

Busting Myths About Nature-Based Solutions: A Participant's Takeaway

Written by: Bart Kapteijns

The "Busting myths: People or with nature" event, on 25th September, not only broadened my understanding of NBS, but it also offered practical insights. Here are some key lessons that stuck with me:

1. Long-Term Success Requires Thoughtful Design

One of the event's standout points was that NBS projects are often misunderstood as "set it and forget it" solutions. In reality, they need ongoing monitoring and adaptation, especially as climate conditions change. Without careful design, much of the potential benefits are lost over time. A key consideration is involving both the natural landscape and the area's morphology—land and water alike. Nature doesn't follow straight lines, so our solutions shouldn't either. Designed with these aspects in mind, maintenance will be minimal.

A Case in Point: The Isar River restoration in Munich is a prime example of NBS success. By removing artificial embankments and reconnecting the river to its natural floodplain, the project reduced flood risks, improved water quality, and restored wildlife habitats. Designed to follow the river's natural braided pattern, this approach allowed nature to manage a significant portion of the ongoing maintenance.

2. Inclusivity and Justice Aren't Guaranteed

One of the more eye-opening aspects of NBS is that projects often benefit socially privileged communities, leaving underprivileged groups behind. Worse, some projects improve neighbourhoods to the point where long-term residents can no longer afford to live there. To avoid this, it's essential to involve local communities and social experts from the beginning to ensure equitable outcomes.

The Madrid Río Project: While transforming the Manzanares River waterfront into a green space, the project unintentionally caused gentrification in historically working-class neighbourhoods. Property values surged, making the area attractive to wealthier residents and pushing out many original inhabitants.

3. Nature-Based Solutions Are More Than Conservation

NBS goes beyond traditional conservation efforts. They are multifunctional solutions that address climate resilience, biodiversity, and even economic concerns. For example, urban green spaces—such as parks and green roofs—not only improve quality of life but also reduce urban heat and manage stormwater. Planting a tree isn't just an act of conservation; it becomes part of NBS when done with a clear purpose.

4. There's No "One-Size-Fits-All" Approach

One important takeaway from the event is that NBS initiatives need to be tailored to their specific ecological and social contexts. What works in one region may not work in another, so involving local communities in the design process is essential to long-term success.





Example: While mangrove restoration works wonders for some coastal areas, trying this along the Dutch coast would be highly impractical.

5. NBS aren't a Silver Bullet

Perhaps the most sobering takeaway is that NBS cannot single-handedly solve climate change or environmental challenges. They are part of a broader toolkit that includes technology and policy interventions. NBS should complement—rather than replace—critical climate actions such as reducing emissions.

