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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Conference on Designing Climate Resilient Landscapes
(Prague, Czech Republic, 13-14 September 2022)
= Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Presidency on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 24 October 2021.

Conference on Designing Climate Resilient Landscapes

(Prague, Czech Republic, 13-14 September 2022)

– Information from the Presidency –

In September 2022, the Czech Presidency organised a two-day **hands-on conference** in Prague on climate change adaptation, with a specific focus on **designing climate resilient landscapes**. The event was the **first of its kind**, taking a **holistic approach to adaptation** (allowing soil, water, forest, biodiversity and landscape planning experts talk to each other), and **allocating most of the time to practitioners** who have designed and implemented transformative adaptation projects.

The **objectives** of this conference were to (i) enable experts to **share their best practices, successful pilot projects** and methodologies on **water retention on the whole surface** of a territory, **soil regeneration, forest resilience, ecosystem services recovery, and landscape planning**, (ii) **raise the interest of decision-makers** and **involve the public** in designing and managing climate resilient landscapes, and (iii) **foster discussion** on **nature restoration, soil health, forest strategy and adaptation to climate change** prior to the COP 27.

The conference was opened by the **Czech Minister for the Environment** Anna Hubáčková, **Czech Minister for Agriculture** Zdeněk Nekula, and **Czech Deputy Minister for Regional Development** Leona Gergelová Šteigrová. They were followed by keynote speakers, including **acting Director-General of DG Climate Action** Clara de la Torre, **Executive Director of the European Environment Agency** Hans Bruyninckx, and **Co-Chair of Working Group II of the IPCC** Hans-Otto Pörtner. During thematic panels, the participants heard from experts from DG Environment and DG Climate Action, from other international organisations, academia, NGOs, businesses, banks and Member States' representatives.

A key outcome of the conference was the adoption of the **Prague Appeal**, calling on:

- decision-makers to help remove identified obstacles to the implementation of adaptation projects,
- project designers and implementers to take inspiration from identified common elements of successful projects and policies, and
- all the stakeholders to contribute to designing climate resilient landscapes.

The **Prague Appeal is attached** to this information note.

Furthermore, project designers and implementers **presented selected innovative projects** from all across Europe on large information panels and **in a brochure**.¹

Over 120 participants attended the conference in person, while many more followed it online and/or watched it afterwards.

On the second day of the conference, participants visited various innovative adaptation projects near Prague.

¹ The brochure is available here: https://www.mzp.cz/en/news_20220913_Brochure-Designing-climate-resilient-landscapes-state-of-the-art-projects-in-Europe

Conference Key Messages

Designing Climate Resilient Landscapes

Prague, 13–14 September 2022

The conference brought together leading experts in climate change adaptation from all over Europe and beyond. They identified pressures and threats posed by climate change, the change of approach that we need, and concrete measures that would help our landscapes become climate resilient (including concrete transformative projects).

Pressures and threats posed by climate change:

- Climate change is a threat to both human well-being and our planet. Human-induced climate change has caused more frequent and extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, heatwaves and forest fires, and has led to significantly increased loss and damage.
- These weather events are neither unexpected nor exceptional; we knew it from models.
- Intensive agriculture has led to soil degradation and the loss of soil biodiversity.
- Forests have become increasingly vulnerable to climate change impacts (droughts, bark beetle, forest fires), and are a net source of greenhouse gas emissions in some countries.
- The loss of wild nature, deforestation, turning grasslands into arable land, large-scale drainage, the ‘locking’ of water streams in artificial canals, and other factors, have led to a disruption of the hydrological cycle and to a loss of 83% of freshwater species since 1970.
- Around 70% of the world’s wetlands and 90% of Europe’s floodplains have been destroyed. Numerous wetlands, which are crucial for a healthy water-soil system and for biodiversity, have become a net source of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Currently, 60–70% of soils in the EU are not in a healthy state.
- While a warming of 1.5oC would keep most of key ecosystems in the ‘moderate risk’ zone, a warming of 2oC would take most ecosystems to a ‘high risk’ zone.
- We are building our well-being at the expense of the well-being of our planet.

Change of approach needed:

- Translate the resilient landscape approach, which is embedded in EU legislation, into a concrete action.
- Focus on implementation of adaptation strategies and plans – they are usually well drafted but rarely well implemented.
- Integrate climate change adaptation into international, European, national, regional and local policies, including concrete budgeted implementation measures.
- Use synergies between mitigation and adaptation projects.
- Reduce land use competition and excessive land use for animal feed, while making use of the development of new food and feed sources.
- Restore healthy soils, rich in organic content, carbon, water and biodiversity.
- Avoid further deforestation and further degradation of intact ecosystems, incl. wetlands.
- Restore the sponge function of the landscape in order to, among other benefits, reduce the adverse impacts of extreme rainfall and droughts.
- Encourage systematic insurance in both agricultural and forestry sectors.
- Replace current sectoral approaches by a holistic systems approach that recognises and promotes multiple dimensions and functions of our landscapes.

Measures and opportunities for designing climate resilient landscapes:

- Consider climate change solutions as opportunities.
- Use the momentum of the reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), under which farmers and foresters should be financially rewarded for implementing measures contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as from the beginning of 2023.
- Make sustainable soil management, natural water retention management, sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation the new normal of the CAP.
- Use new EU initiatives, such as the nature restoration law, the soil legal framework and the forest strategy to design climate resilient landscapes.
- Give priority to nature-based solutions, whenever feasible.

