



CLEARINGHOUSE  
中欧城市森林应对方案



# City of trees

Inspirational package for teachers on  
the importance of urban trees, urban forest and  
why we should care for trees in the city



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# 1. Introduction

Forests importance as the lungs of the world, the great carbon sink (10.2 The ecosystem services provided by trees) of our planet, cradle for biodiversity (10.5 Web of life) and the protector of human health (10.9 Dr Forest and trees as the health care personnel) has never been as clear as it is today. This holds true for forests in the tropics, the small forests between agricultural lands, the fragmented forests in and between cities as well as the few trees in the city center. The benefits that forests and trees offer to humans are so bountiful, ingenious, adaptive and effective, it is hard (and needless) to look for another solution that would work as well.



The UN estimates that by 2050 about 70% of the world's population will be living in cities. With high population density and most of the energy consumed in the world, cities also produce most of the pollution in the world. Due to the lack of green surfaces, cities have become hot spots during heatwaves (10.3 Importance of urban trees) and unbearable to not only their most vulnerable inhabitants. Urbanites are also more prone to face mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, sometime in their lives, compared to their rural counterparts.

“Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” -Warren Buffett

During the ongoing pandemic COVID-19, the importance of forests for yet another reason has become painfully clear to many urban citizens around the world. As other activities have come to a halt, people have found themselves wondering into the parks and urban forests in search for room for physical exercise, a moment of peace and quiet of your own, or simply a change of scenery from inside the four walls. There is an increasing need for green spaces as more people find the benefits of nature.

For the preparation of this Inspirational Package, we conducted a survey and collected over 130 results from across Europe. Many respondents reported about the lack of materials to teach about forests and trees. One of the respondents mentioned the need for “..resources on how to take advantage of the forests on the outskirts or the trees of the city as a tool for direct learning”. It was also mentioned how “devoting an excursion to studying only the trees is always unjustified and difficult to carry on”. We are still long way from prioritizing the education about our natural ecosystems that are trying to exist with us in the city.

The importance of forests and the benefits of single trees in the cities are still too vaguely understood by the urban inhabitants, students and teachers alike. It is unfortunate to continuously witness urban residents and even city officials opt for cutting down a row of trees, seeing them as risks of material

damage or simply as non-productive empty space. Fortunately, sometimes active citizens are quick to act and stop these efforts of urban tree destruction, but just as often such destruction goes without notice.

How then do we make sure we manage to raise the awareness on the importance of urban trees and forests for our own survival and life quality? How do we bring up children and youth to grow up to be active citizens who conserve and increase trees in the city?

Forests tend to be a topic in forest rich countries like Finland, Germany, Canada, Slovenia ..., as we speak, Italy has in 2020 become the world's first country to make it compulsory for schoolchildren to study climate change and sustainable development by enforcing schools to put aside one school hour per week for climate change education, amounting to 33 hours per year.

Increasing knowledge is not enough in this endeavor that often takes more than fact or value-based arguments. An inner motivation is needed to keep people standing up for the things they believe in. A number of studies have consistently shown that an individual's level of connection with nature (6.1 Importance of feeling connected to nature) may not only increase their mental wellbeing, but it can also influence their level of engagement in pro-environmental behaviors. In addition, cultivating a sense of place (6.2 Sense of place as a key to pro-environmental behaviour), i.e. the connection to a place, will help to increase the need to protect and conserve the environment of the place one identifies with. Furthermore, while the looming climate change and eco-anxiety (7. Eco anxiety) caused by it has got many teens suffering from anxiety, strengthening their bond with nature can only empower when coupled with tools and tactics that can mobilize the student to work towards fighting climate change.

This Inspiration Package has been written in a manner that influences that nature connection. Though there are tremendous differences in the level of forest cover in the countries across the world, and even in the countries collaborating on the Clearing House project, the material that is provided here is developed for ANY city environment with trees. This Inspiration Package aims at increasing the knowledge of the importance of urban trees and forests; supporting in developing the skills that are needed in acting responsibly in one's community and strengthening the connectedness to nature through making the urban nature come to life by the activities in this package. It is of central importance that students find a place to the information they have been exposed to in this package, not only on a cognitive level but also on an emotional level. Therefore, we underline the importance of connecting these lessons to wider context (Ch10) (10. Introduction to urban trees and forests) as well as reflecting (2.1 Build-up & structure) on how each lesson makes the people feel.

Another important point is creating material that is accessible and useful for the teachers and that considers each teacher's own level of interest, capabilities and resources to teach about the importance of urban trees and forests' importance.

