

1 Manuscript Title: Urban Tree Diversity – Taking Stock and Looking Ahead

2 Authors: Morgenroth, J^{*a}. Östberg, J.^b, Konijnendijk van den Bosch, C.^b, Nielsen, A.B.^c, Hauer, R.^d,
3 Sjöman, H.^b, Chen, W.^e, Jansson, M.^b

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5 * Corresponding Author

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7 a – School of Forestry, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, +64 (03) 364-2128,

8 justin.morgenroth@canterbury.ac.nz

9 b - Department of Landscape Architecture, Planning and Management, Faculty of Landscape

10 Planning, Horticulture and Agricultural Science, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

11 c - Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen

12 d – College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin

13 e - Department of Geography, The University of Hong Kong

14 **Urban Tree Diversity – Taking Stock and Looking** 15 **Ahead**

16 **Abstract**

17 The first International Conference on Urban Tree Diversity hosted in June 2014 by the Swedish
18 University of Agricultural Science in Alnarp, Sweden highlighted the need for a better understanding
19 of the current state of urban tree diversity. Here we present and discuss a selection of urban tree
20 diversity themes with the intention of developing and sharing knowledge in a research area that is
21 gaining momentum. We begin by discussing the specific role of species diversity in ecosystem service
22 provision and ecosystem stability. This is followed by exploring the urban conditions that affect
23 species richness. Having determined that many ecosystem services depend on urban tree species
24 diversity and that urban environments are capable of supporting high species diversity, we conclude
25 by addressing how to govern for urban tree diversity.

26 **A Background to Urban Tree Species Diversity**

27 As global population grows and migration demography shifts towards urbanization, the need for
28 functional urban ecosystems to meet societal needs increases. Biodiversity has been shown to
29 affect all levels of the ecosystem service hierarchy (Mace et al., 2012). While the concept of
30 biodiversity embraces both the ecosystem, the species, and the gene levels, most research on urban
31 biodiversity has focused on the species level, likely because it is well defined, quantifiable, and easily
32 monitored and communicated beyond the scientific community (Farinha-Marques et al. 2011). It is
33 therefore not surprising that urban tree diversity has developed as a theme of academic and
34 practical importance. This topic was central to the first International Conference on Urban Tree
35 Diversity at the Alnarp campus of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in 2014 (Textbox
36 1). Here we use the conference content to facilitate a more thorough exploration of urban tree
37 diversity and review the scientific literature in three sections: i) What ecosystem services result from

38 urban tree species diversity? ii) Can urban environments support tree species diversity? and iii) Can
39 cities govern for urban tree diversity? We conclude with recommendations for future research
40 crucial to developing the body of knowledge surrounding urban tree species diversity.

41 **Ecosystem Services and Tree Species Diversity**

42 The ecosystem services provided by urban forests include tangible provisioning services (e.g. food
43 and fuel production), regulating services (e.g. air pollution reduction, stormwater management),
44 cultural services (recreation, physical and mental health benefits) and supporting services (e.g.
45 wildlife habitat) (Costanza et al., 1997). Trees reduce air temperature (Bowler et al., 2010), sequester
46 carbon (Nowak et al., 2013a), reduce atmospheric and particulate air pollution (Escobedo et al.,
47 2011), attenuate stormwater runoff (Kirnbauer et al., 2013), improve human well-being (Dallimer et
48 al., 2012), provide resilience during times of war (Lacan and McBride, 2009) or natural disasters
49 (Morgenroth and Armstrong, 2012), provide food for humans (McLain et al., 2012), increase
50 property values (Dimke et al., 2013), and provide energy savings (McPherson and Simpson, 2003).

51 Ecosystem services provided by urban forests are known to be moderated by canopy cover (Dobbs
52 et al., 2011) and tree structure (Nowak et al., 2013b). But what is the impact of tree species diversity
53 on ecosystem service provision and are all species equal? Anecdotally, because ecosystem services
54 are a result of ecosystem processes, their provision depends on the intrinsic (i.e. morphological and
55 physiological) and temporal (diurnal or seasonal effects) characteristics of different species (Clapp et
56 al., 2014). Evidence has shown that species affects ecosystem services including rainfall interception
57 (Xiao et al., 2000), air temperature moderation (Bowler et al., 2010), atmospheric pollution removal
58 (Jim and Chen, 2008), human psychological well-being (Fuller et al., 2007), bird diversity (Nielsen et
59 al., 2014b) and insect diversity (Scherber et al., 2014).

