

THE COMMITMENT TO URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IS HERE TO STAY

Posted on 11/02/2022 by Naider



In recent years, and even more so since the global pandemic caused by Covid-19, the concept of urban environmental health has taken on special relevance. In a markedly urban society, cities and municipalities play a key role for sustainability and social well-being. The need to have urban environments with high environmental quality standards is a new citizen demand that must be listened to, analyzed and addressed from the perspective of the population's health with a view to improving the quality of life of citizens.

The [WHO](#) presents the urban health as a growing priority in urban settings. This must be developed from a strategic approach in a multisectoral manner and coordinated. Making direct reference to the Development Goals UN Sustainable 2030; Goal 11 –Ensure that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable - and the Goal 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all in all ages-, highlights the need to change approaches traditional environmental and health issues that have focused predominantly on individual hazards in environmental media compartmentalized.

Today, it recognizes the urban center as a complex system in which **the dynamics between the environment, health and Well-being is also complex**. This dynamic is marked by exposure to multiple factors present in the city such as air quality, noise levels, green areas, change weather, water pollution, the presence of chemicals, or the state of infrastructures, which in turn are interrelated and create effects combined in the urban environment.



Factors of Urban Environmental Health according to the EEA (European Environment Agency)

In this line, Urban Environmental Health conceptually includes these external chemical, physical, biological and social factors of a person and excludes the genetic and intrinsic factors of people, to explain the risk factors through which the environment environment can influence our health. The WHO confirms that the growing **epidemic of non-communicable diseases and mental health problems observed in urban settings is amplified by these factors**. And the data is devastating in Europe, where the main non-communicable diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and mental disorders) together represent approximately 86% of deaths and 77% of the disease burden. Environmental factors are estimated to be responsible for 13% of deaths in the EU, which translates to a total of 630,000 deaths per year, according to the WHO.

To these data the [EEA](#) (European Environment Agency) adds the nuance that most of the factors causing morbidity in Europe are related to environmental contamination resulting from human activity. Therefore, in case of being able to influence and reduce human activity, such as the use of private vehicles in the urban center, the data would change favorably and environmental

degradation would be reversed.

Therefore,
we are in a situation where cities are particularly vulnerable to these multiple threats and at the same time have less access to the spaces green and blue. The objective is to redesign cities so that they invite to enjoy a quality physical and social environment that promotes health physical, psychological and social.

In Europe it is already
you can find cities that are committed to actions such as increasing the percentage of green areas, the commitment to the value of blue infrastructures or reducing exposure to polluting materials (air quality, noise, water, waste, electromagnetic radiation). can also be find numerous cities, including [Barcelona](#), which have redesigned the urban environment through super blocks that restrict traffic road, prioritize pedestrianization and naturalize the space previously asphalted.

Therefore, in recent years, and more notably after the start of the pandemic, a path has been opened to the redesign of the urban environment to bet on an Urban Environmental Health that ensures the quality of well-being in the city. Although there is still a long way to go, Environmental Health is beginning to play a predominant role in the urban environment and it is here to stay.

Marta Iturriza Mendia

PhD in Ecological Transition at Naider

There are no comments yet.