We hope the compilation of this material lowers the threshold to make trees and forests part of your teaching, across subject lines. It is of utmost important to help the students of today recognize the importance of trees in our immediate living sphere. We invite you to teach your students about urban trees and forests in a manner that allows them the easy integration and application of the learnt material, and finally, inspires your students to notice, value and protect the urban trees and forests now and in the future for the health of humans.



## 2. How does this package work?

This Inspirational Package aims at increasing the knowledge of the importance of urban trees and forest on a basic level; supporting students in developing the skills that are needed in acting responsibly in one's community; and strengthening their connectedness to nature and making the urban nature come to life through the activities in this package.

Our starting point is the teacher who has little prior knowledge and little experience in outdoor teaching, perhaps a bit of apprehension for teaching outdoors. The activities are aimed to be manageable with minimum resources needed and time spent in planning. For those teachers who already have found their way to the plentiful relevant resources that do exist online, this material aims to add an angle that has not yet been covered in length but that is crucial for our and the planet's wellbeing: interconnectedness of urban forests and health. The urban forests and health linkage relates directly to decreased biodiversity and city livability due to climate change which you can read more about in the (Ch10) (10. Introduction to urban trees and forests).



Because cities, countries, curricula, school culture and climatic conditions differ, the material remains on a general level. Simultaneously, the material is designed flexible enough to allow the adapting of it to different conditions. For example, the species of trees are left open, and where possible, activities are planned to be possible in any season or alternatively to be conducted indoors.

The flexibility is also intended to leave the ways in which a teacher chooses to use the material more open. Though we would hope for the teacher to cover all the material during one semester or year, it might not be possible. We have added a separate section introducing this package to students. This section details a few lessons that students can complete on their own from start to finish. This teacher package can be used in different ways, e.g. as extracurricular activities for students with much motivation and interest in the topic.

Because the topics fit in many different subjects, we encourage teachers to coordinate among each other to cover different lessons during the same semester, as it enhances students learning when related topics are handled in different subjects.

## 2.1 Build-up & structure

Each exercise is put together in the steps you find below, always in the same order.



### Setting the scene

Setting the scene to the topic means providing you with the background information you need to introduce the topic to students. We have also added hyperlinked keywords, so you can look for more information in Ch10.



### Activity

The activity is described in its most basic form. For those teachers who would like to increase the challenge, they can continue on the section. Taking it a step further with steps 1 or 2 after the reflection section. In addition, if the class enjoys this topic, they can deepen their knowledge by following steps 1 and 2 after completing the activity.



### Reflections

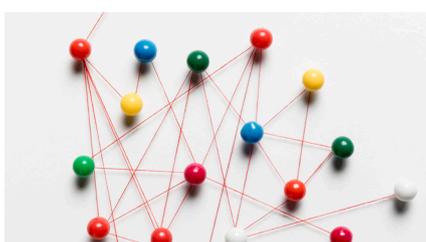
At the end of an activity, you will find some reflective questions. These aim to make sure the pupils have understood the lesson goals on more than just on the rational level. We hope to engage them also in thinking how what they have learned, fits with their values. Each reflection section has been paired with symbols of Nature Connection Pathways to help the teacher to encourage reflecting on the pathway

aspects (e.g. Compassion: How can we make sure the trees have enough space...Beauty: which one of the seeds do you think was most beautiful and why, Senses: How did you find the smell of the leaves you collected?) The reflection questions can be discussed in a group or dealt with individually, using e.g. mind mapping as a reflective tool. The mind map can be then posted on the classroom wall. Often the reflective questions are bordering on ethics, and there exists no one right answer, but multiple views. If the reflections lead the teacher and/or the students to more questions, that is even better. The matter you are working on is complicated. You can always refer to the (Ch10) (10. Introduction to urban trees and forests) for more contextual information.



### Themes

The package has been divided into three overlapping and interconnected themes: climate change (orange), biodiversity (green) and health (blue). Though we have dedicated one major theme for each lesson, you will see that the themes are so connected, they could include all the exercises. You will see the templates in green, orange and blue. The lessons most in front of the package are supposed to be easiest to start with.



### Links

Trees, urban forests and their importance to planetary wellbeing is a complex entity and we do not assume to cover every aspect of this complexity. However, to be able to understand the context behind some topics, we have linked information throughout the document so that you can easily find background information and context of any concept you wish to know more about. You are also welcome to

study or duplicate (parts of) the text from (Ch10) (10. Introduction to urban trees and forests) for your students.



### Exercise pairing and keywords

If a teacher would like to continue on the topic, we have indicated other lessons that continue on the same topic. We have also added keywords to help you navigate to other lessons that talk about the same topic but from a different angle. This will allow you to look for more information on the same topic from a different angle in the other lessons section.



