



Integrating intersectionality into urban NbS

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) interventions are embedded in settings where socio-environmental inequalities can be reinforced over time unless intentionally tackled. This factsheet highlights key learnings from co-designing and implementing more just and inclusive NbS, spanning experiences in European and Latin American cities.

As a Horizon 2020 project, CONEXUS is guided by the European Commission's 2016 Guidance on Gender Equality in Horizon 2020 strategy. The strategy aims to foster gender balance in research teams and decision-making and to integrate the gender dimension in research and innovation. As CONEXUS promotes cooperation between European and Latin American cities with diverse urban and socio-economic conditions, the project moves beyond gender equality to embrace a broader intersectionality framework.

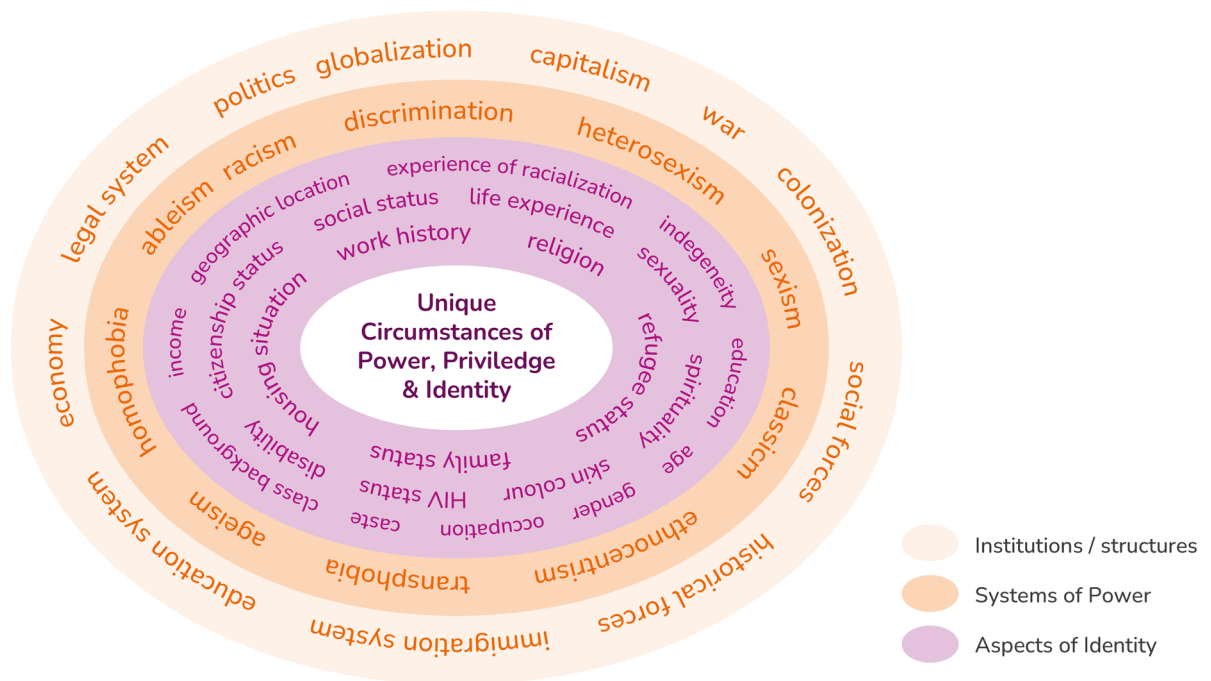
Intersectionality acknowledges that different forms of oppression and discrimination may stem from combining people's social and political identities. Recognizing intersectionality is vital as CONEXUS entails international research collaborations in post-colonial settings and the modification of local environments, affecting urban communities, often in vulnerable settings. We explored the scope and relevance of applying such a framework for co-creating more just and inclusive urban NbS.

Key facts



1. NbS can cause green gentrification and “nature-enabled dispossessions” when not embedding justice and inclusivity principles (FoEI, 2021; Anguelovski and Corbera, 2023).
2. Intersectionality can help understand how people access and experience nature differently based on their multidimensional identities.
3. CONEXUS developed a Gender equality and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) framework to champion just and inclusive processes of NbS co-creation.

The intersectionality wheel by CRIAW-ICREF



Intersectionality

Involving collaboration between European and Latin American partners, CONEXUS spans geographies, disciplines, and both professional and personal experiences and capacities. This collaboration unfolds in diverse environments (e.g., academia, the NGO sector, etc.) and real-life contexts (e.g., urban and peri-urban areas) where multiple inequalities exist. For this reason, a single focus on gender equality would lead to isolated actions addressing gender, which fail to tackle the complex, combined causes of socio-environmental inequalities and vulnerabilities in cities. Socio-environmental inequalities stem from the intersection of gender with other sources of systemic discrimination.

