

CONCEPT NOTE EVENT 21 June

Title: Water talks - reducing urban water risks for a sustainable development in a changing climate

Where: NL Permanent Representation Brussels

When: 21 June 2018, 11am -1pm

What:

The climate crisis is a water crisis. Nine out of every ten disasters are water-related, causing 1.700 billion dollars' worth of damage worldwide between 1995 and 2015 (UN). While the world is becoming more urbanized, cities are feeling the stress of increased populations, climate change impacts and environmental degradation, all contributing to water-related disaster risks.

Business as Usual urbanization means turning natural soil-types into concrete and landfilling wetlands, such as riverbeds, floodplains and mangroves. While reducing water storage capacity, concrete surfaces cause increased rain run-off and river flow, this type of unsustainable development also destroys the natural infrastructure functions of these wetlands that actually protect cities. This is a recipe for disaster, happening in cities across the globe.

Safeguarding and restoring wetlands contributes to reducing water related risks and building resilience to climate change. In an urban context this means combining ecosystem restoration with smart engineering solutions in the wider landscape.

The time is now for mayors to stand up for wetlands and mobilise stakeholders to integrate these natural buffers into the new model for urban development; as a natural part of water infrastructure. It is fundamental to consider the role of wetlands when planning urban protection from extreme events (such as floods, but also fires and landslides) which are expected to increase under climate change scenarios. This will help cities to become less exposed and less vulnerable to impacts from climate change and reduce disaster risks. Furthermore, integrated flood risk solutions incorporating wetlands are adaptive, often cost-effective and provide multiple benefits to society e.g. recreation, increased property value and other economic benefits. They can be combined with grey solutions (hybrid-engineering) when different multi-sectoral expertise and community perspectives are brought to the table in the early stages of planning.

This year's World Wetlands Day (2 February) focused on wetlands for a sustainable urban future. Our water talk is to be seen as a follow up of that celebration and the discussion will serve to inform policy and decisions makers of the importance of wetlands as natural buffers to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthening urban resilience. A sustainable management of water resources is critical for urban development. Sharing successful wetlands/water management policies, strategies and projects at EU level and in development cooperation projects would be an invite to invest on wetlands for a resilient and sustainable urban future. The key messages of the event will serve to input the upcoming discussion on the next multiannual financial framework, the evaluation of the EU Adaptation strategy and the upcoming Open Forum on disaster Risk Reduction in Italy.

HOW:

- a short introduction of the issue
- each speaker presenting (no ppts, just a few engaging visuals if possible) their chosen work in 10 minutes
- short remarks by a very few discussants (2 to 3)
- moderated discussion with the audience about key issues and avenues for further work,
- closing comments.

KEY MESSAGES

Mayors, urban planners and other decision-makers need to recognise that development and spatial plans can sustainably address climate risks if they adopt an interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach from a landscape perspective. This approach helps them to:

- Identify and address the root causes of risk (environmental degradation, building in risk zones, climate change impacts)
 - An understanding of how risk is expressed at spatial scales (within a river basin or at a coastline)
 - The needs and perspectives of all actors involved, including local communities
 - The adverse consequences of unsustainable practices (creating new risks)
 - Key role of wetlands to buffer extreme water related events in an urban context
 - Recognition of the urban benefits of wetlands for human wellbeing additional to reducing flood risk incl. recreation, increased property value, biodiversity related tourism
 - Possibilities for designing and implementing improved ecosystem management solutions as part of the development programme, which can be combined with grey infrastructure solutions
 - Finally, it is key to recognise and support the role of civil society to help drive inclusive and ecosystem smart solutions for sustainable urban development.
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