### Students Materials

Next to this document you'll also find a package for Students Materials. This document consists of an introduction to the material to raise awareness on the importance of this material to students. This package of Students Materials can be given to the students before starting with one of the lessons.

Alternatively, this material is meant for students who can engage in individual work without teacher guidance, as e.g. extracurricular activity. This can be done in class, or individually at home. In either case, you can omit the first page of the lessons (the description, student goals etc). and provide them the pages starting from Setting the scene.

The lessons that can be followed individually are the following:

- #1 It all starts from a seed
- #2 Noticing trees in cities
- #7 Forest for rest
- #10 Finding peace of mind in the city
- #11 (non)- native species

Please note that the above listed lessons require that the students do some observations or material collection in their living surroundings. Use your own discernment to substitute group work prompts other ways of reporting, e.g. video diary, journaling, or artwork.

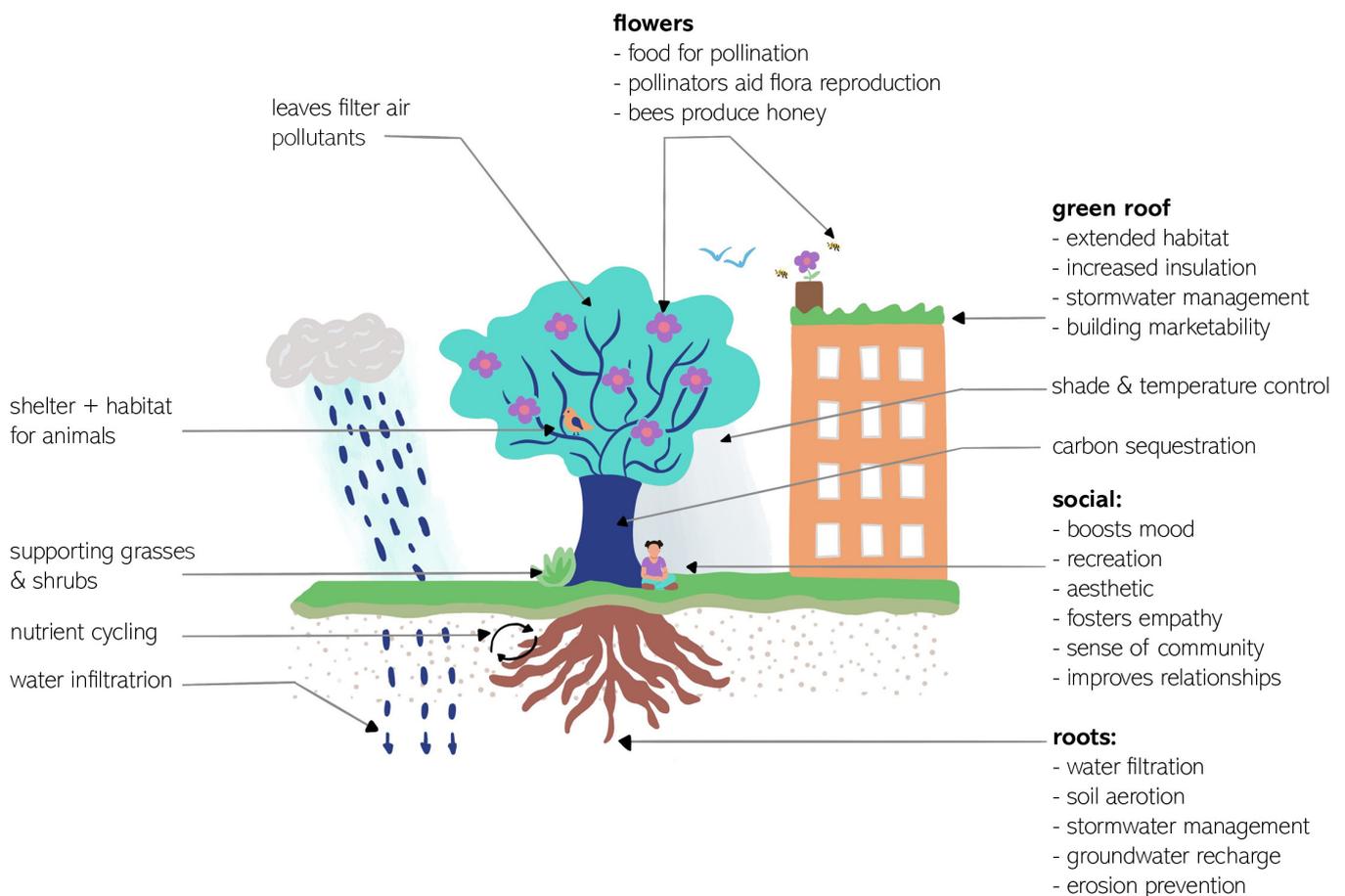


# 3. Why should you teach about urban trees and forests?

## 3.1 Importance of trees and urban forests

Urban trees and forests provide the city residents an endless list of benefits. Next to ecosystem services listed in the graph below, the urban forest is a link to nature, which is our source of health and wellbeing both directly and indirectly. All of the benefits are explained in much detail in the (Ch10) (10. Introduction to urban trees and forests).

