

SUMMARY REPORT

TNOC SUMMIT 2019

4–7 June 2019 → Paris, France





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OVERVIEW

The Nature of Cities (TNOC)

Summit, held in Paris from 4-7 June 2019, brought together a unique diversity of thought-leaders and practitioners to catalyze a cross-disciplinary movement for collaborative green cities.

The Summit convened diverse voices and actors, designing interactive sessions to build new connections and propel change—both on an individual and organizational level. Participants ranged from artists, writers, and activists to people working in academia, urban planning, policy, and practice.



"I was very pleasantly surprised to see the excellent balance of people from across the world and across the generations. This event was exemplary in the way it really was inclusive."

— Public Employee

Why a TNOC Summit?

Cities are both ecological and social spaces. They are complex flows of people, goods, capital, information, and movement. They are in their essence collaborative. The 700+ strong international community of thought-leaders and visionaries that contribute to [The Nature of Cities](#) media platform expressed the desire to create a gathering that would reach across diverse disciplines, ways of knowing, and modes of action to promote collaborative solutions. A meeting of minds, makers, and planners where each could interact, exchange, and experience views of the city through each other's medium, with the aim of helping create better cities and enriching their own work.

"More useful than many events, because it was interactive, exchanges really happened, and trans-disciplinary."

— Researcher

The Summit was designed to push limits and interrogate traditionally siloed processes of city building to propel change and foster transdisciplinary understanding among attendees. It was by design participatory and immersive, blending art, science, planning, and practice to build individual and organizational capacity to rise to the challenge of building solutions in today's complex cities. We placed great emphasis on giving voice to both the global South and the global North, featuring ideas and actions for building



cities that are more just, livable, healthy, resilient, and sustainable. These were the objectives that motivated the design of the Paris Summit, and will continue to inspire future Summits.

WHO ATTENDED THE SUMMIT?

The TNO Summit took place at the Sorbonne University's Pierre and Marie Curie Campus, at Place Jussieu in Paris, with additional evening events, outdoor sessions, and excursions at various other locations around the city.

"To shake hands with four different people from four different continents within the first five minutes of the summit really made an impression I will not forget!"

– Urban Ecologist

371 people,
from **168** cities
& **52** countries

There were 371 attendees from 168 cities and 52 countries, and all the metrics about participants suggest great diversity. The word cloud below displays the countries of origin. The size of the country name indicates the relative number of participants from that country.





government funded or operate for or in long-arm areas of government. Institutes are organizations that focus on research or knowledge building, often attached to other institutions. Government is anyone who works within some level of government. Academia encompasses, researchers, scientists, and professors working within an academic institution.

A notable success of the Summit highlighted in these figures is that we had broad participation from very diverse sectors, including public and private sectors, NGOs, civil society, and small business (SMEs). (Note that many practitioners, such as architects and consultants, are in fact small business owners.) But under-represented sector here is larger business concerns, including developers, something we will strive to address in future summits.

practice
NGO Foundation
CivilSociety
student
academia
institute
government

PROGRAM

We created a program of sessions and activities designed to place dialogue and conversation at the center. A PDF of the full program can be found here: <http://thenatureofcities.com/tnoc-summit-api/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TNOC-Summit-Full-Program-28-5-2019.pdf>.

The heart of the Summit was what we called Seed Sessions. Two and four hour workshops centered on an idea, project, activity, or tool. These were designed to be action driven and very interactive.

Seed sessions were proposed and curated by participants. In some cases, they were led by mixed groups that joined their sessions when they had similar themes. These collaborations led to sessions that had greater depth, catering to broad points of view.





The Summit had 53 Seed Sessions over three days, for example from “Creating Nature Goals for Cities”, “Modeling Paris: Minecraft for Citizen Engagement in Urban Revitalization”, and “Financing City Greening”, to “The City Re-Scripted (a writing workshop)”, “Measuring Urban Nature (An Indicator Party)”, and “An Inclusive Vision for Biophilic Cities”.



Plenaries (which were in a traditional proscenium theatre) represented about 35% of our formal time together. During this period, we tried to minimize presentations and keynotes (none were longer than 15 minutes). Rather, we emphasized conversation in “Dialogues” in which 3-4 people gave short talks followed by engaging conversation. Among the eight 40-minute Dialogues were, “What motivates people to get involved in urban stewardship”; “What is the public square?”; and “Demanding green space as a right for everyone”.

