban woodland, stream and lake environments and coastal environments all provide important ecosystem services to their surrounding areas as well as providing habitats (Bolund & Hunhammar, 1999).

There are also several of the 23 targets that directly address urban sustainability. Target 12 aims to enhance access to green spaces in urban environments, increasing biodiversity-led urban planning, and ensuring an accessible and inclusive urban environment. Target 14 lays out the need for biodiversity to be included in planning and development stages of project development, and Woodruff & Bendor (2016) found in their study that focusing on this increases the sustainability of completed projects.

3.2 Events tackling urban sustainability

On December 14th of COP15, an event took place regarding the role played by nature based infrastructure, which can also be referred to as “green” infrastructure, in sustainable cities. This

panel was composed of representatives from a variety of different organisations with roles to play in the development of nature based infrastructure (GEF, 2022).

A major aspect discussed by Benjamin Simmons (2022) of the International Institute for Sustainable Development is how when it comes to nature based infrastructure, both financial and environmental benefits may be missed by traditional cost-benefit analyses undertaken in the planning and development stages. He describes the concept of avoided costs, that is, costs that are circumvented by using nature based infrastructure, such as incorporating green spaces into urban environments lowering the likelihood of urban heat island effects, which in turn lessen the effects of heat-caused loss of efficiency in power systems such as renewable energy infrastructure (Bechauf, 2022). Nature based infrastructure, which includes both ecosystems such as wetlands, and engineered solutions such as green roofs, help urban communities become more resilient to climate change (Luedke, 2019).

Another topic discussed here is how water management can affect cities. Christine Mwangi (2022) of WWF-Kenya discusses how droughts and floods both pose problems for cities. Overexploitation of water bodies can easily occur when supporting dense population centres and industries, such as Lake Naivasha in Kenya (Harper, et al, 2011), and restoration of natural infrastructure such as wetlands or forests area have twofold benefits, both stabilising water sources and providing jobs to nearby communities (WWF-Kenya, n.d).

4. Conclusion

Both COP15, and the CBD more broadly, aim to decide and agree goals regarding the protection and enhancement of ecosystems and biodiversity. As there are a great number of urban communities all around the world, often with a dense population requiring many resources, ensuring that these locations are sustainable has to be part of developing plans to protect ecosystems. COP15 addresses this need for urban sustainability, and the nature focused planning, green infrastructure and equitable communities needed to create it in both its goals and targets, and invites people from different parts of the world with different expertise to talk on the topic. The goals and targets created as an outcome of the COP15 discussions are intended to be implemented by 2030, and it remains to be seen how urban sustainability will grow and develop in this time.

5. Reference List

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