### Ecosystem services of a tree



In the following list, we summarize some of the most striking direct benefits to our wellbeing from getting in contact with nature.

- Studies have shown that humans can restore from stress and mental exhaustion better in natural surroundings (parks, forests, etc.) than in built environments (e.g. city streets, etc.) Spending time outside unplugged from technology helps our bodies and minds to calm down even without us knowing it. It is how we have been built!
- Coming in contact with natural materials, such as tree bark, forest soil, stones, leaves, moss...is good for our physical health. In natural environments, such as the forest, there exist a number of microbes that are absolutely not dangerous to us. On the contrary, our system should be exposed to these microbes to know the difference between what it should armor up against, and what is safe to be in contact with. That is how we keep our immune system army well trained and functioning.
- Nature lifts our moods when we are feeling down. Also, our feelings of positivity and wonder increase when we spend time outside. Just think of an afternoon at the beach, a walk in the park, or a beautiful view out the window. Indeed, even a view out of the window to nature can help us to feel better!
- Imagine a view over a scenic mountain landscape. Looking far can induce a feeling of awe which has been discovered to generate more generous, more friendly behaviors in us. This feeling of awe relates to gratitude which has been shown to increase our satisfaction in life.
- Nature affects our creativity: when our brains have had the time to rest - which it does automatically in a green environment because this is how we and our nervous systems have been wired - creative and abstract thinking can flourish again. Therefore, during stressful times, it is especially important to schedule some time of doing nothing and just looking at some trees, flowers or birds in the sky.
- It is not only the sights of nature but also sounds and pleasant smells of nature that our brain recognizes and that help to produce the same wellbeing effects of stress reduction and mood enhancement.
- Time in nature can also significantly help by reducing ADHD symptoms as the volume of stimuli is less and the nature of the stimuli is softer. Imagine the difference between car horns and bird song... There is nature at work!
- Finally, being outdoors in nature influences our physical body and immunity when we are exposed to sunlight. Our skin absorbs the vitamin D from the sun light which is good for our immunity in reasonable doses. Furthermore, the air is normally cleaner in natural environments where the sources of pollution are further and the trees help to filter out air pollutants, and there is more oxygen which refreshes us in comparison to a stuffy room. Doing sports outdoors, builds our condition faster, because movement outdoors feels more effortless because nature has many sights and sounds to pay attention to.



In the following sections, we will introduce the specific benefits that trees and green spaces provide to pre-teens and teens. Next to that, we motivate the building blocks of this Inspirational package and why certain aspects are important when learning about urban trees and forests.

