INTA - Biodiversity & Urban Nature: Investing in a Healthier Future

Summary of the 3rd conference

Date: April 23, 2025 • 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Background: third part of the INTA 2025-2026 cycle dedicated to the **culture of urban health**.

Objective of the round	Promote a holistic approach to health in the city; Raise awareness among the urban professional community of the impact of the physical environment on well-being.
Previous Conferences	1.*What is urban health culture?* - Christer Larsson and John Pløger 2. *Mental health, loneliness and the urban environment* - Étienne Lhomet, Léa Portier and Tamara Yazigi.

Summary of the Conference "Biodiversity and Urban Nature: Why and How to Invest for a Healthier Future"

Speakers	• **Thomas Randrup**, Professor, SLU (Sweden) – Specialist in Governance/Management of Green Spaces. • **Karin Krasig Peschardt**, PhD-Landscape Architect, Bio-Strategy Manager, Municipality of **Holbæk** (Denmark). • **Helle Juul (INTA President)**
Introduction by Helle Juul	Reminder of the INTA 2024-2026 strategy focused on the culture of urban health. • Ongoing actions: newsletter and LinkedIn feed (Jacques Gally), global mapping of members. • Publication of field reports (Venice; next interview with Christer Larsson). • General objective: to create panels, to support cities and companies towards innovative approaches to health.

Key points from Thomas B.'s presentation. Randrup (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences)

General framework	• Urban green spaces are now at the heart of multiple **agendas** (health, climate, biodiversity, rainwater management). • Since 2000, publications associating "urban" with these themes have exploded: proof of a growing scientific and political interest.
Key concept: multifunctionality	• It is not only the **quantity** of greenery that counts: the **quality** (diversity of species, good combination) determines the services provided: cooling, well-being, biodiversity.

	• National study (15,000 respondents): beyond **300 m** from a green space, use falls; proximity remains a marker of public health.
Observed Challenges (Northern Studies)	• **Densification**: maximum pressure on the city centre; the periphery, which is less maintained, sometimes sees biodiversity progress. • **Central parks**: small, fragmented, programmed, less "natural" → lower health impact. • **Siloed organization**: budgets and competencies split between 10 or more units; weak horizontal and vertical coordination.
Policy–Practice Gap	• Urban plans all display "green and healthy" cities, but without geographical targets, deadlines or resources → managers hardly refer to them. • Need for concrete and measurable objectives in strategic documents.
Identified obstacles	• Lack of a clear legal mandate (except for recent progress: **European law 2024 on nature restoration**). • Lack of dedicated funding and quantitative evidence on the return to health/economy. • **Engineering culture**: reluctance to move away from proven methods; resistance to change in the field. • **Operational Tactical ↔ Political** ↔ Alignment.
Proposed keys	• More robust local data (health/biodiversity co-benefits). • Real consultation of stakeholders, beyond formal hearings. • Change management: Supporting teams to adopt more integrated approaches.

Conclusion: For green spaces to simultaneously meet health, climate and biodiversity objectives, it is necessary to go beyond the simple creation of parks: this requires coherent governance, clear performance indicators and sustained political commitment.

<u>Speech by Karin Krasig Peschardt</u> *(Bio-strategy Manager, Municipality of Holbæk – Denmark)*

Municipal context	• **Holbæk**: vast territory, two urban centres (30,000 inhabitants / 20,000 inhabitants). • Strong population growth linked to the departure of households from Copenhagen → new bargaining power with developers (nature and health requirements).
Planning challenges	• Climate emergency and erosion of biodiversity. • Urban health is still underestimated in arbitrations. • Gap between national ambitions and **local priorities** - strong dependence on municipal elected officials.

Governance tools	• **Planning strategy** (beginning of mandate): merger of 10 scattered documents → 4 clear themes: urban/rural development, nature-biodiversity, economic attractiveness, climate. • **Municipal plan** (legally binding document): translate the vision into enforceable by-laws → basis for negotiation with the developers.
Multifunctional approach	• The more objectives a project ticks off (biodiversity + rainwater management + heat islands + well-being), the stronger the argument and the more likely the political support.
Datasets mobilized	• **3-30-300 rule** (3 trees visible, 30% canopy, 300 m of green space): red/green mapping that is easy for elected officials to understand. - **Heat island maps**: evidence that retirement homes and high schools are in a critical zone → priority plantations. - **Flood risk maps (100-year rain):** impose retention arrangements in new districts.
Striking case study	Area affected by high risk of flooding: • 2.5 years of developer/municipality dialogue. • Urbanization limited to the dry part; the rest becomes a hydraulic management park and a green corridor.→ The "problem" becomes a landscape and health asset.
Success factors	• **Political will**... or administrative tenacity when it is lacking. • Readable data to convince decision-makers and citizens. • Early involvement of residents (workshops): strengthens support and facilitates adoption by elected officials.
Final message	Municipalities must move from "friendly" health-nature objectives to concrete prescriptions. This requires: • a clear regulatory framework, • local evidence (maps, indicators), • and the courage to negotiate firmly with developers.

Conclusion: "The more a green action responds to several issues — *biodiversity, heat, flooding, well-being...* — the more it becomes essential for decision-makers. »

Discussion – Key Points

1. "Densify" green spaces for equity	Proposed: talk about green densification rather than built to reduce inequalities? • **Thomas Randrup**: Some cities are already internalizing this idea, but the pressure remains strong on central parks; risk of smaller and fragmented plots. A recurring dilemma between urban compactness and the preservation of greenery.
2. Political audacity elsewhere?	• **Thomas Randrup**: the obstacles (silos, slow decision-making, lack of courage) are **global**; the same difficulties observed in Buenos Aires as in Scandinavia.

3. Citizen engagement / digital tools	• **Karin Peschardt**: systematic workshops and public meetings; 18 sectors with a dedicated liaison officer; participatory web platform under development. The objective: "soft" pressure on elected officials through continuous involvement.
4. Transfer, research, → practice	• **Thomas Randrup**: shift towards **applied research**; EU projects require multi-stakeholder teams and measurable impacts; there is still a gap to be bridged between publications and implementation. • **Karin Peschardt** : limited political time → condensing actionable evidence; useful but resource-intensive academic collaborations.
5. Convince elected officials	• Data (indicators, maps) + concrete examples remain more persuasive than abstract principles; importance of quickly presenting tangible benefits (health, economy, image).