60 We feel that it is self-evident that some species are better than others for optimizing individual
61 ecosystem services - which begs the question, is diversity necessary? Both Zavaleta et al. (2010) and

62 Lundholm et al. (2010) demonstrate that optimization of multiple ecosystem services requires a
63 mixture of species. Can the knowledge gained from these studies of grasslands and green roofs be
64 generalized to the urban forest? If so, it seems likely that the plethora of ecosystem services we
65 expect our urban forests to provide can be maximized with high species richness.

66 Species diversity may also be necessary for urban ecosystem stability. Can urban forests withstand
67 disturbance (resistance) and how quickly will they return to normal function after disturbance
68 (resilience)? Such stability allows for the long-term provision of ecosystem services (Colding, 2007)
69 in the face of biotic and abiotic change (Hooper et al., 2005). Recent pest outbreaks (Poland and
70 McCullough, 2006) and the environmental changes resulting from climate change (Easterling et al.,
71 2000) highlight the need for species diversity to achieve a resilient urban tree stock as an important
72 contributor to urban ecosystem stability.

73 Though high species diversity can optimize multiple ecosystem services (Zavaleta et al., 2010) and
74 ensure urban forest stability in the face of disturbance (Colding, 2007), we join Richards (1993) in
75 cautioning against managing only for diversity; increasing tree species diversity does not guarantee
76 improved ecosystem function (Cook-Patton and Bauerle, 2012). Some species may be undesirable
77 such as invasive exotic species, and some species have undesirable characteristics like those that
78 emit volatile organic compounds, those whose pollen is an allergen, or those that cause
79 infrastructure damage (Roy et al., 2012). These species may still play a role in providing species
80 diversity. In fact, all tree species have good and bad characteristics. Species selection must be
81 undertaken strategically to optimize desired ecosystem services and limit ecosystem disservices.

82 Though considerable empirical research into the relationship between urban tree species diversity
83 and ecosystem services has been conducted, some questions remain under-explored. Chief amongst
84 them is separating the effects of tree species and tree structure on ecosystem benefits. It is possible
85 that the distribution and biomass of the urban forest is more important than species richness in
86 terms of ecosystem service provision (Kowarik, 2011). Is species diversity simply a way of achieving

87 structural diversity, so that ecosystem services are optimized? These are important questions to
88 consider.

89 **Cities and Tree Species Diversity**

90 The ecosystem benefits and services provided by trees contribute to urban function – and tree
91 species diversity provides the resistance and resilience necessary to ensure long-term provision of
92 benefits and ecosystem services. But are cities capable of supporting high species diversity?

93 Previous studies have shown that despite urbanization posing a risk to global biodiversity via biotic
94 homogenization (McKinney, 2006), cities usually have greater species richness compared with their
95 rural surroundings (Knapp et al., 2009; Kühn et al., 2004; McKinney, 2002; Wania et al., 2006). High
96 species richness for urban flora has typically been explained by a combination of four factors: (i) the
97 high incidence of introduced species, (ii) socio-economic factors, (iii) land use and land cover
98 heterogeneity, and (iv) diversity of environmental factors like soil and climate diversity. In
99 combination, these four factors contribute to the observed relatively high levels of species richness
100 in urban and suburban areas (Alvey, 2006).

101 **(i) Urban Tree Diversity and Species Introductions**

102 Many studies have found that the number (and proportion) of non-native species tends to increase
103 along the urban–rural gradient, moving toward the urban centre (McKinney, 2002; Nielsen et al.,
104 2014b). There are concerns that non-native species will out-compete native species (Chytrý et al.,
105 2008; McKinney, 2006; Pysek et al., 2009) and therefore urban landscapes with too many non-native
106 species will not function well in terms of providing ecosystem services even though they are diverse
107 (Nielsen et al., 2014b). For example, Khera et al. (2009) found that while bird species richness in
108 urban green spaces of Delhi, India was positively correlated with woody species richness, the
109 correlation was negative when density of exotic woody species increased. On the other hand, the
110 argument for the use of non-native species often refers to fluctuating environmental conditions,

111 which are expected to increase under climate change (Easterling et al., 2000). Under such conditions
112 it is suggested that non-native species have a better chance to cope with these fluctuations than
113 native species. There are also suggestions that compromises should be made and that natural sites
114 should be established that mainly contain natives, whereas semi-natural and artificial sites could
115 accommodate both (Jim, 2013).

