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# Nature and Childhood: From Research and Activism to Policies for Global Change



## Win-wins for the Child, City, and Planet

Oscar Tollast

Forward-thinker and co-founder of Tesla, Elon Musk, once said, “Some people don’t like change, but you need to embrace change if the alternative is disaster.” One way to embrace change, whether incremental or rapid, is to provide evidence of “wins” for policymakers, businesses and other stakeholders.

Participants of *Nature and Childhood: From Research and Activism to Policies for Global Change* considered the benefits of providing children greater access to nature and outdoor play, during the second day of the program.

Three panelists helped participants consider the wins which would derive from childhood development, health and wellbeing, and education. The panel included Margaret Lamar, vice-president for strategic initiatives at the Children & Nature Network; Alexander Plum, director of development and innovation at the Global Health Initiative; and Margaret Otiento, CEO, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya.

Lamar indicated learning in nature can support relationship skills and reduce

stress and aggression. It also enables children to focus, sit quietly, and observe their surroundings. When children connect to nature at an early age, they can develop environmental ethics for life.

The Wildlife Clubs of Kenya is already practicing this model. Members of staff visit schools and provide children information about the environment so they can help conserve nature. Otiento suggested nature was the best classroom children could have.

Plum said societies must consider social, economic and environmental factors when developing health and health care initiatives. Building on this point later, Plum noted making nature normative and putting it back into the middle of an urban context could alter current mindsets. Nature doesn’t have to be a distant concept; it is present in cities.

Stephanie Sanderson, a consultant for the WAZA Nature Connect Program, World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, suggested exposure to nature is not enough, however. Speaking in a subsequent panel discussion, Anderson said a meaningful connection to nature requires contact, emotion, meaning,

compassion, and beauty.

South Africa is facing challenges relating to youth unemployment and education, according to Sabelo Lindani, Head of Green Futures College at the Grootbos Foundation. Lindani revealed the Foundation uses different activities to connect young people and communicate with nature.

Humans, after all, are part of a wider ecosystem. This view was shared by Jo Nurse, a strategic advisor to the InterAction Council. Nurse, who initially qualified as a medical doctor, said if the planet were a human, it would be diagnosed as “seriously ill.” Having a common vision is one of the most powerful things we can do – advocating win-win-win solutions that consider the environment, society and health.

Participants explored terms and concepts which could be used to influence systems change and “save the planet” in a short exercise. “Own it,” “Vitality,” “Local,” and “Safety,” “Political Will,” and “WWW (Worldwide Wellbeing),” were some of the ideas put forward. One participant put forward the idea of a “utopia” – not an impossible future, but a desirable one.



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# Miguel Lores – Bold Policies Propel Change

Spanish mayor shares how his city went car-free and gained the global spotlight

Helena Santos

When Miguel Anxo Fernández Lores became the mayor of Pontevedra, Spain in 1999 he and his team had a very simple but concrete idea: create a new city model where the public space was given back to the people. That idea came to life with the concept of allowing citizens to reclaim parts of the city that had been occupied by cars.

Within a month, they pedestrianized the entire historical center, and 18 years later, Pontevedra stopped being a “car warehouse” as Lores describes it and became an internationally acclaimed city, winning awards such as the UN Habitat Award and the Active Design Award.

People still drive cars in Pontevedra, but as Lores explained at Salzburg Global Seminar’s Parks for the Planet Forum session, *Nature and Childhood: From Research and Activism to Policies for Global Change*, owning a car doesn’t mean owning a piece of public space. With his bold policies of using parking lots for other purposes and cutting the traffic in most streets, he managed to decrease the number of engines started every day from 52,000 to 17,000, with only 9% of cars entering the city, compared to 83% in 1999.

“After we went car-free and allowed only the necessary cars, the vital ones to make a city work, we realized, and we show that through our model, that for a city to work not a lot of cars are necessary and that’s perfectly compatible with a great urban quality [...] Cars can circulate in the city and we solved it using loops, which means we make them leave through where they came from. So, unless someone needs to do something specific there, it doesn’t even cross their minds to do it since we don’t allow them to cross the city,” Lores explains.

This drastic decrease of cars circulating in the city improved not only the quality of life in Pontevedra but also its biodiversity. The city now emits 66% less of the CO<sub>2</sub> than it used to do before the policies were implemented. It now has 223 different species of trees and 131 different species of birds. The city has also become more attractive and has grown economically and culturally.

