

## Green Cities, Happy Cities - Nine Steps for Strengthening City-Forest Relationships

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Arborists and urban foresters can sometimes feel that arguing for having more and better maintained urban trees and urban woods is an uphill struggle. Although there is a general recognition amongst communities, politicians and experts from other fields that trees provide a wide range of benefits, the argument too easily shifts towards prioritizing other interests and seeing trees as a nuisance. As a result, urban forests are under pressure from development, budgets are cuts and residents are not entirely happy with the urban forest around them.

During the past years, research from across the world has provided compelling evidence for at least some of the benefits of urban trees. Studies have demonstrated, for example, the many contributions that trees can make to our health and wellbeing. Although not all mechanisms behind the tree – human health connection are known, the health services of urban trees are seen as by far surpassing disservices such as allergies and risks.

This presentation provides a framework for advocating the benefits and roles of trees in our 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Based on state-of-art research, it shows the development of tree-city relationships over time, with focus on tree contributions to healthy and vibrant cities. This is done in nine steps, moving up Maslow's pyramid of human needs. Trees provide us with (1) Opportunity and livelihoods, by providing products and possibilities for businesses. They represent (2) Diversity and the many cultural links between people and nature, while they also can be symbols of (3) Resiliency, helping to build up local communities after disaster has struck or climates have changed. Good urban forests provide (4) Safe, green environments for us to live, work and recreate. They can promote (5) Literacy, as they keep us and our children with nature and help us learn and develop. The role of urban forests and urban trees in promoting (6) Liberty is not always well known, but they have played an important role in democratization processes and power struggles between different groups in society. Trees and woods help build place and (7) Community – and have contributed to social cohesion over time. A very important role is their contribution to our (8) Happiness, either through providing playgrounds for us to unfold, or by making our cities more aesthetic and inspiring. Finally, urban trees and woods can stimulate (9) Creativity at different levels, from famous artists to office workers who restore their attention when looking out of their office window.

These nine keystones of community-tree relations are used to provide direction for the development of arboriculture and urban forestry. Examples are provided of how cities and towns have used one or more of the nine steps to improve their urban forestry mindset and operations.