116 **(ii) Urban Tree Diversity and Socio-Economic Factors**

117 Urban areas are not only divided by an urban–rural gradient, but also consist of areas separated by
118 socioeconomic and cultural differences (Kinzig et al., 2005). Socioeconomic status and culture are
119 shaping forces for urban biodiversity. For example, higher socioeconomic status is correlated with
120 greater species diversity; Luz de la Maza et al. (2002) found that high income areas in Santiago had
121 28 species per hectare compared to only 16 species per hectare in low income areas. This can be
122 explained by the greater possibility for landowners within the higher socioeconomic areas to shape
123 their surroundings and plant a more diverse range of species.

124 **(iii) Urban Tree Diversity and Land Use/Land Cover Heterogeneity**

125 “Urban ecosystems represent the most complex mosaic of vegetative land cover and multiple land
126 uses of any landscape” (Foresman et al., 1997), which may be because they are formed by human
127 design (Lister, 2014). Cities are characterized by a diverse range of site conditions, not often found in
128 the surrounding countryside, and due to these varied site conditions, urban areas can accommodate
129 a surprisingly varied flora (Jim, 2013). Research has documented that cities are disproportionately
130 located in pre-existing biodiversity hot spots (Kühn et al., 2004; Nielsen et al., 2014b) with high
131 ecosystem productivity or junctions of ecosystems where different land and water types meet.
132 There are, however, differences within cities where the lowest species diversities along the urban–
133 rural gradient occur in the intensively “built” environments of the urban core, and a peak in richness
134 occurs in the suburban areas between the core and rural areas (Kowarik, 1995).

135 **(iv) Urban Tree Diversity and Environmental Factors**

136 The stressful urban environment (e.g. exposure to heat, low air humidity, periods of drought, high
137 soil pH, limited soil volume, de-icing salt and other pollutants (Bassuk and Grabosky, 2014; Bassuk
138 and Whitlow, 1988; Pauleit, 2003; Sieghardt et al., 2005)), together with the predicted climate-
139 change-related increases in average temperature and more frequent heat waves and droughts in
140 some areas during summer (Solomon et al., 2007) creates challenges, but also opportunities for
141 diversification of the urban tree population. The increase in the already heterogeneous site
142 conditions offered in the urban environment creates an even wider range of growth conditions,
143 which often differs greatly from the countryside.

144 **Governing for Tree Species Diversity**

145 Despite appearing capable of supporting high diversity, many cities experience low and even
146 declining tree diversity (Sjöman et al., 2012), and despite high overall species richness, normally a
147 group of a few species dominates the urban tree population (Raupp et al., 2006). Kendal et al. (2014)
148 measured species diversity for 108 cities worldwide and found that on average 20% of trees in an
149 urban forest were of the same species, 26% were of the same genus, and 32% were of the same
150 family. Therefore there is a need for increased emphasis on tree diversity in urban forestry strategic
151 decision-making, design and management.

152 **Guidelines for tree diversity**

153 Tree diversity has been addressed in policy and planning mostly via general guidelines or ‘rules-of-
154 thumb’. Numerous species diversity guidelines exist, including Frank Santamour’s 10-20-30 rule,
155 which recommends planting not more than 10% of a single species, not more than 20% of a single
156 genus, and not more than 30% of a family (Santamour, 1990). Other scholars have suggested
157 working with mathematically computed indices, such as the Simpson and Shannon-Weiner indexes,

158 and recommend diversifying urban forests at higher taxonomic levels than that of species, as pests
159 generally operate at the genus and family levels (Subburayalu and Sydnor, 2012).

160 **Tree inventories and tree selection**

161 Strategic governance and planning for tree diversity needs to be based on the current state and
162 composition of the urban forest (Alvey, 2006). City authorities worldwide have increasingly
163 developed tree inventories, although the focus has mostly been on publicly owned trees (reviewed
164 in Nielsen et al., 2014a). Also, inventories have become valuable data sources for researchers
165 studying the ecosystem services provided by urban trees. Modern technology (e.g., hyperspectral
166 satellite imagery, LiDAR) offers opportunities for comprehensive inventories of all urban trees
167 (Alonzo et al., 2014; Zhang and Qiu, 2012). Tree inventories can provide a basis for diversity-related
168 decision making.