## 3.2 Importance of trees for pre-teens

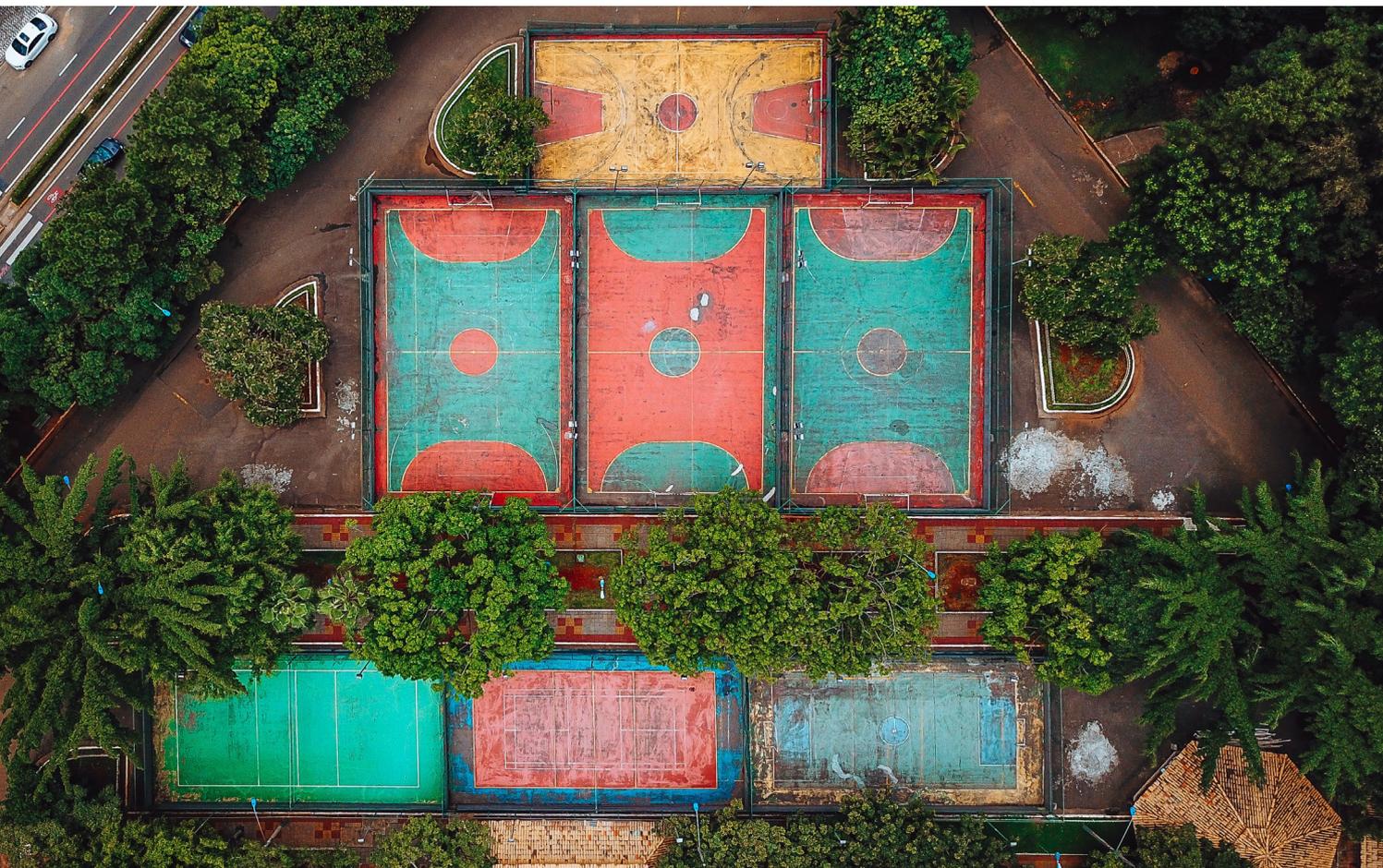
Urban green spaces provide the youth places to spend time being physically active, to socialize or to enjoy a quiet moment on one's own. As digitalization is more and more part of the youth's lives, urban greenspaces invite youth to break through the sedentary behavior and move for their overall health. Many youngsters nowadays have been removed from daily interactions with the natural world and forests in particular, which weakens their inherent knowledge about nature and forests, the phenomena and interdependencies, the use of the natural resources etc. Nevertheless, urban green spaces are important for pre-teens who are entering a challenging time in their lives. Next to the physical and mental development, the formation of identity are important phases in the young person's life, during which time friends becomes more important than parents. Many young people experience stress due to homework, their own ambitions, as well as fear of failure or of saying no to the teachers. Disagreements with those important friends and being (cyber) bullied all needlessly contributes to stress in young people. Many youngsters try to fight this with the help of short-term solutions like watching TV, surfing the internet or taking a bath and seem to need more guidance in how to cope with stress.

Though nature seems of secondary important in the adolescent's life, nevertheless, natural areas and contact with nature provides a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social benefits (9.9 Dr. Forest and trees at your service for our health) for youngsters. Green spaces , such as green school yards or other public spaces with greenery, can provide the space where adolescents can escape stress through leisurely or active movement. They get the possibility to (re)focus, build competences and self-confidence, and form supportive social groups.

Children and youth from minority groups tend to have poorer access to high quality natural environments than their majority culture counterparts, though the direct benefits from nature are as vital for immigrant children and youth, if not even greater, than for majority population. In addition, contact with nature can help immigrant youth cope with their stress and feelings of sadness, as the outdoors in the new country always includes some elements to identify with.



### 3.3 Importance of green school yards



Natural environments can mitigate the symptoms of a number of ailments. Therefore, green school yards offer an important resource for student also on higher levels, as they enable nature exposure that the children and youngsters might not otherwise get to outside of school hours.

Research has proven that spending time in nature can reduce the tendency for violence and stress in youngsters and help them cope with symptoms of ADD and ADHD. There is even research that points to a positive link between near-school nature to a decrease in criminal behavior at school and improved cognitive development. Kids with ADHD could concentrate better when they frequently visited and worked on a youngsters' farm.