“The Nature of Cities Summit revealed a thousand examples of ingenuity and commitment to bringing nature into the hearts of our cities and daily lives.”

– Landscape Architect



Plenaries also included non-traditional elements such as performances and readings, including short fiction on future cities, from the new TNOC book *A Flash of Silver Green*, and a performance called *Hearing Street Trees*, a fable about perceiving the world around us, with music derived from street tree data in three cities, actors, and an accordion playing street musician.

Sessions of micro-talks (each talk was two minutes and one slide long) were available, followed by structured discussion in which anyone could participate (“fishbowls”).

Participatory art and environmental experiences gave participants a way to engage with each other in new ways





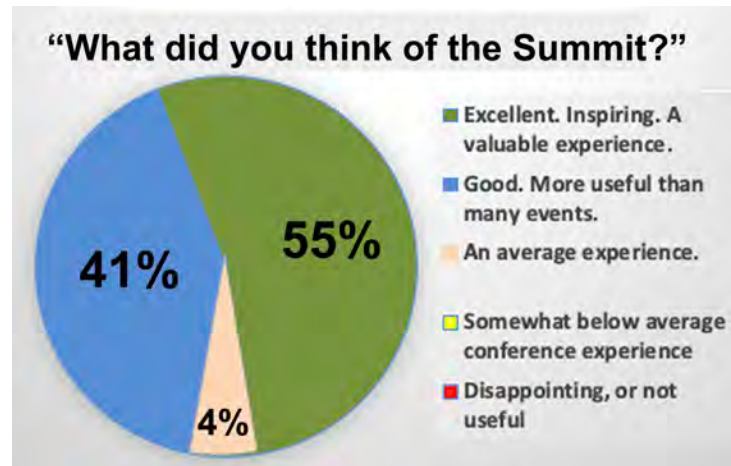
(see the FRIEK section later in this document). There were also special events, such as field trips, a Networking Café, a social event and dinner, and “farm to table dinners” (two special ticket dinners at “local food” restaurants, during which attendees heard short talks by chefs, farmers, garden activists, and sustainability scientists (image above).

One of TNOC Summit’s greatest virtues is that it was fun! It was loads of fun! At the same time the breadth of knowledge and the many amazing hands on experiences provided everyone with several eye-opening moments.

– Architect

Future Summits must continue to explore new formats that stress interaction among multiple stakeholders and ways of knowing. There are plenty of traditionally formatted conferences. TNOC Summit’s niche lies in sustained exploration of novel and innovative programs that seed real results for collaboration for city building in cities around the world.

REACTIONS TO THE SUMMIT



The summit was well received, as can be seen in the survey evaluation results displayed here. **Most participants described it as unlike any other gathering they had attended, and the words *inspiring*, *fun*, and *engaging* were often cited in the evaluation survey.** See the word cloud to the right for words people used to describe their experience. The bigger the word, the more frequently it was mentioned.

The participatory session design and (at times intentionally disruptive) artistic elements pushed attendees beyond traditional comfort zones, energizing new connections and ways of thinking. For some, it was an opportunity to explore their own creative sides or take a more experiential approach to shared challenges. For



others, particularly those craving for cross-disciplinary opportunities, the Summit offered legitimacy and a place where “out of the box” thinking was recognized and encouraged. The chart on the next page shows reviews of individual elements of the program and logistics.

Future Summits must continue to “push the envelope” towards new formats and styles of engagement.

A few had criticisms of various aspects of the program or logistics. Such comments will provide important data for future planning. A limitation of a survey-based approach, of course, is that it does not capture all reactions to the Summit experience. TNOC Staff will continue to solicit reactions to the Paris Summit as a way of improving future events.

