Biocultural diversity in cities – from the static concept towards the dynamic relationship between culture and nature

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In this paper, we present a framework for Urban Biocultural Diversity (BCD). The original concept of BCD emerged from small-scale studies on indigenous people and their sustainable ways of using and managing natural resources. However, urbanity can be seen as a threat for many manifestations of BCD. Urban biocultural diversity is a concept in the making – we define it here as the variability of interactions between humans and natures and their physical manifestations.

We will present results of an explorative survey in 20 European cities, which was carried out within the EU-FP7 research project, GREEN SURGE. It focuses on how biocultural diversity is manifested in highly modernized European cities.

Biodiversity in cities were valued by origin of species, beneficial characteristics of species or green spaces. Cultural diversity was most commonly considered through different socio-cultural groups and their specific needs. Another perspective to cultural diversity emerged from place dependent characteristics, which either represented current quality of place or cultural heritage. Green spaces could be seen an important place to increase or support social cohesion or multicultural interaction.

The development goals and management practices adopted by cities reflect many ways how BCD is created. The first we looked up the main focuses at city level. Maintaining green network was considered most important BCD creative to support ecological connectivity, equal access to green areas for citizens, and enable recreational use of green areas. The second focus is at the local level and is related to quality of green spaces. Ecological and socio-cultural values of green spaces were simultaneously proceed in multifunctional urban green areas. Typical bioculturally significant places that was considered to support biological and cultural diversity by city authorities were urban community gardens and multifunctional parks that supply needs of different socio-cultural groups.

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