Nevertheless, due to our sedentary lifestyles and increased screen-time, which has been estimated to be at least 2 hours a day for young people, youngsters and adults and children alike tend to move less nowadays. Encouraging movement throughout the day can protect the youth from life-long illnesses caused by sedentary behavior. Supporting movement outdoors during recess is a real incentive to adopt a life-long, physically active lifestyle, which can be considered a crucial preventive health measure.

In addition, getting to school either by foot or by bike can constitute over half of children and youth's daily recommended brisk exercise. Especially biking to school has been found to be positively correlated to overall fitness. If, during this bicycle ride on his/her way to school, the teenager is exposed to green space, this can also make up a significant part of the young person's nature exposure within the day.

# 4. Trees and forests as school subjects

This weakened link to nature also means a weakened position for the urban greenery as the youth won't grow up understanding their inherent value and therefore will not be there as citizens demanding more livable cities and protecting the existing natural environments in the cities. In order for the average citizen to understand the importance of the urban forests, some basic knowledge has to be introduced into education to facilitate the raising of citizens who understand, value and want to safeguard healthy urban forest ecosystems in the future.

Due to their broad impact on our survival but also quality of life, single street trees and forest ecosystems can be found to fit in a number of subjects on top of the traditional natural sciences and mathematics. When reading about the history of cities and economic development, trees as a resource will play a role. Learning about art forms and what has inspired artists throughout the world, forested landscapes will play a role. Tree and nature related vocabulary in different languages conveys surprisingly more information about species and in societal topics, forests health impacts, access to forests and greenery in urban neighborhoods teaches about the importance of urban trees and forests in a holistic manner.

Furthermore, a common theme that crosses through subject lines, i.e. integrated study, brings together diverse disciplines in a comprehensive manner rather than keeping subjects strictly separated. The benefits of this approach to teaching - integrating either horizontally or vertically - is that it enables the development of meaningful understanding of the complex associations and influences within a topic. The great and complex questions of our time, both in education and in society, do not respect the boundaries of disciplines but require thinking that is broader and more general.



## 4.1 What keeps teachers from teaching about urban forests?

In many practical circumstances, knowledge exchange is still the standard practice, though the days of believing that if knowledge simply was transferred to students, responsible action would follow, are theoretically long gone. Though materials exist in a variety of topics and levels of complexity, the need for extra time to prepare the activity which requires additional hours, can often keep the most motivated teacher from carrying out their best intentions. Next to lack of time, also teachers own lack of interest, motivation and familiarity with the subject play a role, as do the rigidity of the curriculum, lack of or distance to green spaces from and around school, as well as lack of resources (lack of finances, lack of supervisors).

There is a broad consensus that we need to move towards active, participative, and experiential learning methods that engage the learner and make a real difference to their understanding, thinking and ability to act. Only through broadening the perspective of environmental education onto capacity building, communication and creating public awareness, can the adults of the future have any chance to tackle the world's most serious environmental problems through collective public change. These have also been seen as key strategies for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## 4.2 Characteristics of the most effective environmental programs

Due to e.g. the reporting pressure that teachers experience, lack of resources, class sizes, and unfitting school yards, all too often educational activities in nature are limited to a few, even one outing per year. Activities that take time once a year are positive bonus but do not enable spontaneous and frequent contact with nearby nature which is needed, preferably in familiar settings. Though students will benefit from inspiring visits to more exotic venues (e.g. the seaside, a botanical garden), frequent real life and long-lasting contact with familiar nature seems to be more effective. In these activities, an action component is necessary for the students to engage.

Another important component in most effective environmental programs is that young people see that their efforts are taken seriously, and that they are able to realise at least some of their ideas. To this end, a citizen science project, a collaborative scientific process with non-scientists and scientists, is a good example as it highlights the goals to be reached and allows to practise action skills among others. In this package, we have highlighted ways in several lessons where students can engage their communities and take their lessons learnt to the local government.

The most effective programs in schools, after-school programs and nature centers, measured in terms of young people's increased environmental concern and action, have been found to embody the following characteristics:

- provide opportunities to gain knowledge
- provide opportunities to form positive attitudes about the environment
- provide opportunities to learn and practice action skills
- activities should take place in extended duration of time, fed with one of events
- aim to succeed in achieving some valued goals



# 5. Importance of feeling connected to nature

The increased time that children and youth spend indoors and in man-made surroundings and not in direct exposure to nature and natural elements contributes to the disconnectedness from nature. However, this disconnect also refers to the alienation that humans have come to experience with regards to nature. Therefore, when we witness the loss of interactions with nature, we do not only witness the diminishing of a wide range of health and well-being advantages. What is perhaps even more alarming, disconnect from nature also discourages people's positive emotions, attitudes, and behavior with regard to the environment which can lead to a cycle of dysfunctional relationships with nature in the following generations.