Survey results for individual Summit components	Very inspiring or useful	Somewhat inspiring or useful	Neutral	Somewhat less useful than I had hoped	Disappointing	Not applicable I didn't experience it
Plenary sessions in general	37%	46%	14%	0%	3%	0%
Seed sessions	63%	20%	11%	6%	0%	0%
Micro-talks + fishbowl discussion	28%	38%	22%	3%	3%	6%
Posters	21%	29%	32%	12%	0%	6%
Plenary dialogues (panels of 3 people)	37%	49%	11%	0%	0%	3%
Networking cafe	21%	39%	27%	3%	0%	9%
Summit party (at Les Grands Voisins)	25%	18%	32%	0%	0%	25%
Field trips	38%	16%	22%	6%	0%	19%
FRIEK Art engagements	44%	38%	12%	3%	0%	3%
Attempts at alternative or novel formats	51%	37%	9%	3%	0%	0%
Overall Summit logistics	34%	43%	14%	9%	0%	0%
Chances to meet people	74%	14%	9%	0%	3%	0%
Lunches and breaks	24%	26%	24%	18%	6%	3%
Farm to table dinner (Wednesday)	11%	7%	22%	0%	4%	56%
Farm to table dinner (Thursday)	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	94%
Cvent registration platform	16%	37%	37%	5%	0%	5%
TNOC Summit Smart-Device App	55%	15%	10%	0%	0%	20%
TNOC-Summit.org website	32%	32%	32%	5%	0%	0%

Comments from the summit evaluation survey give a sense of the reaction to the summit formats and are presented below.

SUMMIT FORMAT	<p><i>“So many people who do the same in different places! Finally, I felt I am not alone in my efforts and vision. Because green management is not very popular in my city. And it was a real happiness to talk with people with the same point of view.” — Biologist</i></p> <p><i>“I wasn't expecting the transdisciplinarity to work so well, nor the high level of so many speakers. The great quality short stories were unexpectedly striking, giving depth and perspectives to the exchanges before and after.” — Public Servant</i></p>
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	<p><i>"The summit encouraged experimentation and transdisciplinarity and that on its own is a great move! The App really put the event on a different level. I was able to connect to people on social media instantly (LinkedIn) and invite them for a short talk/coffee. The conference was a massive gathering, so re-connecting with former colleagues or meeting new people was always an option. Hard to get bored." — Sustainability Practitioner</i></p> <p><i>"Seeds session were an excellent format where we could learn a lot and also participate not just listen - it was a good mixture of different formats which kept all vivid and alive." — Urban Ecologist</i></p> <p><i>"As David [Maddox] knows, even though I am a strong believer in his passion for interdisciplinarity and of TNOC overall, I tend to be a bit more "linear and traditional." Considering that tendency, I was pleased with some of the zanier elements of the Summit. Not sure I came away with any new applied knowledge, but certainly appreciated the sense of community, which is itself a great outcome." — Urban Naturalist and Advocate</i></p> <p><i>I have been deeply moved by the positive spirit and sincerity that was present during the whole Summit. Experiencing the inter-relatedness of our work and feeling part of this vast community of caretakers, each strong with their own practices, empowered me deeply. I am thankful for this Summit and I feel strengthen to know that they will be many more to come. — Artist</i></p>
SUMMIT TAKE- AWAYS	<p><i>"Lots of new ideas and contacts. Yes, a whole new initiative will start form this." — Policymaker</i></p> <p><i>"A different way of looking at community collaboration. Thoughts about how others are facing same problems." — Planner</i></p> <p><i>"It was an incredible experience, full of solutions and ideas, and I hope to be present in the next editions." — Ecologist</i></p> <p><i>"As a designer, I was inspired by the mixing up of science, politics, art, planning, and design to create a new forum for the creative interrogation of a nature-based future." — Landscape Architect</i></p> <p><i>"The Summit's focus was very much about how to get the message out, how to engage people and get them onboard. A greener planet is ultimately not so much about science, but about people." — Architect</i></p>



