

One-way Ticket to Nature Central

The Symbiotic City

The voice of nature is loudly heard. The consequences of our devastating impact on biodiversity and climate are all around us. We need a positive vision of the future, beyond the many doomsday scenarios of disappearing species, flooded coastal areas and excessive heat stress in summer. The solution to these problems lies in the Symbiotic City: nature should return to the city and be part of it as a matter of course.





Living in a symbiotic city is nothing like living in cities as we know them in 2022. Now cities are areas where the ground is densely paved, where buildings of glass and concrete retain heat, where the ground is invisible and used for cables and pipes. We can also live in a city where birds, insects, mammals, and plants partner the people who live there. There is actual nature that attracts insects, birds, and mammals. At the same time, greenery makes people feel better and healthier in that city.

Basic principles

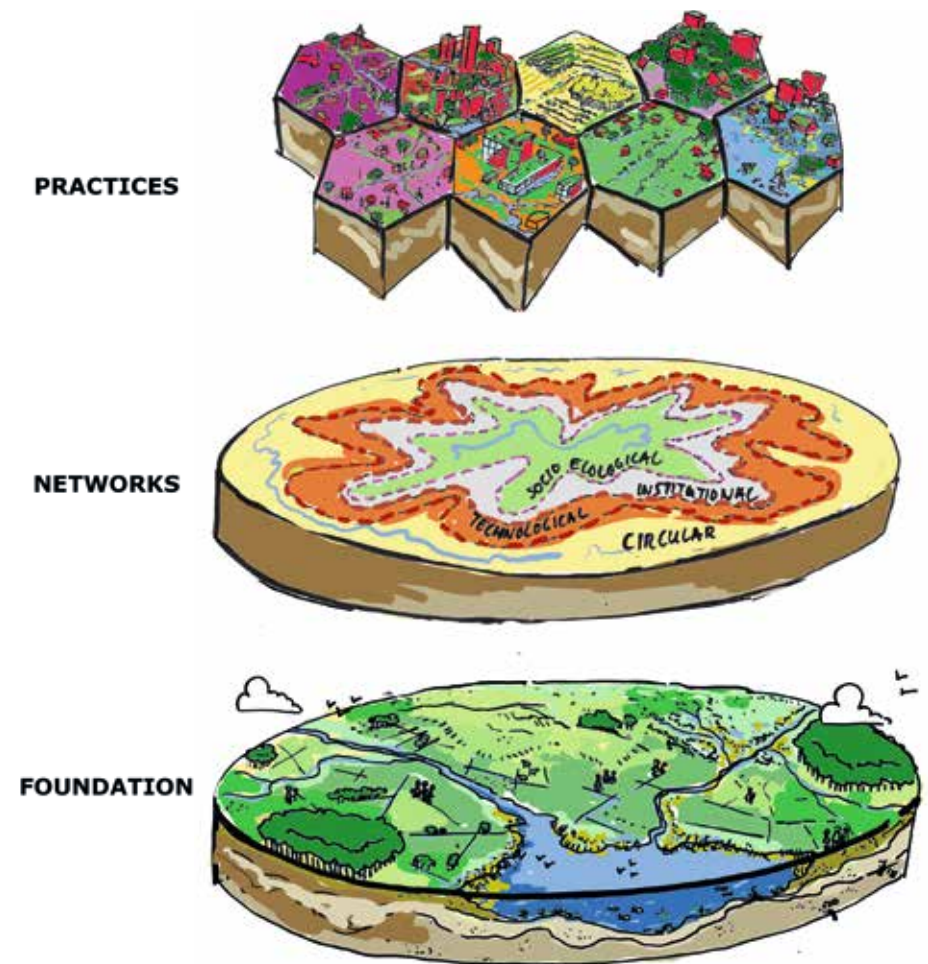
The Symbiotic City uses the following basic principles:

Principle 1: Ecocentrism. It is important for humans to start realising that nature does not serve humans and human needs. We need to start thinking and acting from what nature needs and not from what man needs. A reversal, therefore, in our thinking and actions.

Principle 2: Symbiosis. Species need each other to live, starting from a positive collaborative relationship. The symbiotic city therefore consists of three layers. In all three layers, humans and nature are interdependent. The first layer consists of the foundation of living and non-living matter. The second layer consists of the networks between people, nature, infrastructure, and technology in the city. The third layer consists of everyday human practices such as housebuilding, paving, verge management, activity and living together in the city.

Principle 3: Equity. The symbiotic city is there for all its inhabitants: so, not only for people, but also for plants and animals. Everyone has a role in designing and creating a city in which the connection between people and nature is self-evident.

Principle 4: Values. Several values of



The three layers of the symbiotic city.

nature are visible in the symbiotic city. In the first place the *physical value*: Earth provides food and resources to business and city. The *intrinsic value* indicates that nature has its own value and that, for example, wild places should be created where nature can take its course. The third value is *cultural value*, where people enjoy a walk in the park or go swimming in a nearby lake. The fourth value is the *future value* where water, soil and its inhabitants are given space and thus preserved for future generations of both people and nature.

The attached illustration gives 32 examples of how to build the symbiotic city. To read more about these practices, see www.wur.nl/en/show/brochure-symbiotic-city.htm. Or scan the QR code.

[wur.nl/en/show/brochure-symbiotic-city.htm](http://www.wur.nl/en/show/brochure-symbiotic-city.htm). Or scan the QR code.

Building the symbiotic city, where to start?

