

MEDIA KIT

URBAN BIODIVERSITY

Today, it is believed that 50% of the world's population lives in the urban centers as opposed to rural environments. This figure is growing quickly and as a result of this fast increasing number, the natural ecosystem of the planet will change and the world will lose the ecosystem services that are impossible to live without: clean air, clean water, shade, food, resources and even the simple joy of being exposed to beautiful views and nature. Human health will be adversely affected. However, it is also believed that in Israel, the urbanization of the population is already at 90%. There is therefore no choice in Israel other than to protect the environment and nature and to ensure that it is managed in the best possible way. **Jerusalem is considered a leading city on a national and international arena in this field.**

Biodiversity - the variety of life on Earth - refers to all the species on our planet, from the smallest microbe to the largest tree, and how they interact with one another. Urban biodiversity is an essential element in sustainable development, and must not be perceived as an obstacle to growth. The preservation of urban biodiversity is a way to enhance and improve the quality of life for city dwellers through contact with, appreciation of, and involvement in urban nature. Urban biodiversity is now considered by experts to play an essential role in global ecosystem continuity, sustainability, and ultimately human survival on Earth. It is not just about the loss of exotic species and conservation, but rather, about the vital resources which underpin the wealth, the health and wellbeing of us all.

2011-2020 have been designated as the UN Decade on Biodiversity. The UN has warned that biodiversity loss is a "wake-up call" for all governments. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that, "Biodiversity is life, biodiversity is our life!" - a message to all that humanity will suffer if we continue to lose our biodiversity at the rapid rate we are experiencing at present. ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, founded in 1990 as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, is an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organizations that have made a commitment to sustainable development. Jerusalem is a proud member. **The First International Jerusalem Symposium on Green and Accessible Pilgrimage is part of the city's commitment to sustainable development.** By joining ICLEI's LAB Program, Jerusalem has committed to playing an active role in ensuring that sustainable policies are developed at the municipal level, in order to preserve precious local nature sites and reduce threats to urban biodiversity.

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In October 2009, Jerusalem joined the international LAB (Local Action for Biodiversity) Network, a global urban biodiversity program coordinated by ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) for the efficient management and conservation of biodiversity at the local level. In this context, a Forum of Stakeholders representing different municipal departments, government ministries, park authorities, and public interest groups, conducts round-table discussions on a regular basis to promote awareness and foster cooperation for comprehensive and effective local biodiversity policy-making and management. An additional goal of LAB is leveraging biodiversity conservation for social, cultural and economic development.

Since becoming a member of LAB, Jerusalem has committed to a series of action and delivery plans based on a guided, three year program. In this context, Jerusalem has approved going forward with the establishment of a strategic master plan for urban nature (LBSAP - Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan). The primary goals of the plan include integration of urban open spaces into the city fabric through connectivity and accessibility, rehabilitation and restoration of ecological corridors, and formulation of an efficient management system for the city's natural infrastructure. Once completed and approved, the plan will serve as an official statutory tool, empowering the Municipality to enact local biodiversity conservation measures. In addition, plans are being developed for the restoration of several key nature sites in the city, including three major initiatives within the first three years of the program - the Gazelle Valley Urban Nature Wildlife Park Planning Program (Jerusalem LAB's Legacy Project), the Wildflower Sanctuary, and the Railway Park.

As a LAB Member, Jerusalem plays a prominent role in the LAB Phase Two global partnership program alongside more than 21 cities such as Cape Town, Durban, Seoul, Sao Paulo, Nagoya, Amsterdam, and Curitiba, for the promotion of good practice in local biodiversity management and sustainable urban development.

Urban nature is considered an important factor in monitoring urban sustainability and creating an ecologically sound balance between the built-up and natural open environments. Jerusalem is committed to preserving and developing nature resources in the city and to creating quality open spaces for its residents to enjoy healthy outdoor recreational activities. Local parks and nature reserves provide habitats for indigenous plants and wildlife, while serving as vital resources for health, education, nature appreciation, and sustainable tourism.

In cooperation with government institutions, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, and active civil society participation, Jerusalem has successfully implemented a series of local



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urban nature initiatives in recent years. Of particular note is the publication of the Jerusalem Urban Nature Survey, the first of its kind in Israel, documenting 150 significant local nature sites, and the official designation of 40 of these sites for preservation and restoration in the new City Master Plan.

On 23 April, Helene Roumani, Director of LAB (Local Action for Biodiversity) will present the LAB Report for Jerusalem's Biodiversity at the Symposium.

Source: Green Jerusalem- A Sustainable Future, by Helene Roumani, Jerusalem LAB

Lydia Weitzman

Tel: +972 (0) 52 3584395

Email: lydiaweitzman@gmail.com

Caroline Shapiro-Weiss

Tel: +972 (0) 54 4909277

Email: caroline.shapiro@gmail.com