NEW WAYS OF THINK- ING	<p><i>I used to think this...</i> That art was a nice add-on to some efforts and programs <i>Now I think this....</i> That art can play a key role in engaging citizens to help and appreciate nature and wildlife in cities. — Natural Resource-Community Outreach Manager</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> That if everyone believed basic principles like “communities know best what they need” that progressive policy and design would follow. <i>Now I think this....</i> That it is much more complicated than that—most people at the summit shared my values but are still facing various barriers (internal and external) to making real change. — City Planner/ Geographer</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> That some art interventions were a bit airy fairy. <i>Now I think this....</i> I had fun trying the storytelling and it made me think differently. — Planner</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> That construction companies did not care much about biodiversity and ecosystems. <i>Now I think this...</i> That construction companies are beginning to have this concern and to include in their group biologists, ecologists for multidisciplinary work but there is still a lot of work to do. — Ecologist</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> Raise urban nature awareness also with the 'poorer areas' of our city <i>Now I think this....</i> The same, but do not forget the National Government. We should work both sides in raising awareness. — Urban Ecologist</p> <p><i>I used to think this ...</i> That ecologists liked green walls and urban rooftop farms <i>Now I think this....</i> Now I think that many are not convinced based on scientific research, and some confess to not knowing the answers. — Planner</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> My idea was crazy <i>Now I think this....</i> I should really take it further. — Sustainability Practitioner</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> That "green enough" was a reasonable approach to combat green gentrification. <i>Now I think this...</i> That "green enough" is selling poorer communities short on the amenities they could have. — Earth and Environmental Scientist</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> That people had a good idea of the social sciences behind the research on nature in cities</p>
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	<p><i>Now I think this...</i> People working in the field need a better social science base to do work on nature in cities, go beyond the biodiversity/conservation debates. — Socio-ecologist</p> <p><i>I used to think this...</i> The nature in cities is not such a big topic with many opportunities.</p> <p><i>Now I think this....</i> There are many opportunities and amazing ideas in this field — Environmental Engineer</p>
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PLANNED OUTPUTS AND IMPACTS

We'll spend the next few months creating various outputs, including:

- Proceedings (as an e-book)
- Outputs from the seed sessions, such as TNOC Roundtables
- Short films of individual Dialogues during plenary
- A photo collection—now available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/thenatureofcities/>
- Roundtables and Essays published at TNOC
- A new essay elaborating on a Theory of Change for transdisciplinarity and collaborative urbanism
- Other outputs with partners

Broader impacts of the Summit effort will continue to be explored. Our original statements about impact were that we wished to create a movement toward collaborative urbanism. Proximate indicators of this objective will include continued engagement with the Summit outputs by participants and others, and by expanding the circle of people interacting with regular “Summit News” messages. The survey also contains questions

“Lots of new ideas and contacts. Yes, a whole new initiative will start form this.”
— Policymaker





about how people were affected by the Summit, and these data will continue to be analyzed.

These will be published with various locations. We are also engaged in meetings to determine how and where to make a TNOC Summit 2.0. These discussions are just starting, but we are likely to have the next Summit somewhere in the global South.

The impacts that have resulted from our event are far reaching and remain a resolutely meaningful contribution to ensuring more just, livable, resilient and sustainable cities in the future.

Notably, the Summit provides the following impacts:

- **Networking** and relationship building in a multi-stakeholder, diverse and collaborative environment
- **Innovation** in meeting formats and ideas for convening that tailor to diversity among international groups and work to encompass participation from under-represented groups in cities.
- **Capacity Building** and training on both an individual and organizational level to encourage and support urban stakeholders in navigating the complexity and present day need of multi-stakeholder collaboration in today's modern cities.
- **Thought Leadership** for the future of collaborative city building that promotes and provides a platform for many voices globally to influence and inspire change in the way people think of ideas, possibilities and futures in cities.

Our goal for the next Summit, is to produce a concrete Theory of Change for Collaborative Urbanism that will continue to illuminate our contribution to city change.



FRIEK: Forum for Radical Imagination on Environmental Knowledge



An artist-initiated, transdisciplinary platform, FRIEK exists to integrate arts-based exhibits, actions, and methodologies into the fabric of *The Nature of Cities Summit*.

Attentive to the urban landscape, and partnering with human and non-human companions, *FRIEK* challenges the framework of established knowledge, allowing new ideas to be generated in transdisciplinary collaboration.



I used to think that art was a nice add-on to some efforts and programs. Now I think that art can play a key role in engaging citizens to help and appreciate nature and wildlife in cities.

– Nature Resource-Community Outreach Manager



FRIEK was a key experimental aspect of our interactive meeting, including various collaborative art efforts that were engaging to many.

FRIEK currently has its own website (<http://frik.cityasnature.org>) and will

continue to be part of regular TNOG contents and events in the future.



