

## **Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future TOPICAL LUNCH summary**

**Title:** URBIS and Rio +20: Developing a Global Research/Policy Agenda for Urban Sustainability and Biodiversity

**Organizer:** Keith G. Tidball, Department of Natural Resources

**Date:** December 13, 2012

### **Attendees:**

|                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Bassuk, Nina               | nlb2   |
| Bunting-Howarth, Katherine | keb264 |
| Cerra, Joshua              | jfc299 |
| Chambliss, Lauren          | elc55  |
| Curtis, Paul               | pdc1   |
| Hare, Matthew              | mph75  |
| Harvell, Drew              | cdh5   |
| Kay, David                 | dlk2   |
| Krasny, Marianne           | mek2   |
| Lawrence, Ted              | tjl222 |
| Li, Yue                    | yl983  |
| Saypanya, Santi            | ss2829 |
| Schember, Helene           | hrs6   |
| Tidball, Keith             | kgt2   |
| Travis, Alex               | ajt32  |

### **Abstract:**

Join us as we report back on recent work on urban sustainability and biodiversity conservation that was presented, discussed and launched at Rio +20 in June of this past year. The goal of this ACSF funded work has been to develop an inter-disciplinary research program focusing on sustainability, biodiversity, social-ecological systems resilience, and ecosystem services in cities. Recognizing that cities are now the dominant human habitat, the project has endeavored to address a gap left by other global sustainability initiatives, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which pay only minimal attention to urban ecosystems. This applied research and work at the science-to-policy interface has contributed significantly to the launch of the URBIS global urban biosphere policy initiative, which has been endorsed by several international agreements and was launched at the Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Over the past 4 years, Cornell's Civic Ecology Lab has worked with UNESCO, ICLEI (the international association of over 1200 city and other local governments), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and Stockholm University to develop the URBIS sustainability designation program for cities. Now up and running, URBIS provides a tiered approach for cities to develop and receive recognition for comprehensive urban sustainability and biodiversity planning. In October 2010, we participated in an URBIS workshop at the Shanghai World Expo, and then

helped draft an URBIS resolution at the COP10 meetings in Nagoya, which was approved by the delegates. In fall 2011, Cornell participated in URBIS workshops in NYC and Ithaca organized by Stockholm University, during which we outlined the contents for a forthcoming report: Cities Biodiversity Outlook. This report, which is modeled after the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, provides a summary for international policy makers of our current state of knowledge about urbanization, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and will include chapters by Tidball and Krasny of Cornell.

### **Brief Summary:**

After going around the room for introductions, Tidball presented a power point slide show outlining the objectives for the funding provided by ACSF in support of URBIS and Cornell University involvement in RIO+20.

The objectives were:

- Develop an inter-disciplinary research program focusing on sustainability, biodiversity, social-ecological systems resilience, and ecosystem services in cities.
- Address gap left by other global sustainability initiatives, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which pay only minimal attention to urban ecosystems.
- Build and support the URBIS global urban biosphere policy initiative.
- Contribute to writing and launching the Cities Biodiversity Outlook.
- Increase Cornell University visibility at Rio +20 and side events.

Tidball then reported on how he and the team of Josh Cerra, Kathy Bunting-Howarth, and Marianne Krasny had met those objectives thanks to the catalytic funding provided by ACSF.

Accomplishments reported included:

URBIS initiative funded by ICLEI, IUCN, CBD and officially launched at Rio+20

MOU with Stockholm University/Stockholm Resilience Center signed

- high degree of collaboration with Urban Theme
- Civic Ecology exchange fellows program begun
- Funding from multiple international sources

MOU with USFS NYC Urban Field Station in progress

- Joint project funded by TKF Foundation (> \$500,000.00)
- Multiple joint publications

Participation in response to the City of NY/NPS's RFEI for a Jamaica Bay Science and Resilience Center

Formation of US/Japan Working Group on Nature & Human Security in peopled landscapes - Japan Society for Promotion of Science proposal

Tidball elected co-chair of Ecology & Peace Commission of International Peace Research Association

- Leadership on next annual meeting in Turkey on Ecology, Resilience and Peaceful Sustainable Cities

Launch of Nature of Cities blog collaborative (headed by Sound Science LLC)

- Weekly average of 800-1000 hits per week, from average of 81 cities and 19 countries
- Since launching at Rio +20 --- 26000+ views, 791 cities, 95 countries

Katherine E. Bunting-Howarth leading efforts for Cornell to join the US Dept of State initiated US Water Partnership

- public-private partnership that seeks to mobilize U.S.-based knowledge, expertise and resources to improve water security around the world – particularly in those countries most in need.

Marianne Krasny leading EPA's national environmental education training program with strong emphasis on urban audiences

- teaching online course on urban stewardship (civic ecology)
- conducting research/outreach on participatory approaches to ecosystem services monitoring in cities

Presentations in Brazil from the ACSF funded team included:

| Marianne  | Josh  | Keith  | Kathy  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Environmental Education and Social-ecological Systems Theory. ICLEI Urban Nature Forum. Belo Horizonte, Brazil. 14 June 2012.   | Facilitator, ICLEI Urban Nature Forum Session: Sound Science for Sound Policy. Thursday, June 14, 2012                          | Overall delegation coordination.   | Panelist: U.S. Side Event at Rio +20   |
| Resilience, Learning, and Environmental Education. ICLEI World Congress. Belo Horizonte, Brazil. 16 June 2012.  | Interdisciplinary collaboration for meeting urban ecological goals. ICLEI World Congress. Belo Horizonte, Brazil. 15 June 2012. | Stockholm Resilience Center Rio +20 Science to Policy Media project assistant director.                                  | Putting Words to Action: Implementing the Rio +20 Fisheries Recommendations  |
| Urban landscapes as learning arenas for sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Cities and Biodiversity Outlook Launch. Rio+20 meetings. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 18 June 2012. |   | History of the Urban Biosphere initiative. ICLEI Urban Nature Forum. Belo Horizonte, Brazil. 14 June 2012.               | Participant: Global Oceans Day at Rio +20 (sponsored by the Global Oceans Forum and IOC-UNESCO) (a parallel event)   |
|   |   | Greening in the Red Zone. Cities and Biodiversity Outlook Launch. Rio+20 meetings. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 18 June 2012. | Participant: Advancing Sustainability through Communication and Collaboration, (an official UN side event hosted by the University of Colorado)  |
|   |   |  | Participant. Oceans at Rio+20: Toward Implementation of the Rio Ocean Commitments (an official UN side event hosted by International Coastal and Ocean Organization, Secretariat of the Global Oceans Forum) |

### Future Directions:

Attendees expressed interest in various “science to policy” issues dealing with urban sustainability. Specific mention was made of the NYC tech campus, estuary issues in the NYC area regarding oyster restoration, and climate change preparedness and adaptation (with reference to Hurricane Sandy in NYC and Long Island). An outline of a thematic thrust around urban sustainability in particular emerged, in hopes of capitalizing on the diverse and cross-cutting expertise and interest in the room and across campus.

Two potential follow ups with ACSF were suggested:

- (1) discuss with Directors/Assoc Directors of ACSF forming a Cornell urban sustainability initiative,
- (2) explore expanding or building upon existing collaboration with Stockholm University/Resilience Centre.

The slide presentation is available on line [here](#).

<http://www.slideshare.net/kgtidball/acsf-topical-lunch-urbis-and-rio-20-developing-a-global-research-policy-agenda-for-urban-sustainability-and-biodiversity>