

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 249 (2008)¹ Biodiversity policies for urban areas

1. Biological diversity² is essential for life, ecological balance and well-being. It is facing unprecedented, irremediable threats from man-made causes, in particular, pollution, global warming and uncontrolled urbanisation.

2. Biodiversity in urban areas is of fundamental importance for the health, quality of life, social and economic soundness of towns and cities. It reflects a successful cohabitation between humans and nature and offers a bridge between city dwellers and country dwellers.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe believes that sustainable development entails joined-up solutions and urban biodiversity strategies should be considered together with other environmental policies addressing, *inter alia*, spatial planning, transport and mobility, energy resources, water and waste management.

4. Through its capacity to absorb carbon dioxide gases, biodiversity is able to significantly reduce the extent of climate change. In urban areas biodiversity offers possibilities for adaptation to the impacts of climate change by cooling the temperature, improving air, water and soil quality, offering protection from the sun and regulating water flow, especially floodwater.

5. Although constituting a small fraction of the world's overall biodiversity, urban biodiversity has particular importance because of its close proximity to the majority of the world's population. This proximity is a key element for people's knowledge and understanding of biodiversity. Furthermore, urban biodiversity helps foster a sense of cultural and regional identity. It provides a tool for the revitalisation of neighbourhoods and can be used for educative and recreational activities.

6. The Congress welcomes the existing international instruments on the promotion and protection of biodiversity. It notes with satisfaction the pioneering initiative of the Council of Europe with the elaboration of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats in 1979 followed by the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992 and more recently the Countdown 2010 Initiative to reduce biodiversity loss by that date.

7. However, the Congress is concerned that urban biodiversity is not specifically addressed in any of the basic texts on biodiversity protection. This deficiency is all the more regrettable given that cities and agglomerations are home to a wide variety of vegetal and animal species which are subject to specific pressures in urban areas.

8. In this respect, the Congress particularly welcomes the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (2000) which recognises urban and peri-urban areas as landscapes to be protected, managed and planned and as having an important role to play in the quality of life for people everywhere.

9. The Congress commends the Curitiba Declaration on Cities and Biodiversity (2007), signed by mayors throughout the world, which emphasises the crucial role of local authorities in the protection of biodiversity. It also welcomes the 2007 Brabant-Oisterwijk Appeal: "Regions as champions for biodiversity 2010" which gives the European biodiversity 2010 commitments substance at regional and local levels.

10. The Congress believes that the activities undertaken by networks and local authorities to improve and protect biodiversity within the framework of the Countdown 2010 Initiative, Local Agenda 21s and in preparation for the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 are of particular importance.

11. The Congress hopes that the acknowledgement and greater involvement of regional and local authorities in the achievement of the 2010 Biodiversity Targets and the support brought to the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 2007) prefigures growing international recognition of urban biodiversity.

12. *In the light of the above, the Congress calls upon local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member and observer states to:*

a. recognise that urban and peri-urban ecosystems have their own specificity and complexity and that their protection, promotion and management should be addressed in specific policies and as part of an integrated sustainability management system;

b. participate at their own level of governance in coordinated urban biodiversity activities which respond to the Countdown 2010 Initiative;

c. encourage the 9th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to be held in Bonn in May 2008, to explicitly address the protection and development of urban biodiversity;

d. sign the Aalborg Commitments which affirms "territorial authorities" responsibility to protect, to preserve, and to ensure equitable access to natural common goods;

e. take into account the interdependency between urban and rural areas and put in place policies which promote green and compact cities thereby avoiding their sprawl into natural zones;

f. implement master plans for biodiversity policy in urban areas involving all stakeholders and which:

i. draw up inventories, assessments and mapping of existing ecosystems and threatened species and identify the land available for the development of ecologically-sound biodiversity;

ii. control the introduction, establishment and spread of invasive species;

iii. establish biodiversity indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and set up biodiversity monitoring offices which should work with structures monitoring climate change, water policy, mobility and spatial planning;

iv. introduce financial and fiscal incentive schemes which encourage businesses and individuals to integrate biodiversity into their building projects;

v. create green corridors to allow different flora and fauna to move within biotopes and along paths and between natural environments;

vi. take into account the cultural and biological specificity of each country and region when dealing with biodiversity locally;

vii. encourage local communities to develop a sense of environmental ownership and empowerment by introducing both ornamental and productive biodiversity in buildings and in public and private green spaces;

g. work with stakeholders to raise awareness and introduce education programmes on urban biodiversity and thereby:

i. offer initiatives for the general public on the need for a healthy ecosystem, recycling and the greening of residential areas;

ii. establish norms and rules and offer incentives to guide the behaviour of urban citizens towards biodiversity;

iii. inform the business community on the environmental and corporate benefits of biodiversity protection and development;

iv. promote the introduction of urban agriculture in family and neighbourhood gardens, roofs and terraces and in urban parks;

v. work with farms in the locality to create and maintain wildlife habitats and foster increased awareness of the benefits of organic produce and buying locally produced goods;

vi. encourage city zoos and similar structures to raise indigenous domestic animals, rather than the more exotic species;

vii. prepare information leaflets and trails on city biodiversity and green spaces for use by the local population and by tourists;

h. promote exchange of experience and good practices on sustainable conservation, enhancement, utilisation and management of urban biodiversity with city networks and with all partners.

13. *Within the perspective of the International Year of Biodiversity 2010, the Congress asks its Committee on Sustainable Development to:*

a. encourage local and regional authorities' initiatives;

b. elaborate a co-ordinated programme in partnership with the intergovernmental sector and the Parliamentary Assembly;

c. develop greater co-operation with the Commission for Sustainable Development of the Committee of the Regions and with international associations of local and regional authorities to establish a common strategy to halt biodiversity loss.

1. Debated and approved by the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Local Authorities on 13 March 2008 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 14 March 2008 (see Document CPL(14)11RES, draft resolution presented by W. Borsus (Belgium, L, ILDG), rapporteur).

2. Biodiversity denotes all life on earth, seen as forming a huge and interdependent system. It covers human beings, animal and plant species, marine and freshwater ecosystems, soils and landscape.