FRIEK events in Paris included collaborative sculpture (with participants making the elements of a mobile and sharing in their balancing); a collaboratively painted map of the world, with tracings of leaves brought by participants; writing and Haiku workshops; field trips on nature-themed street art and Paris' hidden waterways; artworks made of recycled materials; dance and music performances; meditation workshops; tea ceremonies; and a collection of young nursery trees that served as set decorations and then became available for donation to Parisians to plant in their gardens (paid for by the Summit in lieu of gift giveaways, a modest offset to our event's carbon emissions); and more.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Financing and operating a relatively large meeting as a small organization will always be a challenge. **We are happy to report that we had a balanced budget for TNOC Summit, with slightly more income (€236,773) than expenses (€234,190).** The meeting was paid for with a mixed strategy of registration fees (27%), ticketed events (4%), and sponsors (68%).

Sources of Summit Income



Categories of Expenses



Note that the budget here does not reflect in-kind contributions, the majority of which were provided by The Nature of Cities, the Regional Agency on Biodiversity (IAU-ARB), and the Sorbonne's Institute of Environmental Transitions.

A key challenge in a meeting that requires diverse participation to succeed is that many among our target audiences have difficulty paying registration fees and travel expenses. We funded the participation of some people (especially practitioners, students, and artists; and those from the global South) through

grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation, Expertise France, the French Agency for Biodiversity, and some private donations; in addition to some allocation of



Summit funds. **Indeed, 23% of our expenses were travel support for participants, the largest share of any expense category.** But more is needed for future events, to continue to expand their reach and impact.

Expanded travel support is a fundamental fundraising imperative for any future Summit.

REGISTRATION STATISTICS

The Summit's participants came from 168 cities and 52 countries.

Three quarters (75%) of the participants were from the global North, while 82% of the payments from individuals (registration or special event fees) were collected from people from the North. The rate of payments from the South (25% of participants but 18% of payments) reflects that more people from the South received complementary entry, and also that people from the South were less likely to choose the special events with extra fees.

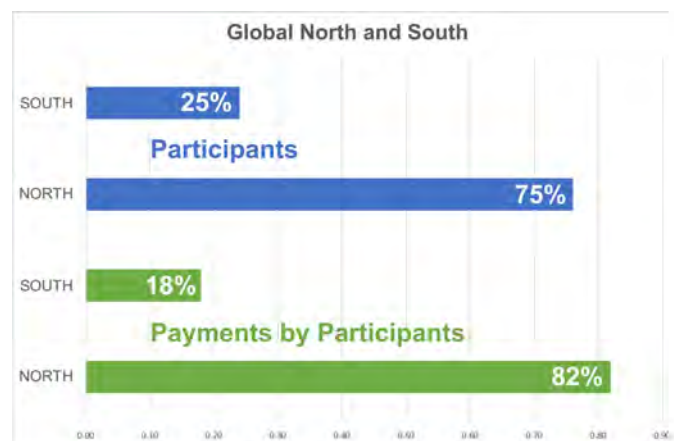
It is to be expected that an event in Paris would attract more people from the North (at least for reasons of proximity), but a 25% participation rate from the South needs to be higher in future Summits. A future Southern

Summit will certainly attract more people from the South (at least from the

continent on which the Summit occurs). That people from the South paid fees at a lower rate is something to address in future Summit planning and in fund raising efforts.

Future Summits will have as target 50/50 participation from the South and North.