As a concept rooted in critical race theory and feminism, intersectionality helps us understand how inequalities and oppression manifest due to one's identity. One's identity is multidimensional and includes aspects such as gender, sex, ethnicity,

age, class, ability, religious belief, and education (Crenshaw, 1989). This means that a person can experience multiple forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, classism, and ableism, all at the same time. For example, a young girl from an ethnic minority group living in a low-income community without employment opportunities may face a series of interdependent challenges related to the built environment. Not considering intersectionality can lead to reproducing or reinforcing discriminatory processes through environmental regeneration (or gentrification) and what Anguelovski and Corbera (2023, p.48) refer to as "nature-enabled dispossession":

[the] appropriation of land, resources, and urban spaces held or enjoyed by vulnerable social groups, whose interests and relationships with nature become undermined over time, and whose own ability to remain in place become jeopardized by NbS.

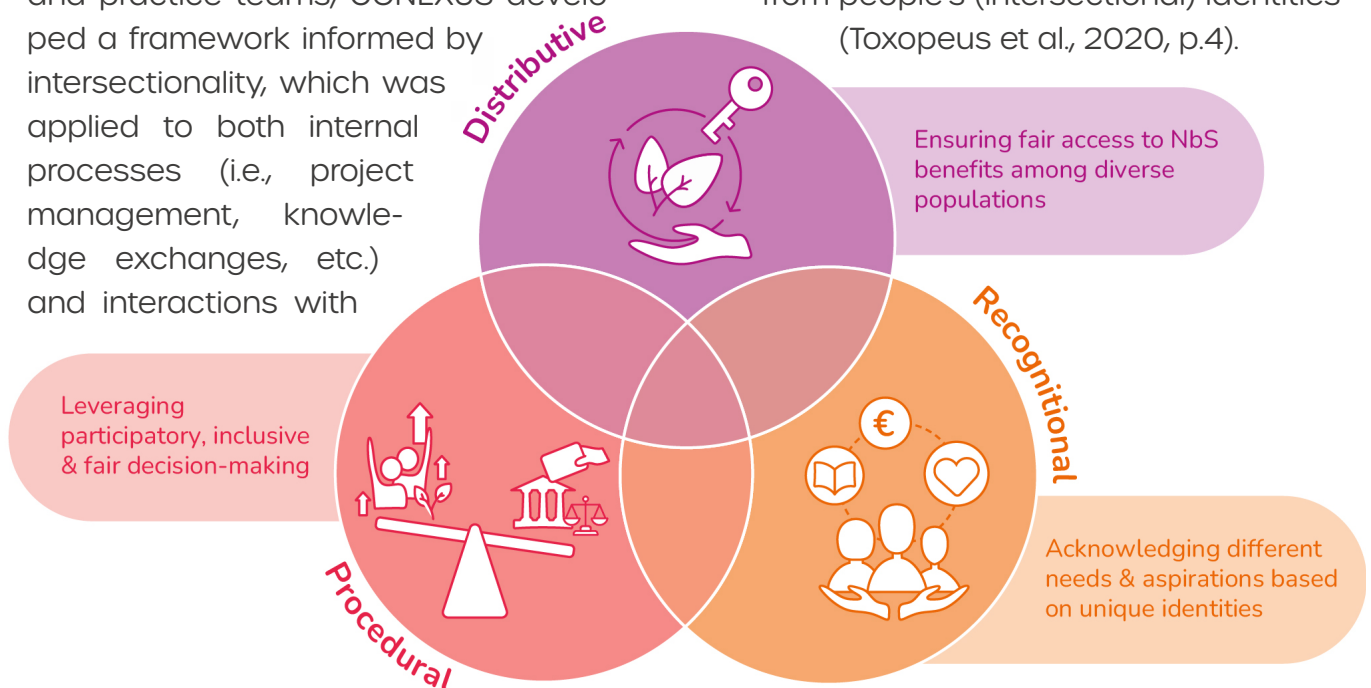
When informed by intersectionality, NbS processes can reveal and intentionally address the drivers of socio-environmental inequality and injustice in cities. By embracing an intersectional lens, CONEXUS aims to model socially transformative NbS, where European and Latin American partners and users of the project are empowered, included in, and benefit from NbS co-creation processes. Project partners encompass researchers and practitioners from multiple disciplines and sectors, including Early Careers Professionals (ECPs). Project users include local communities, stakeholders from local municipalities, national governments, international networks, and representatives from non-governmental and private sector organizations.

