

# Urban Ecosystem Services

## CALL FOR IDEAS PROJECT REPORT

*The 22nd of August 2019 nine researchers and coordinators from LAPF, AEM, Urban Futures and Movium met at the conference facilities of Sankt Gertrud in Malmö for a workshop on assessing and discussing SLU's capacities and strengths developing an SLU Landscape research strategy on urban ecosystem services. The workshop was supported by SLU Landscape as Call For Ideas-project.*

### **Abstract**

There is a current increase of the urban population putting pressure on cities to cope with the increase of people at the same time as maintaining functionality. Currently there is a strong drive to densify cities resulting in a loss of green areas. The concept of urban ecosystem services (UESS) emphasize the multi-facetted importance of urban natural environments for human uses, societal benefits, and socio-ecological values in urban setting. Such multivalent qualities cannot be approached by single disciplines and there is a clear need for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to achieve sustainable urban development.

To critically reflect on contemporary concepts from e.g. smart city to nature-based solutions and to affect actual practices, all researchers of SLU Landscape were invited to a workshop on developing an SLU Landscape research strategy on urban ecosystem services to assess the diverse expertise at SLU that impacts UESS such as: Harvesting diverse positions and interests within SLU concerning UESS, mapping strengths in research fields relevant for UESS at SLU, and identify relevant inter- and/or transdisciplinary research junctions for engaging with UESS in the future.

### **Report**

The participants were asked to prepare a presentation in pecha kucha-style that covered the following items: 1) your position towards/interest in UESS, 2) SLU's (potential) role for UESS, and 3) Future Research & Innovation themes relevant for UESS.

After the presentations, the participants were divided into two small groups where they were discussing the research and innovation themes developed for the Brussels' seminar in march 2018 and ended up in discussions on almost every single word. These themes still seem relevant, but need to be sharpened and more into detail to really target the unique selling points of the broad research capacity within SLU. Further, there need to be additional themes to cover our SLU's strength and uniqueness, such as our capacity in: whole systems-level research, Integrated scenarios, urban planning expertise, creating models to manage complexities of ES, plant soil interactions, people environment interaction, Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, Culture Based Solutions, Landscape services and Nature Based Capital.

### **Conclusions:**

Developing a research strategy on urban ecosystem services is a very complex task within a broad field as UESS at a university with diverse competences and as large as SLU. This CFI project just started a more focused dialogue and collects input for such an endeavor.

Some lessons learned from this project are that identifying competencies at SLU and developing collaboration by making people present their work, to discuss and network is probably more fruitful for the individual researcher as well as for SLU at large, than trying to find consensus on themes. This

process also trains the researcher to present his or her work and increases knowledge within SLU's research communities. Thus, there is an argument to continue the collaborative process of pitching research fields and discussions. Developing a strategy should be a continuous and iterative process, where Urban Futures and Movium could act as supportive structures to bridge people, thoughts and disciplines.

Ecosystems are complex – complex problems need complex solutions, and multidisciplinary teams. To be able to identify the different competencies related to UESS within SLU we need to invite also researchers outside of SLU Landscape. Many researchers are probably doing research applicable in UESS and not knowing it. Most people, who presented at the workshop had a Natural sciences approach to UESS. Therefore it would be in particular interesting to look for people within SLU and beyond that take a social science approach.

One suggestion is to map competencies and their connectivities and present it in a visually pedagogical way, like a network graph. To be able to map the researchers and their research interests related to UESS proposals written within SLU could be screened, or researchers could fill in forms where they tag themselves to specific areas of interest. This suggestion could become a relevant endeavor as SLU is in the process of developing a strategy for the whole university.

Another particular idea that evolved from the workshop was a normative scenario exercise, so-called backcasting that might be interesting to organize a thought process and strategy development. *Backcasting* could be a useful approach to identify competencies at SLU and work towards a goal.

### **A tentative future project roadmap**

#### *“How to foster cross-sectoral collaboration“*

Workshops with the intention to foster cross-sectoral collaboration should be held, e.g. led by SLU's researchers supported by Movium and Urban Futures. Both are key stakeholders in urban research and collaboration and provide funding/seed money to researchers. Movium is also the coordinator of program Built environment within SLU Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, which also provides funding. Invitations should be sent to all researchers at SLU, or target specific groups like the LTV-faculty or SLU Landscape. One suggestion is to form a researcher's forum within SLU Landscape.

The invitation should include a definition on what Urban ecosystem services are so that researchers, who might be less familiar with the concept, realize if their research could be included and contribute to research on UESS.

One target in developing a strategy could be to elaborate an interactive map showing the SLU network of researchers, themes and keywords. To do this there's a need to develop a form where researchers type certain keywords, and use a software that draws a network graph. This map could be presented in an internal/external website, and could play an important role in a backcasting-scenario.

When people get to know each other they feel safe. In safe environments it's easier to be creative. SLU has got a lot of expertise, but we need to improve in collaborative work to be more creative and make use of all of our knowledge. Multivalent qualities or challenges cannot be approached by single disciplines and there is a clear need for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to achieve sustainable urban development.