“One of the things we did was generate a lot of cultural, sportive and festive



activities including in collaboration with local business to fill the public space with activity. When you empty the public space, and if before you could park there and now there’s nothing, you say ‘Why can’t I park my car if there’s nothing there?’ You have to fill it up with activity,” Lores adds.

The children of Pontevedra have especially benefited from this paradigm shift since it makes the city safer. Now, 80% of children walk to school without any adult supervision. The School Path project, which is a collaborative effort between the local police department, the school community, and business owners, contributes to this outstanding number. Through School Path, groups of volunteers monitor the traffic flows in the busiest streets and the business owners have a sign that lets children know they can go in and ask for help if needed.

School Path gives children the opportunity to speak directly to the authorities in the Children’s Council, but that is not the only way this generation of Pontevedra residents is involved in policymaking. In 2016, students from Barcelos Primary School, alongside their parents, presented a project to the city council to transform Barcelos Square into a playground since they felt the need for more space. They proposed taking 50 of

100 free parking spaces and changing the traffic to a one-way flow; the City Council supported them.

“We had to achieve an agreement with education [officials] and Xunta de Galicia [the regional government] to authorize children to leave school to go into the square with all the guarantees so that the teachers’ insurance was covered and everything. The kids are delighted, and it’s a participation of children in the city’s design,” the mayor explains.

During his time at the Parks for the Planet Forum, Miguel Lores was very vocal about his idea that only through good policies we can achieve global change and that Pontevedra provides a positive example. He highlighted the idea that every city should find a different and unique project and discussed his pride each time Pontevedra is spoken as a success story.

“I’m very proud because Pontevedra was a city to which people paid no attention. When you talked about Galicia you talked about Santiago, Coruña and Vigo [...] Now we are in the spotlight worldwide, and people know that Pontevedra exists, that it is a city, that it is a reference in accessibility, in urban quality.”

# Change at Scale

## How the #NatureForAll campaign is helping future generations experience, care about and protect our environment

Oscar Tollast

**It's better to move forward than standing still. By building partnerships across sectors, change can be enacted quicker and reach more people. When considering smart actions for nature-based solutions, however, one has to recognize whether approaches can work in different regions and cultures.**

#NatureForAll's goal is to support and action for nature conservation globally. This work includes raising awareness of nature and its values and creating a culture of conservation. Karen Keenleyside, vice chair for people and parks, IUCN WCPA, suggests the more people connected with nature, the more they support it. Quoting British broadcaster and conservationist, David Attenborough, Keenleyside said, "No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

The movement already has 230 partner organizations and is growing week-by-week. Partners sign up by expressing interest, identifying their contribution, and pledging to take work forward. #NatureForAll is raising awareness, facilitating experiences, and creating pathways to connecting. Keenleyside said the movement provided an opportunity for organizations to speak with a united voice. It is creating a billion moments to fall in love with nature.

Small moments and actions can lead to significant change. Heather Maseko, a response coordinator for Peace Corps Malawi and co-founder of the National Youth Network on Climate Change, has witnessed this first-hand. Maseko reaffirmed how we, as individuals, have different interests, skill sets, and expertise.

In her experience, Maseko discussed the benefits of bringing in partners during campaigns and projects to

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**No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced.**

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provide expertise and resources they otherwise didn't have. In a presentation at Salzburg Global Seminar, she posed the question: How do we move out of our bubble to make meaningful, holistic engagements?

Effective communication is perhaps one of way doing so. It can involve the language, tools, platforms, or strategies used. In her experience, the media helped amplify messages concerning young people and climate change,

according to Maseko. Despite their differences, this was one area outlets united and helped share the message the movement put across.

Cath Prisk, global partnerships director at Project Dirt, is heading the global campaign Outdoor Classroom Day. Working in partnership with Dirt is Good (Unilever), the campaign is delivered locally by teachers, for teachers. So far, 304,165 children and 2,872 schools have been involved. Prisk suggests the movement is about thinking global, acting global, and being part of a global unit. By working with others, they want to help more children experience "real play" every day.

Adrian Voce, president of the European Network of Child Friendly Cities, believes a child's impulse to play is essential to their nature. They have an evolutionary impulse to enjoy their lives in the present. If children are to grow up with a sense of identity and belonging, according to Voce, they must have access to nature on their terms.

When advocating for children's rights, however, Voce conceded parents' wants and needs had to be respected too. Many parents do not feel the outside world is safe enough, which makes it important for play advocates to encourage parents to trust their instincts and recognize the value play carries for the present and the future.