- Enhance the water absorption capacity of soils by restoring aquifers and water streams, by removing drainage, etc. Water systems connectivity is critical to enable natural processes to return.
- Increase carbon content in soils as a part of sustainable soil management, since it improves soil health, helps absorb water, helps reduce the adverse impacts of climate change, lowers the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere, etc.
- Encourage a sustainable production of biomass from climate-smart forestry/agriculture.
- Carry out biodiversity-oriented forest management in both cultural and natural landscapes.
- Promote forest-based adaptation, sustainable aquaculture and fisheries, agroforestry, biodiversity management and ecosystem connectivity, since these measures have been identified as promising, feasible and effective adaptation options.
- Enhance advisory services, training and awareness raising on climate resilient landscapes for landowners, land managers as well as for the public.

The degradation and destruction of ecosystems, soil, water, forests and biodiversity significantly reduces our capacity to adapt to climate change. The most efficient approach to restoring ecosystem services seems to be addressing soil degradation, water retention and forest resilience all at once, holistically. For this, we need a comprehensive approach to climate change adaptation: designing and managing resilient landscapes. To achieve it all across Europe, we need a transformative change. Please see our Prague appeal for details.

Project designers and implementers from all across Europe presented 19 transformative adaptation solutions in the afternoon.

On the second day, participants visited innovative adaptation projects near Prague.

**We, the participants of the Conference on Designing Climate Resilient Landscapes,
gathered in Prague, Czechia, in September 2022,**

recognising the severity of the anthropogenic climate crisis and its impacts,

perceiving adaptation to climate change as an urgent need and our common task, while

acknowledging that its success also depends on our strong and timely mitigation efforts, with global warming kept below 1.5°C,

recognising that the climate, biodiversity, water, pollution and other crises are interconnected and must therefore be addressed together²,

striving to significantly increase the number and area of climate-resilient communities and regions by 2030,³ and to lead Europe into climate resilient development by 2050,⁴

emphasising that rural areas cover most of Europe's terrestrial area and, consequently, successful adaptation has to focus on designing climate resilient landscapes,

stressing that integral landscape management and planning is needed to deploy climate change mitigation, adaptation and ecosystem restoration measures efficiently, while respecting the economic, social and cultural functions of the landscape,

pointing out that adaptation measures can be designed and implemented with any scope, on any scale and at any level, while considering the specific context of each country/region/area,

noting with concern that maladaptation often leads to adverse outcomes, such as additional financial cost or the further deepening of social inequities, and must be therefore prevented,

² Prague Manifesto for Biodiversity Conservation – ECCB 2022

³ Communication from the Commission on European Missions, COM/2021/609 final

⁴ EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, COM/2021/82 final

conscious of the fact that addressing the climate crisis and its impacts is an investment rather than a cost, and that its price is much lower than the future cost of inaction,

1) *Have identified* the following common elements of successful projects and policies which have already contributed to climate resilient landscapes:⁵

- They succeeded in mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- They addressed different elements and functions of the landscape simultaneously;
- They were based on the best available science and data;
- They championed nature-based solutions whenever possible;
- They were based on a systems understanding of environmental, social and economic aspects;
- They valued the non-productive functions of agricultural and forest land;
- They supported networking and cooperation among all stakeholders to provide mutual inspiration, share best practices and find synergies among projects/policies;
- Projects were embedded in national/regional/local policies/strategies;
- Landscape visions and plans were based on a shared vision of stakeholders;
- Projects leveraged local participation and action;
- Local economic and social needs were addressed in building solutions;
- Long-term financing was secured to maintain actions and scale up their impact.

2) *Have identified* the following principal obstacles to a successful roll-out of projects and policies contributing to climate resilient landscapes:

- Adaptation is rarely the focus of stakeholder attention, which adversely affects the allocation of both financial and human resources;
- Serious information gaps persist among decision-makers and the wider public regarding adaptation measures and their importance for ecosystem services;
- Insufficient attention is paid to governance structures, inclusiveness, justice and equity, including gender equity, when designing and delivering adaptation projects;

⁵ Irrespective of the geographic/climatic/altitude area where they have been implemented

- Opportunities to engage business actors and commercial financing are neglected;
 - Complex formal procedures and sectoral policies/strategies, without financial support for concrete response measures, hinder efficient action;
 - Actions still do not attain a sufficient scale to have a significant impact;
 - Some economic interests oppose climate resilient development of landscapes;
 - The tool of planning at landscape level is missing;
 - Insufficient attention is paid to reverse fragmentation of the natural environment;
 - Lack of knowledge, information and advisory services in relation to promising forestry and other land management practices that reduce vulnerabilities and enhance resilience and adaptive capacity.
- 3) *Call upon* project designers and implementers to consider using the above-mentioned elements of successful projects and policies.
 - 4) *Urge* EU Member States to cooperate in removing the above-mentioned obstacles wherever they persist, and in promoting integrated models of resilient landscape design and management.
 - 5) *Remind* decision-makers of mutual benefits between climate change mitigation and adaptation, including an emphasis on water retention (the sponge function of the landscape) together with biodiversity conservation and nature restoration.
 - 6) *Underline* that the completion of the legislative framework as foreseen in the Green Deal, including the nature restoration law, the soil legal framework and the EU forest strategy, is a prerequisite for an efficient implementation of nature-based adaptation measures.
 - 7) *Exhort* businesses and the financial sector, in particular banks and insurance companies, to explore commercial opportunities for investing in nature-based solutions, ecosystem services recovery and landscape resilience.
 - 8) *Stress* the importance of education and awareness raising in relation to climate resilient landscapes, and of the involvement of young people in the delivery of actions.

- 9) *Appeal* to all institutions, public and private, as well as to individuals, to help plan and create climate resilient landscapes, based on their respective capabilities.
- 10) *Invite* decision-makers and project designers in both developed and developing countries to make use of the innovative methods and transformative solutions presented at this conference.

**This is our
PRAGUE APPEAL**