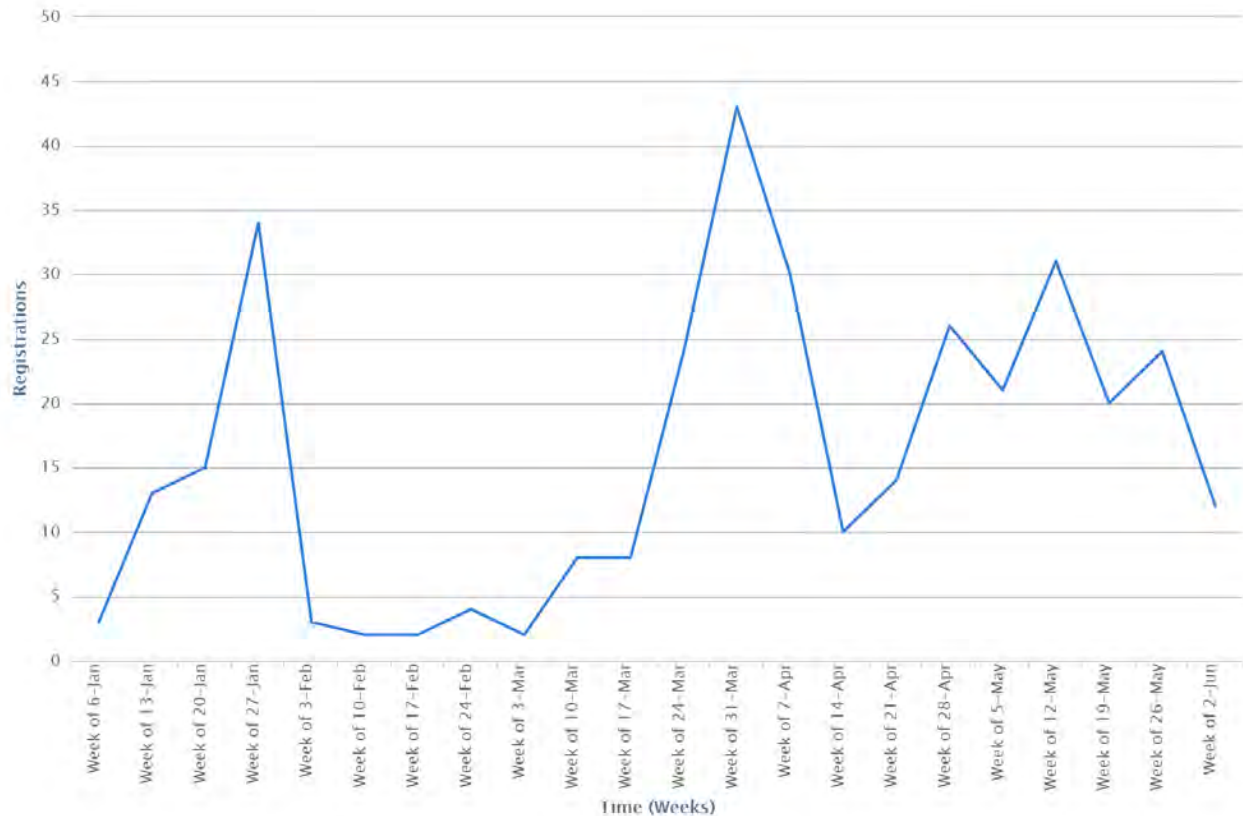
Registration for the Summit was live for a period of 5 months, opening on 6 January 2019 and closing the day at the start of the summit on 3 June 2019. Within this time, we





saw an initial spike in registrants for the 5-week period following the launch of registration in January, coinciding with a “Super Early Bird” registration price. A second period for peak registration occurred from March to April, again for a 5-week period, and coinciding with the end of an “Early Bird” registration price. Registration trends were the lowest in late February and early March.

For future Summits, these patterns are crucial to match periods of high registration with social media and newsletter campaigns that encourage engagement (and also favorable prices).



To improve registration numbers for future summits, greater consistency and frequencies of campaigns is desired.

The Summit had 200 additional unique visitors to the Summit page that abandoned the visit without registering. This demonstrates the potential for registration increase, if we were successful in capturing as registrants a higher percentage of site visitors. It is unclear why these 200 people abandoned their registrations (for example, too expensive, were “just looking”, or whether they in fact registered in a separate attempt with a different email and/or from a different computer), or where they were visiting from. Among concerns about barriers to registration voiced by potential registrants, costs (both registration and travel) were the most common.



STAFFING AND VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Operation of the TNOC Summit relied on a mix of support from a small dedicated paid staff, consultants, freelancers, service providers, and volunteers. During the event, critical support came from 53 (mostly student) volunteers, who agreed to work at the Summit in exchange for free registration; and in a few cases some light travel support.

At the end of the Summit, each volunteer was presented with a certificate of appreciation from the Summit. Many of the volunteers were students, practitioners, researchers, and artists. The volunteers hailed from all over the world (not just Paris, as we had originally expected), and for the most part paid their own travel costs. The highest proportion came from Europe and North America, with a medium cohort from South and Central America, and a smaller group from Africa.