You are always part of a group that can build one or more of the different networks in the city. Everyone can get started right away and put the following priorities on their list.

One-way ticket to central nature

In any urban planning decision, put nature centre stage of the city again. Make nature part of the house and neighbourhood you build, the company you work for, the places you care for.

From me and them, to us

Take the lead and start the conversation about the symbiotic city. Tell how you envision the coexistence of humans and nature, share your dreams, and involve your neighbours in that dream.

Inclusive leadership

Start by recognising that not explicitly including city residents in your projects, designs or plans will almost always lead to the exclusion of certain groups and communities. Be it people or animals and plants. Do you know your own blind spots? What do you know about nature yourself?

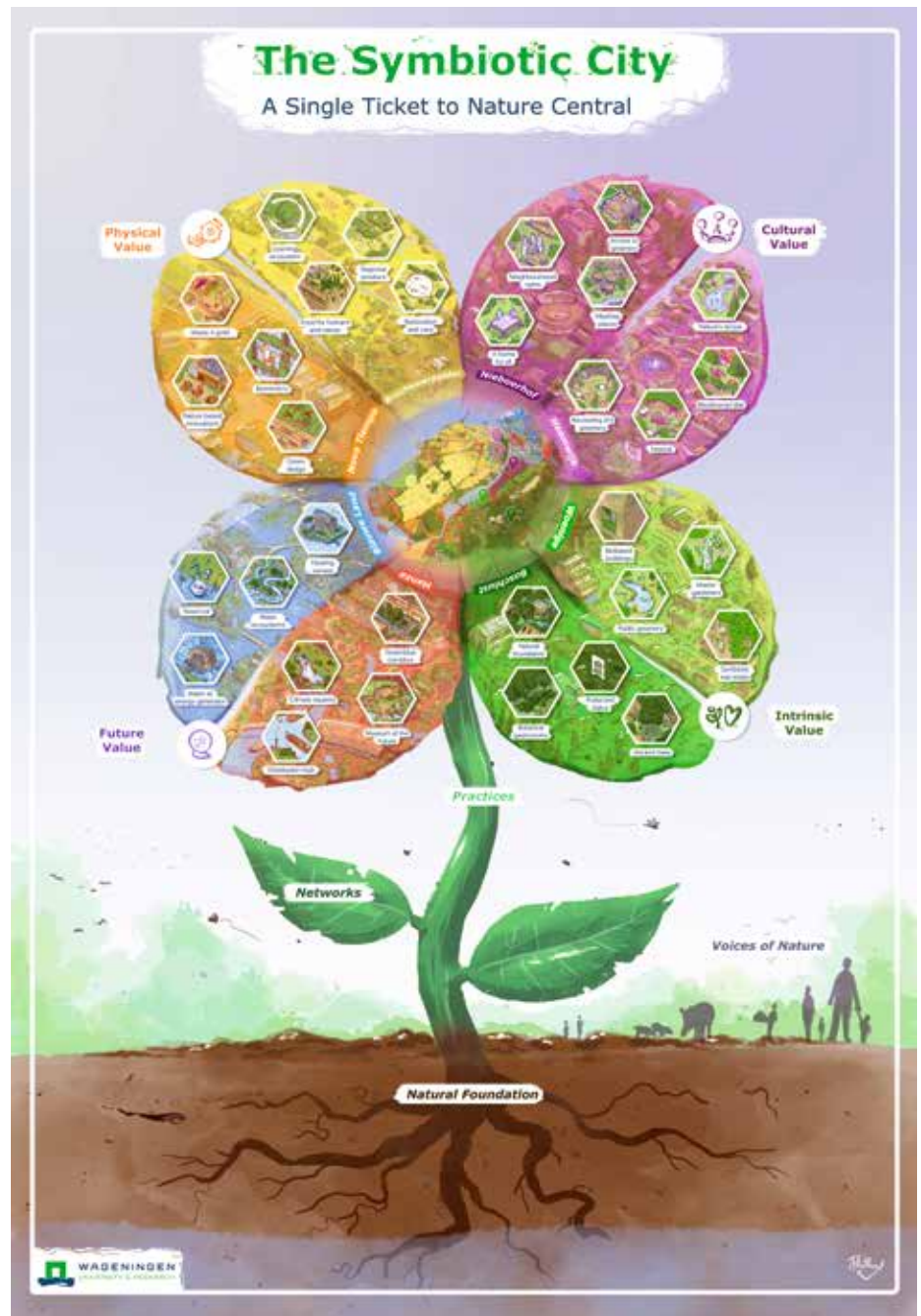
Soil and water guiding urban development

Look at the situation of water and soil in the built environment. Think about your underground spatial planning. How do we get everything united in the soil. Quite a challenge.

An economy that embraces nature

Introducing nature into the economy will create many win-win situations, such as improved living conditions for citizens, better utilisation and management of soil and water, new jobs, more nature, and nature-based innovations. Nevertheless, this transformation will not be without compromises. Also, some (unsustainable) products and businesses will disappear. The new system will gradually replace the existing one. *

This was the second contribution in our series 'On the Road to Future Green City' in which we explore the ingredients we need for a green city with a future. This in the run-up to the Future Green City world congress, Utrecht 23-26 September 2024.



32 examples of building the symbiotic city. The brochure 'The symbiotic city' can be downloaded from www.wur.nl/en/show/brochure-symbiotic-city.htm or by scanning the QR-code that is displayed here.