

Managers of European Periurban Parks Address European Members of Parliament . 25th July 2009

On the day following an election that is so vital for the future of Europe, the managers of European periurban parks, who came together within FEDENATUR, have addressed the elected Members of Parliament and European institutions given the lack of recognition of these sites, which we believe are essential in refocusing on biodiversity, to generate services linked to ecosystems for the benefit of society on the whole.

In Europe, nearly 80% of the population lives in urban areas. This concentration has come about to the detriment of the natural environment, farming activity, rich landscapes, fauna and flora. This concentric urban development has seriously hindered biodiversity. The losses are often irreparable, while greener urban development could slow down or even stop such erosion.

Several European cities have taken on a commitment, for a number of years now, to set up active policies for the preservation, renewal and enhancement of vast natural areas in their immediate vicinity.

These cities have formed a European network, FEDENATUR, which fosters a further exchange of experience in an effort to speed up the protection of natural and rural areas surrounding major metropolitan areas such as Barcelona, Genoa, Rome, Milan, Brussels, Lisbon, Lille, Le Mans, etc. About 30 large parks in all are today members of this network. These periurban parks welcome tens of thousands of users per year.

FEDENATUR hopes that the European political officials will take these areas fully into account in their policies with regard to development, as it is the case for national and regional parks.

FEDENATUR believes that an ambitious European policy must take measures to:

- Speed up the protection of natural and rural areas situated close to sites of several thousands of inhabitants and to consider them as essential factors, along with schools, hospitals, marketplaces and libraries.
- Provide the means needed to enrich biodiversity of these ecosystems and the landscapes linked to them
- Foster a return to sustainable farming in the vicinity, a way to manage these periurban areas
- Depart from a sectorial approach in order to build an ecological, economic, social and cultural identity of metropolises to which the multifunctional nature of natural periurban areas contribute
- Consider these periurban natural parks as areas that hold high stakes, making the preparation and implementation of green and blue lines a fundamental element of all acts of sustainable development on this territory.

By far exceeding a legitimate request for leisure activities in the area, natural periurban parks must be recognised as essential actors of green and blue lines, which are absolutely indispensable for building sustainable urban development. Today, too often ignored, natural periurban parks must find their place in European environmental measures.

For these reasons, FEDENATUR in 2008 addressed the IUCN Congress in Barcelona and the French-Speaking Nations' Summit in Quebec, which have led to favourable results.

In this way, FEDENATUR is addressing all the European Members of Parliament. FEDENATUR would like to know their position with regard to the creation of green lines and the technical and financial recognition of periurban areas too often ignored in European criteria, in environmental, farming or economic policies; as they play a major role in the quality of the life of citizens, social exchange, the image of metropolises, tourism in the area and in supporting biodiversity in metropolitan areas.

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Protection of natural areas close to cities helps to mitigate both the causes and the negative impacts of climate change

In an increasingly urbanised world, the need for contact with nature is rising. Most weekends there are long traffic jams of cars leaving or entering the big cities as they head for or come back from distant villages or mountains.

It goes without saying that this produces a large quantity of CO₂ emissions.

Periurban natural areas provide nature and recreation in and around cities and hence cut down on CO₂ emissions by reducing the number of trips by car to other places.

Periurban natural areas offer quality nature spaces that are easy to get to (on foot, by bike, on public transport) where people can go for a walk, ride a mountain bike, look at nature, meet up with friends and in general spend some time near the city yet switched off from it.

Depending on their level of protection or location, periurban natural areas are called different things: national, regional or river parks, nature areas, green zones, green rings, green belts, periurban parks, natural recreation areas, etc.



The presence of green spaces inside and in the boundaries of cities cool their temperatures down. The Parco Nord Milano constitutes the Big Green Square of the town.

The "urban heat island" effect

Not only are CO₂ concentrations increasing rapidly and outstripping the most pessimistic forecasts made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) but temperatures are doing so too.

As a result of excessive urbanisation, temperatures in cities are higher than in adjoining rural areas thus creating what are called "urban heat islands". This rise in temperatures is brought about by a number of factors, with

special prominence taken by the materials used to build housing and heat emissions from HVAC appliances in households, offices and trading establishments.

