

STEP UP SERIES
CONVERSATIONS

CanU 2020 Vancouver

Access to Nature



INTRODUCTION:

As one of four conversations planned for this year, this is an opportunity to explore more deliberately and creatively how we can support resilience in Canadian city-building. We have heard from a series of urbanists who have shared their personal perspectives and insights - the 'big ideas' that they believe will provide better access for all to the services, amenities and benefits of natural areas and assets in an urban setting.

The goal of the STEP UP Series is to articulate actions for change in the design of Canadian cities underpinned by equity, livability and sustainability. Our panelists' experience and insight will help us unlock the 'big ideas' behind these actions. In this online dialog series we are especially interested in the idea of 'access for all' to the benefits of the urban environment - with an emphasis on nature, mobility, housing and daily needs.


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Connecting natural systems and smaller urban landscapes across cities and neighbourhoods can provide for a deeper, ecologically resilient public realm that facilitates placemaking, honours culture, and serves the innate human need for access to nature.

Access to Nature

SUMMARY

In the context of these exceptional times, the protection of natural systems and resources, the resiliency of human-made environments and access to nature stand out even more poignantly than before as key issues for the future of our planet and societies.

The webinar Access to Nature addressed the notions of green systems (natural and anthropic) and green infrastructure as fundamental themes and endeavors of our professional fields. In other words, we need to think boldly about the encounter between natural systems and urban planning, between nature and culture. Both large-scale development and small-scale interventions must be handled in a more radical, cross-disciplinary approach, breaking down the silos of planning and governance, and zoning for that matter. These institutional barriers hinder the creation of more resilient ways of city building and the huge social and economic benefits that come from healthier natural environments at all scales of the city.

Whereas science-based approaches should guide decision making (soil and species selection, water and canopy management) in Canada, there is much to learn from indigenous worldviews regarding our relationship, interconnectivity and responsibility to the natural world. Sensitivity and openness to other forms of knowledge also remind us of our planning and design fields' responsibility to ensure all voices in the design of open spaces and the need to create design environments that guarantee citizen engagement. A more inclusive and equitable access to natural systems in an urban environment can also mean a time-sharing management approach to accessibility to safeguard the resiliency of all forms of life.

BOLD IDEAS

Reframe

- Endorse an all-living-things ethic
- Initiate green systems and green infrastructure projects as true opportunities for reconciliation with first nations and métis people
- Develop performance targets and measures of ecological benefits to assess and promote the fundamental value of green systems and infrastructure
- Tax grey infrastructure

Advocate

- Advocate locally so that every city succeeds in developing a Green Plan
- Generate local champions that can push the envelope at the political level
- Engage in the network of creative cities to exchange and learn from others
- Leverage relationships and involve landowners
- Ensure all stakeholders come in early in every project to foster common understanding
- Plan large scale, but develop small scale and step-by-step strategies

Design differently

- Create networks and corridors of green systems through the urban environment
- Rethink the street and infrastructure rights-of-way for biodiversity connectivity
- Breakup monofunctional environments with hybrid and layered landscape and infrastructure components
- Introduce true living ecosystems into urban neighborhoods