Nature connectedness (or nature relatedness), is a measurable psychological construct that deals with an individual's sense of their relationship with the natural world. This concept is measurable using a questionnaire with questions like *"I always think about how my actions affect the environment"* or *"My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area"*. The result of this test tells you how connected to nature you experience yourself to be.

It has been found that an individual's actual nature relatedness is an excellent predictor of greater psychological well-being and pro-environmental behavior.



Recently studies have revealed that it is needed to go beyond activities that simply engage people with nature through knowledge and identification to pathways that develop a more meaningful and emotional relationship with nature. Five pathways to increased nature connection have been established and these pathways provide a route for people to develop a new relationship with the natural world, one which can move beyond utility and control, beyond knowledge and identification.

The 5 pathways (Meaning, Compassion, Senses, Emotion and Beauty) are illustrated below and are used in

the Inspirational Package to highlight which pathways are used to support connectedness with nature in each lesson. We invite you to reflect upon them at the end of each lesson together with students.

## 5.1 Pathways to nature connectedness



**MEANING** - nature bringing meaning to our lives, e.g. the first migratory birds in the spring, a sunset or sunrise...



**COMPASSION** - caring and taking action for nature, e.g. collecting trash in nature, helping a wounded animal..



**SENSES** - tuning in to nature through the senses, e.g. listening, enjoying the scents, feeling the textures, ..



**EMOTION** - feeling alive through the emotions & feelings nature brings, e.g. hearing the increased birdsong in the spring, experiencing a thunder storm or a blizzard,



**BEAUTY** - noticing nature's beauty, e.g. enjoying a breathtaking landscape, rainbow, a detail, scent, sound, music or piece of art depicting or inspired by nature...

## 5.2 Practices associated with gains in nature connection among young people

Researchers have been able to identify practices that are associated with strengthening young people's connection with nature. These are listed in the table below.

- Provide time for direct engagement with nature and immersion in natural areas
- Focus on experiences that define nature connection:
  - Affiliation, a sense of belonging, a sense of oneness
  - Enjoyment
  - Comfort and confidence in nature
  - Curiosity, interest, exploration
  - Challenge and achievement
  - Understanding human interdependence with nature
  - Empathy and concern for other living things
  - Caring for wildlife and natural habitats
- Give young people time to encounter nature at their own pace, following their own interests
- Let them know that there are many ways to be a 'nature person', including play and recreation in nature, working the land sustainably, gardening, studying natural history, caring for animals, making art in nature
- Make young people partners in collective efforts to study and protect the natural world
- Ground experiences in the local culture and ecology
- Share examples of people's enthusiasm and care for nature
- Make sure young people see others who look like them engaged with nature
- Enable young people to record their observations and experiences through writing, scientific record keeping and the arts
- Start young, but provide access to nature for all ages
- Aim for extended engagement, but even short-term experiences in nature can lead to gains in nature connection
- Allow young people to overcome fears in nature or fears of particular species through gradual interactions at their level of comfort

From Chawla, 2020.



## 5.3 Reflection as a process that strengthens learning

As mentioned in the previous page, recording one's observations and experiences, a student is pushed to reflect on the experience and material he or she has just learned. Reflection allows the learner to integrate the understanding she or he has gained into one's experience. This new insight will enable them to make better choices in the future as well as enhance one's overall effectiveness.

In this material package, every lesson ends with a reflection moment. This reflection moment can be done in a group or individually. However, it is important to engage all students into the reflection.

The benefits of reflection include:

- promotes independent learning and critical thinking
- teaches organising and express their thoughts
- increases confidence and self-awareness
- develops interpersonal skills
- motivation for their studies increases as they monitor and take responsibility for their own development



Teachers should be supported in engaging students in reflection. Many students do not initially understand how reflection may help them and feel that reflection is over-emphasised. It has been demonstrated that technology (audiovisual formats, such as video and multimedia web applications) can be used effectively to support reflection. However, the use of audio-visual formats should not substitute all written reflection. For example, mind maps/concept maps, 'spider' diagrams or simply arranging post-it notes according to themes, are useful creative tools that help to structure, categorize and make connections between ideas. Mind maps provide the student with an overview of key concepts and their connections, and help reflective learning become visually engaging, dynamic and memorable. Mind maps can help to summarise and reflect on the gained knowledge and understanding on a particular topic.

# 6. Environmental anxiety

Climate anxiety among the youth is part of the wider environmental anxiety phenomenon. Environmental anxiety refers to a difficult feeling that is to a large extent due to environmental problems and threats. Both environmental and climate anxiety, as well as the anxiety caused by the pandemic, are part of the phenomenon in which the state of the world starts affecting mental health (Pihkala, 2019).