The CONEXUS Gender equality and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) framework

Moved by the belief that just and inclusive NbS require just and inclusive research and practice teams, CONEXUS developed a framework informed by intersectionality, which was applied to both internal processes (i.e., project management, knowledge exchanges, etc.) and interactions with

project users and NbS stakeholders (i.e., participatory workshops, communication, and dissemination, etc.). The GEDI framework was developed by employing a qualitative and reflexive methodology that entailed reviews of scientific and grey literature as well as collaborative meetings guided by the project Gender Champion and EDI committee. The framework combines principles of Gender equality with broader concerns of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI), integrating the three dimensions of environmental justice: distributive, procedural, and recognitional.

In the project, distributive justice refers to how access to NbS and their benefits and costs are distributed among the population. Procedural justice concerns the inclusivity and level of participation of NbS decision-making processes. Recognitional justice involves revealing and recognizing different needs, values, and aspirations related to NbS interventions, which stem from people's (intersectional) identities (Toxopeus et al., 2020, p.4).



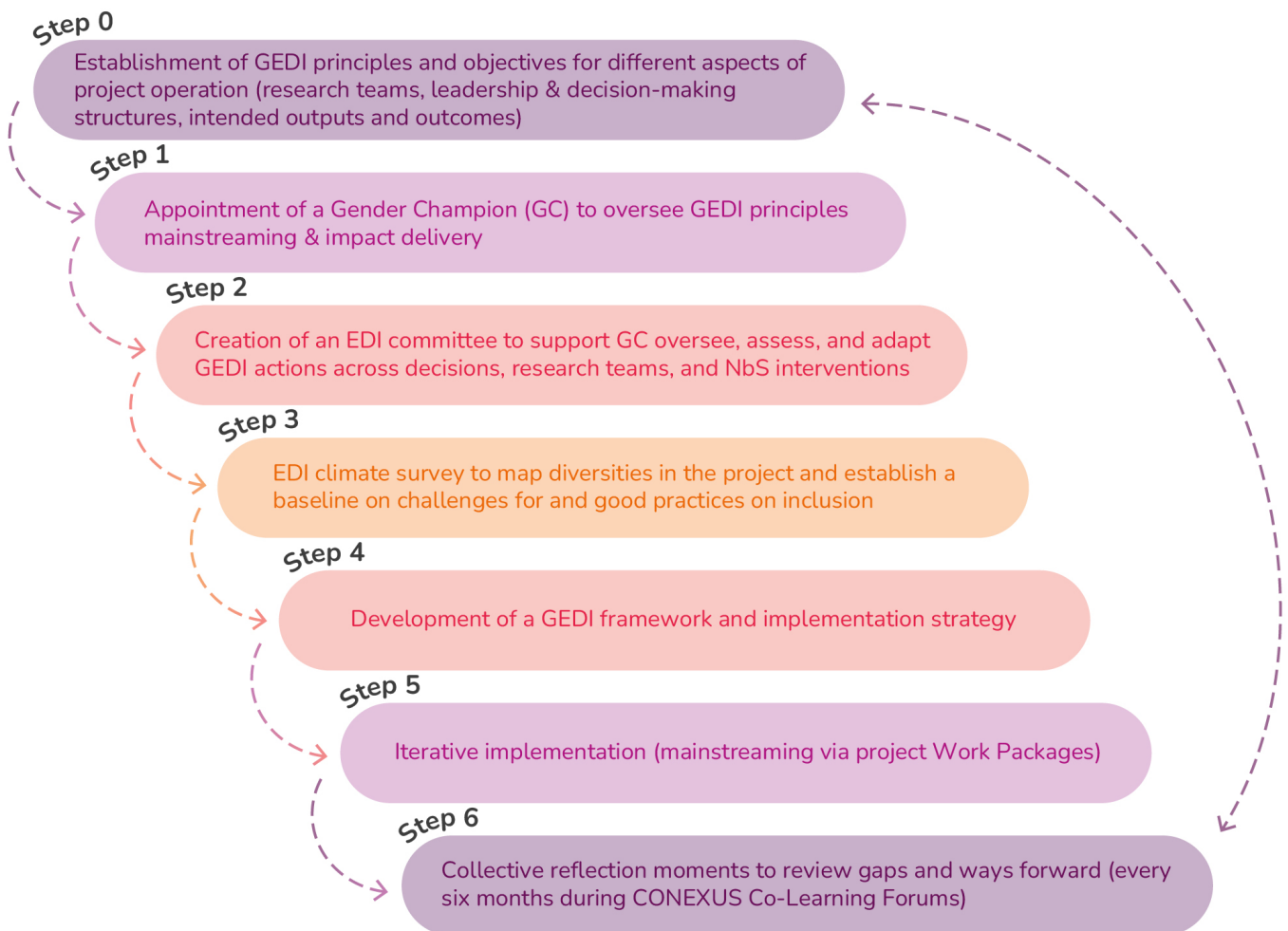
CONEXUS' environmental justice framework

Key steps

Integrating an intersectional lens into project activities while developing and implementing the CONEXUS GEDI framework took several iterative steps.

