



## **Indigenous Ecosystem Corridors and Nodes** A joint project of the UIA and the IFLA

Over several years discussions between the International Union of Architects (UIA) and the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) identified the opportunity that their professions have to repair damage to the ecosystem that frequently arises from the processes of settlement and urbanisation. In 2017 they agreed to establish a joint project with a commitment to promote the restoration of that indigenous ecosystems across urban ideas and beyond. They identified biodiversity and ecosystem continuity as the defining objectives. The project therefore became focused on restoring biodiversity within nodes (areas of varying size) and providing ecosystem corridors between nodes for continuity: hence the title, the UIA-IFLA Indigenous Ecosystem Corridors and Nodes Project (UIA-IFLA IEC+N). While starting with Architecture and Landscape Architecture the project welcomes other professions to engage with this mission.

In parallel, both organisations incorporated this mission within their current programme and investigated how best to engage professionals from the disciplines. UIA established a new vehicle to bring together and advance the profession's commitment to sustainability. The new operating unit of the UIA is the permanent Commission on the UN DSG's. Its commitment is to take up the challenge presented by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Subsequently it was decided that the UIA element of the joint project with IFLA would be embedded as part of that Commission. IFLA has incorporated the joint project in its Climate Change Working Group which has activities within each region. As with the UIA commission, the focus is on the UN SDGs: a common shared platform with other NGOs and civil society.

Two years later in March 2019 the United Nations General Assembly established 2021 to 2030 as the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. Two months after this the Intergovernmental Science-Based Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) delivered its report. It pointed to massive levels of the extinction of species and the degradation of the capacity of the global ecosystem to deliver the ecosystem services on which all life depends. If the Declaration of the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration provided the time-table; IPBES has affirmed the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for effective action. This situation presents the professions with major challenges and corresponding opportunities.

The practical context within which we face this challenge is a world experiencing extensive change at unprecedented rates. Much has already occurred and all predictions are that there is more to come. Affecting almost every aspect of these changes is the pervasive process of climate change. It affects us humans but also all the other organisms of the biosphere. As a result the idea of indigeneity is not what it used to be. What was indigenous to some particular location may no

longer be so in the future. This has become part of the challenge: how to identify these future environmental conditions and then facilitate the development and redevelopment of the biota of the ecosystem accordingly. This is inevitably complex but it is an essential part of sustainable futures.

At this stage it is not the role of the UIA IFLA IEC+N Project to set out what the professions should do or how they should do it. That is for them to explore and invent alongside regional and local governments and the community. Some elements of this challenge, however, are common ground for each of the professions.

1. The starting point for the professions and individual professionals is to recognise this ecosystem challenge at all scales while also exploring opportunities public advocacy and practical action.
2. In doing this there will usually be a need to reach out for knowledge, expertise and opportunities.
3. In the initial context of this UIA-IFLA project the expectation is that the Architecture and Landscape Architecture professional bodies will engage constructively together through their national and regional associations to establish joint expectations and policies for the mission.
4. Establishing communications and working arrangements across professions also applies to individual professional practices and individuals.
5. From investigating and understanding the situation the opportunity for advocacy emerges. The challenge and its opportunities have to be transferred from the thinking of the profession to that of all the others involved. The professional organisations can and should become an advocate to the governance system while practitioners can and should advance the challenge and opportunities to their communities and clients.
6. While humanity is the client the health of the planet is the project. The idea that a project can contribute to a healthier environment needs to become part of the professional - client expectation.
7. Collaboration between professional and local citizens presents a real opportunity to add value.

The project is now in active discussions with technical partners to establish a global information exchange platform. This will provide some initial illustrative case studies showing indigenous biodiversity and ecosystem continuity supported by contributions such as green roofs, hanging gardens, nesting facilities, integrated indoor and outdoor spaces, wetlands, urban design projects, urban redevelopment, enhancing urban connectivity including ecosystem continuity, urban planning and so on. The creativity of the professions will greatly extend the array of possibilities. The advocacy role with the wider community is anticipated to encourage and where possible support biosystem diversity and ecosystem continuity generally across urban areas and beyond.

Extensive active participation is key to the implementation of these ideas and thus the achievement of sustainable futures. Take up the Challenge!

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UIA operates through 120 Member Institutes  
representing 3.0 million Architects

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