



World Environmental Hubs

A global Evaluation and Certification System for Sustainable Societies

World Environmental Hubs is a global initiative to establish a system for evaluating and certifying cities and regions which place environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and ecosystem services at the core of urban and regional development.

Population growth and urban expansion have increased the challenge of ensuring that citizens have access to basic needs such as food, water, and energy, and are protected from more frequent and intense natural disasters resulting from climate change. The aim of this new global initiative is to demonstrate how subnational governments can use the solutions provided by nature to tackle these challenges, and show that investing in nature can enhance economic prosperity and social well-being.

The World Environmental Hubs initiative gives recognition to cities and regions showing leadership for sustainable development, and establishes a global platform for exchange of knowledge and best practices to facilitate the transition towards sustainable and resilient societies.



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Cheonggyecheon River, Seoul, South Korea © flickr / Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism

The Challenge

The past few decades have been defined by unprecedented levels of economic and social change. While this rapid transition has led to many positive developments, the pressure on our planet's ecosystems and natural resources has reached a critical point. Nature is our life supporting system. We depend on biodiversity for food, health, energy, natural resources and a range of ecosystem services such as air and water purification, soil fertility and plant pollination. The continuous decline of biodiversity has serious consequences for human life and ultimately its survival.

The international community has recognised these threats; International initiatives, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Rio Earth Summit, Earth Day and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, have brought together a diverse range of stakeholders in an effort to jointly counteract negative environmental impacts and protect the diversity of life on earth.

The Solution

The World Environmental Hubs is a new initiative which aims to support subnational governments in using the solutions provided by nature to overcome the challenges they are facing.

There are strong incentives for subnational governments to develop innovative ways of integrating nature based solutions within planning and policies. Investing in nature enhances economic and social resilience by improving quality of life, saving money, strengthening the local economy and reducing the impacts of climate change. By protecting biodiversity and recognizing nature as an integral part of urban resilience and sustainability, governments can help to secure citizen well-being for the future.

The World Environmental Hubs initiative will identify leading cities and regions around the world which demonstrate a record of high environmental standards and a commitment to working towards a sustainable future. The initiative will strengthen global cooperation, increase collaboration between national and subnational governments, promote exchange of knowledge and best practices and provide a framework for environmental leadership at local and regional levels.

While these efforts have resulted in significant progress towards the conservation of nature, the promotion of sustainable development, and an increased awareness of biodiversity loss and its negative impact on human well-being, multi-level action of governments and other key actors in society must be expanded substantially in order to secure a sustainable future. Particularly in today's complex and globally connected world, in which environmental issues are inextricably linked to economic and political systems, local-level action is crucial to complement global initiatives.

For the effective development of sustainable solutions, intergovernmental cooperation is essential, as it fosters consensus, boosts awareness of the values of nature and facilitates the establishment of powerful legislative frameworks as well as joint action. The full potential of these initiatives can only be fulfilled if all levels of government and society join forces in their efforts – to work in a top-down and a bottom-up approach towards the continued provision of food, water and energy and to deal with challenges, such as climate change.

Subnational governments lead the way

Local and regional governments around the world have taken the lead in demonstrating their commitment to biodiversity protection and acknowledging nature's value for human life. They have shown that investing in nature and green areas – such as parks, green roofs, forests, rivers, city gardens and allotments – can lead to substantial social, economic and environmental benefits by reducing pollution, decreasing energy costs, improving health and well-being and increasing resilience to climate change and natural disasters.

Effective conservation cannot be confined to remote and pristine natural areas, but must be holistic and inclusive. Supporting sub-national authorities in the delivery of nature based solutions on the ground, and inspiring others to follow suit, is vital to ensuring a more sustainable and equitable future. This will require combining a bottom-up approach at local and regional levels with support and involvement of national governments, international environmental organisations, scientists and NGOs.

Jeju, South Korea © Yangbo Kim



World Environmental Hubs:

From vision to reality

The World Environmental Hubs initiative establishes a science-based framework for evaluating and certifying cities and regions which place environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and ecosystem services at the core of urban and regional development strategies. The aim of this global project is to prove that cities and regions, regardless of size or location, can embrace sustainability, and to show that investing in environmental policies and nature based solutions will help societies and economies thrive.

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Jeju, South Korea © Yangbo Kim



Green cycling lane in Berlin © Chantal van Ham

WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HUBS AT A GLANCE

VISION:

A global network supporting subnational governments which recognize nature as an essential provider of vital ecosystem services and a key contributor to economic prosperity and social well-being.

MISSION:

To help subnational governments embrace nature based solutions by offering them guidance on how to place environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and ecosystem services at the heart of their development strategies, and providing them with a platform for exchange and learning.

How it works

The World Environmental Hubs project is characterized by a unique environmental governance system for capacity building and knowledge sharing. It acts as a bridge between national, regional and local governments and facilitates interaction between key international organizations, urban planners, policy makers, landscape developers, the private sector, citizens and other key stakeholders. The project will build on existing networks and knowledge as well as IUCN's global expertise.

A Steering Committee of high-level strategic representatives of subnational governments and The Working Group with technical experts from all over the world will help to shape the

vision, strategy and successful implementation of the World Environmental Hubs initiative.

The Working Group will act as the project's expert advisory panel, providing guidance and technical expertise for the development of a certification and evaluation system based on sound scientific criteria. Local and regional governments will earn recognition for their outstanding achievements while also contributing to and benefiting from the exchange and dissemination of best practices for environmental improvement and sustainable development at local and regional level.

Get Involved

By supporting the World Environmental Hubs initiative you will help to increase collaboration between regions and cities that meet high environmental standards and incorporate environmental concerns in their sustainable development agendas.

You will be part of a global movement seeking to promote a just and equitable world in which nature is recognized as an essential provider of vital ecosystem services and a key contributor to economic prosperity and social well-being.



Landscape in Jeju, Korea © Yangbo Kim

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