169

170 In planning for species diversity, the range of available / desired species and genotypes needs to be
171 explored. Sjöman et al. (2012) warn against rushing to the use of new species without proper
172 testing. The authors also argue for including better information on, for example, species stress
173 tolerance under different growing conditions. There is a need for ecological and physiological
174 knowledge of tree genotypes and how these are linked to different urban sites and the provision of
175 different ecosystem services. Nurseries play an important role, both in testing new plant material
176 and also through matching the supply of planting material with new demands.

177

178 **Towards governance for urban tree diversity**

179 Urban forest governance not only involves municipal 'tree' officers and urban foresters, but also
180 planners and other public officials, as well as a wide range of other actors, and not in the least local
181 citizens (Lawrence et al., 2013). Local residents can have strong opinions about which trees, urban
182 forest structure and urban forest services they prefer (Gundersen and Frivold, 2008), but are not

183 always involved in decision making. With diversifying human populations, the range of ‘tree
184 preferences’ can also be expected to increase (Fraser and Kenney, 2000). Concepts such as
185 biocultural diversity, which provides an integrative perspective on biodiversity and local cultural
186 diversity (Maffi and Woodley, 2010), offer promising new perspectives.

187

188 Good planning and governance practices for greater urban tree diversity do exist across the globe.
189 Enhanced tree diversity has become integrated in Singapore’s green infrastructure planning (Textbox
190 1), while cities such as Copenhagen, Denmark try to get away from a tradition of using only a few,
191 dominating tree species, such as elm and lime (Sjöman et al., 2012). Santa Monica, USA, developed
192 its urban tree diversity by planting single-species along individual streets, thus achieving diversity at
193 city-level, while also strengthening local distinctiveness. Yet, it is also facing the challenge of
194 *Washingtonia robusta* comprising over 40% of the entire urban forest (Textbox 1). Finally, cities and
195 research organisations focus on urban tree diversity by establishing tree arboretums (Bühler and
196 Kristoffersen, 2009), which provide excellent tools for communication and public involvement
197 (Frediani, 2014).

198 **Concluding Remarks**

199 Examples of governance and management practices to promote urban tree diversity exist globally.
200 Cities and towns are experimenting with ways to increase tree species richness as a means to deliver
201 ecosystem stability and services. Rather than limiting richness, cities appear capable of supporting
202 species diversity due to environmental and land cover heterogeneity, socioeconomic factors, and
203 species introductions. While ecosystem service provision of urban forests is well documented, the
204 role of tree species diversity is poorly understood. Improving our understanding of this and other
205 diversity-related questions expressed in this paper will ensure that urban forests continue to provide
206 the ecosystem services necessary to support an urbanizing global population.

207 **Textbox 1 – First International Conference on Urban Tree Diversity at**
208 **SLU Alnarp, Sweden**

209

210 During 16-18 June 2014, the first International Conference on Urban Tree Diversity was held at the
211 Alnarp campus of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. About 300 international delegates
212 discussed themes related to urban tree diversity, including tree selection, ecosystem service
213 provision, strategies and planning, managing threats, and links between tree diversity and people
214 diversity. Keynote speakers included:

215 • *Dr Leong Chee Chiew*, Commissioner for Parks and Recreation of Singapore, and deputy CEO
216 of the country's National Parks Board. He provided a unique insight into the city-state's
217 impressive greening programme and the importance of trees and other vegetation in
218 sustainable urban development.

219 • Professor Ingo Kowarik, Technical University of Berlin. He focused on the role of trees in
220 urban ecology, as well as the issue of exotic species. He provided a nuanced view on the use
221 of non-natives, highlighting the long history of exotic tree species as important components
222 of urban forests.

223 • Matthew Wells, urban forester, City of Santa Monica. He showed how urban tree diversity
224 policies can be implemented in practical management.

225 A comprehensive conference programme and abstract book documents all presentations,
226 highlighting the complexity of urban tree diversity discussions and the need for more comprehensive
227 research and policy (Konijnendijk van den Bosch and Östberg, 2014). The second International
228 Conference on Urban Tree Diversity is scheduled for February 2016 in Melbourne, Australia
229 (www.urbantreediversity.org).

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