After identifying GEDI objectives and targets during grant writing, the project appointed a Gender Champion to oversee and coordinate the delivery of such objectives. In support of this role, an EDI committee comprising members from different work streams and with various backgrounds was established. The EDI committee was tasked with facilitating spaces for critical reflection on how justice and inclusivity aspects were being integrated into decision-making structures, collaborative teams, and NbS

interventions. This reflection helped to mainstream intersectionality principles across all thematic Work Packages (WPs) and Tasks of CONEXUS, including co-created NbS. GEDI topics were incorporated into management meetings, international conferences, and exchanges among the seven Life-Labs, contributing to the continuous assessment of key barriers to justice and inclusion and the collaborative identification of suitable actions to tackle them. Efforts were made to balance meaningful representation and participation of European and Latin American partners during both online and physical events and to create opportunities for early career professionals to advance in their careers, paying attention



to aspects, such as gender, and ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, the prioritization of intersectionality as a cross-cutting challenge for NbS implementation by the Life-Labs prompted actions ranging from the adoption of gender-inclusive language to the targeted engagement of commonly excluded stakeholders (i.e., women, young children, older people, indigenous communities, and low-income residents) in Life-Lab activities, inclusive communication and dissemination campaigns, and the collection of data disaggregated by gender and age.

Lessons learned and inspiration for future projects

Diverse voices and perspectives are needed in projects' decision-making structures to promote new, more inclusive, and just approaches to NbS.

Integrating intersectionality principles into CONEXUS activities was an enriching and challenging venture that required continuous self-reflexivity. Several lessons learned can be highlighted:

1) Urban NbS need to go beyond single-lens approaches (i.e., gender equality) as socio-environmental inequalities are intersectional. When not taking into account the compounded factors that influence vulnerability and discrimination in cities (e.g., gender, ethnic background, socio-economic status, etc.), NbS could end up reproducing or worsening existing inequalities and contribute to green gentrification (FoEI, 2021) and nature-enabled dispossession (Angelovski and Corbera, 2023).

2) Who is in the room counts. For NbS to be just and inclusive, the research and practice teams responsible for their design and implementation must represent the communities they serve. Factors influencing structural and unconscious bias and the dominance of certain demographic groups in leadership positions should be considered. For example, internal to CONEXUS, the need to give more visibility and decision-making power to younger, non-male, non-European partners was expressed. Similarly, flexibility in the language of communication was identified as a barrier to inclusive and horizontal knowledge exchange, which could be overcome by budgeting for translation and editing services. As part of NbS pilot co-creation, partners also reflected on the need to include different perspectives on NbS since the term might fail to capture the plurality of Latin American understandings of nature (e.g., cosmovisions and indigenous knowledge) (see for more information the CONEXUS factsheet "Supporting Nature-based Solutions via Nature-Based Thinking").

3) Establishing baselines and assessing how different social groups access and perceive NbS and resulting impacts is essential. For this reason, indicators need to be selected that reflect multiple values and perspectives and capture the lived experiences and perceptions of diverse groups. In some cases, collecting data disaggregated by gender and other identity markers can help us monitor how different social groups are included in, affected by, and interact with implemented NbS.

4) Funding calls play a significant role in ensuring that intersectionality is at the heart of future NbS projects, including local and, more so, international projects. By including more stringent requirements for broadening participation and inclusivity beyond gender alone, we can encourage a more critical examination of the structural power dynamics that generate inequalities within research and innovation environments and in NbS

implementation. More explicit intersectionality requirements help projects allocate adequate resources for its mainstreaming, which requires considerable capacities in terms of time and expertise in coordinating interactive and iterative processes. In turn, mainstreaming intersectionality would better position NbS as powerful instruments to reverse existing inequalities and drive positive social transformations.

Lessons learned



1. Intersectionality is a helpful framework for ensuring justice and inclusivity at the core of NbS interventions.
2. Just and inclusive NbS call for just and inclusive research and practice teams.
3. More comprehensive data is required to monitor inclusivity and justice aspects within projects and as part of NbS interventions.
4. Funders can ensure intersectionality is at the core of NbS design by making it a key requirement and specific topic of funding calls.

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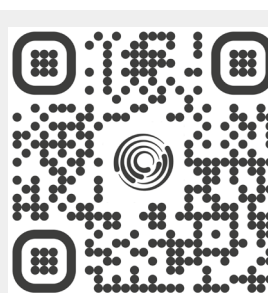
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