

**We are delighted to share this story about the wellbeing benefits of innovative 'green' initiatives in France's sixth largest city, Nantes. Imagine the benefits to your city or town if a version of this was replicated. Growing and sharing freely available fruits and vegetables with the community; or slowing down and spending time with people you know, while meeting and making new friends; perhaps creating green sites of scientific value, open to children's exploration and learning ; rehabilitating and reclaiming degraded waterways or land, and using those sites for community activities. It all starts with local vision and energy.**

**Joanne Abbey, Corporate Wellbeing**

## **Enhancing citizens' well-being – a view from across the Channel**

By Marie-Amélie Viatte

Nantes is located on the Loire River, close to the Atlantic coast; with 600,000 inhabitants, it is France's sixth largest city. Its [Green Capital of Europe](#) award in 2013 gives an indication of its efforts to maximise its inherent green character for the benefit of all. In Nantes, everyone lives within 500m of a park. That's a great asset in itself, but that's not all for the City's authorities have actively promoted the importance of the city for nature conservation and the critical role nature plays in enhancing people's well-being.

Amongst the City's innovative projects are the "gourmet stops": ten edible gardens of fruit trees planted throughout the city, including three in the heart of the city centre. Inspired by [Todmorden's Incredible Edible community project](#) in the UK, Nantes City Council invites its citizens and visitors to stop by, pick some delicious, tree-ripened cherries, peaches, apricots, plums and pears, and take a seat at the picnic tables provided. Free for all! The experience goes beyond the culinary: it's apparently attracted a great social mix, has encouraged people to slow down and reconnect, thus creating a civic space with great well-being benefits.

The City has also created floating gardens on the river Erdre, of both aesthetic and environmental value. The aim is to enhance the quality of the natural environment by creating new habitats for flora and fauna usually found far away from urban centres, and at the same time providing an attractive green space for the enjoyment of all.

A third project that resonated with me is about a roof – not the usual type, strictly forbidden to 'unauthorised persons' but one where children are actively encouraged to go and have a wander. Nantes' Aimé Césaire Primary School has a green roof, of a rather amazing sort it seems. It contains dunes and heathland in an attempt to recreate a typical Atlantic coast ecosystem and encourage the native biodiversity of

the wider region to visit the city. It also contains narrow paths to facilitate the children's exploration of what sounds like a fabulous on-site educational resource. Interesting for its multi-purpose use, this roof ecosystems is also used by the City's science department as an open air laboratory to study the resilience of these particular plants in an urban environment.

Food for thought...

#### **About the Author**

We are indebted to Marie-Amélie-Viatte for granting us permission to republish this blog post. You can follow Marie-Amélie Viatte on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).