FUTURE SUMMITS

Format: Future Summits must continue to explore new formats that stress interaction among multiple stakeholders and ways of knowing. There are plenty of traditionally formatting conferences. TNOC Summit's continued relevance and unique niche will depend on sustained exploration of novel and innovative programs that join different ways of knowing and modes of action into unified conversations. Fewer plenaries, or plenaries in the "round", expanded dialogues with the public, and virtual conferencing that reduce travel are all possible routes in the future.



Participation: There was great diversity at the Paris Summit, but we cannot be satisfied. This level of diversity must be a beginning, a baseline. **Relative participation**



from the North and South needs to close to 50/50. We need to continue to push the disciplinary frontiers of TNOC Summit outward, well beyond the normal edges of a “green urbanism” conference, to include business communities, entrepreneurs (business and social), and other sectors of urbanism.

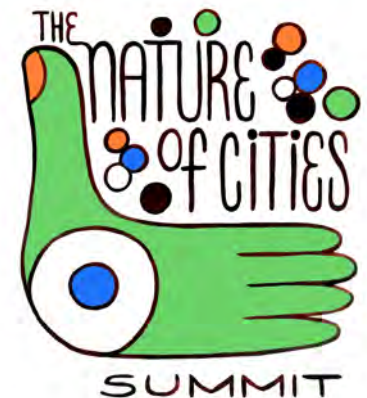
Funding: Fundraising remains a challenge for an alternative event such as ours. A key target for fund raising must be to ensure diverse attendance from many disciplines (from practice and academia) and geographies (North and South). **We hope to use the success of the Paris Summit to attract more sponsors in the future.**

Location: We are intent on moving around the world, and **we plan to hold our next event in the Global South, likely in the first half of 2021.** Other smaller or more regional events are possible before 2021.

ABOUT OUR LOGO

We are The Nature of Cities, and the word “of” modifies nature to mean the “character” of cities, which we view through a green and blue lens.

Our Summit logo, designed by [Frida Larios](#), conveys a sense of a human connection among us as we steward nature and community in cities. The circles depicted in the logo are shared seeds, or ideas, both dispersed and gathered. Similar drawings of hands are common in Mayan symbology, and can mean both to “throw or scatter” and “to receive”. And in many traditions, the open hand signifies greeting, welcome, and openness.





SPONSORS

As always, we appreciate our sponsors and partners, who made this event possible.



ABOUT THE NATURE OF CITIES

The Nature of Cities is an idea hive, an international platform for transdisciplinary dialogue and urban solutions. We facilitate the sharing of diverse, transformative ideas about cities as ecosystems of people, nature, and infrastructure. We are committed to the design and creation of better cities for all: cities that are resilient, sustainable, livable, and just.

Cities are ecosystems of human habitat. A growing movement in urban social-ecology holds that city building requires a green lens—that urban design with, and not against, nature improves both the global environment and the lives of people. TNOC aims to support and propel this movement by curating a network of thought leaders and publishing their ideas. We now comprise over 700 contributors from around the world: practitioners, scientists, artists, engineers, ecologists, social scientists, architects, designers, landscape architects, planners, activists, urbanists, entrepreneurs, government officials—all working to propel a transdisciplinary, participatory, and transformative movement for cities.

TNOC is a “boundary organization” interested in ideas at the frontiers of action, science, design, policy, and the arts—an idea hive that puts different approaches and points of



view together, to discover what novel perspectives might emerge. We work in two principal ways. First, we publish a virtual magazine and discussion site featuring, in multiple formats, the diverse work and ideas of our contributors around the world. Second, we pursue partnerships and special projects in specific areas related to our published ideas and mission.

Three organizations make up a constellation of TNOC efforts: The Nature of Cities (a 501(c)3 in the United States; The Nature of Cities Europe (a Registered Charity in Ireland); and The Nature of Cities France (an Association in France).

The governing boards of these organizations are:

The Nature of Cities: Pippin Anderson (Cape Town); Marcus Collier (Dublin); Martha Fajardo (Bogotá); Mike Houck (Portland); David Maddox (New York); Chantal van Ham (Brussels)

The Nature of Cities Europe: Marcus Collier (Dublin); David Maddox (New York); Siobhán McQuaid (Dublin)

The Nature of Cities France: Gilles Lecuir (Paris); David Maddox (New York); Valerie Gwinner (Vaison-la-Romaine)

Visit us at www.thenatureofcities.com



See you next time!