Anxiety is a reasonable reaction to the magnitude of the world's environmental problems, not to mention the pandemic. Anxiety can however become a problem if it becomes so severe that the person becomes paralysed. There are two fundamental challenges and tasks in dealing with the mental aspects of any of these environmental problems: maintaining capacity by adapting to changing conditions, and the ability to live with the ambivalence.



The global School Strike lead by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg has mobilised millions of youngsters worldwide. This movement should be seen as encouraging as it touches upon the central coping mechanisms of climate anxiety and environmental problems at large, namely expressing one's feelings and taking action.

Opportunities for action help with mental coping with global problems on one hand, but at the same time overemphasising action can lead to avoidance of emotions fueled by the environmental problems and even

underestimating the risks of these global problems. However, "negative" feelings such as grief and anger could be channeled into action and motivation.

Many people have turned to mindfulness for calm and happiness in their lives. Research shows that mindfulness helps to reduce anxiety as it allows us to notice our thoughts and respond to stress with awareness of what is happening in the present moment. Rather than simply acting instinctively, unaware of what emotions or motives may be driving our actions, we become more mindfull of what is going on between our ears and in our bodies. Mindfulness group activities in nature offer a simple and effective way of creating enriching experiences in life that support our coping skills in challenging times. The mindfulness exercises added to this Inspirational Package in **Ch 10. (10. Finding peace of mind in the city)** are also a way nurture strong, caring groups that support each other in the time of need – just like an urban forest supports its individual trees.

# 6.1 Coping with environmental, climatic and pandemic anxiety

Australian Psychology for Safe Climate (PSA) organisation's strategies for "Coping with Climate Change Distress" summarising central psychological coping mechanisms for self-regulation. With a little adaptation and certainly paying attention to the social distancing rules, these can also help in the pandemic anxiety.

## Behavioral strategies:

- **Having fun, feeling good:** Working out the positive aspects of sustainability, and talking about these;
- **Maintain healthy routines:** physical exercise; healthy food; enough sleep; time in nature; permission to good around
- **Take action:** participate in climate action groups; lobby politicians & industry leaders; change behaviours
- **Take a break from being too focused on the problem:** turn off the 24/7 news feed; dedicate a 'do nothing day'
- **Focus on one issue to lower stress levels:** prioritise the activities you chose to invest your energy into.

## Relational strategies:

- **Seek social support:** Share concerns, thoughts & feelings with trusted friends & colleagues
- **Drop the judgements:** 'shoulds' & assumptions: difficult life experiences are painful enough without criticism
- **Balance action with reflection:** Read, write a journal or blog, talk with kindred spirits about how they cope.
- **Cultivate hope:** transforming fear into a something positive. Fear can fuel action.
- **Restore yourself psychologically:** spend time in (green) environments that match your aims to restore yourself.



Teachers and parents should address environmental problems in an age-appropriate way to reduce the potential stress it causes to the children and youth. Positive actions should be encouraged as an alternative and allow the children and youth to participate and contribute to e.g. the global climate change protests and creative projects in which they can express their concerns. This Inspirational Package is doing its part in teaching children why trees and forests are key in protecting the livability of our planet in the changing climate.

Additional strategies to help cope with environmental change are listed in the table below.

## Strategy

## Application of the strategy in practice

**Combine the science of environmental change with information about how to make a difference**

Young people need to understand physical and social causes of environmental changes in order to identify effective solutions. It is equally important for them to know what they can do to address problems, what others are doing, and how decisions made today have the potential for positive impacts tomorrow

**Create a receptive space where young people can share emotions**

Let young people know that they can safely share their feelings about the environment. Take time to listen receptively. Be supportive and solutions oriented

**Encourage the positive reappraisal of problems**

Help young people find meaning in addressing environmental challenges and see positive possibilities in the changes societies need to make to preserve the natural world

**Engage in visioning**

With a focus on local areas, engage young people in visioning futures they would like to see unfold and identifying realistic steps to move in the desired direction

**Provide young people with opportunities to experience agency**

Enable young people to investigate environmental problems that concern them, determine personally meaningful actions to address the problems, and implement practical ideas that they can accomplish individually or in partnership with others

**Foster social trust**

Bring young people together with others who are working to protect and restore the natural world, enabling them to see that they are not alone but allied with others who are working on nature's behalf

**Show that voluntary simplicity can be a fulfilling way of life**

Introduce young people to examples of individuals and groups who find happiness in community, creativity, service and nature, instead of the accumulation of more and more material things

**Connect young people with nature**

Give young people time to become comfortable and competent in nature and feel kinship with other living things

# Resources

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## CREDITS, PARTNERS