Periurban natural areas play an important role in reducing local temperatures by absorbing solar energy through photosynthesis or water evaporation, while they also retain humidity and afford a sense of coolness and shade.

A bike track leads to the Arche de la Nature (Le Mans métropole).



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In fact, studies of the extremely hot weather which hit southern Europe in 2003 show that death rates were lower in urban areas near to green spaces [1].

[1] Institut de Veille Sanitaire (INVS), July 2004, Study of risk factors in the deaths of elderly people living in private homes during the heat wave in August 2003, p 115.



Attenuation of extreme climate episodes

One of the most dramatic consequences of climate change has been the rise in the number of extreme climate episodes ranging from fresh outbreaks of droughts to high levels of rainfall. Excessive urbanisation is the root cause why land in cities has become essentially impermeable, and this leads to an excessive build-up of water during torrential rain which cannot be entirely absorbed by sewage systems.

The Vitoria-Gasteiz Green Ring was originally designed to protect the city of Vitoria against regular river overflowing.



Some periurban natural areas play a crucial role in protecting water reserves and protecting cities against flooding and overflowing rivers. The Grand Parc de Miribel Jonage is Gran Lyon's drinking water reserve.

Non-urbanised land that is permeable enables aquifers to refill. Numerous periurban natural areas have been protected initially in order to safeguard cities against overflowing rivers and flooding. In these areas, rainfall seeps through permeable soil to refill the aquifers.

Carbon sinks

Through photosynthesis, plants absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere which they then use to make carbohydrates, some of which will be used for physiological maintenance while the rest will be invested in growth.

This is the way in which forests trap carbon. Numerous periurban natural spaces feature reforested areas which have been subjected to massive tree felling and degradation because they are near cities. In some cases former industrial land or abandoned agricultural fields have been reforested.

Woodland absorbs large quantities of carbon in its growth stage.

Even more important than CO₂ absorption by vegetation is CO₂ storage in the ground. In the terrestrial carbon cycle, organic carbon in the ground is the biggest reservoir of CO₂ interacting with the atmosphere. In addition soil microbes also regulate other greenhouse gases such as methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

Reforested periurban natural areas fulfil a remarkable CO₂ absorption function.

Reforested area in the Parc del Sausset, Department of Seine-Saint-Denis, north of Paris.

Protection of periurban natural areas

The protection of natural spaces around cities is of crucial importance in the planning of cities and metropolitan areas so as to ensure enhanced quality of life for people by providing valuable benefits that go beyond lessening climate change through CO₂ storage and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Periurban natural areas also provide cost-effective solutions to climate threats (flooding, drought), help to cool cities and purify air, host significant natural, geological and cultural heritage, are the venue for recreational, sports and educational activities and in general help to improve people's quality of life and the concomitant social and economic benefits.

Protecting natural areas near cities would appear to be the smart choice from the economic, ecological and social points of view.

The UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol set out general woodland duties which are applicable to all member countries. They have to promote sustainable forest management, foster the preservation of woodland and reinforce its role as a sink and reservoir for greenhouse gases. They must also promote tree planting and reforestation as well as renewable energy. Furthermore, they must see woodland as an integral part of national inventories for greenhouse gas emission and elimination, technology transfer and national programmes to adapt to climate change..

European periurban natural spaces

Many European metropolitan areas have natural spaces in city centres or on the outskirts of built-up areas: woodland, countryside, wetlands and lakes.

Against this backdrop, a number of periurban natural area managers have set up an association called FEDENATUR, the European Federation of Metropolitan and Periurban Natural and Rural Areas.

The aims of FEDENATUR are the following:

- To promote policies for management, conservation and nurturing of natural and rural spaces in metropolitan areas
- To promote the use, compatible with sustainable development, of the resources existing in these spaces
- To promote the instruments of environmental awarenessraising, information and education
- To defend the diversity of the ecosystems and the landscapes
- To promote criteria for environmental management of agriculture
- To seek to meet the recreational and leisure requirements of city residents, based on a usage which is compatible with the conservation of protected spaces
- To ensure high quality technical exchanges among members
- To represent its members at key European institutions in charge of environmental and urban legislation

Periurban natural areas play an important role in the fight against climate change and are also of major benefit to cities. They host economically important activities, play a major role in a city's social balance and are places for oxygenation and where the public can come into contact with nature and the countryside.