## Watch Again: Interactive Talk on Nature Access for Urban Children

If you or your colleagues missed yesterday's webinar on Policies that Promote Equitable Nature Access for All, you can watch again on Facebook! Find the full one-hour video and all the comments from our viewers around the world here: [www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/608/webinar](http://www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/608/webinar)

Thank you to everyone who tuned in for our first-ever webinar. We had over 2000 views as well as over 70 comments!



## #FacesofLeadership

“We often think about taking children to nature and finding new ways to get children to the nature but I think we need to bring the nature to the children and that means rethinking how the spaces in which children live, play and learn are designed. So we need to think about it on two levels: one is in the built environment in how our cities and communities going to shape their spaces, shape their roads, their parks, their schools, their buildings, their housing, their residences... And then when we have those built spaces, how can we build experiences in those spaces? And we can program them, we can have activities for them, we can have opportunities for engagement that are adult-lead but what we have been talking about here so much [is] allowing children to be children and to exercise their own ability to play... Every day I wake up grateful. I, as a child, had the opportunity to climb a tree, run free, run across the land and it is that gratitude of the feeling I experienced. There’s a special feeling you have when you’re in nature. I know how essential that is to my personal wellbeing and [...] when I wake up in the morning and think that huge numbers of children and adults and families and communities [...] don’t get to have that feeling – that is not acceptable and I will do everything I can while I’m in this planet to make that right and make that OK, and give everyone that opportunity [...] to feel that feeling we feel when we’re in nature, and that incredible sense of wellbeing and belonging and joy that comes from that experience. And it’s tragic to me that some children aren’t given that right because we haven’t figured it out how to invest in them.”

Margaret Lamar, *Vice President of strategic initiatives, Children & Nature Network, USA*



## HOT TOPIC: “What are the first steps towards building a movement for change?”

Carly Sikina

“I think it has start with a deep frustration... I used to live in Lebanon all my life and [then] I moved out of Lebanon for three years to study... [and] when I came back, I saw that the situation could be better. So, I was very frustrated about the lack of public green spaces in the city and I was very frustrated that I couldn’t go to the park... I think [movements have] to start from a frustration of someone or a group of people. And then you have to have the vision to know that it is possible to [do]... I don’t believe in the top-down approach at all, I believe in the bottom-up [approach]. And it starts with a group of people who are really passionate about [something] and then it becomes so contagious that people start seeing that ‘Oh, there is an issue to be solved here.’”

Dima Boulad

*Designer and Co-Founder, Beirut Green Project, Lebanon*

“I think the first [step] is building or rebuilding love for nature, from childhood to the adulthood... So I think, to build some movements in the [person’s] childhood, to have the connection to nature, this is the first step. But, I don’t think that’s enough

because for the decisions, I think it’s important to get it heard and get it known because now if we see what’s going on all around, I don’t think those people really want bad for the earth... but this is just not in their minds when they are doing their daily decisions. So, if we can raise the voice of all of us who believes that the connection to nature is crucial, for all of us... [maybe] it will influence decision-making as well.”

Katalin Czippán

*International Consultant, Education and Communication for Sustainable Development Issues, National University of Public Service (NUPS), Hungary*

“First of all is to really have a simple idea that people can relate to... Then, helping them see that idea in their own context... [And] being inclusive for everyone – what does this mean for youth? What does it mean for children? What does it mean for, in my world, parks and protected areas?... Then I would say the other preliminary step... is to have a way of getting your stories out there, to make sure that nothing you’re doing isn’t communicated and [everything is] shared in a way that is personal and real... so that others can relate to it. Keeping something to yourself isn’t going to start a movement – it really is a matter of sharing

the beginning, middle and end of the process from a personal perspective that will inspire others and ultimately, that sharing of stories... is what starts to affect change.”

Karen Keenleyside

*Vice Chair for People and Parks, IUCN WCPA; Co-Chair, IUCN #NatureForAll; Senior Advisor, #NatureForAll, Parks Canada, Canada*

“I think it starts with two or more people who identify a common problem and then establish a goal that they want to achieve to remedy that problem. They talk to other stakeholders, people in the community, government officials, other institutions and start to see who shares the belief in the problem and who wants to go along with that goal and who might have ideas to modifying that goal to bring in more stakeholders. And it builds from there.”

Andrew Moore

*Director of Youth and Young Adult Connection, National League of Cities, USA*

Have an opinion on our HOT TOPIC?  
Tweet @SalzburgGlobal  
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